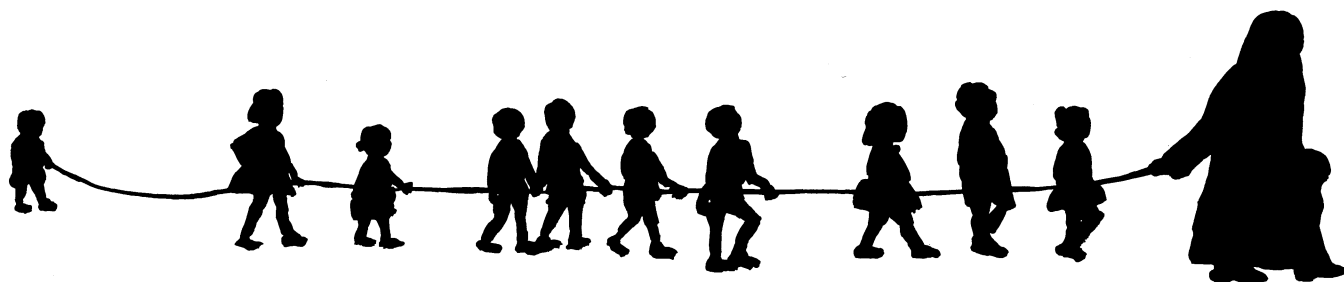


Notes from a Woman Teacher . . . 1978

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“Le Journal d’une enseignante, 1978” décrit les expériences personnelles d’une femme qui, dans son emploi, voit les résultats des récentes coupures de budget dans l’éducation et leurs effets sur les besoins spéciaux des femmes enseignantes et étudiantes.

As a direct result of recent cutbacks, the lives and plans of many women teachers have been drastically altered. I hear at least one new horror story a week. There are the women who were trained for kindergarten and early primary grades who have been bumped into grades and subject areas where they do not feel interested, trained, or comfortable. There are the women trained for and experienced in junior grades who have been bumped into junior kindergarten classes. Many of these women know that they have at best two more years before their jobs will be terminated altogether and that they will continue to be the ‘bumpable’ teachers because of their low seniority numbers. Many of these women have been in three or four different classrooms in a two-year period. The morale in their classrooms is understandably low. They are suffering, and consequently so are their pupils.

There are the women who were among the lot of teachers who—because of ‘overhiring’ two years ago—were never placed in classrooms at all within the boards that hired them. Many of these women were ‘loaned’ to other boards for that year and perhaps ‘loaned’ again to another board last year. These teachers are not guaranteed a job—even if one should become available—within the board that has ‘borrowed’ them, and they will have accrued no seniority within the schools and boards where they have done their actual teaching.

There are, as well, the many teachers who like me were hired in a seemingly good market in 1975; the teachers who have been in the same board and the same school for the whole of the three years with no desire to change schools. I was part of a three-person team, teaching in an open-area classroom in the downtown area. When I received my seniority number last year, I was told that I probably had nothing to worry about for a few years. I remained, nevertheless, quite uneasy about the whole situation, and as it turns out my uneasiness was justified. In May I was asked to place my name on the Transfer List as I, along with four other of the junior staff members at the school, had been declared surplus to the school staff allocation for 1978-9 according to Board enrolment projections. I was quickly placed in another school....I was one of the lucky ones. Since my placement,

two vacancies opened up at my original school. I need not have been forced out . . . indeed I wasn’t forced out, my *number* was forced out. I was doing a good job in a fine school where I was valued. It is the board, not the individual school, that has reduced us to digits. The two positions which opened up at my original school were, in the end, filled by two other low-seniority teachers who were, no doubt, bumped from schools in which they were valued, involved and happy.

Being bumped last year almost certainly means being terminated some time within the next two years. In my case it will probably be in June of 1979 because my number, which came out of a computer lottery, was fairly low. I entered the teaching profession quite late in life. I am a single parent with heavy responsibilities and financial commitments. Before I began teaching I earned less than half of my present salary. Looking ahead is difficult for me. Many highly qualified professional women are having great difficulty finding decent jobs for themselves. After all this time and study and effort I am likely to be among them. Quite apart from the financial difficulty, I will miss teaching. It is a challenging occupation and I am growing with it and loving it. I will resent going back to office work.

I would like you now to consider a little Portuguese girl I know. She is more facile and creative with spoken language (the English language) than any other child I have ever known. Where she has acquired this skill I cannot say. Her family speaks practically no English at all and she has very little contact with the English-speaking world except at school. Something thus far undiagnosed is preventing this little girl from learning to read. She has had a good deal of teacher-generated attention. She has had medical tests, hearing tests, vision tests, and a battery of diagnostic school tests. This child was lucky enough, last year, to be in a school where there was a reading teacher on staff who had formerly taught at a reading clinic. She had daily meetings with this teacher and was just beginning to make some major breakthroughs when the bumpings and school staff adjustments began. Because of program cuts, and a shrinking staff at the school, Dina’s reading teacher has been placed in a classroom on a full-time basis and Dina is receiving reading help from the French teacher whose half-day program (once a full-time French program) allows her extra time to work with children who are experiencing a range of difficulties in the regular classroom setting. Dina has lost her opportunity to work on a daily basis with a staff member who has specialized in reading, and her chance for survival in the school system has decreased.

Had this child been able to receive the kind of extra reading help she is entitled to, had she been able to remain with her regular classroom teacher for an additional year without failing a grade (which is what was planned for her until her classroom teacher was bumped from the school last June), were it possible for her to remain a second year with this year's teacher—again without failing a grade (her teacher this year will likely be bumped next June)—she might have had a chance to reach a grade four level by the time she reached grade four age. At this point the chances for this appear rather slim.

What opportunities will be available to this very verbal, creative, sensitive, bright child when the time comes for her to enter the workforce? It is frightening to speculate.

In July of 1970 a report of the Ontario Economic Council entitled *Immigrant Integration* had this to say:

The enormous influx of immigrant children has placed a heavy financial burden on certain boards of education. It has been necessary to build new schools, employ more teachers, and provide additional services. . .

The concentration of immigrant families in some urban areas is a by-product of the immigration program of the Canadian Government. As this places an inequitably heavy tax load on certain municipalities, it seems reasonable to expect that the Canadian Government should assume further responsibilities for easing the burden.

If the federal government is interested in the future productivity of the labour force¹, it should be willing to ensure that immigrant children are equipped to attain their fullest productive potential.

It is, therefore, recommended that the Department of the Secretary of State make additional funds available through the Ontario Department of Education to support language instruction in areas of high immigrant concentration.

Where have these recommendations and priorities gone? They led to a large English as a Second Language program in the public schools, but for a child like Dina ESL wasn't

needed. Her oral language developed on its own. The language gap hit her later when she had to learn how to read in a second language. The problem and hence the government and school obligation, is really no different. It simply hit at an unexpectedly late stage. Dina is still an immigrant child. She is too advanced in her oral language for an ESL class and too intellectually sophisticated for a special-education classroom, and she would have to wait her turn on a lengthy Reading Clinic waiting list. This little girl deserves a special kind of attention, and there are probably many more children like her in the school system. She has a second language reading disability that is passing for something else and being slighted as our educational budgets continue to be slashed.

To quote again from the Brief to the Commission on Declining Enrolment present by the FWTAO in February 1978:

It is becoming almost a cliché to say that declining enrolment should be viewed not as a disaster for the schools but as a challenge, offering opportunities for improving the schools in ways that educators have wanted to do for years but have been unable to do because of lack of personnel or space. Now both are available; do we have the will?

URGED TO PROVIDE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES FOR ALL CHILDREN WHO REQUIRE THEM, WITHOUT AN INCREASE IN REGULAR CLASS SIZE. (Recommendation 16)

We are too rich a province and a country to be satisfied with inadequate provisions for some of our children. Besides, it is cheaper to pay for adequate and special programmes, than to pay for expensive (and often unsuccessful) remedial work, and to pay forever for unemployment insurance and welfare for people whom the schools failed.

My daughter's education, along with Dina's, hangs in the balance. My career hangs in the balance. I am watching carefully and hoping that the school boards, the parents, the community at large, the teachers, and the children will join in opposition to further educational cutbacks during the spring of next year. Jobs of many highly qualified people are at stake. The education of many children is at stake. The school system as a whole is at stake. We cannot ignore, nor can any of us afford, the extensive costs that further cutbacks will incur.

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