

## ENGAGING PARENTS

# Nurturing Confident Students

**O**ur theme for this newsletter expresses what most educators and parents already know: the role of parents is vital to children's development and education. Educators are well aware that parental involvement is one of the key factors in cultivating successful schools. An increased desire for parental involvement is reflected in recent Ministry and Board policies and actions. For example, *Parenting and Family Literacy Centres*, supporting early learning and development of children and their transition to school, continue to multiply. There are a total of 144 programs now open in Ontario. Furthermore, one of the action items in Ontario's new *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy 2009*, is to promote the involvement and engagement of parents with their schools and Boards. Echoing the same strong desire for parent partnerships, school staff and administration often go to great lengths to engage parents in their children's school life and education.

What are some specific ways parents influence the academic achievement of their children? Research indicates that a child's self concept as a learner is significantly shaped by parents. Greatly influential on academic achievement (Jenynes 2005), is the setting of high expectations for one's child. A third way parents can strongly improve academic success is by reading with their children and having discussions with them about school.

School administrators and staff experience varying success in increasing the level of parental

involvement. They are aware of many barriers such as socio-economic status, health, childcare, geography, language, and parental perception of their role. Educators have found most success in promoting parent participation by taking time to know and understand their community. By using a range of outreach strategies and methods for welcoming parents in respectful ways and addressing cultural and language differences, staff and students are more likely to enjoy parent participation.

Thank you to all who shared their experiences, resources and program ideas by submitting articles.

*Kathy Lazarovits*  
Communications Chair

### Fall 2009

Oscar Night at  
Crescent Town  
School 2

Family Literacy  
Nights 3

Parenting and  
Family Literacy  
Centres 3

The Professional  
Volunteer 4

Sites to See 4

Thanks to You 4

Reviews 5

Outreach 6

Wanted: Hidden  
Pearls 8

2010 Conference  
Registration 8

Directors 8

### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## For Your Professional Development ...



Planning for our 34th annual conference which will take place at the Sheraton Centre on February 11th & 12th, 2010 is almost complete. We have outstanding presenters including Rafe Esquith, Eve Bunting, Kenneth Oppel and long-time favourite Mary Bigler. We are honoured to have Stephen Lewis as our Thursday night Awards Banquet speaker, addressing "Education: The World's Greatest Force for Good". Order your tickets for this event early!

The East York-Scarborough Reading Association executive is made up of 25 volunteer educators from the two Toronto Boards – TDSB and TCDSB. It is through the dedication and commitment of these volunteers that the work of our Association continues to thrive and support many worthwhile literacy projects.

I hope your first term has been a rewarding one and look forward to seeing many of you at the conference in February.

Tony Petitti, President

## Oscar Night at Crescent Town School

Crescent Town School is a large inner-city and multi-lingual school situated in the middle of an apartment complex in the Toronto District School Board. With close to ninety percent of the students speaking another language at home, communication with families can be quite a challenge. Interpreters for meetings and translations of important information are always provided. In addition, the school staff works tirelessly to partner and engage parents in the education of their children while demonstrating the benefits of literacy learning through arts education.

In the winter of last year, the Grade 2 students at Crescent Town Elementary School were given the unique opportunity to write and create an animated film. The students were learning about stewardship and the environment. They read the book, *10 Things I Can Do To Help My World* by Melanie Walsh. Using the book as an inspiration, they took the steps recommended in the text

and added some of their own ideas about how to help our planet. Their film was entitled *14 Things We Can Do To Help Our World*. Each of the 14 mini-films was approximately 60 seconds in length. All seven Grade 2 classes participated in the process, making it a true collaborative effort. (The students were engaged in the process from the very beginning. The connection of media and literacy was ideal.)

When the film was completed, the students hosted a Movie Release Party. The parents were invited, as was the local city counselor, Janet Davis. In true Oscar fashion, awards were given to the film-makers according to certain categories such as “Most Committed to a Green Planet” and “Most Committed to Beautifying the Earth”. Our audience of hundreds of families was excited to celebrate the achievements of their children.

Inner City Angels worked tirelessly to find sponsors and funding to keep the costs manageable for the school. The generous support of East York-Scarborough Reading Association, in conjunction with the Ontario Arts Council made this project feasible for Crescent Town.

*Jen Hart, Teacher, Crescent Town*



Movie release party draws in hundreds.

## Family Literacy Nights: Equipping Parents with Strategies to Support their Child's Reading Development

Family Literacy Nights are opportunities to bring the community together to share consistent strategies for helping our children progress in their literacy development. At St. Anthony School, our focus for the evening was to assist families in realizing that 'the parent is the child's first teacher'. As a result, it is crucial to establish effective learning environments at home that support literacy development. Our evening was very successful. The following highlights are what we feel made it a hit:

- Focusing on one division at a time
- Sending a flyer home advertising the event and including an RSVP portion
- Arranging for food and door prizes and being sure to include this information in the flyer
- Inviting parents to bring their children, so they can learn together, as well as not be concerned with child care
- Sharing of information on short 15 minute carousels was done by teachers through modeling or hands-on sessions
- Keeping information practical
- Raffle door prizes throughout the course of the night so that the motivation is sustained
- Inviting vendors to ensure that quality texts were available to purchase
- Parents also appreciated having access to a teacher to address concerns.
- Distributing literacy loot bags that included a book, reading poster, Ministry of Education pamphlet entitled, *abc 123 Simple Steps to Your Child's Success* and handouts for the evening to support the carousels
- Keeping handouts concise and friendly (posted for easy referral during sessions)
- Decorating the meeting areas with responses from students illustrating how they feel about reading
- Inviting the public library to share programs offered and to ensure that each individual has signed up for a library card

- Encouraging parents to read to their child in their first language as well as in English
- Introducing parents to books on tape and CDs as an alternative voice

We believe that because the content was planned and delivered by our staff members, we had the opportunity to connect with parents. Considering the needs of the community when determining how to best host and organize this evening was also critical in our planning. Our feedback was very positive with approximately eighty in attendance, from grades one to three alone. It is with great excitement that we look forward to planning our Literacy Night for spring 2010.

*Joanne Saragosa, JLI Coach/5<sup>th</sup> Block Teacher  
St. Anthony School Toronto, TCDSB*

## Parenting and Family Literacy Centres: Building Foundations for School and for Life

You will find Parenting and Family Literacy Centres in a large number of schools in TDSB and TCDSB.

These centres, usually housed in existing classrooms, provide inviting environments for children ages 0-6 years and their parents or caregivers to come and play together while learning valuable language and literacy skills.

Each centre has a schedule which includes music and stories, snack time, art activities, sand and water play, dramatic play, gross-motor activities, puzzles, and simple and inexpensive learning materials which can be replicated at home. Such activities are designed to foster literacy and numeracy concepts which, amongst other things, help prepare children for kindergarten entry.

Parenting and Family Literacy Centres help parents and caregivers assist their children in a myriad of ways, while making valuable connections with other adults in the community. Another key feature of the centres is the way in which they positively introduce parents and caregivers to the school system and help them understand the vital role they play in their child's education. All centres are free to the community. Families are invited to attend on days/times that work best for them. No registration is required. Parenting and Family Literacy Centres provide a strong link between the pre-school and school years while building confidence in children and families.

*Lise Hawkins, TDSB, Instructional Leader, Early Years Program*

## The Professional Volunteer

I'm a Professional Volunteer. That is how I refer to myself when asked what I do for a living. I have been blessed with the ability to enrich my children's lives, not only through our day-to-day home activities, but also through various lead programs at school. It was through my heavy involvement in my children's school that I was able to help my son overcome some learning obstacles.

As I sat and watched my children, ages 10 and 7, I would often ask myself if I was doing everything in my power to provide a literacy rich environment. I thought I was taking all the right steps. I had a checklist of sorts:

### Starting a Family Library

- ✓ Letting the children pick their own books
- ✓ Reading with them every night
- ✓ Having them participate in the reading process

My daughter was a 'musical' child from the start, and finding materials that were rhythmic was quite easy. Thank goodness for Dr. Seuss and Robert Munsch! My son on the other hand, is a visual learner, and finding material that he found enthralling was extremely difficult. We tried them all, as the shelves of my home library can attest, and it wasn't that he didn't enjoy books. In fact, he did. He was having a difficult time associating letters and sounds. It wasn't until he was in Senior Kindergarten that we discovered his passion for 'Star Wars' and his reading took flight. Until then, I felt I was failing. Here I was with all the tools. I checked my list, and still he was having difficulty. His Kindergarten teacher and I were discussing the option of an early reading program.

Once I got my mind around Star Wars, a whole new world opened up. I picked up any books with any reference to Star Wars. We built a visual library to reinforce sound. The letter associations — R for R2 D2, A for Anakin, J for Jar Binks — worked wonders but it was the relationship that I had with his teacher that proved to be most important. Star Wars was not only at home but in the classroom too! I believe that through my involvement and visibility in the school and forging relationships with staff, I was able to help my son overcome difficulties and persevere.

As the years pass, Star Wars still plays an important role in our lives, much to the dismay of our daughter. Star Wars has taught us all a very important lesson. There is no true manual or checklist for raising an avid reader. As parents and educators we need to keep an open mind, explore different avenues and know that developing a love for the written word can take many different paths.

*Pina Povoio, CSAC Chair, St. Maria Goretti School, TCDSB*

## SITES TO SEE

Recognizing the role of parental involvement in successful schools and in the academic, social and emotional development of the children in our schools, the Ministry of Education has developed a new Parental Involvement Policy. Many Boards of Education around the province already have a section on their websites devoted to Parental Involvement. The following two sites are maintained by the Ontario government and provide information, research and strategies.

[www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement)

[www.parentinvolvement.ca](http://www.parentinvolvement.ca)

Created and managed by a parent-led organization supporting public education,

[www.peopleforeducation.com](http://www.peopleforeducation.com)

provides information about education in Ontario is offered in 19 languages.

*Jane Milligan, Corresponding Secretary*

## Thanks to You

As a child, I always enjoyed going to school. Over the years, my friends and teachers may have changed, but the unconditional support of my parents remained constant. As I reflect upon these earlier school days, the value of my parents' involvement with my academic life becomes evident. From kindergarten to university, my parents experienced a wide range of recitals, competitions, and pre-exam meltdowns. Through it all, I have felt loved, supported, and encouraged by the first two teachers in my life: 'mom' and 'dad'.

That rainy autumn day is just a memory now, but I can still see my mother waiting by the door with me for the school bus to arrive. My freshly made lunch was lovingly packed in my shiny lunchbox (*My Little Pony*, of

*Thanks . . . — continued on page 6*

**Mathieu da Costa:  
First to Arrive**

by Itah Sadu  
illustrated by Roy Condy  
A Different Publisher 2009;  
Book: ISBN 978-0-9811885-0-8  
Accompanied by audio CD:  
ISBN 978-0-9811885-1-5

“I give it five stars!” “I love the catchy song!” “This book is great for all ages.” These are a few of the responses I received after reading Itah Sadu’s new book, *Mathieu da Costa: First to Arrive* to my grade four/five class. This time, Itah Sadu teams up with illustrator Roy Condy to highlight the story of Mathieu da Costa’s important contributions to Canadian history.

This wonderful picture book and accompanying CD can be used across the grades, exposing students to da Costa’s accomplishments as a multilingual translator from Africa during the 1600s.

Younger children will enjoy the beautiful illustrations, story and song about da Costa. Older children are given an opportunity to use their critical thinking skills to question who is in our history books and why other important figures from the past have largely gone unrecognized.

When I used Itah Sadu’s new book in my classroom, it led to a rich discussion of bias and racism, as well as further research into Mathieu da Costa’s life. The CD is a frequent request during Writer’s Workshop and my students cannot wait to share this book with their Reading Buddies!

Congratulations to Itah Sadu on her latest book. It is sure to be a crowd pleaser.

Elizabeth Blake  
Chester Public School, TDSB

**Your Home Language:  
Foundation for Success**

\$20.00 from TDSB:  
curriculumdocs@tdsb.on.ca  
or 416-397-2595.

A young child’s home language is the most important vehicle for early learning. Research shows that children who have a strong foundation in their home language achieve greater success at school, whatever the language of instruction. But sometimes, parents worry when the language they speak at home isn’t the same as the language used at school. They are concerned that their child will be confused or hindered in some way by the home language. However, research assures us that children learn to sort out the home language from English and to make connections between the two. They can use their home language as a bridge to think through ideas and concepts learned at school. After all, when children have a strong foundation in their home language, they have already learned many important concepts in their first language – it’s just a matter of learning

the new words for these concepts in English.

When children continue to use and develop their home language, they have a great advantage, both in school and in life. They are strong in not just one, but two languages. When children feel good about their first language and culture, they’ll grow into more secure and confident people.

The TDSB has produced a DVD, *Your Home Language: Foundation for Success*, which suggests to parents, family members, and caregivers the activities to encourage both home language development and success at school. The 14-minute video production is available in English and twelve voiced-over language versions, all on one single DVD. An accompanying booklet in thirteen languages (Bengali, English, Farsi, Gujarati, Korean, Mandarin, Punjabi, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tamil, Urdu and Vietnamese.) is included.

Paula Markus, Program  
Co-ordinator, ESL/ELD, TDSB

**Getting Dads on Board:  
Fostering literacy  
partnerships for  
successful student  
learning**

by Jane Baskwill  
Pembroke Publishers Ltd.  
2009, ISBN978-1-55138-234-0

Research has shown parental involvement improves literacy and encourages life long learning. In her book, *Getting Dads on Board*, Baskwill supports the often underrated influence fathers can have in their child’s education. She encourages the use of a “Taking Stock Form”. This enables staff to reflect positively on the methods of communication and successes already in place and to consider next steps.

The book addresses a variety of curriculum expectations and provides basic tools such as form letters that can be used to send home to the male parent/family. The letters contain invitations to events as well as suggested follow up activities for home and school, facilitating continued reinforcement of learning goals. The activities address a range of learning styles and are appropriate for elementary to secondary panels. Parental time constraints are managed by integrating literacy activities into daily routines.

The ideas suggested are easily initiated and ready to use by educators in a how-to method that can easily be adapted to individual community needs. *Getting Dad On Board* is a worthwhile read.

Margaret Talbot  
Recording Secretary



## Outreach

The East York Scarborough Reading Association's goal is to support children and adults in attaining, promoting and strengthening literacy skills. Through your generous support, our association funds organizations locally, nationally and internationally. One of the international organizations we were able to work with is the St. Gaspar Elementary School Project. Donated funds will help them purchase resources for the school in Tanzania. The SOS Children's Village in Greece received support to help orphaned and abandoned children.

This year we are planning to support Toronto's Children's Book Bank, East York Learning Experience and the Children's Rehabilitation Centre in the Philippines, amongst many others.

*Marguerite Campbell, Rose Avenue Public School, TDSB  
Outreach Chair*

*At Rose Avenue P.S. Parenting and Family Literacy Centre, Dad (below) and grandparents (below right) get engaged in the reading process.*



*Thanks . . . — continued from page 4*

course). The long dark braid that fell over my shoulder was woven with care, and my outfit was perfectly coordinated during our last shopping spree. As the bus arrived, she watched me slip through the door into the autumn drizzle. From my mother, I learned how to be prepared to go out into the world.

The dinosaur project in elementary school still exists within a box in my room. Thanks to my father's creativity and resourcefulness, I had transformed a styrofoam container into a ferocious mask of a Triceratops, watercolour paint and all. We spent the weekend getting the shape just right. When I was disappointed that it didn't look exactly the same as the dinosaur in the picture book, my father explained that sometimes, our best is all we can do. As long as I did my best, he would be proud. The styrofoam mask remains a reminder of that weekend when I learned how to take risks with my schoolwork and be proud of my efforts.

Throughout the years, my parents never once gave up on me. Educational (DOS) computer games were played to help make learning fun. Challenging French homework, lengthy science projects, and exam cram sessions were met with support. Tears were wiped away when I was bullied. Advice was given on demand to help keep me sane throughout *all-nighters* in high school and course work blitzes in university.

Whenever I felt overwhelmed, my parents were there with open minds and open hearts. They replaced the words 'failed attempt' with 'learning experience' and helped me to realize my true potential. Although my age increased and certain memories started slipping away, I never forgot how my mother volunteered at practically every elementary school excursion.

As a child, I always enjoyed going to school, but most of all, I enjoyed going home. Throughout the joy and the chaos, I was loved and supported. The little girl behind the Triceratops mask with the long dark braid has grown into the young woman writing this article—dedicated to the first two teachers in her life: 'mom' and 'dad'.

*Benedicta Goveia  
York University Concurrent ED – III – P/J Stream*

“Hi. My name is Felipe Ramos Rubim, and I am a grade 10 student at Harbord Collegiate Institute. I would like to thank the East York-Scarborough Reading Association for the generosity and kindness of your donation and support of the On Your Mark Tutoring Program . . . The Program has helped me in many ways . . . Your help is important, not only for me but the rest of the students, and I know they appreciate your help as well . . .

*On Your Mark Tutoring Program focuses on supporting TDSB and TCDSB students who have Portuguese as their first language. Outreach provided funds to help hire more tutors. Pictured below is the graduating class.*



*JIAS Toronto celebrated the launching of the backpack reading club for newcomer youth. Outreach was delighted to provide the backpacks and the age appropriate resources that filled them.*



*Dear East York-Scarborough Reading Association. Thank you for giving us lots of money to make our movie — from Ash (Crescent Town)*



# WANTED

## HIDDEN PEARLS: TEACHER NOMINEES FOR OUR READING AWARD

Take this opportunity to recognize a deserving colleague and nominate them for this special award. Each year, our Association honours exceptional contributions by teachers in the field of literacy. To qualify for this prestigious **Reading Award** the candidate should:

- have a history of sharing literacy expertise through workshops, seminars and/or mentoring
- have demonstrated a lasting influence on students through innovative teaching
- teach in either the T.D.S.B. or the T.C.D.S.B.
- be nominated by two different sources

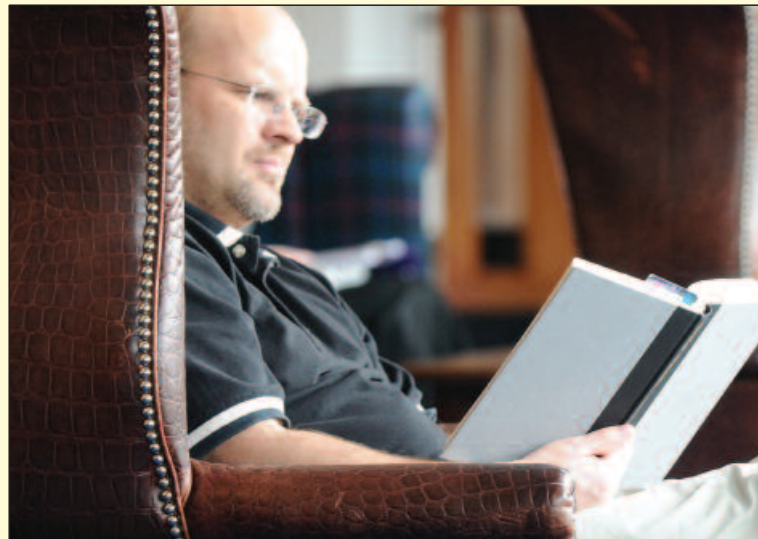
Strong consideration is given to nominees who have attended conferences and workshops sponsored by our Association. Presentations will be made at the annual awards dinner banquet on Thursday, February 11, 2010. Winners will be awarded with a full conference registration, including two tickets for the awards dinner banquet and a \$100 dollar gift certificate to purchase books.

A new, easy-to-complete form can be found on our website. Nominations will be accepted until 5 p.m. on Monday, December 7, 2009.

*Vangie Kalanderopoulos, Awards Committee Chair and Past President*



### NAME THESE PEARLS



## Reading for the love of it 2010

Sheraton Centre, February 11th – 12th, 2010

How to register

- 1) Online with Visa or Mastercard at [readingforthe loveofit.com](http://readingforthe loveofit.com)
- 2) Mail your completed form with a cheque to EYS Reading Association, 1315 Lawrence Avenue East, #309, Toronto, ON M3A 3R3

**Why delay? Register today!**

(left to right, top to bottom) David Lomax, Robert L. Borden BTI – 2006; Bonita Latchman, Marshall McLuhan Catholic Secondary – 2006; Elizabeth Arkwright, Selwyn P.S. – 2007; Violet Lippi, St. Conrad Catholic School – 2007; Johanna Nieuwkerk, Earl Haig Secondary School – 2008; Deanna Giffen, St. Bruno Catholic School – 2008; Lina Bruchkowsky, Holy Spirit Catholic School – 2009; Joanne Parum, Beverley School, TDSB – 2009; Mark Tobin, Firgrove Public School, TDSB (honorable mention) – 2009; Your nomination? – 2010

Return undeliverable items to:

**East York - Scarborough Reading Association**  
1315 Lawrence Ave. East, Suite 309  
Toronto, Ontario M3A 3R3  
416-444-7473  
Fax: 416-444-9282  
E-mail: [eyes@readingforthe loveofit.com](mailto:eyes@readingforthe loveofit.com)  
[www.readingforthe loveofit.com](http://www.readingforthe loveofit.com)

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

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