

GUEST EDITORIAL

The New 3 R's of Education

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In October 2014, the Canadian History of Education Association met at the Bessborough Hotel in Saskatoon for its biennial conference. Like all of its preceding meetings, the venue consisted mainly of individual historians speaking their minds on topics of Canadian history that interested them, punctuated by wine and cheese, awards, dinners and catching up with old colleagues not seen for a year. However, this conference had one stark difference: While the old 3 R's of schooling may have once dominated discussion around a room full of educators, the focus was now squarely on the *New 3 R's*.

Nothing symbolized this shift more than the event that took place on the second evening of the conference. Spilling into the vast space of the hotel's Battleford Ballroom, interested citizens as well as academics gathered to witness a public forum concerning these new 3 R's of education: *Regulation, Resistance, and Reconciliation*. Leaders of *Idle No More*, one of the largest Indigenous mass movements in recent history, had come to not only discuss the past, but the present and future as well. The group had begun small with a series of teach-ins to educate the public concerning what they saw as the erosion of Indigenous sovereignty and environmental protection. It had quickly grown into a wave of millions, mobilized enough to effect change in the social and political landscape of Canada. While protest was a component of this crusade – the ultimate vision was that of hope.

This special issue of *Education Matters* is grounded in these three towering themes, and pays homage to the good spirit that emerged from those four days at the Bessborough. Along with the photographic images that had adorned the conference's program, this issue also contains the writings of a number of those who attended, and of those who follow parallel paths to the pursuit of historical knowledge. As guest editor, my first assignment

was the task of inviting eminent authors to write essays explicitly dealing with these topics. In the end, this was not an onerous burden as I knew almost immediately who should speak on each theme – I had heard their unique voices before.

I have met Dr. **Catherine Broom** from the University of British Columbia on many occasions at these conferences and have become familiar with her speciality and acumen. Graciously agreeing to contribute an essay, she begins the discussion by presenting her view of *Regulation* as shown in the rise of bureaucracy in schools in Western Canada. She gives a lock-step account of the changes that took place in the school system during the early part of the 20th century, all with the goal of efficiency, and the ensuing results of this ongoing decision.

I fondly remember a very heated late-night discussion among the CHEA members in the lobby of that CP hotel during the conference. It equally shifted between heady issues of history to where we should go now that the hotel bar had closed. Rising above the fray were the clear thoughts of **Funke Aladejebi**, a doctoral student from York University, who proceeded to illuminate us all on the issue of mid-century teacher protest. This passion is transferred to her essay on *Resistance*, where she shows great insight into the many strategies used by teachers to resist unfair practices in the Ontario School system from the 1960s to the 1980s.

Finally, I knew of no-one who could handle the issue of *Reconciliation* like my old colleague Dr. **John Long**. I have had many first-hand experiences with his gentle vision of this topic since I first met him so many years ago. A man who didn't merely *talk about* it or *petition for* it, John actually lived this ideal throughout his all-too-short life. When I asked him to contribute this essay, he immediately agreed to the task. At the time, however, he did say that he wasn't feeling well, and that he may not be the greatest authority to speak on the topic. Looking back on these two points, I can only comment on what gross underestimations both of these arguments were. But, that was John to his core. His deeply personal essay on this issue cuts to the heart of the matter (most of what John said did), not seeing it as a state-centred problem to be solved in a fell swoop, but something that must be addressed by each person on an ongoing basis no matter where they stood.

The remaining articles in this issue display the great range of authors and subjects that may be found under the umbrella of history of education in Canada. We begin with **Alastair Glegg's** work, "*The Child's Education to Violence*". A retired professor from the University of Victoria and long-time contributor to CHEA's journal *Historical Studies in Education*, Dr. Glegg discusses the crusade by Mrs. Eleanor Gray of Victoria to ban "crime comic books" in the post-war period. In this study, he expands this movement to show it as part of a larger concern with threats to the social order, a menacing violence.

This idea of maintaining the *status quo* in the face of chaotic and rebellious urges is taken up by **Christine Ensslen** from Brock University in her article "Regulating the Personal Lives of 'Lady' Teachers". It explores the constraints put on Saskatchewan female teachers in the early 20th century as they endeavoured to fit into the small communities they inhabited.

With rebellious natures, a number of articles in this issue tackle important educational concerns of the last few years of Canada's history, and starkly compares them to our present situation. The inimitable **Paul Bennett** from Saint Mary's University, for instance, contributes his insights on a subject that is all too familiar to teachers of today as well as in the past: The erosion of history itself within the High School Curriculum. Alternatively, **Stephanie Blackmon** from the College of William & Mary concludes in her study of educational technology, "Teaching Online, Challenges and Motivations", that attitudes towards online education have remained relatively stable over the past fifteen years. In an inventive twist, **Jonelle Ulrich** of the University of Saskatchewan then takes the lessons learned from an historic disaster at sea and compares them to administrative thought in schools today in the aptly-titled contribution "The Predictable Fate of an Organizational Shipwreck."

The article section appropriately finishes with a literature review that juxtaposes the goals and realities of public education in Western society. Specifically, **Michelle Olivier** and **Candace Besharah's** contribution, "Tensions Inherent in Public Education for the Common Good", looks at the impact that the actions based on this philosophy has had on Aboriginal learners as well as the general education system.

The books in the review section were specifically chosen for this issue: Both played key roles in the proceedings of the conference. Ruth Sandwell and Amy von Heyking's edited book, *Becoming a History Teacher: Sustaining Practices in Historical Thinking and Knowing*, came to press just before the event, and most of the contributing authors to this edited work were actually present in Saskatchewan that October, discussing many of the issues that emerged from its pages. Likewise, Ted Christou's book concerning *Progressive Education* was purposively reviewed with the knowledge that it had won the association's publication award on this particular occasion.

In the end, I hope that this issue brings together a wealth of knowledge that researchers and authors have to contribute to Canadian history of education today. Equally important, I hope that it relays, in colourful array, the impressions left by the participants after this stimulating and important conference. I think that it is only fitting, therefore, that the poet **Dianne Miller** gets the last word with "Dwelling in the past". Her insightful epilogue should give all members of the conference something to think about – but also something to fear and work against!