



# **President's Address**

**2013 Biennial General Meeting  
Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association**

**Lily. B. Cole  
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**(Please check against delivery)**

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Thank you Jim.

Delegates, observers, invited guests, colleagues, NLTA staff, ladies and gentleman. Welcome and good morning to all of you as we commence BGM 2013.

If this is your first BGM, I want to say a very special welcome. As I first found out when I started to attend these conferences, “you don’t know what you don’t know” and what you are about to experience will be one of the best professional development sessions of your career. At least that has been my experience and the comments made by many who have been fortunate enough to attend prior Conventions. If this is another Convention that you wanted to attend – added to your list of many – I thank you for giving unselfishly of your precious Easter vacation to attend and participate. Your Association is ever stronger and better prepared because you took the time to champion its interests, to face further challenges, and to help set new directions. Therefore, I thank all of you and especially those running for elected office on Provincial Executive. Those who do so are once again giving up valuable family, vacation, and personal rejuvenating time for the good of our Association. The act of participating and being active in the NLTA is vital to preserving the principles that founded our Association. So again I say a heartfelt thank you to you all.

Denis Waitly (a respected author and productivity consultant on high performance human achievement) states, “Time is an equal opportunity employer. Each human being has exactly the same number of hours and minutes every day. Rich people can’t buy more hours. Scientists can’t invent new minutes. And you can’t save time to spend it on another day. Even so, time is amazingly fair and forgiving. No matter how much time you’ve wasted in the past; you still have an entire tomorrow.” This is the end of my fourth year as President and I am amazed how quickly the time has gone. I am thankful for all of those tomorrows and hopefully there will be many more to come. To me it seems that there must be a law of physics to dictate that the further we advance in age, the faster the time moves. However, being more of a literature buff than an expert on physics, I will stick with what I know best.

I was given the privilege of being President of this fabulous organization for two terms and as such, I have seen many changes in the direction of education and I have seen some improvements for our teachers. But regrettably, even with long, arduous and diligent work from all, there are still longstanding major concerns that remain unchanged and we continually face more challenges.

The 2013 provincial budget was brought down on March 26. And as we said in our news release and as I stated in numerous media interviews, the loss of 160 teachers from the classrooms of this province will have a negative impact on students and their learning. It is extremely disappointing that government did not find a way to maintain teacher numbers, specifically specialist teachers in intermediate schools, numeracy/literacy teachers, learning resource teachers, and administrative time in many schools.

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Although the class size caps were retained in all regular curriculum, it is a concern that nearly half of the teachers will be cut from the needs-based part of the teacher allocation model. As we all know, fewer teachers means many identified needs will not be addressed.

The loss of administrative time in large schools will have a negative impact on schools at the same time as the English school boards are restructuring into one. There will be more administrative tasks downloaded to the school level.

If the amalgamation of school boards and the closing of regional offices results in cuts to the number of people who are responsible for services to schools, teachers and students, it will be next to impossible to deliver the same level of support over a much larger geographical area.

Parents, grandparents, and guardians of students in Newfoundland and Labrador should be concerned, even with teachers giving 150% to their students as they are presently. Realistically, students cannot expect the same level of service in September 2013 with 160 fewer teachers. It will not be possible for teachers to meet all their students' needs. This is unacceptable to teachers and it should be unacceptable to parents. In the words of Haim Ginott, "We expect teachers to reach unattainable goals with inadequate resources. The miracle is this: they often do."

In his 1847 *Report on a System of Public Elementary Instruction for Upper Canada*, Egerton Ryerson (sometimes known as the founder of Canadian Curriculum Development) stated that public education was created in Canada to ensure that youth were prepared for their "appropriate duties and employments of life...as persons of business, and also as members of the civil community in which they live." As beneficiaries of the public education system, Ryerson recognized, as should we all, that education is much more than the transfer of basic numeracy and literacy skills from teacher to student. A more important goal of public education in a democracy is to prepare all students for active participation in civil society.

Lee Iacocca, the automotive entrepreneurial genius once stated, "In a completely rational society, the best of us would aspire to be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less, because passing one civilization along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honour and highest responsibility anyone could have."

These two influential people have articulated very well the quality work, value and great responsibility we have as teachers. We must give education the value it deserves. Comprehending the value of education is not simply saying it in words. It must be valued by us, our students, our families, our communities, our province, and society as a whole. Many Canadians seem to have lost track of the role public education plays in nurturing our civic culture. Instead, we have allowed consumerist thinking to infect public policy around education. Education should be considered an investment in society instead of an economic drain. We need to re-engage the discussion on the value of education for the public good.

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Our current collective agreement expired in August 2012. From a remuneration perspective our last contract was a good one, and we certainly deserved the compensation for our responsibility and work. In preparing for our next contract, the Collective Bargaining Committee framed our position and Provincial Executive approved the opening proposal on November 25, 2011. In March last year, notice was served to the Employer to open negotiations on the provincial collective agreement. The Negotiating Team was established and began its training and planning sessions in April of 2012. The NLTA Provincial Negotiating Team met on September 10 and exchanged opening proposals with the employer. Both sides explained their respective proposals. Following this exchange, as per policy, all teachers were provided with a copy of both proposals and a series of branch meetings were held to discuss the proposals. In the sessions with the Employer, the NLTA identified a number of proposals put forth which would increase management rights and strip out contract provisions affecting working conditions which have existed for years. The Negotiating Team characterized these as “poisonous proposals” which would inhibit meaningful discussion at the bargaining table and prohibit successful negotiations of a collective agreement. A few of those poisonous proposals are:

- Eliminate the requirements to make every effort to hire substitutes when teachers are absent for valid reasons.
- Eliminate the requirement for a teacher’s consent to serve on committees which are now voluntary.
- Allow the employer to control the teacher’s workday beyond the normal school day without consultation or compensation.
- Allow the Employer to increase the length of the instructional day without consultation.

A request was made to the Employer to provide a response to the Negotiating Team at the next bargaining session which would address the Association’s serious concerns with the identified issues. On November 1 the Employer provided a response; however, many poisonous items in the original proposal were kept and it went on to propose further contract stripping. Two of the further items that were included in the Employer proposal on November 1 were:

- Eliminate the protection of pension benefits provided in Schedule D.
- Reserve the right to submit a further proposal with respect to pensions.

The Negotiating Team informed the Employer that there was no basis for further talks at this time and that the Association would await an Employer response that addressed the contract stripping concerns identified. We are still waiting for that response.

On December 21, Ed Hancock, Don Ash, and I, along with representatives from other public sector unions, attended a meeting at the invitation of the Minister of Finance to discuss pension concerns raised in the media by the Minister. Relevant to teachers was a presentation given by the Deputy Minister on the funding status of the Teachers’ Pension Plan. This meeting also included a discussion of government’s associated concerns with this funding situation and clarification of comments made in the media by the Minister. At that time he provided assurances that there would be no change to current retiree pension benefits, no intention to eliminate already accrued benefits for current active teachers, and recognition that any changes to the Teachers’ Pension Plan would have to occur through negotiations. On January 16, 2013 we wrote the Minister thanking him for commencing the discussions on pensions, and for reassuring that no decisions have been made at this stage and that there is no

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intention on the part of government of impacting accrued benefits or benefits of retirees. On February 8, 2013 we received a response from the Minister stating, “You specifically noted the comment ‘there is no intention on the part of government of impacting accrued benefits or the benefits of retirees.’ To clarify, given the magnitude of the problem with the sustainability and affordability of the pension and post-retirement benefit plans as they currently exist, an extensive review of all options is required to ensure that potential solutions are comprehensive, well researched and balanced.” This to me is backpedalling on comments he made in the public sector meeting. But it is clearly evident that the Employer would like to eliminate pension benefits provided in Schedule D in our collective agreement. Again, we will have to wait.

As it has been documented over and over again, the relationship between quality living and education is so positively correlated that we need to remind ourselves of its continuing importance and value. Joel Westheimer, our guest speaker today, stated last year at CTF that there is a very real and very dangerous growing animosity towards teachers – see Wisconsin to our south, but also here in Canada. This is not something we should assume will go away. Teachers are easy targets and as the media and the general public think more and more that schools are simply a consumer service (job training, customers, etc.) rather than a critically important public institution for the common good, the more they are susceptible to ignorant, malicious and dangerous accusations of teacher laziness, etc.

As teachers, we talk it and walk it, but we have to go even further – we have to unabashedly proclaim the importance and value of a public education that prepares all students to be engaged citizens for a civil society. We need to rearticulate the value of education throughout our province, in schools, in communities, in media, with businesses, with our government personnel, school councils, school districts, parents and many more. Education and learning needs to be unreservedly promoted and proudly proclaimed for the public good at provincial, national and international levels.

We all witness that governments and society are continually placing ever-increasing expectations and demands on schools and teachers – from preventing childhood diabetes, recognizing and curbing bullying behaviours, saving the planet, promoting social justice awareness, encouraging acceptance of sexuality minority groups, to encouraging healthy lifestyles, all the while feeling the weight of the overall responsibility of ensuring academic excellence in all students. If that is what society as a whole demands and expects, then we will need to be supported in our schools with the necessary human and other resources supported by the will and commitment of those who make the decisions. If education is truly valued, and better educated, healthier and critical thinking citizens of a global community is our desire, then all of society must adhere to their responsibility and work with teachers to foster acceptance of this concept. Society must embrace this love of learning and take an active role in developing the kind of society for which we strive – for our children, our grandchildren and ourselves. We all need to leave the world a better place for having lived in it.

As we reflect on education’s importance to a well-balanced civil society, there are many challenges, societal changes, or concerns – call them that you will – but these things increasingly demand more of a teacher’s time. As teachers we witness this first hand.

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The Department of Education has continued with its implementation of a model of inclusion for the delivery of special services in education, the goal of which is to enable all students regardless of academic or emotional challenges to receive instruction within the regular classroom setting with their peers. Today's classroom has a very different composition than it did just four years ago. We have students with profound medical needs, varied learning challenges, ESL students, students of different ethnic and religious denominations, and students from war-torn countries who have never experienced the freedoms, gender equality, or Canadian culture we often take for granted. Interaction with students is part of the daily life of a teacher. And it is their right to have an inclusive education system, so the Department must ensure that the students have the proper supports and resources to ensure their success. And likewise, teachers are provided with the supports and resources they require to create the most enabling environment for students to be successful.

The lack of increased investment in inclusive education is having a negative impact on our schools, teachers and students as this implementation continues without the necessary supports. We have continued to express to the Department that without the proper supports, inclusion in our inclusive classrooms cannot occur as planned. Either the needs of the special services student will not be adequately addressed, or classroom teachers will be faced with prioritizing the needs of one group of students to the detriment of others. Neither scenario is acceptable to teachers, and should not be acceptable to parents.

Since the release of the ISSP/Pathways report the NLTA has seen very little, if any, movement in some of the areas that were addressed in the report such as department heads for special services in all schools and reduction in the allocation for guidance counselors. The recommendations to increase the guidance counselor-student allocation from 1-500 to 1-250 in order to reflect the expanded role and responsibilities of the guidance counselor in the school system, was provisionally accepted pending a review of the role of the guidance counselor. The new approach to allocating teaching resources based on the recommendation of the independent review and report entitled, *Education and Our Future: A Road Map to Innovation and Excellence*, was released in 2008. This is 2013 and that review is still not completed. I am sure that the roles and responsibilities of guidance counselors have not decreased since the release of the report. It is a fact that their workload has increased with more mental health issues being identified, bullying and social media challenges, and many other crises that are occurring daily in many of our schools. I advocate at each and every opportunity with Department of Education personnel to move forward in both of these areas.

Frankly, I find it difficult to understand how the government just does not get what we are advocating for, as it is for the future of the students of this province that we are asking for these supports.

The answer may be in the following quote. As the author Harper Lee so eloquently said, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it." (*To Kill a Mockingbird*) We have proposed to the Premier a "Take your MHA to School Day", hoping to address the situation contained in the quote by Lee; however, to date the Premier has refused to participate. This would give all MHAs a closer look at the realities of today's inclusive classrooms.

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There are global issues that as teachers, citizens and union members we must continue our resolve to speak up and defend to ensure that we have the Canada that we are accustomed to and not let the right wing commentators brainwash the public into believing that unions undermine the good economic performance. According to many respected international organizations, this is just not so. Ed Broadbent, well known Canadian politician, said, “these organizations recognize that unions promote more equitable societies, and that countries with strong unions have less extremes of rich and poor, stronger public services and social safety nets, without adversely affecting good economic performance.” So, I have to ask, why the attack on unions?

At this moment, unions across the country are under attack and we must join together and ensure survival. Democracy depends on it. According to Canadian researchers Errol Black and Jim Silver, we need to reframe the language around unions and emphasize their critical role in a democratic society. This is very necessary with all the negative spin that the public has heard regarding unions. Their perception is one of “big bad unions have destroyed the economy with their greedy pension plans and huge paychecks.” This perception is rampant across the country even though it is false. Black and Silver state, “it is important to re-frame unions in a more accurate light; as leaders in efforts to build a better world for Canadians.”

It was trade unions and the labour movement that joined progressive popular groups to fight for and win union and collective bargaining rights for workers, old age pensions, unemployment insurance, Medicare, the Canada Pension Plan. They championed programs to protect the poor, obtain decent minimum wages and employment standards, advocated for libraries, expanded access to education at all levels, promoted workers’ compensation and workplace health and safety legislation, and fought for the housing and infrastructure required to build decent communities for working people and their families. Not only does the union advantage produce higher wages and improved benefits for union members, but also unions bring the rule of law to the workplace, placing limits on the arbitrary power of owners and managers – thus enriching democracy and our individual and collective human rights. Black and Silver rightly conclude that “these are enormous achievements from which all Canadians benefit. We need to be relentless in saying these things.” Imagine if our Employer was successful in removing schedule E from our collective agreement, the discretion to control the teachers’ workday beyond the normal school day without consultation or compensation. Many of us in this room could not imagine this happening – we can be guaranteed that it would not be in our best interest.

These democratic union processes and rights are being systematically eroded in Canada. Teacher associations and unions in general are facing numerous challenges. The attack on educational workers in Ontario with the passing of Bill 115 is not an isolated incident. Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the federal Labour Minister, Lisa Raitt, have intervened in both public and private sector negotiations. First it was with the workers at Canada Post, then Air Canada. In both situations, the Minister forced an end to legal labour actions. The reason used, “Canadians mandated our government to protect the Canadian economy.” In other words, it was about money and not basic rights. These examples seriously undermine the unions’ democratic right to collectively bargain. This is only the beginning and we must stand together in this fight.

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As Ed Hancock stated in his article in the January/February 2013 issue of *The Bulletin*, “Unions are not faceless organizations; they are workers who have had the collective strength and, indeed the audacity (often in the face of strong opposition) to organize and support each other for the collective best interests. It is our task to ensure that this collective strength and support exists for future generations.” The devaluing of unions is underway and the question should not be who will be next but “not in my backyard!” We must stand together and ensure we do not end up as the poem by Pastor Martin Niemoller...

*In Germany they first came for the communist and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.*

*Then they came for the Trade Unions, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Trade Unionist.*

*Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant.*

*Then they came for me – and by that time no one was left to speak up.*

My parting wish is that each and every one of us will not be silent and we will speak up for the good of our educational system, the good of the country as a whole and the continuation of civil society as we know it. Future generations are depending on us.

As I conclude my address I want to thank you, the teachers of this province, for your dedication, commitment, enthusiasm, and compassion that ensures that all students of Newfoundland and Labrador have a first rate education, and I commend you for that continued dedication.

I would also like to thank you for your many years of support that has enabled me to be President of this illustrious Association. It has been an honour and privilege to serve you. As it is often said, “it is the journey, not the destination, that is most important.” How true that is! However, I do see the destination ahead and I also see a fabulous and talented new President, Jim, and Vice-President, Dean, getting ready to start their journey.

I want to express my deepest appreciation and heartfelt thanks to all the executives I have worked with during my years with the NLTA, but especially the last four years. Your unwavering support has been tremendous and your dedication to this organization outstanding. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank all of our staff at the NLTA office. It has been my privilege to have been given the honour to work with all of you. Our administrative staff and support staff work tirelessly for the teachers of this province and I have tried to thank them frequently for their dedication to the teachers of this province. I want to thank each and every one of them today for all the support they have given me during my terms of office and for always going above and beyond to assist me in my endeavours.

I would like to thank my family for their love and support as I embarked on this journey.

Thank all of you for the confidence you had in me to let me serve you as your NLTA President for the last four years. The journey has been incredible. Have a wonderful convention. Thank you.