

Executive Summary

Terms of Reference

As well as documenting what is actually happening in English-language Canadian high schools, this report was mandated to produce pragmatic suggestions on how to ensure that Canadian students and teachers are adequately encouraged to use Canadian literature in schools.

Methodology

All stakeholders were notified of the research project and asked for suggestions. In conjunction with teachers, a draft survey was developed. The draft was tested, revised and mailed to all high schools along with a second survey for students. The survey was designed to be as inclusive as possible to allow teachers and school librarians the opportunity to identify and discuss all the associated issues related to the teaching of Canadian literature.

Results

Response

The teacher survey results indicate a good provincial representation from across the country that is reflective of population demographics. Likewise, there was a good response from a range of school boards including urban, rural and private. The responses represent an acceptable range of grade levels, years of experience in the classroom, and educational positions. Given the volatile state of teachers and the highly charged political situations in many provinces, the response rate was very favourable particularly considering the length of the survey and the scope of the questions.

Curriculum

Provincial curriculum documents are complex and dense. Although all provinces indicate a desire to include work that is authored by Canadians there are huge variations in the prescribed policies. Provincial guidelines have a new emphasis on technology and methods of communication other than print. English literature courses have been replaced by English Language Arts classes and now teachers must use many strategies with many genres including art prints, CDs, videos, newspapers, journals, etc. The new definition of "text," while exciting to many educators, in practical terms means that students are reading less print texts of sustained length, specifically novels. New curricula often require the purchase of new textbooks/anthologies resulting in decreased or no spending on novels and literary collections. There is a strong focus on outcomes, student testing and skills development.

The Classroom

Teacher survey respondents indicated that in 31% of their schools there is a Canadian literature course. The number of Canadian literature courses has declined over the last few years and will continue to decline, in some provinces, as more new curricula are implemented.

Provincial guidelines vary greatly in the amount of discretion given to classroom teachers about selection of course materials. The responses suggest that most selections are based on availability of texts (books that the school already owns), acceptability (provincial guidelines, community standards, interests of students) and the agreed consensus of the department.

There are many impediments to writers-in-schools programs including isolation, expense, scheduling problems and lack of information. Teachers who regularly invite writers to their classrooms say it is what gets students most excited about Canadian literature. Few schools participate in off-campus literary events or reading festivals.

The biggest in-class challenges for ELA teachers are: encouraging students to read; weak literacy skills of students; finding material that students will find interesting, fit varying reading levels and will not offend the community; funding for books and support resources; finding resources; time. Many teachers expressed high levels of frustration with the current education environment.

The Students

Teachers report that few students are writing creatively-poetry, short stories, etc. Teachers say few students can identify 10 Canadian writers and that most students read five or less Canadian books during their secondary education. The most effective methods identified for engaging students in Canadian literature are: specific authors; writers-in-schools programs; teachers' enthusiasm; film adaptations of Canadian novels; literature that has ties to students' own lives and to their communities; short works; silent reading time; class study of novels; supplementary material such as magazine articles.

The Texts

The majority of literature taught in Canadian schools is American authored. New books are introduced to the classroom at a slow rate and in small numbers. Prize-winning books are popular choices for purchase as are the more prominent names in current publishing. Teachers' fear of repercussions from parents and community greatly influence the selection of material. There are often vast differences between the theory of the curriculum and the practice in the classroom.

The bulk of recent budget dollars have gone to anthologies, which have significant Canadian content from various genres (novel excerpts, poetry, journalism, artwork, photography) and time periods. Some teachers like the anthologies while others say students "are not responding to them." Novel studies courses are no longer the norm.

Some teachers feel that literature has been lost in a system that increasingly puts lower values on the humanities. They believe that at the Ministry level, theory and pedagogy have become too important. And while these teachers struggle to find money for books that will engage students they cannot forget that the "ultimate political goal is to ensure that the students pass the tests."

Support material and secondary resources

In order to teach more Canadian literature, ELA teachers need better support and access to secondary resources, specifically: more money for texts and class sets; affordable books; educational/literary web sites; teachers' guides; more information about young adult titles; mandates from provincial ministries to include CanLit courses; anthologies of regional literature, short stories and poetry; more videos, posters, and authors' readings; book review publications; more professional development opportunities; more support from publishers. The Internet could be a more useful tool for disseminating information.

Without a full-time qualified librarian, building a school collection is a difficult task. With large amounts of ELA budgets designated for anthologies and little money left for the purchase of individual literary texts, the access to literary material by students and teachers is further eroded by declining school libraries.

Teacher Training

University/College of Education training

Respondents indicated that 69% had taken a Canadian literature course as part of their university degree. Frequently teachers say there was no emphasis on Canadian literature at teacher training level and if not for an undergraduate degree, they would have no experience at all. The respondents

who are the most comfortable teaching Canadian literature identify themselves as having very positive undergraduate experiences with exposure to various types of literature including many Canadian literature courses. They are avid readers, have a "personal interest" in Canadian literature, belong to reading groups and have interests in regional literature. They often took Canadian literature courses during their high school years.

Ongoing training/professional development

Throughout the country there are great variations in professional development opportunities about Canadian literature. Many faculty at post-secondary institutions indicated that they would be willing to go into schools and do workshops with teachers. Publishers are concerned that there is very little offered to teachers to upgrade skills. They would like to see conferences with sessions that deal with content. Many respondents did note that when professional development workshops are available there are a number of problems associated with attending; times of workshops interfere with class scheduling; funding; distance-isolation of schools from larger urban centers that offer the workshops; infrequency of course offerings.

Attitudes about Canadian Literature

There appear to be two opposing camps in the education system with regard to the "legitimacy" of teaching Canadian literature. One group believes that teaching Canadian literature is part of a good education and "good citizenship"-we must be the "only country in the world that doesn't teach its own literature in its schools." There are others who maintain that the nationality of the author is not important; "Nationalism and nationalist agenda and the cultural value of literature are mutually exclusive."

Despite a publishing industry that boasts an international reputation, many teachers say their colleagues have "disdain" for Canadian literature. Some teachers suggest that Canadian literature is limited in scope and lacking in universal themes and "moral fibre." A huge issue for teachers is content that is acceptable by community standards; "usually Canadian fiction doesn't fit this criteria."

Those teachers who are ardent supporters of CanLit say the system does not support or allow for the celebration of Canadian literature. Teachers who want to teach CanLit courses are frustrated by lack of support from colleagues and administration. They also point to another complicating variable; "when course lists are drawn up by administrators they do not represent the books that teachers like, the ones they are enthusiastic about."

There seems to be a consensus that it takes more effort to teach Canadian literature. The majority of respondents would like to see the amount of Canadian literature taught in schools increased but in order for that to happen there needs to be support, funding, resources and clear mandates from provincial ministries.

Post-Secondary Concerns

According to English faculty at Canadian universities, "preparedness of first year students for university English courses simply covers the whole range from totally unprepared to impressive reading and writing ability." "Most students do not have a very strong sense of Canadian literature in that they do not have an extensive awareness of Canadian authors and not even generally of any 'major' texts, as would once have been the case." University faculty members express concern that there is so much focus on testing and "learning outcomes-skills versus thinking and analysis." Many post-secondary educators take issue with the new approaches at the secondary level.

Publishers Issues

Dramatic changes in education funding have changed purchasing patterns with implications for the Canadian publishing industry. The main issues are: high school libraries have small budgets, reduced staff and less emphasis on building collections; marketing problems, both geographic scope and expense; no book review mechanism for high schools; Canadian books are expensive; curriculum guidelines are increasingly restrictive; publishers struggle through the process to get work authorized or added to provincial lists without guarantee of adoptions or sales. Programs designed to address these challenges have met with varying degrees of success.

Publishers would like to work more closely with the educational community and market. Teachers would like better information about materials being published. There is concern from both groups about finding ways to get more materials into the classroom. Both teachers and publishers are concerned about purchasing patterns that are based on money rather than quality or preference. Both would like to see ways to create more excitement for primary texts in the classroom as an investment in the next generation of readers.

Results of the Student Survey

The range of books being read by high school students is diverse, everything from philosophy and history to science fiction and poetry. The Chicken Soup series, horror and fantasies are extremely popular with young people. Students report they are more inclined to get books from bookstores than school libraries. Few read book reviews, relying on recommendations from friends and family. Young people are big readers of magazines and big users of the Internet. 57% of respondents stated they write creatively.

Students have a high level of political awareness surrounding books. They are concerned about lack of resources and relevant resources. While many students have a well-established love of reading, just as often reading is associated with work, almost punishment, something that takes time and effort rather than providing enjoyment. More research needs to be done to develop the incentives for reading at this age that are essential to the development of life-long reading patterns.

Change From Previous Years

Some teachers say there may be more Canadian literature in various grade levels but there are less Canadian literature courses. In some high schools there has been an increase in the amount of Canadian literature, in some there has been a decrease and in others there has been no noticeable difference. The environment and challenges remain very much the same as 30 years ago.

Conclusions of the Survey

The information compiled during this research project points to many areas and methods where things need to be done to assist with the teaching of Canadian literature in Canadian high schools. Currently, teachers and students are not adequately encouraged to read Canadian literature.

- Teachers need more and better access to resource material about Canadian literature;
- Within the high school educational system there is limited knowledge about Canadian writers and the Canadian publishing scene even among teachers who are supportive of CanLit;
- There is an attitude within the high school educational system that Canadian literature is substandard and doesn't merit being taught in schools;
- Teachers have challenges with the new curriculum and approaches to literature studies that impact the amount of Canadian literature being taught;

- There is significant competition from American and British literature;
- Funding is a problem-not enough money for books, for resources, for writers-in-schools programs or for professional development;
- Decline in librarians has impacted access and depleted collections in school libraries;
- While writers-in-schools programs are reported to be the most effective method of exciting students about Canadian literature there is little knowledge about these programs;
- There is little research in the area of Canadian literature in high schools to provide support material for curriculum designers;
- Marketing to high schools is a challenge for the publishing industry;
- There are no effective methods of communicating with stakeholders;
- There are not enough professional development opportunities for teachers;
- Community standards and fear of reprisal has a large impact on classroom teachers' selection of materials;
- The Internet and new technology have not been fully exploited for CanLit studies;
- Teachers need more support from all sectors including government agencies.

Conclusions of the Report

Network

One of the biggest challenges identified by this research project is the lack of a network to share information about and promote Canadian literature to high schools. Many teachers and the organizations that try to support their endeavours operate in isolation and as a result, are less effective. There needs to be new networks created to connect organizations and establish effective communication channels. Certainly, if any national initiatives are to have significant impact a national network is essential. Productive solutions will require the participation of all stakeholders.

Use of the Internet

Some problems about accessing information identified by this project could be addressed through the development of a web-based database. The problem of isolation could be reduced with web access to information. The current on-line resources are inadequate for secondary educational needs.

Writers-in-schools and Youth Festival programs

Writers-in-schools programs have been identified as making a difference in the classroom and motivating students to read, and read Canadian. Such programs also encourage the creative writing of students and enhance teachers' awareness of CanLit. At the high school level, these programs are drastically under funded and under utilized. The organizations that administer writers-in-schools programs and youth writing festivals face the same challenges. There is currently little, if any, opportunity for sharing of information and expertise between these programs.

Teacher/Librarian Publication

There is currently no print publication directed to the high school educational audience and circulated to schools with reviews appropriate to the education environment. There is a need for a publication that would include: reviews of publications, including new literary works, anthologies, collections and critical work; a commitment to review and promote young adult titles; interviews; essays.

A print publication would provide increased knowledge for teachers about publishing trends and help to improve the attitude about Canadian literature. The publication has the potential to be a valuable marketing tool for the publishing industry.

Awards

Although there has been a dramatic increase in the number of literary awards in the past 30 years, there is no award that encourages participation from high school readers.

Distribution

A distribution system is needed with an established pattern that is common knowledge-a package that teachers expect to receive and trust it contains useful information about Canadian literature. This could be achieved through a combination of an email database, a print publication or a mailed package that would be distributed to schools on a regular basis.

Better Awareness

There is a lack of awareness about the amount of Canadian literature being taught in high schools that extends from curriculum designers and the ministries through to teachers and parents. The findings of this report should be circulated widely to the media, government and all stakeholders. An ongoing campaign needs to be designed to create awareness. There needs to be increased presence of Canadian literature at educational conferences, professional development days, round tables, and any other opportunities to promote the use of Canadian literature in Canadian schools.

Ongoing Research

There is little research in the area of Canadian literature in high schools. In order to find effective methods to make it easier for teachers to teach Canadian literature, research needs to be conducted into models that have worked in other countries, for example: the repatriation of Australian literature in Australian schools; the new funding mechanisms for books in American school libraries; international reading studies.

Writers' Organizations

Writers' organizations should be encouraged to do workshops and displays at teachers' institutes and conferences. There needs to be: more educational material about writers' organizations available to schools; a unified approach to improve communication between the publishing community and the educational community.

National Book Week

National Book Week had enormous impact on the educational system. Thought should be given to reviving and renaming this program, focusing at the high school level, and converting Canada Book Day to Canada Book Week as a weeklong program for schools.

Advisory/Liaison Body

Continuity is an essential component to any endeavour to increase awareness of and knowledge about Canadian literature in Canadian schools. Strong ties need to be forged with secondary educators, post-secondary programs, pre-teacher training and professional development programs. If there is any break in that continuity, the results are less effective. There needs to be an Advisory group to assist.

Library Reading/Reading Festivals

The difference in opportunity between children's programming and teen programs is staggering. Public libraries need to be encouraged to work more effectively with high schools for readings and writer-in-residence programs. Reading Festivals should be encouraged to add an educational component. There needs to be funding available for festivals that already run education programs to train and share their information with those festivals wishing to start educational programs.

Canadian Literature Studies

The results of this report suggest that in the environment of a Canadian literature course students learn context and cultural literacy. The development of cultural literacy is necessary in order to ensure that the next generation has both knowledge and pride in Canada's rich literary heritage.

The Council of Ministers of Education should be approached and encouraged to: develop mandatory Canadian literature courses as part of the curriculum design; develop guidelines about percentage of Canadian literature in courses at all levels. In order for such recommendations to be given serious consideration the other components of this report must be implemented: support, funding, access to information, on-going training.

Publishers

This report has identified the following needs that directly relate to publishers: more literature related to native studies; funding subsidies for high school purchases of Canadian books; more anthologies of Canadian poetry and short stories; more support material about Canadian writers; anthologies that have historical scope and context. Implementing the recommendations of this report will create demand in the schools. If the demand is created, publishers will produce secondary materials.

A version of this report should be distributed to school administrators, boards and parents to encourage the purchase and promotion of Canadian books in Canadian schools. Publishers need money to promote titles to the educational market. Funding is also required to develop videos, CDs, posters and other tie-ins for high schools. Currently an enormous amount of educational money is being spent on American products. The money should be redirected to Canadian products and Canadian publishers.

Post-Secondary

Some Canadian universities do make it mandatory to take a Canadian literature course as part of a degree requirement for training teachers. These policies need to be encouraged and introduced where they do not exist. In addition, faculty at universities should be encouraged to participate in training teams about Canadian literature at teachers' conferences and professional development days.

Student Publication

Research for this report indicates that creative writing engages the student, validates the ability of the student and enlarges understanding of literature. Educators at all levels suggested that students who write creatively read more than other students. There is not much validation for creative writing and it has little emphasis on curricula. Literature, reading and writing have become distinct things

rather than integrated. A publication that focuses on the creative work of students would address these issues. The publication should include: creative work of high school students; information about Canadian writers; information about the publishing community; reviews; essays by students about Canadian literature; interviews of Canadian writers by students.

Two other initiatives that would develop reading and communication skills and increase knowledge of Canadian literature are book camps and writing contests.

Benefits

The creation of a devoted organization or project to undertake the implementation of the recommendations of this report would have many benefits to the publishing industry, the education system and other stakeholders. Potential results:

- Promote the study and enjoyment of Canadian literature;
- Develop stronger partnerships for existing organizations;
- Establish a leadership role for Canadian literature studies in high schools;
- Improve delivery of existing programs;
- Development of a new audience;
- Champion the place of the artist in society;
- Support writers and their work;
- Increase knowledge of Canadian literature in the education community;
- Bridge the gap in the continuum between children and adults ;
- Create a network and structure that will help with the distribution and dissemination of information about Canadian literature;
- Provide a structure that will allow Canadian writers to do more touring and more readings;
- Increase partnerships between community organizations-high school, libraries and other literary groups;
- Encourage cooperation and cross-referencing.
- Relevant, effective and measurable results;
- Reduced duplication of financial and human resources;
- Better networking of existing programs and organizations.

Both the Canada Council for the Arts and the Department of Canadian Heritage have strong mandates to support youth initiatives. Ironically, at the greatest opportunity for the development of a

life-long love of Canadian culture and Canadian literature, high schools lack the support to deliver the programs. As a result, few graduating students have taken courses in Canadian literature.

New technologies do not replace the need for books in schools. Without investing in books, there is much reduced quality of education. At a time when literacy concerns are high, young people need to be strongly encouraged to become life-long passionate readers. More needs to be done.

Recommendations

Recommendation one:

Create a distinct body, either a new organization or part of an existing organization, to be named the "CanLit Educational Project" to generate cooperation and encourage the use of Canadian literature in Canadian high schools. The mandate of the CanLit Educational Project would be to:

- Create new partnerships and networks;
- Develop projects to address identified needs;
- Develop communication methods between stakeholders for sharing of information;
- Create awareness about the need for recognition of Canadian literature in high schools;
- Continue research about Canadian literature in Canadian high schools;
- Be receptive to new ideas and methods of encouraging the use of Canadian literature in Canadian high schools;
- Function as an advisory organization;
- Be receptive to new ideas, methods, projects and partnerships;
- Work on the implementation of the recommendations of this report.

Recommendation Two:

Develop a detailed proposal for a CanLit Educational Project database available on the Internet. The database would be a supplement to existing provincial sites and resources and available to the entire education community.

Recommendation three:

Create a national network of organizations that administer writers-in-schools programs and youth writing festivals. This network would develop an action plan to address the challenges identified in this report.

Recommendation four:

Develop a prospectus for a CanLit Educational Project publication for distribution to high schools.

Recommendation five:

Explore existing literary award models and develop a proposal for awards that would promote Canadian literature in high schools.

Recommendation six:

Develop a prospectus for a distribution network to high school English departments that could be accessed by all stakeholders and used to disseminate information and other products from these recommendations.

Recommendation seven:

Develop an aggressive public relations program to create awareness about CanLit in high schools.

Recommendation eight:

The CanLit Education Project needs to continue research on the use of CanLit in schools and develop measurement tools for projects implemented.

Recommendation nine:

The CanLit Educational Project will have an advisory role to liaise with organizations and encourage the use of Canadian literature in Canadian schools through the following.

Advisory recommendations:

- There needs to be a proactive approach on the part of government funding agencies to encourage more educational opportunities for secondary teachers and students in library readings and reading festivals.
- There needs to be a proactive approach to the Council of Ministers of Education to consider developing mandatory Canadian literature courses as part of provincial curriculums.
- Provincial governments need to be encouraged to invest in school libraries and develop incentive programs for schools to buy Canadian books.
- Canadian Heritage needs to consider funding incentives for publishers to implement the recommendations of this report.
- There needs to be a proactive approach to Canadian universities and faculties of education to make Canadian literature courses a mandatory degree requirement for post-secondary-training teachers.
- The Department of Canadian Heritage and The Canada Council for the Arts should consider funding incentives for student publications, book camps and student writing contests.