

The World is Our Classroom

by Dr. Joe Norris, professor, Mount Saint Vincent University's Summer Institutes

Taking seriously the adage 'It takes a village to raise a child', fifteen graduate students who were enrolled this summer in Literacy in the Community: Exploring Writing and Reading at Mount Saint Vincent University, left their desks to enter a number of sites across Nova Scotia to learn about a variety of literacy activities, *Street Feat* being one. Field trips were the norm for this course and each visit brought a greater appreciation of the number of programs that exist that support people of all ages in their reading and writing endeavours.

FRONTIER COLLEGE, in keeping with their long-standing tradition, erects a reading tent and invites children and their parents to participate. The entire class visited the playground outside of the George Dixon Centre where Ramona Clare and her staff read to a variety of age groups and later involved them in a number of playful activities aimed to increase their motivation to read. In addition to scheduled times at the George Dixon Centre the tent traveled to Fairview, Bayers Westwood, north-end Halifax, Halifax Needham, Cole Harbour, and Dartmouth, advocating literacy within the HRM village. More information can be found at: <http://www.frontiercollege.ca/english/literacy/halifax.html>.

The READ TO ME program provides a bag of books to every newborn's parents to take home for reading. Carol McDougall warmly met with a group of two students and explained the program. A large team of volunteers distributes bags of books at each of Nova Scotia's eleven hospitals that provide maternity services. It is estimated that over 56,000 bags have been distributed since 2002. Their web site even advocates reading in utero, expanding our notion of the boundaries of our village. *Babies learn language by hearing language and they can hear from seven months in utero. Sharing songs, stories and nursery rhymes throughout the day calms, entertains and helps build language and writing skills.* (<http://www.readtome.ca/>)

But literacy programs are not just for the young. Coordinated by Carole Boudreau the GRANDPARENTS INTERNATIONAL STORYTELLERS is a group of grandparents who take the African adage *when an old person dies it's like a library burning to the ground*, to heart. They gather to support each other in writing their personal stories about living in their village. To date, they have published four books, *Stories that Bind Us Together*, *Our Pathway Our Life*, *Our Time to Reminisce*, and *Bridging the G.A.P.* (Grandparents Against Poverty). Carol hosted a visit with three students who met a number of the storytellers in person. Her house was a large library. Proceeds from their first three books were donated to support adult learning and literacy activities within the Annapolis Valley and from sales of the fourth \$1000.00 dollars was donated to the Stephen Lewis Foundation to support their sisters in Africa. There is a very large village. They can be found at: <http://www.accesswave.ca/~thegist/>

A major focus of the course was on the power of voice and how literacy, or lack thereof can either strengthen or weaken one's political stance in the world. We applaud the work of STREET FEAT in its efforts in bringing the voices of an under represented population of our village to the public eye. Juan Carlos Canales-Leyton generously found time in his busy schedule to meet virtually, exchanging a series of emails with two students that expanded their understanding of this literacy activity. By reading this, you, the reader,

have demonstrated your interest and support. We encourage you to keep reading/ listening to the wide variety of voices found in our village. <http://www.streetfeat.ns.ca/>

Supporting writers is the mandate of the WRITERS' FEDERATION OF NOVA SCOTIA (WFNS). Two students met with Susan Mersereau who explained many of the federations programs. The WFNS newsletter keeps their members up to date with many writing events, including workshops, competitions, and calls for submissions. They sponsor social events that enable writers, who most often work in isolation, opportunities to discuss their craft with kindred spirits and all who enter the Atlantic Writing Competition (in its 33rd year) receive their feedback to support them in the expected rewrites. For information about this non-profit organization visit: <http://www.writers.ns.ca/>.

Melissa Michaels enthusiastically met with two students, just days, if not hours, before her due date. She has been actively involved with the HALIFAX COMMUNITY LEARNING NETWORK, which is a village in itself, offering free tutorials to adults across HRM. This year tutors have assisted over 200 learners with their basic reading, writing, and math skills. The program operates in a variety of sites including, THE KESHEN GOODMAN LIBRARY, and THE CUNARD LEARNING CENTRE. Information on their programs can be found at: <http://www.hcln.ca/>.

Trudy Anstey provides educational programs for inmates at the CENTRAL NOVA SCOTIA CORRECTIONAL FACILITY. Working in a small converted computer lab, with groups of students no larger than six, she determines the educational needs and goals and assists them in achieving them. Many aim for a GEDÆ, while others enjoy the opportunity to read and write in the community of others. Poetry seems to be the preferred writing genre. She claims a 50% success rate in the obtaining of a GEDÆ, however more may obtain it after their release. This program aims to free people from the invisible bars that can keep us from reaching our potential.

Another two students visited David Pilmer and Meredith Hutchings of the NOVA SCOTIA SCHOOL OF ADULT LEARNING (NSSAL) an administrative body of the NS Department of Labour who provide adult learning opportunities throughout Nova Scotia including the Adult High School Diploma and the GEDÆ. In partnerships with regional public high schools, the Nova Scotia Community College, and others, they ensure access to programs that deliver basic literacy skills up to high school graduation. By encouraging a culture of life long learning they ensure that the social and economic well being of the village of Nova Scotia continues to grow, one learner at a time. Further information about their programs can be found at <http://www.gonssal.ca/>.

In addition to these field trips, one member of the community came to us. Paul MacNeil of the Bedford-Sackville Literacy Network (BSLN) shared his own literacy story with the class, describing himself as a 'poster boy' for adult literacy programs. After the economic downturn in Cape Breton, he sought out programs to advance his education. Now, with two degrees he finds himself as the coordinator of the BSLN. His enthusiasm and dedication was inspiring and much like Emma Lazuraus' poem at the foot of the Stature of Liberty, we could hear 'Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free' as he

promoted the work at BSLN. Being a success story, Paul is driven to provide others with the opportunities that he so greatly appreciated. He can be found at: <http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Education/BSLN/>.

The course also turned its attention to visual and dramatic literacy with field trips to the ART GALLERY OF NOVA SCOTIA (AGNS) and TWO PLANKS AND A PASSION'S performance of *Rockbound* at the Ross Creek Centre for the Arts or SHAKESPEARE BY THE SEA'S production of *Jack and the Beanstalk-Market*. Willie Reid, ArtReach Coordinator at AGNS linked multiple intelligence theory to the visual arts and led the class through an enlightening workshop that demonstrated how one could use images to promote vocabulary development and how *reading* images can evoke the imagination, bringing pleasure to those who know how to look. After lunch Enrique Ferreol, Assistant Curator of Education of AGNS conducted a tour of the gallery using concrete examples (Will Gorrilz's paintings) that helped us all in learning how to *read* images. The performances gave us insightful glimpses at the workings of our village from Nova Scotian history to modern economics. The actors read the word through the memorization of printed texts, further advancing literacy in image, gesture and sound.

(http://www.artgalleryofnovascotia.ca/en/AGNS_Halifax/default.aspx)

<http://www.twoplanks.ca/>

<http://www.shakespearebythesea.ca/index.html>

We concluded the course with a greater understanding and appreciation of some of the many organizations and individuals who support the continued education of our population. They are vibrant, generous, passionate about their work and always underfunded. We were humbled by their dedication.

It took our village to teach this course and we thank its citizens!

Dr. Joe Norris is a professor of Drama-in-Education and Applied Theatre in the Department of Dramatic Arts in the Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts at Brock University and often teaches at Mount Saint Vincent University's Summer Institutes. This article summarizes his students' reports and presentations.

CHECK THIS OUT!

Our Thyme Café Employment Training Opportunity

Our Thyme Café is a social enterprise initiative of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia. This fully operational Café and Catering training site provides an opportunity to women who have been involved in the criminal justice system and/or may be experiencing barriers that include homelessness and poverty, to develop certified skills and hands on experience in the food-industry.

Our Thyme Café opened December 11, 2008; we currently have women of diverse backgrounds involved in the project in varied capacities. We are actively recruiting women who have barriers to employment and who are seeking resources and training that could facilitate a smooth transition into the work force.

If you know of anyone who may be interested in this initiative or if you would like more information, please contact Lynn Yetman or Mary Young at 902-406-7467 or email lyetman@ourthymecafe.biz.

An Evening of Hospitality and Music Is Yours!

Marthas on a Mission

Saturday, October 17th, 2009, 7PM

St. Patrick's Church, 2267 Brunswick Street, Halifax.

Sisters of St. Martha invite you to celebrate the gifts of Hospitality and Music. As you may know, the Sisters are presently working in Halifax and area, with people, who sometimes, find themselves on the street without a home.

Cost: FREE (unless you would like to make a wee donation to aid the work of the Sisters.)

People will be available to help with parking cars.

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www.veithstreetgallery.org	

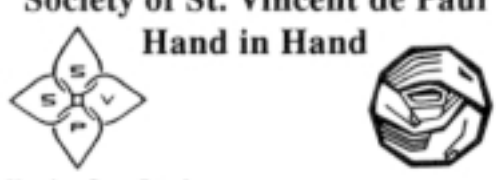


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