

## East Coast Retired Teachers' Association (ECTRO) Report

The East Coast Retired Teachers' Association (ECRTO) resumed their face-to-face meetings in Montreal from October 18 to 20. The retired teacher organizations from Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Quebec all sent representatives.

Katherine Snow, President of QPARSE, welcomed all to Quebec and introduced the organizing committee.

The first presentation of the day was by Dr. Catherine LeMaistre, who has served as advisor to the Government of Quebec on the issue of English Language Education in Quebec. The Education Ministry was particularly interested in: a) reasons for the success in the English Language schools; and b) the conditions in English Language schools that contribute to their success. Her research indicated that all Quebec schools, either English or French, have commonalities. These commonalities are: 1) they all have the same curriculum; 2) they all have highly qualified teachers; 3) they have the same budgetary rules; 4) they have a defined governance structure within the schools; 5) they all have supports for students with special needs; and 6) they all have their own culture.

The Advisory Board on English Education (ABEE) next addressed some of the differences in the two school systems they refer to as the 6 Ds. Those Ds being Distance, Demography, Distribution, Diversity, Decision-making, and Distinctiveness.

**Distance** – there is a great distance from school board offices to most of the English-speaking schools. This lessens the impact that school boards have on the day-to-day running of the schools.

**Demography** – of the 8.5 million students in the province of Quebec only 8% are students who identify English as a mother tongue.

**Distribution of resources** – the English Language schools tended to pool their monies and create programs and resources that could be commonly accessed, instead of a duplication of services.

**Diversity** – the English Language schools are very diverse culturally and linguistically due to immigration.

**Decision-making** – the French system has a very hierarchical system of administration while the English Board has a more linear administrative system and is responsible to a Director of Education rather than the Department of Education at the government level.

**Distinctiveness** – in some cases, the survival of the English Language schools translates into the survival of rural communities.

The ABEE contends that the English language system has a high number of bilingual and bi-literate students. These students are the most bilingual in Canada. The English system has an 80% retention rate compared to a 60% retention rate in the French stream. The English system is open to change, prepares students for the larger world, supports and maintains cultures and values diversity. The English language system has a high degree of parent involvement at the school level.

Despite recent changes whereby immigrants and children of non-English speaking parents are required to attend French language schools, the English system has a valid and important role within the education system of Quebec.

The second session of the day was a practical session called "Cell Phone Photography". This session was presented by Marilyn Aitken and David Hopkins, both professional photographers.

They led the session by reviewing the editing features that are common on most cell phones today. David identified what the features were and where to access them on the phone. They outlined practical applications for the features and organized a series of photo sessions that permitted the use of the newly identified features on the phone. They talked about the importance of lighting, subject matter, positioning of people and objects within the frame and editing a photo to bring out its full potential. Through demonstration and a hands-on application, the language of professional photography and editing came to life. As a matter of fact, for the rest of the conference any time anyone took out a phone to take a picture there were references to what we had learned and how to implement it. This seminar should be available to anyone with an interest in photography. I highly recommend it!

The Fraud Prevention session presented by Vincent Wesley of Desjardins is a must for every senior in the country. Vincent concentrated on fraud and phishing scams. Phishing scams usually target people by unsolicited email, hoping to get their personal information. Once a criminal gains access to your personal information it is very easy for them to assume your identity and then incur debt in your name.

Phishers, once they have access to your information, are able to get into your bank site, change the mailing address, and have debit and credit cards sent to the new address, often before you are aware your information has been compromised. Mr. Wesley revealed that only one in ten report being a victim of fraud. One in ten are victims of phishing but for both, the actual rate of being victimized is probably much higher. There are approximately 8.4 billion emails sent monthly of which 1 in 715 is a phishing email. 71% of phishing emails use the name and colours of actual banking institutions in their bid to obtain personal information. If you receive an email that you are suspicious of, there are several telltale signs to look for: 1) there are often spelling mistakes on the site; 2) website address doesn't match the known site address; 3) unknown zone will be displayed in the bottom right hand of the screen; and 4) right hand bottom of screen should have a locked symbol. To protect yourself, he recommends the following: 1) check your transactions frequently; e) notify your bank if problems arise; 3) keep your information confidential; 4) protect your debit and credit cards as if they were cash; and 5) keep an eye on your cards during all transactions.

If you are a victim or suspect that you are a victim of fraud or identity theft, Equifax offers one free credit check per year upon written request. You can obtain the address for Equifax from your local bank. If you feel there may be a need to check your credit, do so.

We were also cautioned that protecting yourself and your information is much easier than reestablishing your credit if you become victimized.

Marg Urquhart, East Coast representative, guided the attendees through a Round Table discussion on Best Practices that our individual organizations have found useful in promoting ourselves to our general membership. The discussion was focused on membership action, explicit strategies, resources, increasing visibility, Zoom and webinars on topics of interest, the needs of our members at different stages in their retirement journey and geographical challenges. The hour-long session ended with a list of suggestions that are being compiled by QPARSE and will be distributed to all groups present.

The second day of the conference started with greetings by Jan Langelier, Past President of QPARSE, and Executive Director of AAESQ. She explained the composition of the different retired teacher associations in Quebec.

The first session speaker, Johanne Côté, spoke on the effects of the gender gap in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and in the field of Artificial intelligence (AI). She addressed the effect that it has on society in general. She promotes the concept that female role models are visibly absent in the sciences. It is important that girls be exposed to a variety of careers in the sciences. This underrepresentation

of females in the pure sciences has been evident for decades. Some areas of the sciences do have larger numbers of women than others, but they are usually computer-based programs.

During her work with the University and a group of astrophysicists, they have identified the following as contributing factors in the disparity between the number of males versus females enrolled in science programs at the University level. The first factor is stereotypes. Scientists are usually viewed as middle-aged men in white lab coats. The second factor was the male dominance in the culture of science. While it may not be a deliberate bias, there is a bias. Many of the programs and algorithms were written by males and have within their structure a bias towards males. The third factor is fewer role models. Whether it be on TV or in the classrooms, fewer women are portrayed as active scientists. If they are on the screen, they are usually the lab assistant. The fourth contributing factor is math anxiety. Girls often feel they are bad at math even when marks do not support this. When speaking of AI, we speak of a process meant to mimic the problem-solving and decision-making capabilities of the human mind. AI is a human creation. Currently in this field 80% of the positions are filled by men. The positions that are filled by women are in the lower rated jobs. Data collection used to create algorithms is often collected, labelled and put into the database by men. One glaring recent example is the hiring algorithm used by Amazon. It was gender biased towards men. This was probably not a deliberate bias but since most of the previous employees at Amazon were male, the algorithm inadvertently imposed male keywords in its selection process.

In our modern culture computer science is seen as a socially isolating job. Its focus is on math, and you need an inborn brilliance to succeed in the field. These are some of the reasons females struggle to find a strong sense of science identity. Despite this, females need to be encouraged to consider AI as a viable field of education. It can provide them with lucrative and full-time employment. There is a deficit of AI scientists in the field. At this point there are more needed than the universities are graduating. Girls would build tools to shape society into the future. With enough female AI scientists, gender bias could be neutralized.

Miss Côté, through her talk, made a plea that we encourage females to explore all avenues of interest of higher education. It is through this exploration that females will take their rightful place in all areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. A society that encourages all to work to their full potential benefits all.

Martin Higgs, president of ACER-CART brought greetings from the national organization. He thanked QPARSE for hosting the conference and congratulated them on the success of their efforts.

Mr. Higgs commented that there had been two executive meetings this year and a third general meeting which will be held by Zoom will be upcoming in November. He reiterated that the priorities that have been set forth by ACER-CART can only be met with the collaboration of other groups who share our concerns and actively work to having them resolved. We are most effective when ACER-CART works through our member organizations as there is power in numbers. We were informed that some ACER-CART committees are going to combine to work on identified issues and we are looking to do outreach with the Canadian Medical Association as we feel we can greatly benefit each other's identified needs.

Mr. Higgs addressed the diverse problems and diverse situation in which our member organizations find themselves. He pointed out that while our individual problems may be different, they are similar in some ways. At the federal level we continue to lobby by writing letters and support any avenue of positive change for seniors. Petitions to Parliamentarians on issues of concern can be done through the New Mode program. This program is specifically designed to target MPs on individual issues and can be tweaked to address more than one concern. He concluded with the request that we remind our organizations' members to check the website on a regular basis for updates on areas of interest to them.

The Round Table discussion for the afternoon centered on a vision for ACER-CART. The chat group revealed that most member organizations recognize the importance of fostering a relationship with the active teachers'

union and the importance of promoting ourselves to teachers before they retire. Notes were kept throughout the afternoon session and will be shared at a later time.

Nova Scotia will host the BGM in 2024.