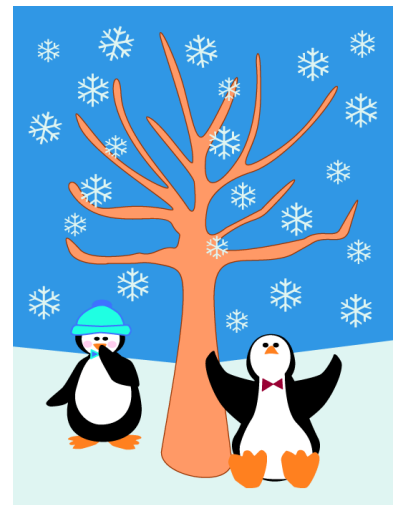


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RETTA RECORD

The official newsletter of the River East Transcona Teachers' Association
December 2010

President's Message - Jennifer Schlag

We are fast approaching that time of year when most of us start to reflect upon our values and our blessings. I think it's true of our professional context as well.

For me, the salient value is fidelity and remaining faithful to that commitment. It is reflected toward the children in our care, their parents, our profession and each other. Our sense of pride in this is the glue that binds us together. At a time of year when we pause to give thanks, we can be grateful that we have much to be thankful for, as professionals, as colleagues, and as friends.



As a follow-up to my October report, this is just a reminder that RETTA is going to conciliation with the Board mid-December and I am optimistic that there will be some resolution to our positions. There is roughly 123 days of school left and you've almost made it to the 2 week break! In the remaining days, please remember to keep a balance between work and your personal time - we all know there are many demands placed on us at this time of year.

On behalf of the RETTA Executive, I want to wish you all Happy Holidays!

As always, if you have any questions or comments, don't hesitate to call or e-mail the RETTA office.
Take care,

Jen Schlag

Vice-President's Message

By Jennifer Levesque



While I have enjoyed meeting with you at our school visits and chatting about negotiations, the Personal Professional Development Fund, and workplace safety and health my thoughts are turning towards turkey and tins of cookies.

What are your holiday plans this year? If you are like most teachers you are probably more than ready for the break. I hope that you will have the opportunity to spend some quality time with family and friends this season. It is important to recharge our batteries and while the holidays can be a hectic time here are a few suggestions:

- 1) Play in the snow (shovelling it doesn't count). Build a fort or snowman, make a snow angel, ski, snowboard, snowmobile, or go tobogganing.
- 2) Enjoy a warm beverage by the tree or fire (do not place the tree too close to the fire or this moment may not be very relaxing).
- 3) Sing, hum or whistle your favourite holiday tunes. It amazes me how calming it can be to sing out loud (Warning: it may not be very calming to those around you so ask them to join in).
- 4) Laugh. Try to refrain from laughing AT your relatives as I find that it is safer to laugh WITH them instead.
- 5) Watch a favourite holiday movie. Put on your pjs, make some popcorn (I do not advise eating the string of it that you put on the tree), and slip on your Snuggie so that you can suspend yourself from reality for a couple of hours.

Wherever you find yourself this holiday season I wish you a peace, joy, and love. See you in the New Year when we will continue discussing bargaining, professional development and safety.

Burkina Faso - By Kelly Allen

Some of you may have read Jennifer Levesque's article in the October RETTA Record about her fantastic experience in Sierra Leone. I was also lucky enough to be chosen to participate in Project Overseas/Service outre-mer 2010 thanks to MTS and CTF/FCE (Canadian Teachers Federation/Fédération canadienne des enseignants/enseignantes). Notre aventure s'est passée en Afrique de l'ouest dans le petit pays francophone de Burkina Faso, dans la ville capitale d'Ouagadougou. Mon équipe y comprenait 3 autres enseignants de 2 autres provinces. Our team leader, Michel had already been to this welcoming country in 2008 with another team. It was great to have his experience on board during our preparations. Nous avons commencé la planification au mois de février par téléphone et par courriel. Dès le début on se sentait comme des amis et pas des étrangers de 3 différentes provinces.

Notre formation a eu lieu du 2 au 5 juillet à Ottawa. It was there that we got to meet not only our own team members but the 54 other participants that were going in teams of 2-7 to 12 different countries all over the world. We shared ideas, concerns and experiences during that weekend and also learned how to deal with culture shock

After the training we set off on our adventure flying out on July 6th to Ouagadougou, via Paris. We arrived in a torrential downpour with exciting and scary turbulence coming into the airport. As soon as we arrived you could tell how grateful the members of SNEAB (le Syndicat national des enseignants africains du Burkina) and SNESS (le Syndicat national des enseignants secondaire et du supérieur) were to have us. We had a few days to meet with our burkinabé co-instructors and get used to the heat, humidity and time change.



We were each assigned subjects to teach during our 2 week teacher training session in Ouagadougou. We got to present our ideas alongside local members of the teaching unions in Ouaga. Our African colleagues presented theoretic material while we supported them with practical and fun lesson plans and ideas. Michel was in charge of elementary and high school mathématiques where he shared many active strategies for mental math, Bruno (Ontario) taught français for elementary and high school and my roommate, Natalie (Ontario) presented strategies for assessment by establishing criteria and identifying roles during group work. Nous avons aussi pris le temps de travailler avec un expert burkinabé dans les domaines du VIH/SIDA, l'environnement (les changements climatiques) ainsi que genre et développement (l'équité de la femme). Une chose que j'ai observé c'était que les burkinabés AIMENT parler! Les débats en grand groupe étaient inoubliables!

We trained teachers for 2 weeks and spent evenings and weekends getting to know our African colleagues. Nous avons dansé, mangé et voyagé tout autour d'Ouaga pour mieux comprendre la situation d'enseignement de nos collègues. Au début de la première semaine, nous avons eu la chance de visiter une école primaire dans la ville. C'est là qu'on a rencontré d'autres profs et qu'on a vu le montant incroyable d'élèves dans chaque salle de classe. Même dans la chaleur intense, une classe de plus que 100 élèves a partagé des chansons et des poèmes avec nous, des étrangers. It was an unforgettable day and that evening we all went back to our hotel and changed our lesson plans to try and accommodate 100 to 200 students. Their reality is not ours and I will forever be grateful for the 20 plus students I have in my classroom each year. I can only hope that by sharing my experience with others, they too will remember to be thankful and grateful for what they have.

THANKS PPDF!

Thanks to the PPDF, I had the opportunity to travel to Baltimore to attend the National Middle School Association's Annual Conference. This year's conference was entitled Innovate, Create, and Inspire. Inspire it did. The keynote speakers were fantastic. Dr. Benjamin Carson delivered a powerful and inspiring message about his journey from poverty and poor grades to becoming a world-renowned pediatric neurosurgeon. Bill and Cal Ripkin Jr. closed the conference on Saturday evening with a presentation about the Cal Ripkin Sr. Foundation which they founded in their father's name. The goal of the foundation, which has raised millions of dollars, is to help disadvantaged youth to learn valuable life lessons and enjoy experiences they would otherwise never encounter. I also had the opportunity to attend many great workshops on a variety of topics including assessment, leadership, school improvement and using brain research to motivate reluctant learners (Rick Smith-look him up!).

I really appreciated the conversations I had with Middle Years ("Middle School" south of the border) teachers, consultants and administrators. It is always interesting and enlightening to have these conversations.

Baltimore is a beautiful city right on the harbour ("harbor" south of the border). There are so many things to see and wonderful restaurants that I probably would never have had the chance to experience if it were not for the PPDF. Thanks for your support RETTA!

If you are ever in Baltimore try the famous crab cakes!

Shawn Osiowy
Vice Principal
Chief Peguis Junior High

HEY, IS THAT A WALKING VIRUS? NO, IT'S MR. JOHNSON

We all have seen those commercials of individuals sleeping, resting, slurping chicken noodle soup and the voice over saying "Take a BENYLIN®Day". I believe teachers are their own worst enemy when it comes to working when sick, myself included. Teaching involves more than just the classroom. We have many commitments outside the regular classroom routine: coaching, committees, fundraising, parent teacher conferencing etc. and it's often because of these responsibilities that teachers find it difficult to call in sick.

Teachers need to realize that when we are truly sick we need to get better, at best if not for any other purpose than that of preserving our health. A healthy teacher will be more effective than one who is coughing, hacking, sneezing a walking virus.

A school is like a Petri dish just waiting to get that first whiff of a microbe. Before you know it's The Gala Event of Germs at the school, since it's only a matter of time when most everyone will inevitably get infected.

Teachers should also take precautions to keep themselves healthy. This this does not mean being the "bubble" teacher, since we know that students will find a way to burst that bubble. Here are some tips to stay healthy.

- Be Active to help reduce stress
- Wash Hands Regularly
- Cover Coughs and Sneezes
- Eat Healthy Meals on a regular basis
- Get the Flu Shot

Just remember that if you are sick give yourself the time you need to get better and stay healthy.

Jason Oliver
Groups Benefits Chair/RETТА Executive