

Live & Learn

Winter 2006

The Newsletter of the PEI Literacy Alliance

PEI Reads

On October 19 Premier Binns launched a new family literacy project called PEI Reads.

The project features:

- Family Story Nights in elementary schools around the Island
- Parent Guides given to all children in grades 1-3 in PEI called “How to help your child learn to read and love reading” with library cards attached
- a new PEI Reads website at www.peireads.com

Ray Doiron of the Literacy Alliance and Martha Ellis of the Home and School Federation joined the Premier for the launch.

They all stressed that helping children to read is one of the most important things a parent can do. Reading is the key to all learning.



Eight year old Jayden Bell reads to his mother Sharon as part of the PEI Reads launch ceremony

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Live & Learn

The Newsletter of the PEI Literacy Alliance

Live & Learn is published four times a year by the PEI Literacy Alliance.

Edited and designed by Catherine O'Bryan and Norman Finlayson.

We would like to hear from you if you have:

- learners' stories
- creative writing by learners
- articles or news about teaching adults
- upcoming events
- new resources for adult education

Please send your material to:

Live & Learn
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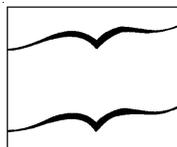
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PEI
Literacy
Alliance

*This publication is made possible
by funding from the
PGI Golf Tournament for Literacy.*



Greetings and best wishes to all as we head into the holiday season. May this be a time of peace and joy for you and your family.

In 2005, we have seen many literacy initiatives that had an impact across the province. The Summer Tutoring Program for Kids, Family Literacy Carousel and Golf Tournament for Literacy are just a few events sponsored by the PEI Literacy Alliance. We were pleased to be part of the PEI Reads project where students in Grades 1-3 received a family literacy booklet and a library card. Turning children and their families on to reading is why we took part in this project. You will be hearing more about PEI Reads in the New Year.

The Christmas season is a great time to encourage people to read. We can share Christmas stories, swap recipes and enjoy music as we gather to celebrate with friends and family. Be sure to add books to your gift list for all your family. Maybe this year you could share a favorite book with a senior who may not have access to enough books.

How about making some New Year's *Literacy Resolutions!*

- I will read every day.
- I will read to my children every day.
- I will visit my local library often.
- I will take a course and learn something new this year.
- I will get involved with my community.
- I will volunteer.

There are so many ways to help everyone have a joyous holiday season. I encourage you to add literacy to the celebration and make a difference in someone's life.

From everyone at the PEI Literacy

- Ray Doiron, Chair

What is Literacy Action Day?

Each year on Literacy Action Day (LAD), literacy representatives from across the country come to Parliament Hill to discuss literacy issues with Members of Parliament (MPs) and Senators. The Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL) organizes and hosts this event. LAD has been held every year since 1993, except in 2000 when a federal election intervened.

The PEI Literacy Alliance is a member of MCL and on October 27 board member Dianne Smith and executive director Catherine O'Bryan participated in LAD. To kick off the day Senator Joyce Fairbairn hosted breakfast for all the participants.

Catherine and Dianne met with Senator Percy Downe and three staff from MP Joe McGuire's office. Catherine, Dianne and representatives from the Atlantic coalitions also met with MP Shawn Murphy and three senators of the Atlantic Liberal caucus. They were questioned about the status of the Rising Tide initiative – a plan for economic development in Atlantic Canada. There has been a lot of work done, according to the politicians, however little work has been done regarding literacy and immigrant training.

The literacy groups highlighted how these initiatives fit well with MCL's National Literacy Action plan and Minister Bradshaw's efforts to develop a National Literacy Agenda. Both Catherine and Dianne were pleased to see that the politicians are well aware of the literacy issue in Canada and the need for a pan-Canadian strategy to address it.

Province Commits to Lifelong Learning

"My Government is taking action on several fronts to encourage and engage Islanders in learning: in early childhood, in our public school system, in higher education and in the community."

"Recognizing that reading is the foundation for all learning, My Government will work with partners in the coming year to develop a provincial strategy to improve literacy and learning in our province. **As a first step, My Premier will work with the PEI Literacy Alliance to host a Premier's Literacy Summit where Islanders from all walks of life will work together to build a culture of learning in our province.**"

"My Government was pleased to work with partners to launch the **PEI Reads project**, a family literacy initiative to help children develop a love of reading at an early age. Government and community groups are providing information to parents to help encourage their children to read. Every child in grades one to three across the province has received his or her own library card."

"My Government applauds the hundreds of adult Islanders who take charge of their future by returning to school to upgrade their education and training. **We will continue to support adult learning programs such as the GED program, and community programs like Laubach Literacy** which connects volunteer tutors with Islanders wishing to improve their reading skills."

...excerpts from the Speech from the Throne - 16 November 2005

Meet Seana Evans-Renaud



On December 9 staff of the Alliance met with the new president of the PEITF so we could introduce her to our members.

Seana Evans-Renaud is the president of the PEI Teachers' Federation, a member group of the PEI Literacy Alliance and a director of the Canadian Teachers' Federation.

Tell us a bit about yourself

My husband and I came to PEI on a summer vacation riding a motorcycle from Toronto. Like so many summer visitors we decided we would like to stay and in 1990 we moved to PEI and settled in St. Peters Bay. I secured a job at Souris High School and have been the principal there for the past four years.

Rick and I have three children and live in St. Peters Bay. We run a restaurant there called Rick's Fish & Chips and Seafood House.

After working at a private girls' school in Toronto it was a big change to live and work on the Island. I enjoy my work in Souris and I have a lot of faith in Souris High staff and students.

How did you get involved with the Federation?

After working as a volunteer and chair of the Annual Convention Committee, I decided I wanted to stay involved with the Federation. I offered for and became a Member-at-Large, then VP and now I am President for the next two years.

Where do you see the education system headed?

There seems to be an international obsession with accountability. The possible move to standardized testing in PEI is worrying. Standardized testing is unfair to kids. It excludes many people and doesn't make them feel welcome at school. Drop out rates have increased significantly in provinces where they have standardized tests.

We have to consider who profits from testing for testing sake. Many states and provinces are pulling back from standardized testing. In some areas, funding to school boards is directly tied to test results.

We believe in authentic assessment – teachers test everyday. We aren't against testing but let's make it relevant. There is a lot of work to be done with curriculum but PEI has good retention rates. The longer people stay in school, the more likely they are to be employed and productive.

What is your vision for education in PEI ?

We need to get back to teaching children. We have wonderful assessments happening all the time. I would like to see more money for curriculum development, especially for those students who are not university-bound. We need to look closely at poverty and equity issues in our system. I would like to see the same programs and equipment in schools across the province. We must stop wasting time on the mistrust that seems to be happening in the education system.

We need to communicate better with parents. Often teachers aren't aware of low literacy parents. Although PEI is a leader in the inclusion model of education so learning disabled and special needs children can be supported, education assistants have been cut. The Federation supports the hiring of a Learning Disabilities consultant for PEI and would like to see more early identification and intervention in grades 1-3.

On a personal note, I grew up as a voracious reader but my kids don't all share my love of reading. My boys are less enthusiastic than my daughter. I would like to instill a love of reading – an appreciation of learning through reading. It's exciting to see kids so excited.

Currently Seana is on leave from Souris Regional High School while she completes her term as President of the PEITF.



Functional Context Education

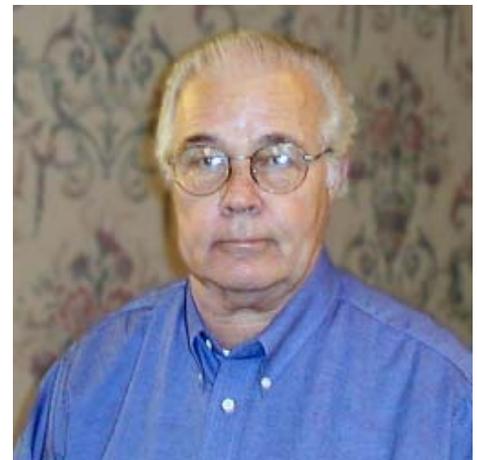
On November 16 Dr. Tom Sticht presented a workshop called "Functional Context Education: Making Learning Relevant in the 21st Century."

He spoke about the importance of educating adults with low literacy skills. He discussed studies which show that literacy and numeracy training is more effective if it is put in material that is relevant to the learner. He questioned the validity of the Statistics Canada interpretations of the International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey.

Tom Sticht has taught at numerous universities and has published over 150 books and articles on the education of under-educated youth and adults. In 2003 he was awarded UNESCO's Mahatma Gandhi medal.

Over 35 participants attended the workshop co-sponsored by the PEI Literacy Alliance, National Adult Literacy Database (NALD) and the Canadian Council on Learning.

You can find numerous articles by Dr. Sticht at the NALD website at www.nald.ca.



Tom Sticht

Bursary Winners December 2005



Summerside bursary winners Debra Sobey and Todd Simpson are pictured here with Marilyn Smith, on the left, and Lois Praught. Marilyn and Lois work as instructors in Adult and Community Education.

Bursary winners from Charlottetown are (left to right) Margaret MacDonald, Lisa MacLean, instructor Karla MacDonald and Kathie Stevenson. Margaret's night school instructor is Eric Wilson.



PEI Literacy Alliance Adult Bursaries Available

Five \$500 bursaries will be available this spring to adults who are enrolled in an adult education program that does not exceed high school graduation. Laubach Literacy students are also eligible to apply.

For information and an application form call Catherine or Norm at 368-3620 or visit our website at www.pei.literacy.ca.

Deadline for applications is February 14, 2006.



Learner's Story

How and Why I Returned to School

I believe the most important thing I have learned since I left school with a grade nine education is how important my education should have been to me. I should have taken my education more seriously and completed school.

After leaving school I was fortunate to find various jobs in retail. I worked in retail for 29 years and then was laid off due to a shortage of hours. I was sick over my situation. Being a single parent of two children, I didn't know what I would do. My lack of education was my stumbling block. I felt that my options were narrowed down to retail because that was where my experience was.

After filing for EI, I went with a resume in hand to seek new employment. I would ask to speak to the manager so I could make a good impression and sell myself. I was taken by surprise more than once when asked not about my work history but my education. I realized it was education I needed, not a job.

EI directed me to Holland College where I planned to apply for a GED Preparation Course. I was time to tell my children the real truth about my education. They both assumed that I had graduated from Colonel Gray as I spoke of it on various occasions. Even though I was not in school I was always involved and continued to follow all the sports teams.

Before filling out my GED application I sat and spoke with my children. They said they were shocked that I hadn't graduated but both had wondered why they never saw my graduate picture on the wall at the Gray.

At the time they were just OK that I hadn't finished high school but were behind me 100% and proud of me for



wanting to pursue it now. They both felt that this was an opportunity of a lifetime and they would be there to help me in any way.

I went ahead and completed the forms and took them to the College. I was accepted into the course full-time and EI would help me out while I was fulfilling my dream. My grad picture may never be in the hallways at Colonel Gray but I can picture it hanging proudly between my children's graduation pictures at our home.

I am so happy now that things turned out the way they did. My children now know my little secret and I am finally pursuing my education -- a dream of a long time.

As one says, "Things happen for a reason". But truly, I never did understand that quote until now.

Lisa MacLean

Lisa is a recent winner of the PEI Literacy Alliance \$500 bursary. She is continuing her studies at Holland College in Adult and Community Education.

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Recent Alliance Activities

“Promoting Literacy in Healthy Public Policy” is a new Alliance project funded by the Population Health Fund.

Project objectives include:

- Development of partnerships among community organizations, learners and government policy-makers
- Identification of health policy issues related to literacy
- Increased awareness and understanding of the links between health and literacy

We hope to achieve these objectives by holding roundtable meetings around the Island and a Health and Literacy Summit in 2007.



“Fostering Plain Language in Public Communications” is another Alliance project supported by the National Literacy Secretariat.

We plan to work with five community groups to meet these objectives:

- Development of collaborative partnerships
- Identification of information needs related to plain language
- An increase in awareness and understanding of the links between literacy and plain language

We will perform literacy audits, training sessions and hold a Phase II workshop for all groups to share what they have learned.

Election 2006

When politicians come to your door this winter please consider asking them these questions:

Literacy is a key factor in Canada’s economic prosperity.

What is your party’s commitment to adult literacy and education in Canada?

According to the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, about 42% of adult Canadians either cannot read well enough to deal with everyday printed materials or they need documents written in clear language to be able to understand them.

What will your government do to meet the needs of adult learners?

Low literacy levels are linked to higher health care, correctional and social services costs.

What plans does your party have to improve this situation?

The results of the first International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey clearly show that countries that provide training in the workplace have more literate employees.

How will your party ensure that workplace education programs are available ?

