From the Editor: Boys and Reading

Raymond Chodzinski

This issue is about boys and literacy but it might well have been titled boys as reluctant readers. Increasingly, word is spreading that boys are lagging behind girls in reading and writing proficiency. As the articles in this issue attest, it is a concern that requires immediate attention and intervention.

Kathy Sanford, of University of Victoria and **Heather Blair** of University of Calgary collaborate through an email interview and respond to questions about their experience, research and observations about boys and literacy and how these issues can be addressed.

Shirley Kendrick, consultant and **Max Vecchiarino**, vice principal both with Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board, team up to suggest ways in which teachers can effectively address issues of concern through collaboration and dialogue.

Sharon Campbell-Springstead, a consultant with Early Literacy, Halton, Ontario, asks "what is it with guys and reading" and provides some interesting strategies for parents and teachers to help motivate boys to read.

Debbie Kilmer, a former Brock University Faculty of Education Preservice graduate now teaching at an alternative education school describes her proposal and strategy for ensuring that every student becomes a reader.

David Skuy a successful lawyer, sought after speaker and author of books for boys speaks to his own personal frustrations about how the publishing industry values boys as readers.

Philip MacMillan, a psychologist with Beacon Literacy Inc., shares his thoughts about why boys become reluctant readers and how specific interventions can be helpful.

Anthony Mollica, a professor emeritus, Faculty of Education, Brock University, who has recently published an anthology of fourteen short stories in French by the well-known Québec author, Roch Carrier, *Roch Carrier raconte...* (Soleil, 2007) provides a short bibliography of Carrier's books in English.

Michael Sullivan, who hosts www.talltales.com and is an accomplished speaker, lecturer and storyteller shares his personal perspective on why parents and teachers need to revise the way in which reading and writing is taught to young boys.

The issue concludes with my synopsis of what former President **William Jefferson Clinton** and former Premier **Bob Rae** had to say at a recent Champion of Youth speaker series held in Hamilton, April 03 2007, sponsored by Transitions for Youth, Halton Region.

A Reflection

Years back, when I was an elementary school teacher, I recall that nearly all of the so called reluctant readers in my classes were boys who claimed they were bored and disinterested. The topics suggested in the curriculum of the time (stories in *The Young Canada Reader*) were just not adequate to provide motivation and a reason to become involved. Once we, (students, parents, and myself), discovered what it was that they were interested in we

discovered various innovative ways to involve them in the so called "required reading and writing tasks" of the day. Many of them (not all mind you) but many, became just as actively involved on task as any girl in the class. Could it simply be that by adapting the school curriculum to meet the "needs and interests" of the learner is a deciding factor in whether or not a boy applies himself to the tasks at hand? Surely, it couldn't be that simple?

It may well be that we are entering a new era of literacy competencies. Watching and listening seem to be very important skills for youngsters and these skills become more useful when we acknowledge that interactive learning experiences via television and computers such as virtual field trips, virtual science experiments, language labs etc. require more attention to listening than to reading and writing. Interesting is that children use text messaging more frequently than most adults send letters. So maybe we are in a transformational stage where children are learning to become skillful at what is important for them to function in a world of new literacies.

That said over the years I have observed that nearly all boys and girls enjoyed a story that was told or read to them by a parent, a teacher or a good reader. I guess if we were really listening we would be doing a lot more storytelling and reading to them than story assigning.

"Modelling isn't one way of influencing people. It's the only way."

Albert Einstein