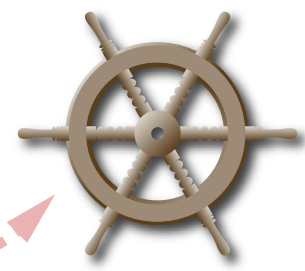


Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



We don't need a raft, we have each other

Paul Syme, MA. Art & Design Teacher, Horton High School

In 1816, the French frigate *Méduse* ran aground after being steered one hundred miles off course by a inexperienced politically appointed captain. Of its approximately 400 passengers and crew, half departed on small boats, 17 stayed with the ship, and the 146 remaining men and women boarded a hastily built raft. After 13 days at sea, the 15 remaining on the raft were spotted and rescued by the *Argus*. Theodore Géricault's depiction of "The Raft of the Medusa" (1818-19) is arranged in two overlapping triangles, one of despair, the other of hope. Through despair, many were killed or killed themselves. Géricault's work teaches us that when we lose sight of hope we also lose sight of our noble spirits — turning instead to despair where we are capable of heinous acts. As such, believers in the power of hope gravitate to those who speak in the language of possibilities. Despair has no place in public education as it drives us apart especially when we are most needed to pull together.

As new school years get underway, teachers typically swim in streams of hope that are sometimes tempered by currents of distrust. One of those streams of hope can be found in the restorative approach the NSTU is engaging in, with a focus on relationship building both within the NSTU and, perhaps, also from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). Teachers can be proud of the report of the Commission on Inclusive Education, the NSTU's efforts to remain firmly affiliated with public school administrators, and our voice in the establishment of relevant and data informed teaching standards. Teachers can also join the DEECD in welcoming Dr. Sharroky Hollie and his promotion of culturally responsive pedagogy as it supports classroom conditions that foster positive administrator-teacher-student relations.

Restorative Approach

At the first meeting of the Provincial Executive, executive members and staff, came together in a smudging ceremony. As part of this, old grievances were privately written down and set ablaze. By retiring some of our pain we are released to remember the good times, reconnect with each other, and to recharge our spirits. The Provincial Executive table was reconfigured into a circle and all worked on focusing on equity and respect. The day was pleasant and jovial, I felt no presence of strife or conflict. This team is determined to work together for teachers and the betterment of our education system.

Inclusion

The Final Report of the Commission on Inclusive Education provides a critical examination of our current school environments and makes specific recommendations towards identifying and tracking the impact of efforts to remove barriers to truly inclusive public schools. Students First would have schools and an education system that "addresses students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioural needs in an integrated way." (p.5) This report, resulting from an arms-length NSTU/Departmental partnership, recommends broad changes and investment to provide appropriate funding, specialized staff, student-centered interagency collaboration, strengthened home and school partnerships, streamlined policies, strong leadership and oversight, and "a plan for phased-in implementation and alignment with other education initiatives" (p.7) The NSTU has endorsed the entire report while Government has committed to adopting parts of it and addressing other areas through their own, to be determined approach.

A new relationship

While it is a reality that our administrators have been removed from the bargaining arm of the NSTU, as affiliates, our teachers with administrative responsibilities remain part of our teaching family. As such, administrators will continue to share access to most of the services, supports, and benefits of the NSTU. The interim board of Public School Association of Administrators in Nova Scotia (PSAANS) have been warm and wish to work closely with the NSTU. Further, our Provincial Executive unanimously agreed to enter an interim agreement with PSAANS. To this, I hope we see continued collegiality and team spirit in our schools.

Teaching Standards

Representing the NSTU to government in the drafting our Teaching Standards and Teacher Evaluation, Dr. Anne Rodrigue, who is working on the NSTU's behalf is driven to ensure that these standards are professional, relevant, and borne out of peer reviewed research. She has suggested that we can expect the standards to reflect the highly educated and effective composition of teachers that we are, often punching above our weight. Dr. Rodrigue suggests the "standards can be used to reflect on individual and collective notions of what good teaching looks like, how to build inclusive classrooms and respond to the emotional and learning needs of our students."

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Towards social inclusion and forming positive administrator-teacher-student relations, the Department, through its Regional Centres for Education has invited Dr. Hollie to deliver a one-day inservice on culturally responsive pedagogy. Some centres have made efforts to ensure all office and support staff to be present for Dr. Hollie alongside teachers and administrators, with many of these sessions having already been delivered. Many teachers have found it refreshing to participate in a professional development session that focussed on establishing positive and effective relationships with students rather than another session on software, performance indicators, or outcomes. Dr. Hollie offers useful insights and tools towards welcoming more students to feel valued and included in our classrooms. He reminds us that culture shapes us in ways that are much deeper and more profound than how we might recognize it on the surface. Dr. Hollie contextualizes otherwise disruptive behaviour as potential cultural expression—where we can shift our responses from ones of conflict towards positive change—when we



validate, affirm and build bridges (VABB) to stronger relationships and more normative behaviour. Dr. Hollie urges us all to consider the impact of our actions and language while he directs us to be mindful of diversity and equity, the rings of culture, the iceberg concept of culture. (@validateaffirm or www.culturallyresponsive.org)

Renewal

For the NSTU, this is a year to **remember, reconnect, and recharge**. While we can remember the strife of the past few years we should also remember what is most important—the resilience found in the positive relationships we form with students and each other. We need to reconnect with our teaching and learning communities, our friends and families and ultimately recharge ourselves. I hope this spirit of renewal and compassion is found, felt, and persists for all every day throughout the year.

Paul Syme recently completed a secondment with the NSTU as an executive Staff Officer in Professional Development.