

# Snapshot

SERIES OF INFORMATIVE TEXTS ON THE CONSEIL SCOLAIRE CENTRE-NORD WRITTEN BY GLEN TAYLOR

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## HELPING THOSE WHO HELP STUDENTS

**W**hen you consider the number of hours children spend in school, there's no doubt that teachers play a vital role in their lives. Fortunately, a large team of education professionals is there to help young people learn, grow and become informed citizens.

For instance, the teacher who helps children learn to read provides them with a skill they'll use all their lives. The math that's taught beginning in kindergarten will prove very useful years later when it comes time to manage personal and family finances. Social studies help to open our minds to the world, science helps us understand natural events, and so on.

It's tempting to think of teaching as an art (if not a sport), but in reality it is based on a science called pedagogy, or the science of education. And as in any scientific field, there's a lot of research being done to better understand the subject and improve the approach in the classroom.

At the heart of education in Alberta schools are *Programs of study* (also known as *curriculum* in some circles) which include among other things all the content that is to be taught in different courses and in different grades. Alberta Education also develops courses and resource material for teachers in order to help them meet the requirements of the programs of study.

In addition to the Department of Education training and materials, there is a host of other courses and resources available to help teachers enrich students' learning. But teachers have very little time to keep up on all the latest developments in a given field. They already have their hands full in the classroom—how could they teach and spend hours analyzing documents at the same time?

### KEEPING UP TO DATE AND SHARING

To fill this very important need, the Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord (CSCN) created the position of *Educational Consultant* with the mandate to help teachers learn all about the programs of study and enrich the curriculum they teach. These are resource persons who contribute indirectly but importantly to the education of all students.

The Conseil has two educational consultants on staff: Denise Moulun-Pasek at the high school level, and Josée Lemire at the elementary level.



Josée knows the world of education very well, having taught for 16 years in addition to holding administrative and technological positions. Among other things, she worked two years for Alberta Education, where she developed educational resources in French. She has been in her current position at the Conseil for almost two years now.

According to Josée, her main role is to ensure that teachers are kept up to date on the latest information from the world of elementary education. To that end, she is constantly gathering information on research, resources (books, DVDs, websites, etc.) and courses that are offered to teachers.

"There's a wealth of information circulating throughout the world of education," says Josée. "It takes time to keep up to date on everything that's happening, and teachers are already really busy in their classrooms. So I help them by analyzing the many teaching sessions and resources that are out there. And I'm kept very busy because there's always something new!"

"For example, a teacher came to see me one day about a child who needed extra help learning how to write. Before we could draw up an action plan, we had to examine the writing process in light of



the latest research in the field. I went through all the relevant studies and other information, and shared the results of my analysis with the teacher. Based on what I'd found, we were able to come up with a personalized program for the student.

"I base all my recommendations on the latest research," continues Josée, "and I inform teachers of developments that directly affect them."

In addition to gathering and analyzing information, Josée also takes courses herself in order to broaden her knowledge in various fields.

"There's no way I can be an expert in everything, so I look around for ways to increase my knowledge. One of the benefits of this approach is that I get to work with what we call *professional learning communities*, or groups of educators who come together for the benefit of students."

#### MENTORING PROGRAM

One of the programs Josée takes part in is the 'mentoring' or partnership between a new teacher to the Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord and a more experienced colleague.

"Last year, the Conseil hired some forty teachers," explains Josée. "Newcomers have a lot of questions on different aspects of teaching in our schools. They also need to develop a long-term educational plan."

The educational consultants help participants in the mentoring program to set goals, and school principals ensure that the newcomers receive all the help they need. Ideally, a mentor teaches the same grade and in the same school as the new teacher, but that's not always possible, especially in more isolated schools. The participants try to meet regularly but, if necessary, they communicate by videoconference or teleconference.

"We use a lot of different technologies like the Internet because CSCN schools are scattered over a wide area," says Josée. "It's not always easy to be physically present."

One advantage of mentoring the program is that new teachers can visit their mentor's classroom. "A picture may be worth a thousand words, but a visit to a classroom is worth ten thousand ideas and strategies!" says Josée with a laugh.

#### PARENTS: INTEREST AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Even if she doesn't work directly with students, Josée sees daily the benefits of parents getting involved in their children's education.

"We can all have an impact on our children's learning," concludes Josée. "The best thing you as a parent can do is show your interest in their education. If you're not available to go into the classroom, there are lots of other things you can do instead.

"At home, for example, always look at your child's work and be positive about his or her progress. A parent's encouragement is vital to a child's well-being and personal achievement!"

