

V.24 N.2 (#118) WINTER 2015 \$15.00

OUR SCHOOLS

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

OUR SELVES

The normalization
of surveillance

Teach for Canada redux

Liberal arts vs
neoliberalism



Challenging

society's perceptions
about poverty

FOR CHILD

UNIVERSAL CHILDCARE:
KEY TO ELIMINATING
POVERTY IN CANADA



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Our Schools/Our Selves is published four times a year by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives @250ne Community, 500-251 Bank St., Ottawa, ON, K2P 1X3. This is Volume 24, Number 2, Issue #118 of the journal (WINTER 2015). *Our Schools/Our Selves* is a member of the Canadian Magazine Publishers Association. It is indexed in the Canadian Magazine Index and the Alternative Press Index.

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Subscriptions and Advertising

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Tel: (613) 563-1341 Fax: (613) 233-1458

ISSN 0840-7339

Production

Typesetting and design: Nancy Reid

Printed in Canada by RR Donnelley, 1500 Saint-Patrick, Montréal QC H3K 0A3
Publications Mail Registration No. 8010.

Cover, interior cover, first page and table of contents photos: Nancy Reid
Cover design: Nancy Reid (nrgrafix.com)

The opinions expressed in *Our Schools/Our Selves* are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the CCPA.

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BY FREDERICK HARRIS



ERIKA SHAKER

Poverty, Privilege, and Pedagogy

“It’s cold out there”

One of the aspects I love most about *Our Schools/Our Selves* is the way in which certain articles or entire issues can both spark and host conversations about a particular topic of discussion. This issue is a prime example.

In the fall 2014 issue, one of our articles addressed the “culture of poverty” narrative and the damage it inflicts upon our most vulnerable children and families both inside and outside the school system. That piece provided a wonderful jumping-off point for a robust and multi-faceted discussion; and so in this issue we explore the concept of equity literacy in much greater detail, prompted by a workshop on the subject that took place in Toronto in October.

Yvonne Kelly explains the thinking behind organizing the workshop in her article “Wanted: A classism reduction strategy”:

Until we can recognize our own biases and stereotypes that fuel our beliefs about what the poor deserve and don’t deserve, I don’t think our governments and our society will make any headway on eliminating or even reducing poverty. And to do this requires each and every one of us to consider what it is that we believe that allows us to let our fellow human beings, our neighbours, live in untenable situations. In addition, the workshop was structured to talk about how

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schools were, or in many cases were not, addressing equity, inclusion and classism.

Several of those present at the workshop have provided articles reflecting on their experiences growing up and living in poverty: Sam Samady provides his impressions of the equity literacy workshop; Dianah Smith (whose piece provided the inspiration for Nancy Reid's cover illustration and design) explores the impact poverty and precarity have had on herself and members of her family; Kristine Carbis talks about her experience as an anti-poverty activist and the work she has done at the York Region District School Board to support families; her son, Greg Carbis, talks about how as a student he wants to challenge people's assumptions about what it's like to live in poverty, and the way in which people respond to him; Melanie Cloutier-Bordeleau provides a thoughtful analysis of the public discourse on the topic of socioeconomic status, particularly how in her experience the school system's structural assumptions and misconceptions frame the topic.

Cecil Roach and Yvonne Kelly explain the ways in which the York Region School Board has integrated the principles of equity and inclusion into board priorities, and worked to provide a classism counter-narrative to the "culture of poverty" frame so many of our educational institutions still use. This counter-narrative is discussed by Dr. Paul Gorski in his article which provided much of the background for the equity literacy workshop as well as a more thoughtful understanding of classism that we need to utilize if we are to work for the structural and systemic change so vital to reversing inequality.

Interestingly, one theme that came up in both Greg and Christine's pieces was that of constantly being watched and judged by those who have more or presumably "know more" (or perhaps feel they *deserve* to "know more"). This theme of surveillance is explored in other articles. Laura Pinto and Selena Nemorin look ways in which a toy (specifically the "Elf on the Shelf") may normalize the concept of surveillance for young children starting at a young age, and in a seemingly-benign way (a "holiday tradition in a box!"); this is particularly significant given corporate educational resources that integrate the Elf on the Shelf into Common Core curriculum in the U.S. Readers may have noticed a shorter version of this article, posted to the CCPA's website as a commentary, created a bit of an international media furour over

the holidays. Jack Dodds explores the topic of surveillance on a much larger scale, and the impact it may have on our civic engagement and in our lives. Larry Kuehn also looks at this issue, and how it is playing out in classrooms internationally, in his Education Roundup. (On a sidenote: readers may be interested in MediaSmart's *Privacy Pirates*, an online unit designed to help kids navigate and understand the topics of privacy, surveillance and online information.)

Other articles reflect on trying to ensure education is relevant and accessible to all students, particularly those in vulnerable situations or from traditionally marginalized groups. Tobey Steeves continues his analysis of the Teach For Canada initiative, looking into its corporate and political connections:

...Teach For Canada can and should be recognized as a colonialist intervention. With flowery rhetoric and a velvet glove, Teach For Canada imposes the will of privileged political insiders and corporatists on educators, students, and communities. Moreover, the resources of educators, students, and communities become a vehicle for advancing Teach For Canada and privatization.

Carol Zavitz of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario discusses ETFO's *Re-examining White Privilege* workshop for elementary educators that raised the ire of the *Toronto Sun*. Nora Loreto talks about the importance of a public, universal child care system to ensure accessibility and equity to families across the country. And Ben Sichel discusses how, as a non-Aboriginal teacher, he teaches Aboriginal history to other non-Aboriginal students. His article is also available as a webinar and blog post, and links to a number of useful online resources.

Fred Harris provides another valuable review of a number of online social justice resources, as well as a Deweyan review of *The Schools Chicago Students Deserve* (by the Chicago Teachers' Union). Ryan Cho writes about the BC CCPA's Climate Justice Project and the new classroom resources it has produced (in collaboration with the BCTF):

eight highly interactive lessons designed for secondary (and adaptable for upper elementary) that explore climate change in the context of British Columbia's communities, history, economy, and ecology. Looking at the issues through the lenses of fairness and equity, each

lesson explores how BC may chart a course forward in the face the world's climate challenges, and how that work can improve the lives of people throughout the province. It is a free resource and is available both online and in print at <http://www.teachclimatejustice.ca>.

Finally, Josh Cole and Ian MacKay have written an extremely thoughtful piece that looks at how the liberal arts can and do provide an antidote to the neoliberalization of education. They explain:

We think that the liberal arts are, in fact, inherently destabilizing, and therein lies their value. A society made up of citizens schooled to be critical of the existing social order and 'wide-awake' to social alternatives is the only society that can meet a contemporary situation full of ever-increasing challenges — economic, political, environmental, and so on.

The harshness of the neoliberal agenda and the deep entrenchment of poverty and inequality was underscored earlier this year when several homeless people died on Toronto's streets in the bitter cold. It reinforced the desperate need for a drastic shift in our national priorities to develop an antipoverty strategy that ensures basic dignity, security and community for everyone, but particularly our most vulnerable.

As Rachel Gray, Executive Director of the Stop Community Food Centre wrote in the *Toronto Star* on January 8, 2015: "It's been a bitter start to the year. We are long overdue for the change we need.... Let's get going. There are too many people living on a perilous, treacherous edge. And it's cold out there."

I would like to thank all the contributors to this issue — and all past issues of *OS/OS* — for generously giving of their words, wisdom and experiences. This issue, and the growing discussion of which we are all a part, are vastly enriched as a result. I also would like to extend my appreciation to our readers who provide their support and encouragement on an ongoing basis. As always, we look forward to hearing from you.

Wishing you all a 2015 filled with warmth, peace, and progress.

ERIKA SHAKER is the Executive Editor of *Our Schools/Our Selves*.