

## Curious George in our Classroom?

by Ardith Shirley, NBTA Staff Officer

I was fortunate to grow up in a home where literacy was encouraged from an early age. My Dad visited the library weekly and books were his entertainment of choice. Thankfully, he chose to share that love of reading with me by making time to read at least two 'bedtime stories' before drifting off to sleep each night.

Some of my favourites came from the 'Curious George' series by Margaret and H.A. Rey. There was something about that little monkey and the willingness of the 'Man in the Yellow Hat' to provide George the opportunity to satisfy his curiosity in the pursuit of learning, that appealed to me.

### Curiosity and Learning

A recent study published in *Neuron* magazine, documents researchers Matthias J. Gruber, Bernard D. Gelman, and Charan Ranganath's use of functional magnetic resonance imaging to investigate how curiosity (intrinsic motivation to learn) influences memory. In both immediate and one-day-delayed memory tests, participants showed improved memory for information that they learned during states of high curiosity.

This is not a new concept to educators. For years we have employed tools such as K-W-L charts to get students minds 'activated' for learning by encouraging them to become curious about the day's lesson. The challenge for teachers is in sustaining that curiosity and leveraging it beyond the opening activity. Perhaps even allowing students' curiosity to be-

come the driving force of learning in our lessons. Too often, the pressures of covering the curriculum or preparing for the next assessment take precedence.

### Who Wants to Know?

*"Step into an average classroom in any K-12 school and research suggests that almost 80 percent of the talk that takes place in that room will be framed as a question. Assuming this research is sound, it would seem that questioning is a dominant instructional strategy... it is important to pause and reflect on the quality of questioning that we are employing."* (Shirley, NBTA News, February 2012)

Fast forward three years later, and I would go on to add that **who** is getting to ask the questions in our classrooms may be the real professional discussion *"To promote deep learning, remember that students' questions matter most. Instead of spending time honing our questioning skills, it's time we help students hone theirs."* (Tovani, EL October 2015)

### I Wonder?

This leads me to some questions of my own... Would George actually get the chance to be curious in today's New Brunswick classroom? Would he be too distracted answering questions on yet another test so that a 'reliable' mark can be generated for the report card? If the 'Man in the Yellow Hat' were teaching in a New Brunswick School, would he be so busy measuring, sifting, sorting and documenting data about George's learning experiences to plan the next adventure for George and his friends?

### For Learning's Sake

Anyone who has been around a young child for very long can attest that they are filled to the brim with curiosity and LOTS of questions. Recent research would support that one of the best things we can do to support deep, meaningful learning in our classrooms is not unlike that of the "Man in the Yellow Hat" in the Curious George series – make time and space to foster a climate ripe for curiosity and student questions - for learning's sake!

***"To promote deep learning, remember that students' questions matter most. Instead of spending time honing our questioning skills, it's time we help students hone theirs."***

(Tovani, EL October 2015)



## May I Recommend:

This month, I recommend the following articles for your consideration. If you are reading the electronic version of the news, you may be able to link directly to them. Should you wish to have a paper copy sent to you, drop me a line.

**Being Human in the Classroom** by Carol Ann Tomlinson appears in the October 2015 issue of *Educational Leadership*, (Pages 74-77). The October issue is themed *Emotionally Healthy Kids* and contains many articles that are worth a read. I found great inspiration in this article – a reminder of why we do what we do. “Teaching is the rare profession that allows practitioners to model a world that dignifies/lifts up all its members. It is important to me to create a classroom where my students and I learn together to be more fully human. My students hear every message I send – whether overt or implied – about their capacity to learn and succeed.”

**Beyond Phys Ed: How educators can harness the benefits of exercise** by Dr. Christopher Gilbert in September 2015 issue of *Education Canada* explores how exercise influences the brain, and has an effect on learning. This article suggests the application of exercise findings in learning environments. I know a number of NB schools and classrooms are in the process of exploring this concept through your own action research.

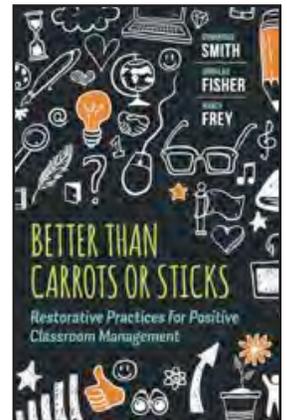
**Are Report Cards Making the Grade?** by Meaghan Gilmore in September 2015 issue of *TEACH* provides an overview of some of the efforts taking place in Canada to create the “ideal” communication tool to report student learning efforts to the home. New Brunswick’s provincial report card pilot in ASD-West is highlighted.

**The Trials and Tribulations of Substitute Teaching** by Edgar Rider (September 30, 2015) features tips and tricks to help any teacher get through a challenging day teaching “someone else’s class”. A highlight for me was the suggestion for ‘five minute fillers’ – ideas that any teacher may wish to add to their tool box!

## Book Give-Away!

Congratulations to Louise LaBerge of Fredericton High School who was the winner of our September book.

Our next draw will be for **Better Than Carrots or Sticks: Restorative Practices for Positive Classroom Management** by Dominique Smith, Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey. Sound interesting? Drop me an email at [ardith.shirley@nbta.ca](mailto:ardith.shirley@nbta.ca) with the subject line “Book Draw”.



*Ardith*



## Closing Quotes:

***“It is a miracle that curiosity survives formal education.”***

— Albert Einstein

***“I think, at a child’s birth, if a mother could ask a fairy godmother to endow it with the most useful gift, that gift should be curiosity.”***

— Eleanor Roosevelt