Teacher, Tell Me a Story!

Mark Yurick
Coordinator, Professional Development

“Tell me a story.” How many times have we heard this from our students or perhaps our own children, nieces and nephews, or the children of others? What is it about hearing stories that attracts us to this most basic human experience? Pamela Rutledge tried to answer this question in her article “The Psychological Power of Storytelling,” which appeared in Psychology Today in January 2011. In the article she writes that stories are about authentic human experiences. They connect us to a larger self, they engage us through emotions and they connect us to others. Humans make meaning through stories. Stories aimed at passing along knowledge from one generation to the other help us grow and make sense of the world. Other stories provide a springboard to dreams and imagination, stimulating the creative parts of our brain. In short, in spite of instant messaging, Twitter accounts, and on-demand video, there still is a place if not a need in the human psyche to listen to and enjoy a story.

That is why we are so pleased to be profiling in this edition of PD E-News a new publication: Alberta Voices: Teachers’ Aspirations for the Future of Teaching. There are very few things more magical than teachers telling their stories, and this publication is a wonderful collection of teachers’ words. I know that when you read parts or all of it you will be inspired, and I encourage you to use the document as a springboard for many conversations as you engage with others to talk about the teaching profession. You will find a wonderful “story” written by my colleague Gaylene Schreiber profiling this publication on page 3 of this newsletter.

Continuing with the story theme, we are at the start of a new chapter in our lives here in the Professional Development program area. As you know, on January 1 of this year our friend, colleague and mentor Michael Podlosky retired after providing 25 years of service to the Alberta Teachers’ Association following a distinguished career in the field as teacher and school administrator. Simply put, Michael’s leadership, vision and integrity, as well as his commitment to the profession and
the students it serves, allow me to consider him one of the finest people I have had the pleasure of working with. We wish Michael well as he starts this new chapter in his book of life.

Also starting a new chapter is our new staff officer in the Professional Development program area, Jeff Johnson. Jeff is an outstanding teacher and school administrator from Edmonton Catholic Schools. He is currently the president of the Council for School Leadership and has done extensive work in the field of educational technology. While more complete information about Jeff will be provided in the next issue of PD E-News, we want to take this opportunity to formally welcome him to his new position!

Upcoming Events

March
22–28 Calgary Public Spring Break
25–28 Edmonton Catholic/Public Spring Break
29 Good Friday

April
1 Easter Monday
12–14 Career and Technology Studies Council Conference
12(eve)–13 Local Diversity, Equity and Human Rights (DEHR) Conference
15 Administrator Instructor Spring Meeting
19 PD Facilitators Meeting
Convention Association Meeting
19(eve)–20 Spring Professional Development Area Conference
26–27 Middle Years Council Conference
26–27 Global, Environmental & Outdoor Education Council Conference
26–27 Association Instructor Spring Training

May
2–4 Health and Physical Education Council Conference
3–5 English Language Arts Council Conference

Webinars
April 11 “Learning with the Brain in Mind”
May 22 “Here Comes Everyone—Teaching in the Culturally Diverse Classroom”
Presented by Andrea Berg and Joni Turville
Register at http://www.learning-network.org/programs.
Alberta Voices: Teachers’ Aspirations for the Future of Teaching

Gaylene Schreiber
Executive Staff Officer, Professional Development

In the fall of 2011, the Alberta Teachers’ Association was invited to participate in a national study conducted by the Canadian Education Association (CEA) and the Canadian Teachers’ Federation (CTF). The resulting publication, titled *Teaching the Way We Aspire to Teach—Now and in the Future*, was released in July 2012 and is available on the CTF website, www.ctf-fce.ca. It reports aggregate national data of focus groups held throughout the country and an online survey completed by more than 4,700 teachers nationwide. In Alberta, 35 focus group participants shared their recollections of moments when they were teaching at their best and recounted what they would need to meet their aspirations for themselves and their students in the future. The Association has compiled the information into a highly readable 18-page report.

“My Grade 6 students were preparing for and enacting a mock legislature to learn about the provincial government. They were given various roles and researched the issues they were debating. Then we went through the process of debating and passing bills into laws. We arranged the desks to simulate the legislative assembly chamber. I recall looking around with a sense of wonder as we began the debate: the students were poised and prepared to ask and answer questions and speak about the bills being passed. I can see now that it didn’t just happen—a lot of people supported the activity. I taught research skills, prepared them with the outline of a script and staged a model debate of one issue when I introduced the project. The students bought into the debate and the roles and could see the relevance of it all. They brought enthusiasm and a willingness to act their part. Their parents helped by discussing the issues with them beforehand with the result that students commented afterward that they wanted to do it again. I just wish I had been able to share what I was experiencing with a colleague.”

“I wish I had been able to take pictures of one particular lesson I designed. We were studying electricity, and my kids were building a wired shoebox house with specific components, using motors, wires, batteries and other materials. They were using parallel circuits and double switches and were expected to incorporate certain elements, such as an alarm, used in a logical way. I encouraged them to develop their own plan and provided only broad outlines. The challenging part was organizing materials and keeping kids focused on completing their own projects. They kept helping each other with problem solving! I was proud that they were all so charged and that they had remembered previous lessons and applied the concepts so well. I am lucky to have a teaching assistant who helped me with materials and a custodian who didn’t complain about sweeping up all the wire bits. The principal encouraged me and stops in when I tell him that something neat is planned so the kids can tell him about their projects. I will be able to use what I learned from coaching the students to improve this lesson for the next time I teach it.”
document entitled *Alberta Voices: Teachers’ Aspirations for the Future of Teaching* that can be readily shared with all community members to help others understand the realities and promise of education today.

Teacher participants were asked to share powerful teaching stories and were asked to describe their ideal future teaching situation.

At the end of the focus group events, teachers were asked to describe their highest aspirations for teaching in the future.

Participant submissions reveal that teachers continue to hold very high aspirations for themselves, for their students and for the education system. In this study, teachers exhibited a strong desire to create great schooling experiences for every student and a strong commitment to their schools, students, communities and profession. They asked for the space, time and resources to be creative and responsive to their students. They wanted to build caring relationships with their students and their colleagues and to imaginatively create learning spaces where students could be full participants in the pursuit of learning. They asked to be given the professional autonomy to collaboratively shape school-based learning communities that would engender relevant lived curricula and be responsive to students within a negotiated learning context. The vision of the future articulated by these teacher participants has the potential to fundamentally shift education. If society and the education system collectively hope to transform learning for students and the future of Alberta, it will be the responsibility of education sector workers to hear and honour the voices of teachers such as these.

**“In the future, my teaching situation ...**

“encourages students to learn through inquiry by using a variety of teaching techniques or strategies that meet individual learning styles. Students will be held responsible for their own learning. Teachers act as facilitators and encourage students to work to their potential.”

“involves self-directed students with access to global resources.”

“includes all teachers working together for kids. There is a spirit of collaborative learning to engage and educate kids.”

“is more relaxed because I have time to fully explore and master the important objectives in the curriculum.”

“has less central control and more professional choice.”

**Each person will be able to teach, discuss and support learning.** attaining the best for him- or herself and those around them. The support and infrastructure will be available to all. Learning will be a journey and teachers will not be distracted by the idea that they have to constantly best others. The journey will be exciting and inspiring, and each participant will have an unconditional interest in getting the best learning experience for all. In this new teaching environment I will have time to prepare, time to teach, time to reflect.

**I will create a classroom environment** in which all students feel welcome and safe, one which I would want my own child to experience. The ideal classroom situation will allow each child to reach his or her full potential, academically and socially. There will be support and I will feel that I can do the best for each child in my class.
New Teachers Resources for Working with Immigrant Students and Families

Andrea Berg
Executive Staff Officer

Children from immigrant families often face cultural, language and social challenges in school that teachers can help to mitigate. The Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation (CMEF) and the Alberta Teachers’ Association are developing a series of resources that will be useful to teachers as they work with students and parents from immigrant families. Each resource is developed by teachers and community resource people with the assistance of a professional development consultant. Materials were selected by the authors based on their experience of the needs of students and families with whom they have worked.

The first two publications in the series address the needs of students from South Sudan and Somalia. Both resources provide a comprehensive background on the traditions and cultural contexts of the communities, thus providing a critical starting point for teachers. Included are effective strategies for working with immigrant parents and engaging the local community, as well as ideas for lesson plans.

Working with South Sudanese Immigrant Students—Teacher Resources was authored by Abiel Kon, Elaine Lou, Mary Anne MacDonald, Atheng Riak and Lynn Smarch; Teaching Somali Immigrant Children: Resources for Student Success was authored by Mulki Ali, Kelsey Franklin, Kerry Harvey, Guled Hussein, Sarah Jane Lees, Jill Munro and Bette Yelich. Pam Young and Earl Choldin edited the booklets. Choldin, president of the Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation, observed that, “The great job the teams did proves the value of giving teachers time and resources to develop their own materials. The CMEF is proud to have initiated the program and looks forward to preparing more resources focused on other communities.” A third booklet is planned for the fall.

Resources can be downloaded from www.teachers.ab.ca by following the links: Teaching in Alberta>Diversity, Equity & Human Rights/Resources; or from the Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation website, www.cmef.ca. Alternatively, complimentary copies can be ordered from the Alberta Teachers’ Association by contacting tammy.smith@ata.ab.ca
Creating Possibilities, Balancing Priorities—The 2012 PD Survey

Spotlight on Professional Growth Plans: Success and Challenges

Gaylene Schreiber
Executive Staff Officer, Professional Development

This study reports the results of research the Association undertook during the 2011/12 school year to assess the landscape of teachers’ professional learning.

The study shows that essential conditions for effective professional development have declined, and that promising practices identified in research have not been adopted consistently throughout the province. Moreover, competing agendas for teachers’ learning have created a paradoxical situation—teachers are in the best position to determine what professional learning they need, but they are often unable to devote themselves to self-identified learning goals because of extraordinary work demands and a plethora of external professional learning mandates. PD planning is sometimes done in a manner that does not respect the professional judgment of teachers or the unique context in which they teach. There are nine main data sections within the report. One of these, “Growth Plans: Successes and Challenges,” is detailed below.

Growth Plans: Successes and Challenges

The survey solicited open-ended responses on questions that asked respondents to describe both challenges and successes experienced in development and implementation of growth plans by teachers in their local area. The body of responses as a whole revealed respondents’ comprehensive understanding of the interrelated elements and the tensions inherent in competing priorities within teachers’ professional work and learning.

- Respondents noted that there were many organizations offering a wide variety of professional development topics, but also noted that once a teacher had gained initial exposure to and practice in implementing new learning, it was often difficult to obtain deeper expertise in the topic, in part due to availability.
- Some respondents noted that time for reflection, consultation and collaboration was rare—in some cases neglected—and this hindered the efficacy of the process. Respondents
positively cited situations in which time was allotted for consultation with administration and collaboration in pursuit of teacher professional growth goals.

• The overwhelming majority of respondents commented on the considerable tension between teachers’ desire for growth goals based on their own skills and context and higher administration expectations that teachers align their growth plans with system or school goals. One respondent contributed a comment that captured this overarching concern:

When teachers are allowed to develop TPGPs that truly reflect their own needs and goals versus contrived goals that fit the school’s/division’s goals, they feel the highest degree of ownership. This sense of autonomy leads to “real” growth plans rather than a make-work paper project.

• Respondents noted that where structures supported autonomous goal development and implementation, with collaborative and consultative structures readily available, teachers found growth plans an effective way to increase self-efficacy.

Overall, it is encouraging that respondents appeared to feel considerable affinity with and investment in the professional growth plan process. The concerns voiced indicate that, in principle, teachers support the growth plan model and principles; ideally, the growth plan process guides and empowers them to achieve their own professional growth goals. In order to maximize the effectiveness of the growth plan model, teachers’ voice and choice should be of premier importance.


Spring Professional Development Area Conference, April 19(eve)–20, 2013

The spring Professional Development Area Conference (PDAC) is scheduled for Friday evening and Saturday, April 19(eve)–20, at Barnett House. The Friday evening session will be interactive and generative on topics that are of significant concern to the profession, such as inclusion, supporting teachers in their early years of practice, and the profession’s role in participating in and supporting the curriculum redesign process. Friday’s session will conclude with a reception.

Saturday morning will feature program updates and will devote significant time to the Association’s First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) Action Plan and initiatives that support FNMI learners. A skills session will precede regional meetings.

Invitations have been sent to local PD chairs and presidents, convention association presidents and program chairs, specialist council presidents, PD facilitators, regional consortia executive directors and Association representatives, and members of Provincial Executive Council.
Reflections on My Time in Esperance, Australia

Jacquelyn Austin

As I told family and friends upon my return home, I can’t imagine not having done the exchange. It has changed the way I teach and handle new situations both in and out of the classroom, and changed me in ways I don’t yet know. I hope I can share my experiences with my students, and help them be more global citizens—a part of the world we live in.

I was drawn to the idea of teaching in another country, and the challenges and amazing experiences that I knew would be a part of that. I wanted to grow professionally and personally. I had also talked to teachers that had been on exchange before, or those that had always wished they had.

During the exchange, at times my goals were very short term. I was in survival mode. But as the year progressed, so did my goals. I was involved in several reading events in my host school, which is where my interests lie. I wanted to make connections in my host community and certainly did so. I wanted to do as much exploring as possible in my year in Australia, and I do believe I’ve used my time abroad in as broad a way as possible. I also managed to spend a week in another school up north in Onslow and got to experience another school setting. I had a great time teaching the younger kids (prekindergarten). I would do it all again in a heartbeat.

The most exciting part of the exchange was discovering the little things that make life in Australia different from life in Canada, and taking joy in these differences. I feel blessed to have had these experiences that will last a lifetime and that I can share with others.

I will miss the teachers that I bonded with, and the friends that I made in my host community, Esperance. I know I would not have made such close friends if I had not been in an isolated town like Esperance. I will miss the land itself, and the way people relate to one another, playful and honest. I will miss seeing kangaroos on the beach, and the piece missing from the tanker jetty. I will miss exploring on my own, going at my own pace and appreciating all the little things I had to get used to. I will miss “rugging up” in my house and driving on the beach. I will miss seeing “Advance Australia Fair” at assemblies, and the sound of all the kids clapping along out of sync. So many things I shall miss.

To the unforgettable Aussies, I thank you for your kindness and your welcoming ways, and opening your heart to a Canadian like me. I was so far from home but you made it seem less so. You’ve made a difference in my life, no matter how big or small, and I thank you a million times over for all you did for me.

Jacquelyn Austin teaches at Gibbons School, in Gibbons, Alberta.
Inspiration Into Action! DEHR Conference, April 12(eve)–13, 2013

The Alberta Teachers’ Association will host “Inspiration Into Action—Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Conference,” to be held Friday evening, April 12, and Saturday, April 13, at Barnett House, 11010 142 Street, Edmonton.

The conference will provide a forum to build awareness and create momentum for local associations that are considering or are in the process of establishing DEHR committees. The conference will be of interest to teachers and administrators who want to explore topics of diversity in the classroom and workplace and learn the necessary skills for establishing local DEHR committees.

David Bouchard, keynote speaker and best-selling Canadian author, will share his knowledge of diverse learners.

The Association’s Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Conference promises to be an exciting and informative event. We hope that all locals will send representatives. Each local is eligible to send two delegates to the conference on a grant-in-aid basis. Locals may send additional delegates at their own expense. Speak to your local president if you are interested in attending!

Parenting Under Pressure: Rescuing Childhood in the 21st Century

A public dialogue with award-winning author and international speaker Carl Honoré.

It is not just kids who are under pressure now; it’s parents too. We feel we have to push, polish and protect our offspring with superhuman zeal—or else we’re somehow failing our job. We start from the noble and natural instinct to do the best for our kids but end up going too far. Social and cultural pressure drives a lot of this.

About the speaker

Carl Honoré is an award-winning journalist, author and internationally recognized TED speaker. His speech “In Praise of Slowness” at the prestigious TED conference has been viewed more than 750,000 times. Carl’s talks are dynamic, challenging, eloquent, informative and full of humour. The Wall Street Journal hailed Carl as “an in-demand spokesman on slowness.” ABC News called him “the unofficial godfather of a growing cultural shift toward slowing down.” For more information about Edmonton’s own Carl Honoré and his career, visit www.carlhonore.com.

When: Wednesday, April 17, 2013
6:00 pm: Registration and reception (light food and cash bar)
7:00 pm: Public lecture and discussion
8:30 pm: Book signing

Where: Centennial Centre for Interdisciplinary Science (CCIS)
North Campus, University of Alberta
11455 Saskatchewan Drive (East of 116 Street)
Edmonton, Alberta

Tickets: $10 each or $50 for six
Seating: General

Order tickets online at www.learningourway.ca.
Seating is limited. Order your tickets soon!

For more information, contact Karin Champion by e-mail at karin.champion@ata.ab.ca or by telephone at 780-447-9435 (in Edmonton) or 1-800-232-7208 (from elsewhere in Alberta).
Enseigner selon nos aspirations—Aujourd’hui et demain

La vision des enseignantes et enseignants à l’égard de l’enseignement et de l’apprentissage dans les écoles publiques du Canada (juillet 2012)

Par Françoise Ruban, cadre supérieure au secteur du Perfectionnement professionnel et de la direction de l’ATA

L’origine de ce projet de recherche vient de l’intérêt commun de la Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants (FCE) et de l’Association canadienne d’éducation (ACE) de suivre les expériences d’enseignants dont la vision de l’enseignement est en accord avec leurs propres aspirations, c’est-à-dire l’enseignement qu’ils dispensent rejoint leurs convictions à propos de l’enseignement et de l’apprentissage.

Au Canada, plus de 4 700 membres du personnel enseignant ont répondu à cette enquête en ligne et plus de 200 enseignants ont participé à des séances de discussion selon un modèle de facilitation appelé interrogation appréciative.

Au cours de cette étude, les auteurs voulaient notamment savoir :

• Le personnel enseignant sent-il une différence entre enseigner selon ses aspirations et enseigner selon les exigences qui sont posées? Dans l’affirmative, pourquoi?

• Quels sont, d’après les enseignants, les éléments ou les conditions contribuant à leur capacité d’enseigner selon leurs aspirations?

• Quelles en sont les implications pour l’établissement d’environnements d’apprentissage où ces conditions existent de façon constante et systématique?

Au Canada, pour donner suite aux pressions actuelles des gouvernements provinciaux et de leur ministère d’éducation respectif, ce n’est pas par hasard si aujourd’hui plus que jamais la voix collective des enseignants doit se faire entendre. Un des défis importants qu’ils doivent surmonter est qu’il existe souvent une différence sensible entre leurs aspirations dans l’enseignement et le rôle d’enseignants qu’on les incite à jouer.

Selon les auteurs de cette recherche effectuée par la FCE et l’ACE, les conversations avec des enseignants débutants sont souvent marquées par l’espoir, la passion, et le désir d’inspirer et de motiver les élèves avec qui ils travailleront et d’avoir une incidence similaire sur leur vie. En revanche, les conversations avec les enseignants chevronnés laissent souvent entendre que leurs idéaux de début de carrière ont été peu à peu modifiés, et bien qu’ils gardent espoir, bon nombre d’entre eux sentent que des facteurs indépendants de leur volonté les empêchent de réaliser pleinement la vision idéale initiale de ce que devait être leur vie professionnelle.

Faits saillants de la recherche :

1. Une importante proportion d’enseignants ont vécu, du moins à l’occasion, l’enseignement selon leurs aspirations.

Toutefois, près de la moitié des personnes (49 %) ont indiqué qu’elles n’avaient qu’à l’occasion des possibilités d’enseigner selon leurs aspirations (rarement ou jamais selon 9 % d’entre elles), et 48 % des personnes ont indiqué qu’elles n’avaient qu’à l’occasion la possibilité de faire preuve de créativité dans le cadre de leurs pratiques pédagogiques (rarement ou jamais selon 6 % d’entre elles).
2. Bien que les enseignants puissent enseigner selon leurs aspirations à l’occasion, cela ne se produit pas de façon constante et systématique.

Les enseignants ont identifié les éléments suivants comme critiques pour les soutenir afin qu’ils puissent enseigner selon leurs aspirations :

– des possibilités d’apprentissage professionnel, en particulier des possibilités pertinentes qui soutiennent le travail en collaboration des enseignants;
– des liens de confiance avec des élèves, les parents et l’administration ;
– le fait d’être soutenus, valorisés et reconnus en tant que professionnels par le gouvernement, le public, les parents et l’administration scolaire;
– un leadeurship pédagogique visionnaire;
– des politiques, des programmes et une infrastructure rehaussant la souplesse en classe;
– des politiques et des pratiques d’évaluation et de présentation de résultats fournissant aux parents, aux élèves et au personnel enseignant des ressources utiles pour adapter l’apprentissage.

3. Enfin, il existe un consensus quant aux caractéristiques personnelles les plus importantes des enseignants, soit :

– une passion pour l’enseignement et un engagement envers les élèves;
– aimer les enfants;
– connaître les élèves;
– la possibilité d’utiliser son jugement professionnel et sa compétence pour prendre des décisions pédagogiques éclairées favorisant l’apprentissage des élèves.

Les résultats de cette recherche ont donc démontré que malgré les tendances prometteuses, il reste beaucoup à faire pour que nos enseignants soient toujours en mesure d’enseigner selon leurs aspirations et que leur vision de l’enseignement selon leurs aspirations se réalise de façon constante à l’échelle du système.


L’Alberta Teachers’ Association a aussi participé à cette recherche nationale et les résultats de cette participation et collaboration sont rassemblés dans un document intitulé : Alberta Voices: Teachers’ Aspirations for the Future of Teaching également disponible en ligne sur le site de l’ATA : www.teachers.ab.ca sous Publications > Research.
ATA Educational Trust—Supporting Teachers’ Professional Growth

Kim Dewar
ATA Educational Trust Administrator

In 2012, the ATA Educational Trust awarded more than $80,000 in support of teachers’ professional development. For more than 31 years, the Trust has been supporting public education and providing grants to improve teaching practices in Alberta. The Trust’s programs include the following:

• Educational grants to encourage Alberta teachers to improve their skills and knowledge through formal education. Applicants are entered into a draw for grants of up to $600 that teachers may apply towards tuition. Application deadline—May 1.

• Project grants of up to $3,000 for the development of original classroom resources or research projects that improve teaching practices. Association subgroups are encouraged to consider applying to our project grant program. To see resources previously funded by the Trust, consult the ATA library or our catalogue of Trust-sponsored projects at http://bit.ly/vOBCb3. Application deadline—May 1.

• ATA specialist council grants of $400 to help teachers attend an ATA specialist council conference or event. Deadline—September 30.

Association subgroups are encouraged to make an annual donation to the ATA Educational Trust. The Trust is funded entirely through donations and so asks that provision be made to support the valuable programs that the Trust administers. Group or individual donations, such as retirement tributes or in memory of departed teachers, are encouraged as well. Receipts for income tax purposes are issued for all individual donations made to the Trust. Visit http://bit.ly/w6wVq1 to download a printable donation form. The Trust reports to Provincial Executive Council of the ATA once a year. An annual report and the Trust financial statements are printed in the ARA Handbook each spring.

For detailed information on the Trust bursary program and to download application forms for any of our programs, visit the Trust webpage on the Alberta Teachers’ Association website at http://bit.ly/rjAZ1G or contact Kim Dewar in Edmonton at 780-447-9436 or 1-800-232-7208, ext 436.

Reminder
If you are a new PD chair, please send your name, the name of the local you represent and preferred contact information to tammy.smith@ata.ab.ca