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OUR SCHOOLS

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

OUR SELVES

Root Gorelick:
silencing of dissent
at Carleton U Board
of Governors

School lockdown drills

Be(rate)MyTeachers



Community Watch?

Surveillance, safety and
control in Canadian education





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PROTECTING AND ENHANCING PUBLIC EDUCATION

Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation
Fédération des enseignantes-enseignants
des écoles secondaires de l'Ontario

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WHO WE ARE!



Toronto Education Workers (Local 4400)
is made up of approximately **12,000**
EDUCATION WORKERS
who primarily work for the TDSB
(Toronto District School Board).

At the TDSB alone, there are over
400 **JOB CLASSIFICATIONS**
and over **1,000** **WORK SITES.**

EDUCATION MATTERS

Not all of our members are employees of the TDSB. Our newer members include employees who work for the Viamonde French School Board, the Bloorview School Authority and at various early education/daycare centres across the GTA.





**“One teacher, one child, one book,
and one pen can change the world.”**

**~ Nobel Peace Prize recipient Malala Yousafzai
addressing the UN on her 16th birthday.**

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ERIKA SHAKER

Community Watch

The eye in the sky

Back in 2014 when Laura Pinto and Selena Nemorin wrote “Who’s the Boss?: ‘The Elf on the Shelf’ and the normalization of surveillance” (based on a longer article that appeared in the Winter 2015 issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves*), we were admittedly taken aback by the public response.

Actually, check that; we were overwhelmed. The commentary became a bit of a sensation (due in part to a somewhat hyperbolic article in the *Toronto Star*) as, internationally, the media clamoured to speak with the professor who took such an alarmist position on such a “harmless” holiday toy (more than one article included the description “rosy cheeked”).

But within a few days, the initial wave of media frenzy was replaced with another, more thoughtful approach to the issue. People wanted to talk about the growing role surveillance was playing in their lives and the lives of their children — in school, at home, in toys, and in politics — often dressed up in concepts like “safety” and “convenience”.

This past winter the Elf became the subject of another round of media scrutiny, but again the focus was on the broader concepts of surveillance in society. There seemed to be genuine concern about whether our personal privacy was being eroded in both playful and much more serious ways. And that was, in large part, the impetus

behind this issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves* where we explore not only surveillance, but the ways in which control is exerted on and through our education system as well as its workers, teachers and students. We also look more closely at the concept of “safety” and how it often is used as a rationale for more surveillance and less privacy.

The treatment of the topics discussed in this issue has been kept deliberately broad and flexible. We wanted to expand the conversation of how we talk about control to include streaming and labeling; how surveillance culture is a part of how students and teachers police themselves and each other when it comes to behaviour and appearance; the connections between standardization, data management, and corporatization and implications for privacy (particularly in the broader context of trade agreements and globalization); the rapidly-evolving frontier of social media; the impact of a customer satisfaction model of evaluation on professional reputation and job security; the blurred boundaries between personal life and professional responsibility; and the ways in which a corporate model of education can and often does result in the control and silencing of dissenting voices, often when they’re needed the most and directly contradicting the concept of academic freedom.

This issue explores the policing of bodies, wardrobes (see Jacqueline Kennelly’s article) and gender — what is considered “appropriate” and what is not, and the ways in which gendered stereotypes are rigidly reinforced, often because they are deeply internalized. As Parmar and Pinto explain, “children correcting peers’ bullying behaviour would be a positive social surveillance practice. But context matters — and the negative effects of that kind of self-modification can lead to personal tensions and inauthenticity.”

Gender, as well as race and class, is also implicated in the processes of streaming and labeling students, with tremendous impacts on future educational success and social positioning. As author Alison Gaymes San Vicente explains:

This article is about Andre and other students like him who are the victims of institutionalized structures and bias in their education. It asserts that children streamed into lower-track programs/pathways... are able to access fewer post-secondary opportunities and, therefore, have reduced life chances. It also asserts that all children benefit from

rigorous curricula, and that streaming as an educational practice is a structural barrier that supports class and race-based stratification. It is a reminder of the urgency to respond to streaming as well as our own culpability in the persistence of inequity in public education.

In a related article, Kaitlyn Campbell examines the ways in which “appropriate” classroom behaviour is a gendered construct that can result in a diagnosis of deficiency and, in some cases, medicalization. Kaitlyn, an undergrad in Human Rights and Sociology at Carleton University, interned with *Our Schools/Our Selves* and helped set the parameters of this issue of the magazine. She describes her experience:

From institutionalized racism to systemic gender inequality, censorship, surveillance, and control permeate our schools in ways that unfortunately serve to reproduce the very inequalities our schools are meant to deconstruct. This issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves* has allowed me to explore how practices of gendering and medicalization influence behavioural management and classroom control measures and, in so doing, lend my voice to an important conversation about how these elements effect our students today and in the future.

Policing classroom behaviour is the topic of Agata Soroko’s article on Class Dojo, a highly profitable app currently used in classrooms around the world to reward “good” behaviour and discourage “bad”, and simultaneously let parents know how their child is performing in class. ‘The prospect of continuous surveillance strikes me as oppressive, but what if such policing had existed when I was a child, under the auspices of my Grade 1 teacher? Perhaps the idea of always being watched would seem normal, and that is even more disturbing.’

One of the concerns raised about apps like Class Dojo is the storage of data on servers outside of Canada. Data mining and storage is further explored by Larry Kuehn, and Bernie Froese-Germain and Cassandra Hallet DaSilva. Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood provides a broader frame for the discussion of data and privacy, looking at the issue in the context of international trade agreements like the TPP and CETA.

Of course, students are not the only ones being “rated” for their classroom performance. Misha Abarbanel looks at the customer-satisfaction-based evaluation model epitomized by the RateMyTeachers

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website, and Morgan Rooney examines the impact of student evaluations on precariously-employed contract faculty.

As mentioned earlier, increased surveillance and control of behaviour is often justified as a means to alleviate safety concerns. Christopher Schultz examines this in the context of school lockdown drills. He explains:

Even if one were to accept that emergency preparedness for school violence is vital, one must still place school lockdowns within a broader continuum of disciplinarian features of the elementary school system. What this means is considering the effects on students' societal perceptions, and how fear of violence disciplines them toward certain beliefs or behaviours already prevalent in society.

Similarly, Clare Mian looks at the increasing tension between the right to privacy and the ways in which governments are exercising more control over citizens under the guise of promoting a safer society: "ostensible protection of young people from bullying does not justify the infringement of Charter rights of a significant segment of the population. Placing people of any age under surveillance based on suspicion of future wrongdoing is a dangerously undemocratic practice unless evidence is strong and supported by the judicial branch." Expanding on this topic, Valerie Steeves explores how restrictions on networked technologies within the school were changing the educational experience and making it more difficult to facilitate a relationship of trust between administration, educators and students.

More worrisome, Sarah Lazare discusses in *AlterNet* how the FBI is instructing schools across the U.S. 'to report students who criticize government policies and "western corruption" as potential future terrorists, warning that "anarchist extremists" are in the same category as ISIS and young people who are poor, immigrants or travel to "suspicious" countries are more likely to commit horrific violence.'

Laura Pinto builds on this in her PanOCTicon article where she looks at social media guidelines set by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), exploring "how the surveillance operates when members of the teaching profession find themselves caught between their responsibilities to their employers and their rights as individuals to engage in legal behavior on their own time." In his commentary, educa-

tor (among other activities) Anthony Marco points out how the OCT's advisory is contradictory when it comes to what is both expected from teachers on social media, and what is apparently allowed. He explains: "Crowdsourcing knowledge in an online community is a laudable goal, but the friendly and casual tone — in order to make the experience less pedantic — that administrators are striving for is precisely the same tone that can result in teachers making flip, off-the-cuff remarks deemed 'reckless'"

Educational institutions finding new ways to exert control over employees is the topic of Carissa Taylor's article. She outlines the ways in which her employer, Brock University, is implementing a code of conduct for non-unionized employees, directly threatening academic freedom and limiting the scope of the research in order to ensure that it is favourable to the public image of the institution.

To resist the corporatization of universities, we need to be able to speak out — freely, and without fear of reprisal — against universities as institutions, and the decisions made by those at the top. If workers — especially those who are precarious — cannot speak out, administrators and boards will continue their path toward elite, private, profit-driven institutions that do not seek to benefit students and society, but rather to privilege the interests of those same powerbrokers who work to further entrench inequality in society.

One of the most powerful examples of the role of university as brand — threatened by and silencing free speech — is currently happening at Carleton University. Root Gorelick, an elected faculty representative on the Board of Governors has written a detailed exposé of his experience on the Board, where his due process geekiness (his words) has resulted in what can only be referred to as a series of gag orders from the university, in direct opposition to academic freedom and the transparency one should expect from institutions that claim to act in the public interest. "The board of any public university should reflect democratic principles, not corporatization of universities" he writes, and we couldn't agree more. It's an eye-opening description of an ongoing issue, and of trends that are being played out in varying degrees at institutions across the country.

It's a pleasure to have been able to work with so many talented, thoughtful, dedicated and generous authors, educators, and research-

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ers to allow for a more comprehensive discussion of a topic that is key to so many facets of how we work, live, and learn. Thank you to Kaitlyn Campbell for her assistance, and also to Nancy Reid for her artistry and skill in putting this issue together.

ERIKA SHAKER is the Executive Editor of *Our Schools/Our Selves*.



The advertisement features a black and white photograph of a smiling woman on the left. The background is a chalkboard with mathematical formulas, including $\frac{1}{x^2+a^2} = \frac{1}{a^2} \int \frac{dx}{x^2+(x^2+a^2)^{r-1}} - \frac{1}{a^2}$. To the right of the woman, the text reads: "Committed to protecting the quality of education in Ontario universities". Below this is the OCUFA logo, which consists of the letters "OCUFA" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Underneath the logo, the full name of the organization is written in a smaller font: "Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations" and "Union des Associations des Professeurs des Universités de l'Ontario". At the bottom right, the website address "www.ocufa.on.ca" is displayed.