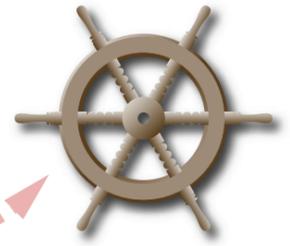




Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Respect for Human Rights: The Indicator of a Humane Society

By Gérard Cormier, Executive Staff Officer, Outreach Programs & Equity Services

Human rights are the basic rights belonging to every living person. These include, but are not limited to, the right to freedom, justice, mobility, equality, etc. Within these broader categories can be found the rights to fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of thought, religion, belief, opinion, and expression. Equality rights would include freedom of discrimination based on a variety of characteristics including race, national origin, colour, sex, age, and sexual orientation, to name a few. There are also democratic rights, such as the right to vote, and legal rights, which includes the right not to be arbitrarily detained. All of this provides a snapshot of the rights and freedoms of all Canadians according to Canadian law.

This brings up the crucial issue of the enshrinement of human rights in a country's legislation. Canadian legislation includes the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act, and the provincial and territorial human rights acts. These various pieces of legislation are the cornerstone for the protection of human rights in Canada. They are not static and came about after much thought, debate, amendment, and governmental approval. They should not be taken lightly; without their existence, life experience in this country would surely be different. When individuals feel their rights have been infringed upon, they can seek redress by way of human rights legislation. The process may sometimes be lengthy, but at least the process exists.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for all peoples. One has only to scour the headlines of newspapers to find stories of human rights abuses in countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Cuba. Western democracies appear to hold their human rights records up as the example that the rest of the world should emulate. This past February, I had the privilege to attend a keynote address by Marina Nemat who is the author of the book *Prisoner of Tehran*. Her account of her arrest and subsequent persecution in her native country made me realize that the religious freedom that Canadians take for

granted on a daily basis is only a dream for others. Her story brought to mind the issue of human rights education in Canada. Are Canadian schools teaching Canadian youth about human rights in regards to their existence, importance, and respect?

At last year's NSTU Equity Conference *Taking Pride in Equity* which examined the issue of sexual orientation issues in education, the keynote speaker, the Honourable Scott Brison, member of parliament of Kings-Hants, encouraged educators to make sure that Canadian youth are learning about the importance of human rights in society at large and the fact they need to be respected by everyone. He emphasized the fact that human rights do not exist as a hierarchy, that is to say that one right does not supersede another. Sometimes there is a clash of rights. He gave the example of a religious group that was opposed to same-sex marriage. He informed them that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that guarantees their right to freedom of religion also gives gays and lesbians the right to marry. He ended by saying that human rights are not a buffet with the choice of picking one right but leaving another behind.

As a result of that speech, the NSTU Equity Committee chose the theme of human rights for its 2010 Equity Conference held this past April 9-10 in Halifax. Panelists from the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, school boards, government agencies, and schools spoke of the importance of human rights in relationship to who they are as Canadians, and also in terms of their work in educating students and the public at large. The variety of workshops is a testament to the broad range of human rights education. They included topics such as Holocaust Education, making classrooms safe for all students (including those belonging to a sexual minority), teaching rights and social responsibilities, creating a Challenge Day in your school, and Human Rights Education. The Equity Committee also unveiled two new posters available for NSTU members, one dealing with the importance of human rights

for everyone and one stating that a teacher's sexual orientation should not matter. These can be ordered by emailing gcormier@nstu.ca.

As educators plan their lessons, units, school outings, etc, they should remember that human rights have their place in education. As Kofi Annan, seventh

Secretary General of the United Nations, once said, "We may have different religions, different languages, different coloured skin, but we all belong to one human race." By educating the children of today, we ensure the human rights of tomorrow.

**A well-balanced plate:
Everyone has that RIGHT.**

race
age
religion
sexual orientation
gender
family

creed
disability
sexual orientation
politics

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Email your name, home address, and school or campus name with PD Giveaway in the subject line to theteacher@nstu.ca by June 1, 2010 to be eligible for the draw.

This month's PD giveaway is *Around the Reading Workshop in 180 Days: A Month-by-Month Guide to Effective Instruction*, written by Frank Serafini with Suzette Serafini-Youngs and published by Heinemann.

The author provides month-by-month strategies for running a reading workshop across an entire school year. He provides everything you need to change the way intermediate and middle-level students think and talk about reading, including: instructional strategies, ideas for lessons, ways to connect reading and writing instruction, assessment and evaluation techniques, tips for helping students choose books, lists of recommended children's literature and recommended professional resources.

In addition, classroom teacher Suzette Serafini-Youngs illustrates Serafini's ideas with "Windows on the Workshop," classroom vignettes that bridge theory to practice. Whether you're a 30-year veteran or a novice teacher, go *Around the Reading Workshop in 180 Days* with Frank Serafini and take your students on a memorable journey into literacy.

The winner of the PD book *Building Character from the Start: 201 Activities to foster creativity, literacy, and play in K-3* is Heidi Shea-McGowan, Cornwallis Junior High.

The winner of the PD book *Conflict to Conciliation: How to Defuse Difficult Situations* is Lori Richard.