

Reading for the love of it

Speaking of Reading

SPRING 2011



FOSTERING CRITICAL THINKING

An Administrator's Perspective

Most educators would agree that critical thinking is an important skill for students to develop. Educators, parents and primary caregivers want to help children to grow up to be independent and critically reflective thinkers. Curriculum documents, teacher resources, educational websites, workshops and conferences all focus on the importance of instilling and nurturing student's thinking competencies. In this Digital Age, children as young as four, use complex technology with ease. In order to function effectively in today's society, we need to help all students learn to interpret messages and formulate opinions based on concrete evidence that is free of bias and prejudice.

It is not uncommon for educators and parents to express frustration when a child or teenager takes a course of action that does not appear to exhibit critical thought. Students are not always consistent. They may exhibit critical thinking in academic situations or in social situations, but not always in both.

As a vice principal, I meet with students to help them examine their words and actions as they work through conflicts. When students are asked to reflect on their decisions, they need guidance to consider alternative viewpoints and to think about the implications of their course of action. One of the interesting aspects of this process is that when students begin to think critically, they also begin to develop a greater sense of empathy and appreciation for one another.

Engaging in critical thought is a life-long task, demanding effort and practice on the part of the student as well as modeling by educators and parents. It is not easy to be a critical thinker, and unfortunately, our society does not always reward those who are courageous enough to question what is commonly held to be true. Schools, while being obvious places for fostering critical thought, cannot be solely responsible. Students are inundated by advertisements, television shows, song lyrics and video games, to mention just a few message sources. Discussions with family and friends that explore and uncover hidden meanings in mass media, on-line, in print or in electronic games, can help

"Thinking is skilled work. It is not true that we are naturally endowed with the ability to think clearly and logically — without learning how, or without practicing."

Alfred Mander, Author, *Logic for the Millions*, 1947

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Spring, 2011

AS WE ENTER into the spring of another school year, we take this opportunity to reflect on the work and accomplishments of the East York-Scarborough Reading Association. Firstly, thanks to everyone who attended this year's very successful *Reading for the love of it* conference at the Sheraton. Comments and feedback from delegates and speakers confirm our feeling that *Reading for the love of it* is one of the best reading conferences for educators anywhere in the world. At this annual event, we revitalize ourselves with stimulating

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to build the confidence children need to confront the inconsistencies and inequities in their world.

Time spent in after school programs, ranging from clubs to organized sports to classes in the arts, can all help to inspire critical thought, but it cannot happen by osmosis. For example, when adults



Kelly Manning

make critical thinking transparent by demonstrating the process of decision making, students are empowered to make their own decisions that are more reasonable and just. After school programs hold valuable opportunities for children to develop open-mindedness, empathy, the ability to express their values and beliefs and to be respectful towards others.

The complexities of our modern world demand innovative thinkers who have developed the capacity to work outside conventional frameworks and to travel unexplored paths. Critical thinking is intrinsic to education and personal growth. Environments where it is promoted are invaluable to students.

*Kelly Manning, Vice Principal,
Our Lady of Lourdes, TCDSB*

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speakers and add new authors, books, and professional ideas to our teaching repertoires. Thanks are extended to Teresa Paoli, Conference Programme Chair and the Programme Committee members who worked diligently on our behalf. Thank you for your attendance and the feedback you provide. We are incorporating helpful suggestions into next year's conference.

Congratulations to our *Reading Teacher of the Year* award winners — Giulia Di Carlo, grade 8 Teacher at St. Louis Catholic School, TCDSB and Dolores Sullivan, Teacher/Librarian at Kent Senior Public School, TDSB. Hearing about the work these talented teachers do daily in connecting children to books and reading is an inspiration to us all. We hope that honouring teachers in this way results in our collective commitment to improving literacy instruction in our schools.

Our Outreach Committee, an increasing emphasis for our association, continues its excellent work. It brings enhanced literacy opportunities to those in need locally, na-

tionally and around the world. Our association understands the connection between literacy and life outcomes and we work diligently in this area. I would like to commend Marguerite Campbell, Outreach Chair and the committee for their outstanding efforts.

The Newsletter Committee, chaired by Kathy Lazarovits, is responsible for providing you with this biannual publication. We hope that this year's theme of critical thinking has provided you with information that has supported your classroom instruction.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Erica Townson, who has stepped into a new position as Executive Administrator for our association. She has provided a fresh perspective and did a wonderful job at overseeing our recent conference. Erica has contributed greatly in positioning us for ongoing success.

Best wishes,

Anthony Petitti, President

Five Questions Critical Thinkers May Ask

- 1) What am I being asked to believe or accept? What is the hypothesis?
- 2) What evidence is available to support the assertion? Is it reliable and valid?
- 3) Are there alternative ways of interpreting the evidence?
- 4) What additional evidence would help to evaluate the alternatives?
- 5) What conclusions are most reasonable based on the evidence and the number of alternative explanations?

*Anne McDonagh as published in
Learning Curves, March/April
2011 Issue*

Reading Award Winners

Many wonderful teachers and curriculum leaders were nominated this past year for the 2011 Reading Teacher of the Year award. We are honoured to announce this year's recipients:

Giulia Di Carlo,
grade 8 Teacher at
St. Louis Catholic
School, TCDSB



Dolores Sullivan,
Teacher/Librarian at
Kent Senior Public
School, TDSB



e-Newsletter Survey

Congratulations to **Kaitlin Coopman,** winner of our e-Newsletter Survey. She has won a comfy Reading blanket.



Teaching Critical Thinking Through “Article of the Week”

It is Monday morning and the children are buzzing about their weekends as they come into the classroom. After a quick “1-10” to see how everyone is feeling that morning, we begin our weekly “Article of the Week”. The anticipation is high because students enjoy reading articles that are pertinent to their lives. I love “Article of the Week”, because it introduces relevant texts that help the students think critically in a very real way and create an opportunity to share their thoughts.

The idea and strategies for “Article of the Week” came from speaker Kelly Gallagher at *Reading for the Love of It* 2011. Kelly, a teacher and author of many books, including, *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It*. He originally came up with the idea for “Article of the Week” to help build his students’ prior knowledge about the world. He says, “by the end of the school year I want students to have read 35 to 40 articles about what is going on in the world... if my students are to become literate, they must broaden their reading experiences into real-world text”. I think “Article of the Week” does that and so much more. For my grade 6 and 7 class, “Article of the Week” provides me with a chance to do a whole group guided reading lesson and helps the students to think critically about media texts and points of view. It allows me to see their critical thinking in a very visual way.

Teachers select a high interest short reading each week. Kelly’s website, www.kellygallagher.org, has a selection of articles that are engaging and interesting, even for my much younger students, but I have also found great articles, columns and editorials in the daily

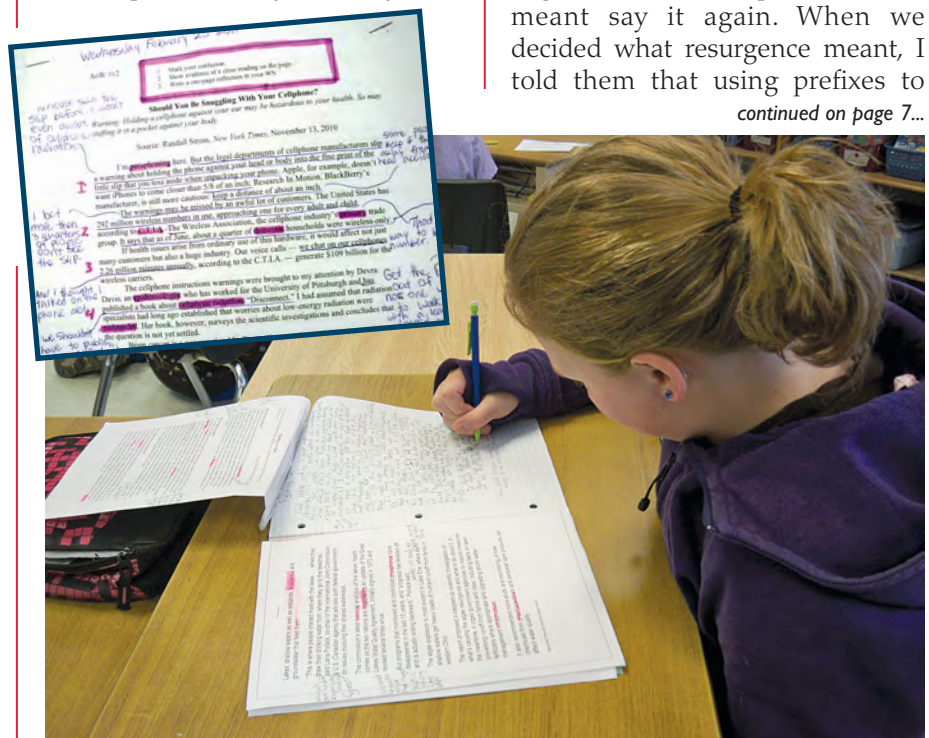
newspaper and various magazines. The key to the article is that it must be short, engaging and relevant to the children’s lives. The first article I tried was on the dangers of cell phone use, particularly for children. Students were instantly engaged, because if they didn’t already have a cell phone, they wanted one in a bad way.

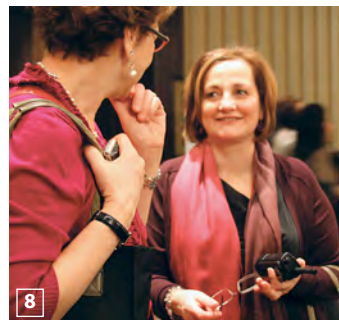
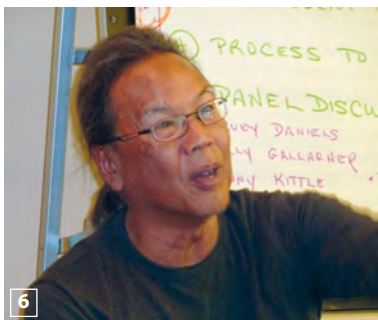
The key to success with my junior aged students (I have done this with primary students with very short readings) was a lot of modelling before the “gradual release” to them. For the first few weeks we did the entire process together, with me working on the document camera, thinking aloud and writing my own comments, questions and reflections, so my thinking processes became very visible to the children.

The announcements are over and the children have settled. I tell them that today’s “Article of the Week” is on cell phones. They excitedly chat

amongst themselves about their dreams of owning and using a cell phone. I am hoping that once they read they will begin to weigh the cool factor against the health factor in cell phone ownership, but I say nothing as I hand it out. Like every Monday, I tell them that the first thing we will do is read the article on our own and underline or highlight our confusions. I do this at the same time as they do, working on the document camera. When I am done, I circulate around the room looking at what they have underlined. When they are done, I read the article aloud, paragraph by paragraph and ask students as I go, what confused them. In the process we are able to discuss the article as well as reading strategies. One week the word “resurgence” came up. When I asked the students if they had a way to figure out what the word meant, one student said the “re” meant “again” like in “repeat”, which meant say it again. When we decided what resurgence meant, I told them that using prefixes to

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- 3 Setting the tone for the Dinner Banquet
- 4 Directors Margaret Talbot, Vangie Kalandropoulos, Denise Canning with Mélanie Watt
- 5 ESL session in progress with Peter Heydon
- 6 Allan Luke speaks to whole school literacy curriculum planning
- 7 Mariatu Kamara author of *Bite of the Mango*



"Thank you for giving me the inspiration to "keep the course" not only in teaching, but in life."



- 8 Teresa Paoli, Vice President and Programme Director consults with colleague
- 9 TDSB Music Consultant Colleen Orr with Association executives Doris Wukasch and Carol Munro
- 10 Award-winning author Wayson Choy and Director Kathy Lazarovits



Reading for the love of it

conference 2011



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“Wonderful, very practical and applicable for my classroom.”

- 11 Engaging sessions that fill the house
- 12 Mary Bigler with Director Jane Milligan
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- 14 Sharing a laugh at the Annual General Meeting. Left to right: Jill Eason, Mary Francone, Deborah Chisholm, Jo-Jo Guillet
- 15/16/17 Publisher’s Display
- 18 Jeff Smith and his ever popular graphic novels delight the audience
- 19 Jian Ghomeshi with a few of his fans
- 20 Author/illustrator Mélanie Watt thrills fans at book signing
- 21 Frieda Wishinsky with one of her most recent books



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“Very uplifting! Fabulous conference!”

Critical Thinking Applications for a Study of Short Works of Fiction and Storytelling

In the unit, *The Unexpected*, students explore short works of fiction. Throughout this unit, they are asked to critically consider the guiding question, "How do you tell a good story?" as they read short works of fiction and write their own story. They learn to understand how authors use narrative elements to build an engaging story, and to apply these elements to their own writing. They also learn to identify and to apply descriptive elements and literary devices to make their story more compelling. Finally, by reading the short works, they gain a knowledge of the narrative form, and observe and compare how authors across cultures effectively use storytelling to illustrate that which is unexpected or unexplainable in life.

To begin the unit, a scary storytelling session is held complete with popcorn, dimmed lights and haunted house music. Students are encouraged to tell a personal story in small groups. They use this story as the basis of their own composition. Concurrent with their own storytelling and story writing is the study of ten short works which include: folktales, ghost stories, plays and short stories.

Applications for critical thinking can be supported by the use of thinking tools such as visual organizers, checklists, and classroom or peer activities. When reading the selected short works and considering plot construction, students are asked to analyze a story using a *Plot Jigsaw Worksheet* and then compare their findings with a friend. They then apply this technique to their own story — graphing it to determine if it is an effective story and presenting it to a small peer group for feedback.

Once they are satisfied with the structure they begin to refine their story. The use of the *Narrative Paragraph Worksheet* ensures they have all the elements and the structure of the story. This worksheet mirrors the *Story Tracking Worksheet* they use to collect information about the stories they study.

Students revise their stories by using a *Narrative Paragraph Checklist* and a *Narrative Paragraph Rubric* that they develop as a class. They then share their story with their peers, and assist a friend (think-pair-share) in the editing of their story. This checklist reviews language applications such as descriptive words and clauses, past tenses and literary devices. Students have collected these items through three methods: the *Story Tracking Worksheet*, a teacher-guided close analysis of text, and the *Literary Devices Chart*. This takes place as the students read the short works and answer guiding questions.

To complete their story-writing process, the student conferences with the teacher and a formative grading of their story with the rubric regarding ways to improve their story before submitting it for a final assessment. The culminating task for the unit is a *Short Works of Fiction* test. This assesses the content and understanding of the works studied, student's ability to respond concisely and completely to short answer questions, and their ability to understand literary concepts by applying their knowledge to a sight passage of a short story. Students can be guided in their preparation for this test with the *Study Notes Organizer*.

This unit, *The Unexpected*, has been successfully used with ESL DO (Level 4) students. It has helped

Outreach 2010-2011

On behalf of the East York Scarborough Reading Association, I would like to thank all the delegates who attended *Reading for the love of it* for their support of our Outreach program. Every purchase made at our Outreach table including bags, pins and the beautiful new reading blanket, helps us assist organizations focused on improving literacy in the lives of many people around the world and in our own backyard.

This year, we have sent school supplies to an orphanage and made a donation to Solidarity Haiti, which is working to improve the educational opportunities. Funds sent to the Canadian Friends of Peru help provide financial aid to students while in university.

Closer to home, your purchases have enabled us to help sustain the Jane Finch Coalition and Homework Club; to make donations to the Children's Book Bank of Regent Park; and to contribute to two Food Banks.



Thank you for the support you have given us. Please visit our web site www.readingforthe loveofit.com for more detailed information about the organizations that we currently assist.

Marguerite Campbell, Outreach Chair

them learn to identify the criteria and techniques of effective storytelling and provided them with the tools to think critically and analyse short works of fiction — including their own creative writing.

Mandi Gerland, ESL and International Languages Coordinator, Branksome Hall

For all resource notes and referenced worksheets please visit the Newsletter section of our website at: www.readingforthe loveofit.com

...Teaching Critical Thinking cont. from page 3
figure out a word was a good strategy. We go back and ensure that we understand the sentence the word was used in. Discussing our way through the article ensures that everyone has a chance to understand what it is all about.

The next step in the process is, in Kelly's words, "show evidence of a close reading on the page". My junior students love this. To them, it is being critical of the author's thoughts or information. They write questions and comments all over their pages. After the close reading of the article, "Should You be Snuggling with Your Cell Phone", by Randall Stross from the *New York Times*, I knew that there was no doubt the children were thinking deeply and critically about this issue. Some of their "close reading" comments, scribbled on their pages include:



*Can high cell phone use cause memory loss?
Children should not be allowed to use or buy cell phones.*

This is scary — your cell phone has a risk of killing you?

Are these statistics real? Where did they come from?

Where else does radiation come from?

We quickly discuss the questions and comments at table groups. They are genuinely engaged. I hear one child tell another that he will stop begging for a cell phone, "Why would I beg for something that can make me sick" he says. Another argues back, "We need to find out more about this. Do you think it is all true?" Still another is making the connection to wireless technology in the classroom and wondering what the dangers from that might be. I am smiling, because a simple article, that peaked their interest, has provided rich fodder for thinking. Without much preparation on my part, "Article of the Week", carefully selected for its

ability to engage, can provide my students with opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of a media text, express their personal opinions about the ideas in it, identify points of view presented and those that that might be missing, and they even enjoyed doing it.

The last step in "Article of the Week" is for each student to write a reflection about the reading. Kelly provides some questions at the bottom of the article that might help those children who are struggling to get started. Most of my children do not need the prompts. Their close reading and table group discussion has provided them with material to write about. They make connections and inferences easily. I encourage a half page reflection, cognizant of time, but most write more. As the year goes on, this could be a homework assignment, due at the end of the week, as Kelly suggests. About the cell phone article, Max writes, "Good thing I don't have to get a cell phone until I am in high school. I will probably only text. I will only call in emergencies..." CJ wrote, "This article really woke some of us up to see beyond having the good life to seeing reality! When I read this it made me feel worried because all my friends and family have cell phones. The article says that they are harmful to our brains, but what about when we are carrying them in our pockets?" The students are doing what good readers do; they are thinking about the world and their place in it, and asking questions that are pertinent to them and their lives.

Many of the Ontario curriculum's media literacy, reading and writing expectations are perfectly met through "Article of the Week". Students are able to demonstrate their ability to interpret media texts through their close reading and reflections.

In today's highly connected world it is important that we find

Picture Books That Inspire Critical Thinking

One
by Kathryn Otoshi



No, David by David Shannon

My Two Mothers by Patricia Polacco

The True Story of the Three Little Pigs by Jon Scieszka

The Wretched Stone by Chris Van Allsburg

Riding the Tiger by Eve Bunting

Subway Mouse by Barbara Reid

The Lighthouse by Robert Munsch

Scaredy Squirrel by Mélanie Watt

One Thousand Tracings by Lita Judge

Swimmy by Leo Leoni

Click, Clack, Moo Cows That Type
by Betsy Lewin

2011 Great Summer Reading



The Glass Castle: a Memoir
by Jeanette Walls

The Beauty of Humanity Movement

by Camilla Gibb



Secret Daughter by Shilpi S. Gowda

The Help by Kathryn Stockett

The Postmistress by Sarah Blake

Little Bee by Chris Cleave

Lake of Dreams by Kim Edwards

The Elegance of the Hedgehog
by Muriel Barbery

relevant articles that help children question this new world and their future place in it. Teachers have a vital role in helping children to critically read and question the information they are presented with. "Article of the Week" is one way to do this.

*Terri Howell, Grade 6/7 Teacher/
Literacy Coach, Trillium Lakelands
District Board*



Debby's Adios

Best Wishes Debby...

Adios to all my friends at the East York-Scarborough Reading Association. It is with some sadness that I have decided to resign my position on the Executive after 20 plus years. My affiliation with this group has provided me the privilege of working with an incredible group of educators from both the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board in a wide variety of ways. This experience has been invaluable to me both professionally and personally. After retiring from the TCDSB last June, my husband and I are off to work at the Mont'Kiara International School in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia come this August. Here I will serve as Principal of the pre to grade 6 school. It is a new adventure and I am looking forward to the challenges and learning that this experience will provide. Best wishes to all and keep on doing the wonderful job that you have always done in providing excellent educational opportunities for children.

Deborah Chisholm, Director, EYSRA



Plan to Attend 2012 Reading for the love of it

Meet us back at the Sheraton on **Thursday, February 9th** and **Friday, February 10th, 2012** at the Sheraton Centre Hotel, downtown Toronto. Online registration will open on **October 1st, 2011** at readingforthe loveofit.com. We recommend that you register early.



Speaking of Reading... Thanks to You

A note of appreciation and gratitude is extended to educators, parents and students who submit articles to *Speaking of Reading*. Thank you for taking time to share your knowledge, expertise and experiences. A heartfelt thank you is also extended to the incredible communications team who work with great commitment and diligence to produce this newsletter for our readers.

Kathy Lazarovits,
Communications Chair

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We are committed to improving the quality of literacy instruction and encouraging the development of a lifelong interest in reading.

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Executive (2010-2011): FRONT ROW (left to right): Jennifer Baker, Mary Wilson, Mike Francone, Marguerite Campbell, Teresa Paoli, Tony Petitti, Kathy Lazarovits, Vangie Kalandropoulos, Erica Townson, Kelly Manning; MIDDLE ROW (left to right): Liz Blake, Joan Barrett, Judith Laskin, Lise Hawkins, Margaret Talbot, Jane Milligan, Carol Munro, Jill Eason, Doris Wukasch; BACK ROW (left to right): Jose Molina, Denise Canning, Nora Lovgren, Brenda Stewart, Deborah Chisholm, Val Collins, Marisa Liscio, Tanya Reilly Primaylon, Brian Svenningsen



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