

FIRST READING

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LESSONS IN LEARNING



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School and community form partnership

By Sheila Kushniruk

They just do it. They skipped the red tape and formalities that go along with bringing agencies together to work on a project and they got right to the heart of the matter — helping the kids.

Three schools and several service agencies are meeting every Wednesday morning to talk about problems that students are having. They brainstorm, they troubleshoot, they plan and they make it work. Before the project, the only way to get help for student problems was by making dozens of phone calls to several different agencies in the hope that someone could suggest something.

T.D. Baker, W.P. Wagner and L.Y. Cairns Schools are testing the waters for interagency collaboration. Other participants include Alberta Correctional Services — youth probation, the Edmonton Board of Health, a clinical neural psychologist, a psychologist with the school board, a social worker with the school board, The City's Community and Family Social Service, Alberta Community and Family Social Service — child welfare, and the Edmonton City Police.

"Collectively we were able to convince ourselves we could do it. We just said let's get innovative and attack a problem here," said Noel Kunst, principal of T.D. Baker Junior High School. "If we each take our strengths and pool them, we're so much better."

The idea evolved last year and after meeting with a couple different agencies Constable Mark Johnson, an Edmonton Police resource person who works out of W.P. Wagner School, and the three school principals decided to just go ahead and call everyone who wanted to be involved to come together for Wednesday morning. They've been doing so for the whole school year and plan to keep it going.

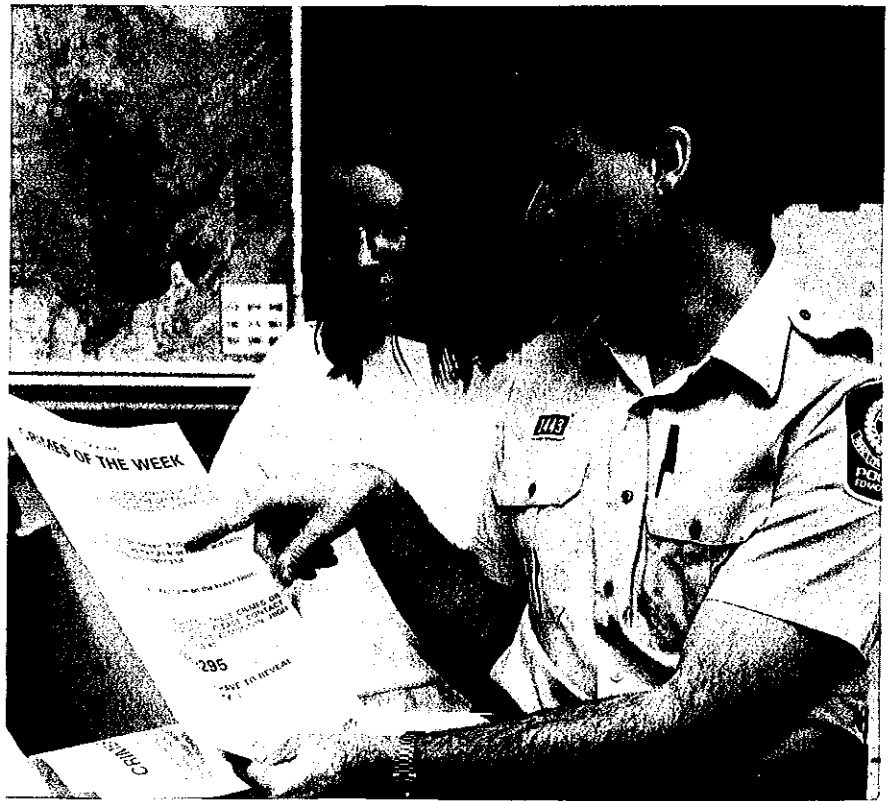
**"If we each take our strengths and pool them, we're so much better."
- Noel Kunst,
principal T.D.
Baker Junior
High School**

It's not as though any of these schools are constantly plagued with crises. They are not. But when a student is experiencing family problems, physical or sexual abuse, has low self esteem, is involved with the Young Offender's Act, has a problem with drugs or alcohol or even has thoughts of committing suicide, it can affect their attendance and their performance at school. It can also have a negative effect on their peers.

"The reality in today's world is if we're going to attack these huge problems we need to co-operate," said Kunst. "I can't say how much this approach has helped T.D. Baker — it has helped us so much," said Kunst. He said there are immediate rewards in that people can see they've made a difference and it gives them job satisfaction. They've developed a level of trust among agencies, the school, the students and the community and together they are more efficient at providing service to people.

Constable Johnson said the approach has allowed the group to be proactive rather than reactive. He said by having all the groups meeting in a school they are able to reach many more young people than just waiting for them to walk into an agency waiting room.

One of the objectives for the group is to get help for the student before a problem turns into a crisis. Johnson said now he has students



Constable Mark Johnson and W.P. Wagner student Jill McPhee look over local crime statistics. Photo courtesy of Edmonton Public Schools.

coming up to him and saying they are having problems at home and they are going to run away. They want to know where they can go. Before this group started meeting, he would have been dealing with the young person after they had already left home.

There was no money allocated to bring all parties together and there was no new manpower given. The group is trying to keep it simple with no formal structure or mission statements or hierarchy. They work as a team. Now instead of problems taking weeks before there is some kind of action or assistance, the group can often get support services together within the space of an hour. Members of the group then

follow-up with their own agencies to put in place the assistance required.

Students have reacted positively to the team's work. When one student is helped the word spreads and now many young people are coming forward. Staff at the schools are excited about the group's work and the community is becoming more aware and involved with the project.

Three elementary schools will be coming into the group next school year and other community groups are expressing interest. Kunst believes this is the future direction for delivering service and he hopes it will bring communities together with the school as a focal point.

Teachers pushed to act as social workers

... no resources to do so and less time to teach

By Fran Savage

Give me kids from stable home environments, with enough sleep, proper nutrition and love and I'll show you results.

Sleep, food and love, it's a very simple recipe for a child ready to become the healthy, productive adult we hope our education system can produce. But this recipe comes from an Alberta teacher who is concerned because too many of her students haven't had these fundamental needs met.

This teacher was only one of thousands who participated in preparing submissions to an Alberta Teachers' Association committee that asked teachers what effects increasing demands on education were having in their classrooms.

The responses were eloquent, moving and frightening. For overwhelmingly, teachers said they were asked to do much more than teach - so much more that they were finding it difficult to actually get to teaching. Instead, they're busying themselves trying to give children what they need **before** they can even begin to learn. These preparations include changing diapers, administering medications, dealing with disruptive behaviors, counselling and consoling.

We, as a society, are learning so much more about why children fail in school. We've acknowledged that family violence exists and that children who are the direct victims, or the 'spin-off'



Teaching has become far more complicated than just educating students in the three R's — reading, writing and arithmetic.

Photo courtesy of the Alberta Teachers' Association.

victims as witnesses, suffer. We know that suffering affects their ability to learn. We, as a society, now acknowledge that sexual assault exists within families and that the victim's bruised sense of self has trouble believing he or she can learn. And we, as a society, now acknowledge that all people have a place in the mainstream of our culture.

This knowledge has had an enormous impact on the role of the teacher. As one teacher wrote in the report of the committee on public education and professional practice (**Trying to Teach**): "Many times we are forced to spend time helping children or their families meet basic needs. While this is not technically part of our job, we know that hungry children, children with no glasses whose working parents are impoverished, and children who see one parent batter the other are in no position to make progress at school.

"We need school counsellors, psychologists, social workers, speech language pathologists, school nurses, parenting instructors, and other preventive social services available in sufficient quantity and quality that we are free to teach."

The recognition of the many ways we hurt children is a positive step in seeking solutions. Parents alone can't and don't always provide their children with all they need. But in acknowledging that parents need support and help, we've mistakenly assumed that teachers can provide it. We're sadly lacking in creative solutions and

government is misdirecting its efforts by concentrating on measuring schools with increased external testing and education report cards, rather than supporting schools with increased resources.

The average child from birth to 18 years of age will spend only 8.2 per cent of his or her life in a classroom. That's



Time for one on one teaching is becoming harder to accommodate . Photo courtesy of the Alberta Teachers' Association.

not enough time to heal the hurt of physical and emotional abuses, to teach social skills, to monitor medical conditions, to unteach aggression and, in addition, to teach reading, writing and arithmetic.

If we're serious about raising this generation of children to be the strong, healthy and happy individuals they were meant to be, we must start before a child ever gets to the classroom with early intervention programs and parent support. If we're serious about students maximizing their learning potential, we'll feed and clothe

them before they get to the classroom. And if we're serious about including all children in the mainstream of society, we'll make sure support, money and manpower is there for them in the classroom.

We can't successfully shift the job of raising children from parents to teachers. This generation of young people

needs the help, support and encouragement of every adult member of society. If school is the best place to reach children in need, then we must coordinate the efforts of departments of health, social services and education along with parent and volunteer groups. The problems we face in the classroom today are social problems, not just education problems, and we can't solve them with education dollars and manpower alone.

Fran Savage is the President of the Alberta Teachers' Association.

Parents determined to get lunch programs by this fall

— partnerships needed

By Gordie LaRocque

I am compelled to start with the parents, those parents who despite demanding lives gather their personal resources to dedicate volunteer energy to disadvantaged children. For the parents this is also an issue about power and an equitable share of available resources.

In the spring of last year 'grassroots were in bloom'. A core group of parents organized from a common concern. They know from personal experience there is a serious hunger problem within the schools of Edmonton's low income neighborhoods and they committed themselves to advocating for a publicly funded school lunch program. There is a dire list of statistical indicators to back what these parents know in their gut. We all have seen the numbers regarding child poverty — they won't be repeated here, expect to say it is increasingly difficult to find people who dispute the hunger problem within our inner city schools.

Throughout this first year the School Food Action Committee (SFAC) has emphasized partnerships — that government and school boards should work together with parents and communities to make child hunger a priority. By going public during the municipal election, school board budget and with a current public education campaign parents have put a human face on

the statistics and have done credit to themselves and the child poverty issue. But in putting themselves on the line parents have had to answer tough questions. As in who's responsible for hungry kids in our schools? We've maintained that it is every one's responsibility, that it is a societal problem, and that all of society would benefit by alleviating this problem. The bottom line is poverty and hunger are not the fault of children of the increasing ranks of the poor. It is indefensible for our society to have hungry children in our schools.

Everyone agrees that the future lies with our children. Children in poverty, who attend school hungry, are not able to receive an equal education and do not share in the promise of the future. The future should also include adequate income, good health and the opportunity to become productive members of society. But children living in poverty, who attend school hungry, do not learn properly. The cold hard facts state these young people have a greater probability of becoming the school drop-outs, unemployed youth, welfare recipients, street people, and prison inmates of tomorrow.

Now I would like to share some numbers (hard to avoid them completely) from the Federal Government, Ministry of State for Youth. One million unskilled and largely illiterate workers will enter the labor market by 2000, if trends continue.

Considering lost tax revenue and higher social expenses, young people who leave school early will cost Canadian taxpayers about \$33 billion over the next 20 years. And 2.4 billion is spent annually in Canada for youth under the unemployment insurance program.

The SFAC says let's correct the course of those

Ultimately all segments of society have a moral responsibility for hungry children and all would benefit from better educated, healthier children who as adults would contribute more fully to our common future. The SFAC regards school lunches as a cost-effective investment that will cut future social-economic costs. The most

needed in Edmonton's inner city schools. But so far funding has not been as forthcoming. The SFAC now is hoping to build on this qualified support by inviting potential funders to a meeting. Some private and public sector agencies have responded.

After a year of planning, advocacy and increased support parents are resolved to implement a school lunch program. The SFAC continues to emphasize partnerships to achieve a common goal. With growing recognition of the need for a school lunch program how long must parents wait for that goal to be realized? With hundreds of children suffering from hunger today and throughout the past school year, parents are determined that the children not wait much longer, that the hunger stops in two inner city schools. September 1993 is the goal for lunch program delivery.

Parents are doing their part, and call on other partners to make a school lunch program a reality. Our common future and the society determined by our children will be the beneficiaries of our partnership.

For more information or to get involved contact Gordie LaRocque at the Boyle Street Co-op(424-4106).

Gordie LaRocque is the community organizer of the School Food Action Committee.



Shauna Quinn and her sons, Billy and Jamie, stopped by Eaton Centre's Body Shoppe to sign a petition and talk with Gordie LaRocque and ESFC's Ivone Martins.

trends. When the current political climate is all about fiscal restraint we assert that trying to teach hungry students is actually a waste of our expensive education tax dollar. It doesn't make fiscal sense to try to teach hungry children. The SFAC calls on governments to make child hunger a priority and to re-allocate existing resources to alleviate child hunger.

The SFAC program design includes a parent lunch fee, and in an effort to forge new and creative partnerships, encourages business and labor to contribute their resources and energy.

unforgivable cost is the loss of human potential. Accompanying costs are loss of tax base and increased expenditures in health, education, justice and social services.

School meal programs are not a novel concept, they have been successful elsewhere, having positive effects on children's ability to learn. Locally, parents have been commended by politicians and administrators for developing a good plan and for advocating for a needed program. The SFAC's success has been limited to the growing recognition that a school lunch program is



By
Jonathan
Murphy

Welfare reforms have promise, pitfalls

Alberta's welfare program has been floundering for years. Organizational reshuffles and new program names have been introduced amid fanfare and then disappeared without a trace. Threats and incentives to get off welfare have come and gone. Senior bureaucrats have been promoted, demoted, shuffled, fired and then re-hired as consultants. Legions of staff have been sent packing to regional headquarters in Tory rural Alberta, then just as suddenly "recentralized" back to the big city. Only one thing never seems to change; growth in welfare rolls.

Meanwhile, through the 1980's, there was a continual tug-of-war over welfare rates and regulations. The government would take benefits away; we the advocacy groups would howl. A few more dollars or a relaxation of rules, and we would claim partial victory, always careful to demand a bit more dough for the poor. No-one dared question the underlying philosophy of welfare.

By 1990, some of us on the advocacy side realised we were in a rut. By focusing so

much on benefit levels and the 'right to welfare', we forgot the flip side of that equation; the right not to be on welfare. The recession fired thousands of families into the welfare hopper every year, though most escaped sooner or later. But some did not. And the longer they stayed dependent, the greater the chance they would never get back on their own feet. And if they didn't get off welfare, would their children? Five dollars more on a monthly cheque or the odd emergency food voucher wasn't going to make the difference. We were fiddling while Rome burned.

Meanwhile, every family on welfare adds a drop to Alberta's ocean of debt. Politicians who never challenged multi-millions in patronage handouts suddenly show deep concern about the thousand dollars monthly that welfare gives a single mother with two children. The public was getting mad with politicians, and what better way to deflect that anger than upon the poor, the sick, and the lame?

The welfare state consensus started to collapse. On the right, the demand was

for an end to laziness through more fraud investigations, program cuts, and forcible works programs. Much of the left continued a defensive fight to the death amidst the burned out shells of their hallowed universal programs, but others poked their heads out of the sand long enough to see that crisis presents opportunity as well as danger. These progressives didn't yet know *what* they wanted, but they realized a costly state-run support system which isolated people and made them dependent was not necessarily synonymous with social justice and human liberation.

Today there is growing consensus that *work* is the key to solving the welfare dilemma. Real work provides social status, self-esteem, income, friendship and purpose. Lack of work doesn't always mean those things are missing, but it's sure hard to get them all at one time without a job.

When Mike Cardinal was appointed minister of family and social services, it was clear he too would emphasize employment programs. Mike's career as a government official in

northern Alberta taught him first hand that welfare dependency was destroying communities, many of them made up of aboriginal people like himself. Cardinal set up and ran a works program as part of his job.

So what do we make of the minister's first big welfare

lending credibility to the rumor that the forthcoming election played a role in speeding up a design process which needed more input and discussion. Nevertheless, the human service sector must not lightly dismiss the reforms. The public is not in the mood to have nay-sayers

to deal with these two issues has stymied most previous programs of this type.

Cardinal's 'Job Corps' plan shows he understands the private sector isn't likely to hire any but a small percentage of the most able recipients, who would probably find work anyway. The Job Corps will be operated by municipalities and non-profits, and will offer minimum wage jobs mainly in simple manual work like cleaning road allowances, fixing up pathways, and beautifying rivers and other recreation areas. There are several potential problems with the Corps. The type of jobs being suggested don't give much hope for skill development or long term steady employment. Also, the program may work well in rural and northern areas, where the potential scale of the program is small, and personal supports and encouragement can be offered to participants. But in cities like Edmonton and Calgary, properly training and supervising thousands of participants will be an enormous task.

Minister Cardinal may also find that many of his so-called employable recipients are far from job-ready. Long periods of welfare dependency, limited educational and other social skills, and a variety of social problems plague many recipients. With the best will in the world, they may find it very difficult to show up regularly for

The Welfare Reforms - Positives

- **More training incentives** - for employers to hire welfare recipients - no details provided.
- **Job Corps** - minimum wage jobs for employables to be administered by municipalities and non-profits.
- **Transitional health benefits** - medical benefits provided for a time after recipients get jobs - two pilot projects only.
- **Earnings exemption** - 25% of net earnings can be kept by recipients, plus a "flat rate work-related expense benefit" - but many recipients working part-time may end up with less money than under the current policies.

reform? The package announced April 15 contained two major thrusts. Private sector employers would be given 'training incentives' (presumably subsidies) to hire recipients, while a public sector 'Job Corps' would be set up for those who don't get hired by the private sector. Cardinal claims that most employable welfare recipients will be put to work one way or another. If they won't work, they'll be cut off assistance.

Details are sketchy and implementation plans apparently non-existent,

demolish apparently well intentioned attempts to reduce dependency and cut the debt. Our criticisms must be constructive and our alternatives realistic.

Reducing welfare dependency by moving people into the workforce is far more complex than it might first appear. Two elements at least are critical to success. First, there must be *new* jobs available, otherwise the recipients will simply displace other people in the workforce. Second, the 'employable' recipients must be truly able to work. Failure

work and follow supervisors' directions. It is essential that any 'compulsory' program like the Job Corps recognizes the need for intensive and often costly supports and services to deal with these barriers, and that the category of employable recipients be narrowed to a group of people with a realistic chance of holding down regular employment.

While the publicly announced program of reforms has potential for success, the same cannot be said of the interim package of administrative changes leaked to the media and opposition parties in March (see box *The Welfare Reforms - Negatives*). This package consists entirely of punitive and unhelpful measures which will make life harder for poor people.

Of particular concern is a directive that department workers not advise clients of benefits to which they may be entitled; "clients are only issued benefits other than standard if they request them ..." Surely government has a duty to advise its citizens of benefits and programs available to them? This is especially critical in the field of welfare, where many of those eligible for benefits lack the literacy and other communication skills needed to independently gather program information.

In addition, the new prohibition on issuing benefits while a client is waiting for an appeal will inevitably

cause some clients serious hardship due to mistaken or even malicious decisions of departmental staff. And elimination of the requirement to provide a client 30 days notice of benefit termination may result in people ending up on the streets, without the time to find

ment earnings.

- Design Job Corps projects with lasting benefits and real skill development. One such program would upgrade some of the disgraceful housing conditions in the inner city and decaying low income housing projects.

The Welfare Reforms - Negatives

- **No information on benefits** - workers are only to provide benefits which the client specifically requests.
- **Only 30 days benefits to single employables** - previously, benefits were reviewed every sixty days. Now their cases will be reviewed every thirty days.
- **No benefits while awaiting appeal** - appeals can often take a month or more to be processed - how do recipients support themselves while waiting for appeal?
- **No guarantee of early intake** - previously, intake was guaranteed within 48 hours. New clients may now be left without funds for an extended period.

alternative arrangements.

The overall impact of the new reforms cannot be assessed until program details and implementation plans are finalized. That gives time for some of the negative features to be quietly dropped, and for the employment initiatives to be designed so they provide real benefits and opportunities to participants. Some important program adjustments and clarifications would include:

- Increase the earnings exemption so recipients can keep more than one quarter of their employ-

- Restore the policy that government welfare workers should inform clients of benefits to which they may be entitled.
- Establish program guidelines and evaluation mechanisms for works projects to ensure that jobs created are new, not simply replacement of existing workers.



United Way
OF EDMONTON AND AREA



By June
Sheppard

Stepping tentatively into the future

On a recent morning while listening to Peter Gzowski's program on CBC-AM radio, I heard him refer to himself as a "techno-peasant!"

I felt an immediate surge of rapport. With our respective backgrounds in radio, television and newspapers, I think it's fair to say we're open to new developments, new ways of doing things, and to questioning where fast-paced changes could be taking us.

That certainly includes what we know as the "technological revolution" sweeping through our society at a pace that is both exciting and bewildering.

A "techno-peasant" I may be, but that doesn't suppress many questions on the subject relative to the speed of the technology race and its social and human implications.

I guess it would be accurate to say at this stage of the "revolution" that I am clapping, but with one hand.

New technological advances are not easy to keep in step with but it is obvious that many have brought with them convenience, efficiency, and access to great masses of

information transmitted with almost unbelievable speed.

With the exciting changes comes the possibility of entering new areas such as genetic engineering, space technology and atomic physics, etc.

They are impressive, but we really don't know whether they will bring the "good life" to the world's people — to our family lives.

Speaking of families, among the changes technology has brought is the working mother bringing the computer, etc. home from the office to combine her job with child care.

Some women I've spoken to and read about find this the best of all possible solutions. For others it's turned out to be a mixed blessing.

I believe it is undeniable that the new technologies can pose a disturbing threat to privacy, but not nearly enough is known about this subject.

The director of the International Centre for Leadership in Education, speaking recently in Toronto, declared that "traditional higher education is not needed in the technological age!"

Do we infer from this that books, music, nature, history, the contribution of good teachers and many other sources of knowledge will be ruled superfluous?

And what of "lower" education? Will those 6,000 classroom videos provide all the educational inspiration a young mind will really need or want?

We are told that the field of technology will be the main provider of jobs in our future. But it's too early to know that. Isn't it also possible it could push more working people to the sidelines?

Technology has a downside. In the enthusiasm for it, that has to be remembered. The changes it brings so rapidly affect everyone's world and not always for the better.

To harbor some doubts, some fears along with the interest and enthusiasm is being realistic not reactionary.

It's particularly vital that young people learn that the new inventions are more than gadgets, more than toys. These new inventions can have profound effects on their future.

Language Learning: Don't let them confuse you with any red herrings!

By Artur
Gudowski

In North America there has always been a parochial distinction between first language and second language acquisition. Its existence is often justified by the fact that the former happens to be studied by the more academic disciplines such as psychology and linguistics and the latter by more applied ones like education. It is often suggested that languages are not like mathematics which is a universal language: they do not belong to one particular culture, thus are not instruments of domination of one country or culture by another. These assumptions lead to xenophobic attitudes toward language learning. Definitely, learning languages is a process of developing awareness of the world outside the classroom — it is the “practice of freedom.”

Just as the teaching of the mother tongue in Freire's *Pedagogy* becomes a process of increasing consciousness of one's society, so too may teaching of a second or heritage language (Freire 1972). Freire aims to encourage the individual's capacity to act on his or her environment to change it for better. The teaching of languages may also, in a modest way, contribute to this process. The stress in teaching heritage languages should not be limited to heritage preservation but should also include:

- the broadening of the learner's horizons
- the development of the student's personalities and potentials
- the acquisition of more diverse ways of thinking.

For me, the main, if not the only, objective of language education is bi- or multilingualism. Lambert described a

bilingual child in a following way: “...a youngster whose wider experiences in two cultures have given him advantages which a monolingual does not enjoy. Intellectually, his experience with two language systems seems to have left him with mental flexibility, a superiority in concept formation, a more diversified set of mental abilities. In contrast, a monolingual appears to have a more unitary structure of intelligence which he must use for all types of intellectual tasks.” (Lambert 1972)

Unfortunately, such opinions are not shared by many politicians — Ronald Reagan's concerns about bilingualism led him to depart from his prepared speech in 1981: “It is absolutely wrong and against the American concept to have a bilingual education program that is now openly, admittedly dedicated to preserving their native language and never getting them adequate in English so they can go into the job market.” Such attitudes must be shared by the federal politicians in Canada. In 1990, the Secretary of State discontinued subsidies to heritage language schools in Canada even though it probably was the cheapest language education system in the world. This elimination of funding for supplementary education of heritage language was a blatant disregard for the multicultural Act — section 3.1 (i) and (j): “...policy of the Government of Canada to preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada... to advance multiculturalism throughout Canada in harmony with the national commitment to the official languages of Canada.”

The commitment to the official languages of Canada has also been substantially reduced. The 1992 policy of Employment and Immigration Canada's “Lan-

guage Instruction for Newcomers to Canada" is a major improvement in language training for integration but it affects only a limited number of new immigrants while, for example, the Secretary of State refuses to fund any language training for Canadian citizens.

Recent developments in Alberta in the area of language education prove one more time that we have not recovered from the hangover from times when random exposure to language and haphazard immersion in language were considered to be the educational philosophy behind language acquisition (it led to the formation of a linguistically deprived, thus silent, minority in Canada).

Becoming bilingual is a way of life. The whole person is affected as s/he struggles to reach beyond the confines of his/her first language and into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling and acting. Total commitment, total involvement, a total physical, intellectual, and emotional responses are necessary to successfully send and receive messages in a second language. It is never too late to become bilingual.

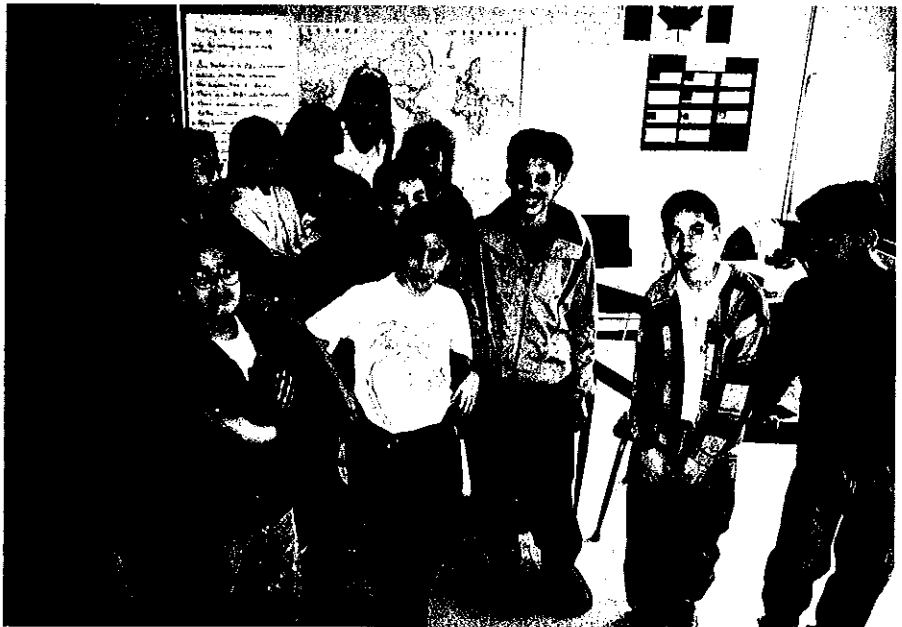
In Saskatchewan, the problem of maintaining the heritage languages have been ignored by the educational institutions almost completely until recently. In the elementary schools, ethnic communities kept their languages alive while in high schools the system of credits seems to be finding its way into the schools across the province. In either case, there has been very little, if any, support from the Department of Education which for years has been shunning the problem of

heritage language education in Saskatchewan. Paradoxically heritage language schools have been generating more interest in language education, for adults and for children. The enrolment at the Saskatoon Polish School has increased by about 20 per cent in 1992/1993.

It is obvious to me that the problem of minority language education has been intrinsically connected with heritage lan-

of leaving too many people on the margins. Current official language education is inadequate. The federal and provincial government must collaborate to ensure that access to language training programs is available to all immigrants.

- 2 Lack of educational policy to teach children heritage languages at schools does not allow Canadian society to



Spanish heritage language students meet each Saturday afternoon as part of the Gabriela Mistral Latin American School. The school has 110 students and runs 10 months of the year as part of the Northern Alberta Heritage Language Association.

guage education. A variety of approaches to both problems (or lack of them) prove that the educational system has failed to introduce a comprehensive policy towards language education in schools. To conclude:

- 1 The problem of new immigrants not speaking either official language is as old as Canada itself. In previous generations, it used to be simply ignored. Now it cannot be ignored because we have come to realize the economic and social impact

enjoy the full benefits of early bilingualism which increases children's language abilities and helps their progress at school. Apart from the accomplishment of understanding and using two languages, which nearly everyone would rate as a gain, I see in early bilingualism the advantage that it trains the child to think instead of merely speaking half mechanically. Of course

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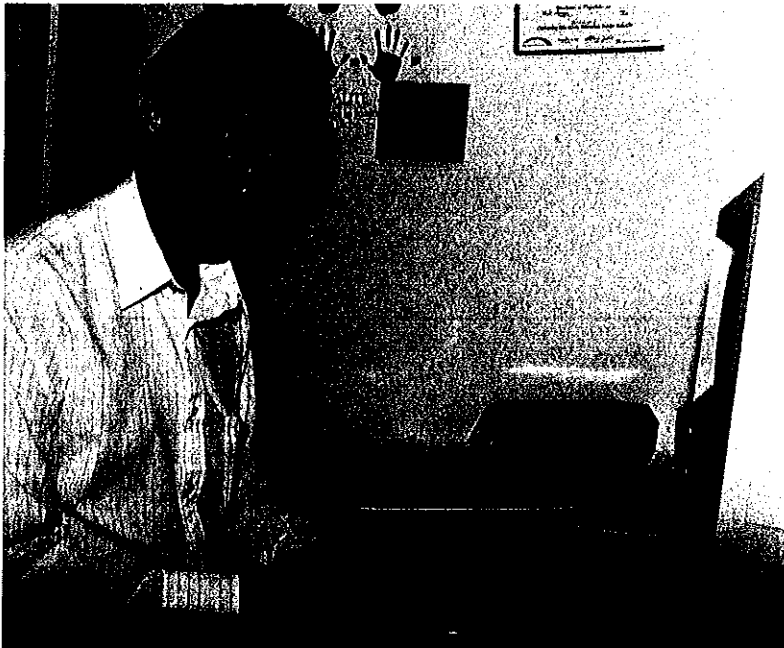
LIFE AFTER LIFE

— PRISON NEVER LETS GO

By Brian Stewart

This is the second and final article of Life After Life — the first having appeared in the March 1993 edition of First Reading.

January 31, 1993 marked my second anniversary out of prison. For the first time in my adult life I was able to smile and stretch after a good meal and reflect upon my success at remaining a law-abiding



member of the community for two full years. Two years of plying the skills and coping strategies which took 36 years for me to grasp. Well, actually I didn't become or start to be educated in these areas until I was 32 years old.

November of 1986 marked my temporary transfer from the Edmonton Institution (the Max) to the Re-

gional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatoon. The purpose of this transfer was to undergo an intense period of testing and assessment prior to my going before the National Parole Board. Generally the testing session takes a month and my expectations were just that, 30 days and I would be back at the Max awaiting a parole hearing.

My 30 day schedule turned into an offer and acceptance of admission to a communal therapy program called the MacKenzie program. On average a six month program of dissecting, analyzing, rebuilding, educating and restoring by a team of psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, professors and an assortment of assistants.

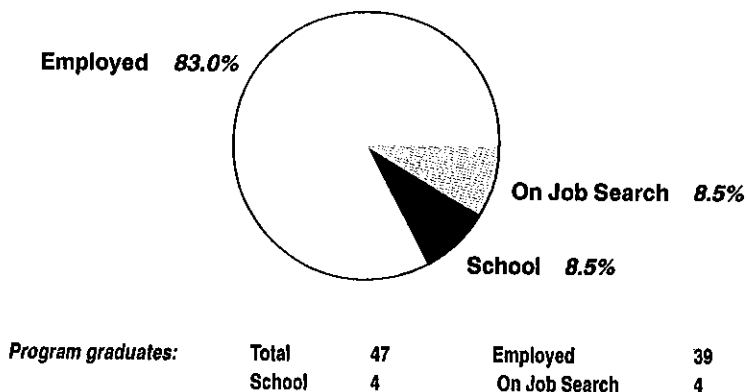
What was held out as a promise to me when asked if I would care to partake in this program was true enough. I was promised that by joining the program I would, at the very least, learn a lot about myself and come out of the program with a greater understanding of what makes me tick. My ultimate goal was to be released by the parole board, but that didn't carry much weight when I decided to join the program. My only hesitation came with having to postpone my upcoming hearing where I was certain I would be started on a release program.

The things I learned during that program sometimes made me smile in a self-congratulatory way, while other times I could have kicked my ass when something would be so simple that I should have known or recognized it. It is always pleasing to me to have a conclusion that I had come to reinforced by professionals.

The MacKenzie program wasn't the cure all and end all. What it was, was a means to attain balance and approach society without all the hang ups and misconceptions that I had previously held. They gave me the time and education which could allow me to break from the victim cycle.

Once a transition from victim to independent person has been realized a format for re-integration can be established. Pre-release programs and either private or government halfway facilities become the safe zones. Theoretically it is in these settings that a person can put to use and practice the newly learned behaviors and social skills while also being exposed to mainstream society. Entering into the work force or continuing education programs are generally the most acceptable objectives during the halfway stage. For some it marks the end of one life and the resurrection into a new life. For others the transition is very complicated and fraught with confusion and bewilderment. It is during this period when under proper supervision, problem areas such as inter-personal relationships, self esteem and dependencies can be identified and worked on. Individuality becomes a very important key to remember. I find it refreshing that some visionaries have realized this and have been developing programs aimed at the individual.

Learning and Employment Enhancement Program: Graduates Hired or In Training



Source: Learning and Employment Enhancement Program, 1993 Tel: (403) 424-1815

One program sponsored by Employment Canada and the John Howard Society is the Learning Employment Enhancement Program (LEEP). LEEP is an intense 18 week course divided into two terms. The first nine-week term is a therapeutic classroom style session of exposing intimate behaviors and ambitions. It is an exploration of what a person's current life consists of with the goal of eliminating or solving existing problems. Interspersed within this term is a reinforcement of job skills and aptitudes topped with a refresher on job search techniques and workplace behavior.

The second phase of this course is a nine week job placement. Providing that all works well, at the end of the nine weeks the student is hired on full time.

For some this innovative program was something that

they desperately needed to establish some control and direction in lives that could easily have gotten out of sync with the rest of society. For others it provides a smoother transition from being incarcerated to being a socially responsible citizen. It eliminates or lessens some of the more known and recognized pit falls of recovery.

Experience has made it possible for me to understand that crime prevention does not have to be solely a defensive measure but, under the right guidance, can be an effective educational attack on recidivism and also on those who turn to criminal acts or socially unacceptable behaviors.

Brian Stewart is serving a life sentence and is now on parole.

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there are some problems — a monolingual could develop through the compelling influence of his/her single language a simpler and therefore more forceful view of the world. However bilingualism will improve the mettle of strong personalities who achieve better results in the educational process. The difference is the same as between a highly educated and an uneducated person. Ignorance and superstition make the decision of life simple. Education does not make life easier, but better and richer. Few would condemn education for this reason (Hakuta 1986). Bilingualism should be seen in the same light — as additional education.

- Heritage language education should not be looked upon as a phobia or a political assassination of Canadian culture. It should be viewed as additional education which will make our society stronger. We should stop stressing our differences but rather start celebrating them.

It is high time the decision makers in Canada woke up from their mental hibernation and recognize the importance of language learning, while we the teachers of language clarify our assumptions and values regard-

ing linguistic versatility so that there is a basis for assessing what is or is not being achieved.

Artur Gudowski is the ESL Program Head at the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology and has been teaching language since his arrival in Canada (1984). He has been actively involved (on the provincial and national level) in the process of recognizing language education as a salient part of the educational system in Canada.

For your information:

The Northern Alberta Heritage Language Association has 52 different language programs running on the weekends in Edmonton. Each school has about 100 students that study a language, but also study the culture, crafts, and history of a specific ethnic group.

Teachers are volunteers from the community and they may have previous teacher training from a different country or they have gone through the heritage language teaching program at Grant MacEwan College. Teachers are not paid and they work on average about three hours each weekend with their class and that doesn't include preparation time.

To become involved with a heritage language school call NAHLA at 451-1719.

ESPC welcomes new board

The Edmonton Social Planning Council's annual general meeting April 15 brought six new Board members into the organization. They join nine continuing Board members to make up our 15 member Board.

First term members are: Richard Arcand, Kevin Feehan, Lois Gander, David Hewitt, Maggie Hodgson, and Shirley Serviss.

Continuing Board members include Jackie Fiala, Nancy Kotani, Papiya Das, Rick Guthrie, Dr. Hubert Kammerer, Noreen Marshall, David Schneiderman, Bernd Walter, and Board President Heather Konrad.

**ESPC is hosting the
Mayor's Luncheon,
Tuesday June 1, 1993
at the Empire Ballroom of
Hotel MacDonald.
Reception begins at 11:30 a.m
Cost \$25 Call 423-2031**

Watch
SOCIALLY SPEAKING

May 17 at 9 p.m.
for a discussion

on **RACISM.**