Editorial

It is an honour and a privilege to have been invited to become the Editor of the new, online, open access, and peer-reviewed journal entitled LEARNing Landscapes. I was pleased to accept this position because I believe the collaboration between the Leading English Education and Resource Network (LEARN)[1] and McGill in this project will provide an important link between the University and the educational community in Quebec, and beyond. Also, I believe the work will provide the opportunity to blur boundaries between theory and practice, and between discipline and research divides, and across educational sectors, areas that are striving for similar goals, but with little time to entertain exchanges or collaborative activities. The added appeal of the work is that the journal will be available to anyone and everyone without a subscription, and the technology will allow imaginative experimentation with different kinds of texts and graphic possibilities.

Less than a year ago, during a meeting with Michael Canuel, CEO of LEARN and his colleagues Rosa Kovalski and Mary Stewart, our discussion wandered off the immediate topic and we ended up in a wonderful "what if" moment. It was then that the kernel idea for LEARNing Landscapes was born. Within a month plans were solidified, a trajectory was set and the journey began. It has been an exhilarating one. I am totally indebted to Michael Canuel for his openness and support, to Mary Stewart, Managing Editor, for her friendship, conscientiousness and organizational skills, to Maryse Boutin, Graphic Designer, for her talent and patience, to David Mitchell, Copy Editor, for his careful and diligent work, and to Robert Costain, Systems Analyst at LEARN for his technology expertise and support.

My interest in student engagement spans more than three decades from the elementary to university classroom, but it became more focused and articulated in the mid-90s when I participated with five other colleagues from across Canada in the Student Engagement Project funded by the McConnell and Vancouver

Foundations that studied 10 schools across the country over a five-year period, and in my subsequent work with John Portelli, a colleague at the University of Toronto, and a member of the original project team.

The results of the study turned many of the long-held, stereotypical notions of student engagement upside down. It showed for example how engagement is located in a complex interface of contexts and people, rather than residing just within the student. These include the classroom, school, home and community, and the student, teachers, peers, and family. It suggested that engagement at times may be palpable, but at other times may be far less visible and, for this reason, must be examined carefully and deeply before conclusions are drawn. Most importantly, it demonstrated that the inequalities that exist for students in classrooms, schools, and society at large have huge implications for how students are judged and how engaged they are able or want to be. Educators need socially just and inclusive, rather than deficit notions of student engagement, and must include student voices in developing these concepts, in order to make inroads with all students, especially with those who are in most need of support.

There is no doubt that my interest in student engagement contributed to the decision to make this the theme of the inaugural issue of LEARNing Landscapes. However, it also seemed very appropriate to start an educational journal with a focus on students. The growing, global interest in the field of student engagement facilitated the gathering of a varied and very interesting set of articles to be featured in the issue. We have made an effort to include pieces that are predicated on the fundamental human proclivity for making sense of our world through narrative (Bruner, 1986; 1991) and that are accessible to a wide range of readers/viewers. These include varying forms of texts and modes of inquiry that portray the voices of students, teachers, principals and other educators, as well as mainstream and arts-based educational researchers.

The journal begins with two commentaries provided by the eminent journalist, education advocate, and first woman Chancellor, now Chancellor Emerita, of McGill University, Gretta Chambers, and by the renowned narrative research scholar, Professor Jean Clandinin, Director of the Centre for Research on Teacher Education at the University of Alberta. Chamber's piece casts a wide net for considering student engagement by juxtaposing the state of our educational institutions—and what that means for engaging students—with those of countries where food, shelter, health and safety are fundamental problems, and the prospects of schooling of any sort are remote for many children. Clandinin's commentary complements this nicely arguing

for a narrative curriculum to optimize student engagement, one that builds on and connects with identities and experiences of students in fundamental and inclusive ways.

The articles by Garmaise, Howell, Robertson, Sanders et al., Sturge Sparkes and Zyngier all focus on what students in varying contexts have to say about student engagement. Garmaise, who at the time of writing was a Quebec high school student, provides important suggestions about the "dos" and "don'ts" of student engagement. Howell, an Ontario high school student at the time of writing, reflects on how certain teachers sparked a passion for philosophy in him that contributed to his engagement in school and to independent study he pursued. Robertson, a former director general of a local school board, relates how he and colleagues studied the involvement of students from across the educational sectors in a series of strategic planning exercises that proved to be illuminating both in the ideas and suggestions that arose from the work, and in the insights gleaned about student voice and engagement. Sanders et al., in a study that took place in Philadelphia, show how youth leadership conferences held outside of school develop a sense of agency and belonging, as well as leadership competencies, and a tolerance for diversity that can be transferred to the school context to enhance student engagement. Sturge Sparkes draws on work from her doctoral research and subsequent experiences in Montreal school boards to show how student engagement can be realized through varying levels of participation and by listening to students talk about how to make learning meaningful. Finally and importantly, Zyngier, in a study conducted in Melbourne, Australia, shows how by putting youth at the centre of conversations about engagement, he was able to identify three contesting epistemological constructs of student engagement. He concludes that not all notions of student engagement are equal and this has consequences for how students are treated and how they participate in school.

Sullivan's compelling poems smoothly bridge the work on student voices and engagement with the subsequent articles that focus on a range of classroom stories of engagement. Her work demonstrates how form mediates understanding (Eisner, 1991; 2005) and why currently there is a keen interest in arts-based qualitative research. Grossi weaves together portions of her recently completed doctoral thesis to portray her autobiographical account of student engagement, and some pivotal moments she has experienced with students in South Africa over many years. Jarrett shares a small study she did in her secondary IV and V English classes in Montreal to obtain student opinions about student engagement. She juxtaposes these with a list of important features of student engagement she produced, and shares the insights

resulting from this work. Kingsley demonstrates how peer-tutoring conducted in an early childhood classroom in the Eastern Townships in Quebec, a study that was part of her doctoral thesis, enhances literacy learning, self-confidence and engagement among second language learners including those with learning challenges. Pasquin and Winn, two newly retired principals, argue that it is in the "being" of teaching and the "doing" of curriculum that promotes engagement, and they relate three persuasive narratives involving pre-service and graduate students to illustrate their points.

Three other researchers provide interesting perspectives on student engagement. Lessard et al., using a quantitative approach, studied 715 grade eight students in the Eastern Townships in Quebec to find out how "non-at-risk" students and "at-risk" students perceive school bonding differently and that peers and teachers play an important part in bonding. They suggest changing a focus that is predicated on a deficit notion of "at-risk" students to one of "at-promise" could influence the trajectory of students in school. Markus describes an approach to visual inquiry that uses collage to get at intuitive and tacit understandings of student engagement, ones that were not apparent to her before engaging in this process. Last, but certainly not least, Strong-Wilson and her research team of educators in a school board in the southern suburbs of Montreal examine how technology can be incorporated into pedagogical practices and conclude that teacher support and engagement contributes a great deal to student engagement and learning.

Hopefully, the kaleidoscope of perspectives, contexts, and voices presented here on the theme of student engagement will resonate with the work and experiences of other educators, and elicit new conversations that will contribute to further insights and nuances about ways to support and engage all students.

L.B.K.

Notes

1. LEARN is a non-profit, education foundation supported by the Québec-Canada Entente for Minority Language Education. Its mandate is to provide access to quality learning material and services, educational technology, and e-learning resources to the Québec English Education community.

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