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Stephen Lewis on the
Climate Change Crisis

Elizabeth May and
Green Citizenship

Indigenous
Language Rights

OUR SCHOOLS

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

OUR SELVES

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a patterned blue and white cardigan, blue jeans, and brown shoes, stands on a rocky outcrop. She is looking directly at the camera. The background is a vast, snowy mountain landscape with evergreen trees and a valley. The sky is clear and blue.

Divided We Stand, United We Fall

Challenging how
we think about
environmental education

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Introduction

Tor Sandberg is officially the co-editor of this issue of *Our School/Our Selves* but, in reality, he's done far more work than that title would suggest. Tor does web communications with us at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives but when he approached me with the suggestion that the fall issue of this magazine focus on environmental education — one of his interests — I jumped at the chance to work with him.

I think you'll agree that from the striking cover photograph to the exciting and informative content, Tor has done a wonderful job of laying out a number of the debates about and within environmental education: sustainability; implications for First Nations; integration with school curricula; relationships between environmentalists, scientists and journalists; community collaboration; and corporate "greenwashing".

While the majority of this issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves* does focus on environmental education, a number of other articles have been included — articles which relate, directly and indirectly, to that broader theme. They include: examinations of teaching and protection of Indigenous languages (including a thorough analysis of the development of the Education Act in Nunavut); a template for analyzing school-corporate relation-

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ships; and a description of a new initiative to develop a cooperative university in Canada that operates under principles of sustainability and promotion of social justice.

It's a testament to Tor's skill as an editor that this issue of the magazine seamlessly accommodates so many varied articles...and so many impressive authors. We're so thrilled we could benefit from his interest, enthusiasm and expertise in an area of such vital importance to us all.



TOR SANDBERG

Divided We Stand, United We Fall

Disrupting environmental education's grand messages

Read the news today, oh boy. Headlines tell of new 'bubbling cauldrons of methane in the Arctic that will accelerate climate change¹ and bears in British Columbia that will starve this season because the salmon have disappeared.² Stephen Lewis' piece in this issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves* — if you dare read it — gives a horrifying account of the humanitarian crisis already unfolding as a result of the changing climate. This is all sobering news in the lead-up to the Copenhagen UN Climate Change Conference in December, 2009 — which many leading scientists have suggested is humanity's last chance to stave off catastrophic climate change.

This environmental pessimism stands in stark contrast to the collective sigh of hope that thousands around the world took earlier this year as they sat by their computers and hit 'send' on short personal messages that would be forwarded to Gliese 581d — an earth-like planet 20.3 light-years away. An Australian science magazine sent the collected messages via NASA's Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex as part of a publicity campaign.³

Space acts such as this one are often cited as great moments for humanity. They illicit wonder, portray humanity as united, evoke patriotism and allow dreams of extra-earth possibilities.

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Witness the first message sent to Gliese 581d from Australian Senator Kim Carr, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. She wrote: "Hello from Australia on the planet we call Earth. These messages express our people's dreams for the future. We want to share those dreams with you." Another from Santiago, Chile said: "We're trying to get over wars [on] our planet, but greed is greater [than] our dreams. Lots of us know that this is wrong and won't give up! Hugs from little blue."⁴

Could appealing to such grand ideas — earth patriotism, humanity against climate change, a wonder for the natural environment — be slogans that could help save us from the brink?

While overwhelmingly narrated as positive, space acts can also be a window unto the paradox of the times. As the first person stepped onto the moon in 1969, he narrated his feat by describing it as a great leap forward for humanity. What it also represented was not a collective endeavour to reach the moon, but a contest between the world's two most powerful nations (who happened to be pointing nuclear warheads at each other). As the planet watched an exciting space act, it also sat frozen in the fear of nuclear annihilation.

Political leaders certainly love grand messages. At the end of August 2009, former U.S. President Bill Clinton arrived in Toronto to give a speech entitled "Embracing Our Common Humanity." And Liberal Party leader Michael Ignatieff stressed the importance of social cohesion in his most recent book *True Patriot Love: Four Generations in Search of Canada*.

"We need a public life in common," wrote Ignatieff, "some set of reference points and allegiances to give us a way to relate to the strangers among whom we live. Without this feeling of belonging, even if only imagined, we would live in fear and dread of each other. When we can call the strangers citizens, we can feel at home with them and with ourselves."⁵

United we stand?

These politicians' grand messages on 'humanity united' belie a number of unfortunate ironies. Clinton's tenure as U.S. President continued a trend of growing inequality in the United States. And when confronted with a Conservative government that systematically attacked Canada's social safety net, Ignatieff refused to unite with the other two Opposition parties to call for an election (to say nothing of the Liberal leader's now-renege)

endorsements of “soft” torture or the invasion of Iraq). How exactly do these political leaders want us to embrace our common humanity when we are being more and more segmented and divided by the very policies they support?

The time for grand messages from ‘grand’ men is over, and this issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves* explores that realization through the lens of environmental education.

The issue greets this theme with its cover image: a self-portrait of Jin-me Yoon entitled “Souvenirs of the Self (Lake Louise).” As one art critic observes, Yoon’s portrait subverts the “heroic tradition of Canadian landscape [art]...by placing herself within an iconic winter wilderness.”⁶ Yoon is not the archetypal male European-descended parks visitor (she is Korean-born), nor the oft-expected artist of such a scene. As a result, “Yoon’s work, as its title implies, interrogates both personal and national identity, along with colonialism and gender relations.”⁷ A critique of environmental exploitation can also be interpreted from the image, as grand experiences of Canadian landscapes are reduced to souvenirs — a scenery to conquer instead of an environment to respect. In an unfortunate twist of fate, a week before this issue goes to print, newspaper headlines reveal that 510,000 cubic metres of water have disappeared from Lake Louise — likely a result of tourism.⁸ Yoon’s photograph is able to show how the snapshot is fraught with grand messages of racial and national identity that are deeply linked to other grand notions of the environment. An ability to disrupt grand messages signifies there is something wrong with them.

Jocelyn Thorpe, for example, in her article for this issue “From Food Waste to Forced Relocation: Making Connections,” explains how she was able to disrupt her regular notions of environmentalism by learning about First Nation land claims and social justice. “Environmentalism as I knew it,” writes Thorpe, “meant caring for the earth, but not asking critical questions about, for example, Aboriginal claims to land, or about who can afford organic food.” Constance Russell’s article in this issue offers a deeply personal account of the surprising connections the author made between animal rights and domestic abuse while teaching in a community outreach program. The pervasive effects of climate change are even helping people not usually interested in environmental issues make the connections, albeit not as criti-

cal. In August 2009, U.S. General Anthony Zinni, a retired Marine and former head of the Central Command said: “We will pay for this one way or another. We will pay to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions today and we’ll have to take an economic hit of some kind. Or we will pay the price later in military terms. And that will involve human lives.”⁹

And so how do we move forward, past the grand messages that invariably obscure the complexities of environmental hurdles and hinder solutions? As already mentioned, the answer flows naturally out of a movement *against* the grand messages of the likes of Clinton and Ignatieff who desire a patriot humanity. The articles in this issue, ironically, do profess a solution for finding a shared humanity, but the devil is in the details. Finding a commonality is about understanding and acknowledging the differences that exist between us, and how they relate to our precarious position on the planet. How to stand divided.

Elizabeth May’s article provides an excellent overview of how environmental education is failing in this regard. She criticizes environmental education approaches that put the onus on another generation, that utilize environmental lesson plans from corporations that have poor track records in environmental stewardship, and that paralyze students with fear. In each case, there is a failure of dialogue, an almost purposeful disregard for understanding the intricacies of human relationships and their link to the environment. May calls for a greening of the curriculum, educating a re-acquaintance with nature, and better citizenship.

One of May’s critiques is given depth by Trevor Norris’ comprehensive case study of corporate involvement in education. Norris examines the “partnership” between Future Shop and the Toronto District School Board, producing troubling questions of how far school boards will go to increase funds.

An example of May’s recommendations can be found in Anders Sandberg’s article. Rejecting the idea of grand apocalyptic messages that frighten students into inaction, Sandberg describes his use of an unusual sculpture on York University’s campus as an environmental education tool. Students, working together, use the sculpture and a campus tour to question the running of a university and deconstruct and challenge the present storm-water management on campus.

In the same vein, Hannah Lewis demonstrates how maps, ordinarily perceived as harmless and scientific representations of the environment, can be oppressive and often have intentions behind them. Lewis describes how colonial maps were meant to “catalogue the land, people and resources through comprehensive mapping in order to dominate them.” By facilitating community mapping, relationships are strengthened in communities not only between residents, but also with the environmental, social and economic ties of the community.

From Sweden, Ebba Lisberg Jensen writes about the need to once again get to know the natural world, by describing the positive aspect of Sweden’s emphasis on environmental education, asking: “[If] Rachel Carson hadn’t been such a fanatical ornithologist — would she ever have noticed that the spring was so silent?”

Leesa Fawcett, in her evaluation of environmental education in Ontario, reiterates the need for curricula to be written with the environment in mind, creating intersections or links between the environment and social issues (something she refers to as “cultural ecotones”). Fawcett also decries the inability for substantive curricula changes in Ontario without the proper political will and funding.

Imagine the possibilities if education programs made attempts to emulate the infusion of principles of social justice and sustainability in post secondary schools. Wilma van der Veen offers a glimpse into this possibility by describing a new university cooperative that attempts to do just that.

Susan Newhook, in addressing the relationship among environmentalists, scientists and mainstream journalists, argues that there are no absolute truths. She suggests such stories don’t necessarily exist, and that there is a larger teachable moment — where students can learn about the subjectivity of not only journalism but also science. Newhook feels that this critical understanding of sources on environmentalism may strengthen students’ abilities to take informed positions. “[All] students — all citizens,” she writes, “should know that the IPCC [International Panel on Climate Change] comes out ahead of *ilovemySUV.com* or a coal industry think-tank.”

Rasmussen shows how Inuit of northern Canada have been repeatedly denied the right to protect and promote their lan-

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guage in education, writing that Canada has consistently pursued “access to Inuit land and the minerals underneath it,” but proven less “interested in protecting the Inuit language and culture on top of it.” He provides for several constructive measures to promote Inuit language and education rights in Nunavut. It’s an eye-opening piece on how the Canadian government exploits both the Inuit and the land that belongs to them, another example that disrupts the myth of the Canadian nation.

The significance of language rights is reinforced in Priscilla Settee’s piece, which details the importance of ensuring that indigenous languages (and by extension knowledges and cultures) do not die out. “[Preventing t]his can be achieved by valuing Indigenous languages enough to offer them at mainstream universities,” suggests Settee. “Indigenous languages should be recognized as official national languages and resources identified to make that statement a reality.”

Andrew Hunter, in a provocative narrative about his daughter’s science fair, suggests, in line with the issue’s theme, that more collaboration and less competition is needed in the way society is run. Hunter showcases some of the projects he’s involved with to further that goal — some of which had their debut at the World Environmental Education Congress in Montreal (2009), where I made contact with several of the writers for this issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves*.

The grand adage “United We Stand, Divided We Fall” has been used by nationalists globally from the Founding Fathers of the United States, to independence fighters in India, to the Ulstermen of Northern Ireland. Thomas Jefferson reversed the term so many years ago to underline the importance of religious diversity in America. The same message is important for environmental educators. Who is included and who is excluded in environmental education curricula? How are environmental issues constructed and taught in a fragmented world? If the lessons from the authors of this issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves* are any indication, it’s that in order to address environmental crises, grand messages must be disrupted and differences and divisions be acknowledged.

* * *

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ENDNOTES

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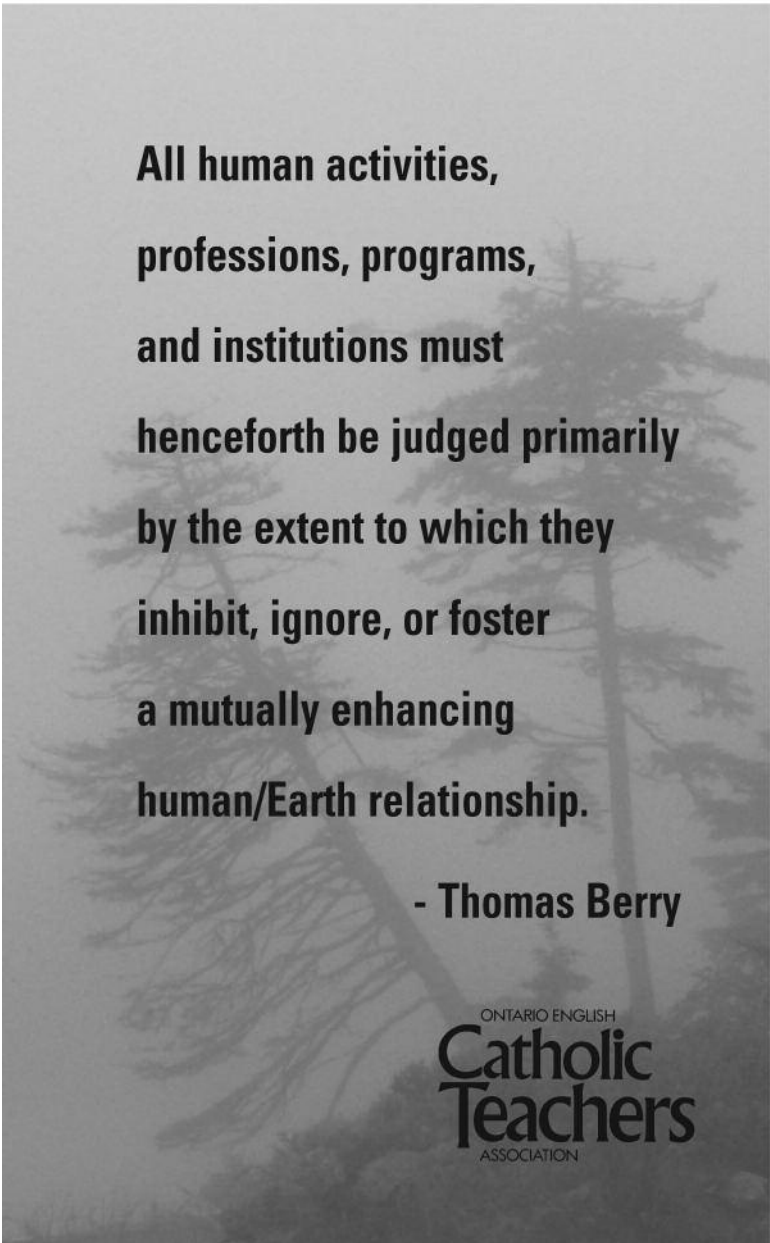
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**All human activities,
professions, programs,
and institutions must
henceforth be judged primarily
by the extent to which they
inhibit, ignore, or foster
a mutually enhancing
human/Earth relationship.**

- Thomas Berry

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