Avis Glaze Interview Transcript

Andrea Bradley (AB):

What are your impressions of the current readiness of the Scottish education system to achieve greater equity outcomes for children in school who are living in poverty?

Avis Glaze (AG):

Thank you for this opportunity, Andrea. As you know, I've worked in many countries and I think that Scotland, more than the majority of places I've seen, is ready to provide equity of outcomes for students, regardless of personal, cultural, demographic or economic differences.

There is no doubt in my mind of the work that has been done so far leading up to this because this is the third or so time that I've been here. The focus, the emphasis, when Mr Sweeney or Nicola Sturgeon speak, they are passionate about and speak with sincerity about the same goals and the agenda for Scotland. I am convinced they are serious. I think they are ready to go to the next level of implementation that will propel them towards achievement of their goals.

There are so many things that I could commend about the system compared to other systems that I have seen. For example, the focus on equity and excellence is a brilliant focus, because the truth is, you never have excellence without equity. They are two sides of the same coin and Scotland gets it, so I'm delighted with that.

I am also happy with the emphasis on research, because systems must be committed to the successful practices identified in research. What we did in Ontario really worked for us because of the emphasis on research. From the outset of our reform initiative we wanted to be a research-informed system and as we said to teachers, "No longer can we say, 'I think' or 'I feel'. That no longer works. Parents are doing their own research. They're going to the libraries and using the internet more than ever. They're asking us tough questions and we better know why we choose one strategy or one approach over another, so the focus on research is a fundamentally important strategy if we want to improve student learning, achievement and wellbeing."

Another reason I think Scotland is ready is that you're focusing on and using data- using evidence for decision making. That's the mark of a system that knows what it's doing because you're saying, "Show me the data," and you're disaggregating data, you're going deeper, you're looking at how specific groups are doing, and that is essential if we're to address the needs of those groups. No longer can systems be good if it's a one-size-fits-all approach. One size does not fit all. It has to be personalized, individualized, when we want to really find out what's needed, what's needed in your rural schools, what's needed in your urban

schools- it's not the same and unless we talk to the leaders of those systems to find out what is it that you need to improve your schools, we won't get it right. I think Scotland is acutely aware of that.

Undoubtedly, funding is important but we should never think that funding alone improves pupil attainment. But money is scarce these days. I don't know of any system that thinks it has enough money or more money than they need. So, it's a matter of how systems use the scarce resources that they have in order to support strategies that work, innovation and, ultimately, student learning and achievement.   I think Scotland's efforts with the Pupil Equity Fund is one way of ensuring that you are really addressing the equity and excellence imperative and going deeper, giving those who are making these decisions the opportunity to choose to apply the funding as needed. That's another strength of your system– one that is worth emulating.

The focus on information in terms of determining a student's progress so everyone knows exactly who is doing what and where students are along the learning continuum is another positive aspect of education in Scotland. Admirably, you are focusing on professional judgement. Systems cannot improve teaching, cannot improve systems, without the goodwill and professionalism of its teachers and principals.

And unless you acknowledge that professional judgement is important, then the people who we are expecting to do the work will soon become demoralised and dispirited. Scotland is putting emphasis on professional judgement. That, to my mind, shows maturity as a system. You have to trust your teachers and support them. It means mega doses of capacity building at the same time to ensure that they have the knowledge, skills, attitudes and sensibilities necessary to address the needs of all students. With trust comes a lot of responsibility. It means that teachers have to make sure that they are inveterate learners; that they know what to do and are confident in drawing from their repertoire of skills and utilising them to address diverse needs. Children with special learning needs must be well served in an equitable system. Children with behavioural challenges must not be left behind. If a system is committed to an agenda of equity and excellence, I will repeat my old refrain, "There can be no throwaway kids." Countries today are recognizing that they need all their young people to be educated so that they can become caring, active, engaged and productive citizens in their societies.

I am optimistic about Scotland's efforts to prepare caring citizens. I have many stories to tell about the young people I have met in the hotels, airports and restaurants. They are so helpful and considerate! Once I went to a store and was exhausted after a long walk and recovering from a broken ankle. When I entered the store, I stood for a moment to decide where to go. A young woman approached me immediately and said that I seemed to be exhausted. She offered to find a chair for me to sit for a while. That's the Scotland I know and love.

I also think you're ready because of your approach to inclusiveness, and inclusiveness not only of the student population, but of the adult population and

all those who are expected to deliver- although I don't like the word 'deliver' itself- so clinical- but those who are expected to make it happen. And I see your efforts to have a shared agenda. It's not just a top down system - it's about engaging others and to be able to build all those aspirations into a vision for the system. I like systems that use words like 'collaboration'. In other words, more of the 'soft skills' which, to my mind, are the hard skills.

I think there is a lot of emphasis on the kinds of programs and services to address the needs of students. And we had Chris speak this morning and he talked about all those services- the breakfast programs when you think of the poverty issue and it's not only poverty because we started breakfast for the rich children who didn't have breakfast. But having programs like breakfast programs for children so that they can all be nourished and be ready to learn again.

I could go on and on about why I think Scotland is ready to deliver on its promises.

AB:

So you're seeing it, then, that lots of these essential pieces are already in place?

AG:

Already in place, or you are building upon them and expanding them as you gather new information. You are also going deeper and that's why I think you're ready to deliver.

AB:

Is it an entirely bright picture, then, as far as you see? Do you see any gaps in what we have?

AB:

I think it's a very optimistic picture, but, as with all school systems, I think we must challenge ourselves, consult with those we are striving to serve, and ask questions. They are the ones who should inform us of what their needs are. Good leadership today means not making assumptions about people and their needs and expectations. We must seek every opportunity to meet with them and listen to them. When I was growing up, because I talked so much, my mother used to say to me, "There is a reason we were given two ears and one mouth!"

That's another reason I believe that Nicola Sturgeon appointed International Council of Independent Advisors. We are here to ask questions and to share ideas of what works in a variety of settings across the world. Even though you're doing so many things well, we still ask tough questions. We are not rubber-stampers. For example, how are you going to determine who leads this

initiative, who champions this initiative? What are the characteristics of such a person? Is it somebody who has done the work? Is it someone who has results to show when they stand in front of teachers?

It is important to teachers to be able to say "Ah, they've been there. They know what it takes. They have done the work!" and that's very important to have that kind of person working with teachers. How will you foster and develop a sense of ownership and responsibility if the messengers do not have credibility? It's one thing to deal with structures and cultures but to me where it's at, to bring about change, we have to extend that model. Capacity building at all levels of the system is key. Then we have to ensure that we focus on achieving greater ownership and ultimately, teachers being fully supported to take responsibility for student learning and achievement. That doesn't mean that they are solely responsible. It is a shared responsibility. But, as gurus like Ken Leithwood would say, two keys to improve school systems is to focus on instructional effectiveness and leadership development.

How are you going to make sure that there's a consensus and a willingness to get all of that done?

I cannot nor do I ever speak for the Council. I do have personal views, though as an educator. I hasten to say that there are always issues with communication - always. If I were to ask at the airport or in a restaurant what is the focus of Scottish education, would those people serving in the restaurants be able to tell me? Are we communicating widely and deeply enough? As by that I mean not in terms of one-way communication but a multi-pronged approach in which everyone knows what we are about.   That's important in stable times, but more importantly, when we are in the midst of change and improvement. We have to make it clear that whatever we are doing is not going to be done *to* people, it's got to be done *with* them, so I can always see us improving our communication style and strategy - in a very multi-faceted way. So to me, one test was always if I were to ask anybody on the street, what does the school district stand for or focus on? Would they be able to tell me?

In Ontario, one of the things we did some time ago was to reduce our focus to a manageable three goals: (1) to improve student learning, achievement and wellbeing, (2) to reduce gaps in achievement and (3) to build public confidence in the public education system. Over time it has been impressive to see how these goals have been embedded in all that happens in education and school districts.

I don't think there are many things Scotland isn't doing. You have a very comprehensive set of objectives. But, as in all reform initiatives, there are things that you can do more of. I think some places are probably still doing too much, and they have to identify just a few "non-negotiables" that are done by everyone.

When I was in the Chief Student Achievement Officer in Ontario, if I found a school in which many children could not read or write, I didn't want them to be involved in multiple initiatives. The fundamental focus has to be on literacy, numeracy and an initiative that addresses culture such as character

development. I'd look at their school improvement plan -   I'll never forget when I asked them for their plans. Some were like fifty or more pages – like a history of the school. They were trying to do too much.   At one stage we said we want everybody to focus on literacy and numeracy, and then character building which I think is very important because of what it does for the individuals and for the culture of the school. I could tell you many stories of the potential of character building and its impact in many schools. Do remind me to tell you one story before I end this session.

Let me also say that one my strong beliefs is that we must have high expectations for learning and achievement. The demands for higher levels of skills in our society require this. One of the comments I always bear in mind is what international guru, Michael Fullan, said to me a couple of years ago as we talked about school improvement. Suffice it to say that Michael has changed his earlier belief that schools should have 90-95% success. His comment was this:

> " *The new mission for schools is to achieve 100% success, and to have specific explanations and strategies for addressing any figure that falls short of full success."*   (Fullan, 2016)

We should heed Michael's comments.

So I think some schools that are trying to do too much. They need to focus on a few goals and work assiduously to achieve them. It is not easy, especially in situations in which children have many challenges. But it can be done. We have many examples. Poverty, for example, should not determine destiny. We have the will and the skills to improve achievement with a sense of urgency. My title of my recent biography is "The Children Cannot Wait."

It is also important for systems and educators to determine what's negotiable and what's not and what are the few things that we're going to do well. Scotland is a system that believes in continuous improvement. And when you do, you're never satisfied. You always want to take your school or system to new heights. As soon as you finish one thing, you want to move on to something else. You are a learning organisation, if I may use that term – one in which where you're constantly developing your practice, enhancing and improving.   So you will never get to the stage where you – and the words I used last year were 'rest on your laurels'. You want to improve because you're inveterate learners. That's another characteristic that is so positive about your educational system.

I can also see your efforts to involve and fully engage students, parents and stakeholders - so that education becomes the concern of all individuals who have a vested interest in the success of the system. This includes the grandparents and people who don't have children in school. They all benefit from a robust and successful education systems – a system that produces the doctors, nurses, plumbers, electricians – all the professions that serve our needs as a society. Everyone benefits from a good education system.

So often we focus on communication to the parent population – we do that very well. But there is a need to ensure that the "non-parent" population, for want of a better term, are the recipients of our communication. They don't have

children in schools and may not have access to the newsletters that many children take home. They're paying taxes. Sometimes they resent it because they don't see the benefits that accrue to them in terms of health care and other services. How are we going to make sure that they become a part of the agenda, recognizing that when you improve Scottish education you're improving the country as a whole and the benefits for all? The hospitals, the doctors, the police officers nurses, engineers - all of the individuals make up the workforce are all products and beneficiaries of an effective Scottish education system. That's a part of what it is all about.

AB:

So that comes back to your point about communication and getting the strategy for the communication around all of this right and far enough reaching?

AG:

Exactly and we cannot say we have done a great job of communication, we must continue to do even more and foster multi-pronged communication- not just one way or even two ways, as many ways. And getting all those networks communicating and sharing successful practices, that's all communication. So communication is very broad when it comes to school reform.

AB:

You've outlined quite a number of strengths, you've linked the strengths to areas for further development- and actually quite a multiplicity of those- so if you were to identify three main priorities for immediate attention what would they be?

AG:

I think Scotland has already identified these priorities - improving attainment levels, closing achievement gaps, among others. The whole issue of leadership development is very important. The other one is always strengthening pedagogy. In fact, as I have said before there's a lot of research saying, if you only have money for two things, to reform your system, the focus needs to be on instructional effectiveness and leadership development, and you're doing that.

I think it's important for Scotland to also focus communicating what you are already doing. And let's not forget the issues of mental health, wellbeing and citizenship development, resiliency and other interpersonal skills. Developing a global perspective, critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving and entrepreneurial skills. Those are essential skills. They are the skills that students will need to be productive members of society. Along with high levels of

attainment, they are the skills that help to build public confidence in our education system. But to me, what is most important is to also develop the lofty goals articulated by philosophers like Plato such as the skills and orientations to create a more just and harmonious society. To my mind, publicly funded education must replicate the kind of society that we have all fought for. It must develop a sense of our common humanity with the skills of empathy and caring for one another, resulting in a citizenry that is committed to altruism and philanthropy.

Whatever we do we must ensure that we improve public confidence in the public education system.

AB:

How do you think that's done? How do you think you approach that?

AG:

Well, it has to be done by including all the stakeholders, making sure you're communicating well, and making sure that they have input in the what the system focuses on. They must be able to see their aspirations and expectations being realised; that we are building on the students' strengths and talents; that we are making sure that all aspects of the "community" - the immigrant population, the marginalized, the youth - all of those groups are seeing themselves in the agenda. So, it's a process of community outreach and engagement and making sure parents, the non-parent population and all those who form the community of concern - all have opportunities for input and for their voices to be heard.

Now one of the areas of focus that helped us in many ways in Ontario was character development. You may remember when Columbine happened, the school shooting. I was so distressed! I thought we should do something about it and people said, "Oh c'mon, Avis, you know that's the United States." About a month later there was a shooting in Alberta, Canada, just getting closer and closer to us. No longer can they say it's the United States but what really galvanized me to action was, on a Saturday morning I had a call from a parent, a father in tears. "Dr Glaze, they have beaten my boy, he's in a coma," he said, That was in my little community. I knew the parents well.

Jonathan Wamback, if ever you google that, Jonathan Wamback of the A.N.B East Gate story, he was beaten by a group of boys and Mr Wamback said, "Dr Glaze, I'm sending the police over to your home and they have to identify these boys. Jonathan is in a coma…" and so on. I was absolutely devastated. I said to myself: "We can't wait anymore, we have to do something to educate, not only the minds, but also the hearts of our children. We have spent so much time on academic achievement – and have not put equal emphasis on the personal, intrapersonal and interpersonal qualities that we want to nurture in our children.

We must build character with a focus on characteristics such as respect, responsibility, empathy, and caring."

So, I went to my trustees with a proposal to begin a character initiative in our schools. "How can we do this?" they said. "Where in the Education Act does it say schools should focus on character development?" And it didn't at the time, we were just ahead of our time.

I went back a second time and I said, "Let's do it this way, let's bring together two hundred and fifty people." I just chose a big number- there's nothing research informed about that- two hundred and fifty people from all walks of life, and let's have them spend three evenings with us, and by the third evening let's ask them what attributes we should be addressing in our schools, in order to educate and hearts as well as minds.

We held community consultations – from the widest possible cross-section of individuals, and, working with a consultant, those who were are the forums chose 10 characteristics that they wanted our school district to focus on: Respect, Responsibility, Honesty, Integrity, Empathy, Fairness, Initiative, Perseverance, Courage and Optimism. These were the character attributes chosen by this community. The community, with its diversity of religion, social class, race, gender, immigrant status, among other things, "found common ground on the values they had in common. By then the Premier of Ontario heard about this process because we made sure that there were journalists from the local papers on the Committee who writing about the process. This was another example on how we used communication for community engagement.

So, to cut a long story short, a character development program was in the making. We then worked hard to bring all the teachers and principals on board. At first some said: "Our plates are too full, we can't deal with this" but we were able to convince them that this is not entirely new. Many teachers are already character developers. We simply formalized the process and had the community participate in identifying the attributes. The Business community was very helpful, stating that these were the attributes that they wanted to see in the graduates of the education system. As one business person said – "We can teach the technical skills. Just send us graduates with character."

But one of the things that I had said to the Principals, I called them and I said, "You know at some point, we don't have permission to do this from the government. At some point people are going to ask, "How do you know it's working?" And I said, "I want you to look at some behaviour in your school that you're not pleased with and collect some baseline data, and as we implement, then you see if the program is having an impact." So one person said my biggest problem is bullying; another said, the problem is my school is swearing. Another was name calling. I said, "Look at the data- how many times you have to suspend students or how many times they are sent to the office because of these behaviours." They all had some data from which they could determine if the initiative was making a difference.

What was interesting after they had the baseline data, the next thing I thought, we don't want people to think we're always doing new things. Let's find out what

kinds of programs they have that would be teaching about these attributes that we're talking about. So I thought I would collect stories from across the province. You can find that book of stories on the website from the Ministry of Education on character development.

One of the stories I like most is one from the Vice-principal. She said that one day school started at eight thirty and about nine thirty she didn't know that there wasn't a teacher in one of the classrooms because they have a system in the office in which teachers just phoned in to say when they were not going to be in school. Unfortunately, that machine was broken and they didn't know. So two young girls came from the fifth grade and said, 'Miss, we don't have a teacher.'

So the Vice-principal said, "Avis, I ran across the school and as I ran I thought - oh my God, have some gone home? What if there's an accident? What do I tell the parents? We didn't know there wasn't a teacher in that room."

When she went to the room kids were perfectly quiet. One had taken a problem from the teacher's planning book and written it on the board. The students were all working quietly. So she said, 'Thank you so much' and one student said, 'Miss, what did you expect? We're a character class."

What became clear was that character development was working in this classroom. Character is often about how we behave when we're not being watched and about self-discipline. So people then started to realise that there's something about this character development that's getting to the hearts and minds of the children- they're kinder, they're gentler, they're more caring and considerate of one another.

To further develop this in schools we brought teachers together showing teachers how every teacher can infuse character strategies into their subject areas. If you're teaching mathematics, you can talk about honesty and integrity. Every teacher had to find ways to use the "teachable moment" to integrate these attributes into what they were doing - into the programs, practices, processes, rules and interactions. Notably, all of this was being done without "permission" of the Ministry.

The Premier of the Province heard about it, met with me and told me he wanted every school district to have a character development program.

What was also interesting, some colleagues asked, "Avis can you send us those character attributes?"

I said, 'No, you have to go through your own process because that's how you're going to develop ownership.'

We found, however, that when you get people involved, across the province there's very little variation in the attributes they all chose. Everybody wanted respect, responsibility, honesty, empathy to name a few.

You have no idea, Andrea, how important empathy is to me. Can you imagine what our communities would be like if we talked about empathy in schools and

created more opportunities for student to practice and demonstrate empathy more frequently? And I think that's an area where Scotland, because you're so much further ahead of others, could focus on. You have to look for the kinds of things that will add value to an already good system of education. You can ask yourselves, how empathetic are your students? They're bright, they're doing well but how empathetic are they, how caring are they, how concerned are they about others? My story earlier should show that you are doing a good job. But that is a small sample that is not generalizable. Systems like yours can be enhanced with a focus on what business refers to as the "soft skills" now, in order to take your education system to new heights.

So after implementing character education in schools, I went to all the mayors of the communities, brought them together and told them that I wanted to work with them to build "communities of character." And if you go to my website you will see a lot about building communities of character. You can also visit the York Region Character Community website to learn more about all the activities that still continue in that community. There's some places in Canada, you drive into the community, it says, for example, 'Fife, a community of character. It is all so amazing that this started in the school system, making it clear that schools do not only reflect community as is commonly believed. Schools can shape community.

People now say that, what this initiative has done by engaging people in the process, they have become conscious of those attributes and the need to demonstrate them in their daily interactions.

We later moved from "Building communities of character" to a third focus on "Character Development in Business" or "Developing Business of Character." By extending this initiative to community and workplaces, it ensured that everyone was supporting the school.

And to tell you that this is working, I want to tell you what I experience. After I retired, I went back to the community. I rented a car and had to take it in to the dealership. They said, "It's going to take about two hours- just go up to our waiting room and we'll let you know when the car is ready." As I went up to this room, there was a sign: 'Lexus, a business of character'. The character attribute of the month, optimism. Can you imagine how I felt?

So, the businesses in York Region, just north of Toronto, with our assistance were also implementing an initiative around creating business of character. This is one example, Andrea, of schools helping to create the kind of society that we all want. I would encourage schools to do more, in a conscious and intentional way, to shape society. Implementing an intentional program of character development is one initiative that can help.

Well, it has to be done by including all the stakeholders, making sure you're communicating well, and making sure that they have input in the system, that they can see their aspirations and expectations being realised, that we build on their strengths and talents, that we make sure that all aspects of the community, the immigrant population and so on, all of those groups are seeing themselves in the agenda. So, it's a process of community outreach and

engagement and making sure the parent, the non-parent population, all have opportunities for input.

AB:

In relation to what you described and identified as priorities, what do you see as being the potential role of the EIS in assisting the agenda?

AG:

How important the role of the EIS is... When I was the Chief Student Achievement Officer, it came at a time after a lot of strikes and so on and so there was a lot of turmoil in the system. I had or have always had a lot of faith in the unions and the associations. One of the first things I did was called them together and I said, "I'm prepared to give you quite a bit of my budget if you will help me to address different issues." For the elementary teachers I said, "You have to have the poverty agenda- what does it mean? How do we reduce poverty? How do we address this issue the school?" So I gave each of the Unions a different focus and I said, "Bring me back a proposal in two weeks around how you're going to use the money." Quite a bit of money -one union had five million dollars – and the unions came back. They had their proposals about what they would do to address issues that we said were important to us, so they were fully a part of the agenda. I'm going to tell you one story which will emphasise how important it was.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) was asked to address the issue of poverty in our schools. After I retired I was invited to a school district in Ontario that was interested in knowing how they were doing in improving their schools. I said that I would like to have some focus groups with staff and community members. I wanted to speak to the mayors and other politicians. I met with teachers, principals, and asked for focus groups of students as well. I wanted to listen to hear what they had to say about the impact of the work in education on these students.

In one of the focus groups of young kids who were probably seven or eight years old, I asked questions such as, "How was school this year? What do you want to tell me what you learned in school this year?"

One little boy, waving his hand insistently said, "Me, miss, me, miss!"

"OK, tell me what you learned."

He said, "Miss, we had a play called 'Danny in the Basement' and it taught us

about poverty and our attitudes towards poor people and how we should treat

people."

The Elementary Teachers had commissioned the play "Danny in the Basement" with the poverty theme, with accompanying strategies and resources. They engaged actors in the community who went around and performed in the schools.

What was most telling was that a child in a rural area was telling me that that this play was the most important activity for him. So what the unions had done had percolated through to the children in the classroom!

If that is not successful implementation I don't know what is. I'm glad I trusted the unions to help with the initiative. I'm glad I asked them to be a part of the improvement agenda. We could not have done it without them.

AB:

So what did they do there? Did they design a resource for teachers?

Avis:

Yes, a programme and resources – everything. I wanted to address the poverty and gave them time to come up with a proposal, how they would address it in the schools and that particular association chose that they would commission a play around a boy who lived in a basement who didn't want people to know he was very poor, to take that around to schools. Teachers had lessons plans and ways to discuss it with students and all the resources around teaching about poverty in schools.

So basically teacher members of that union had autonomy to shape a bit of that curriculum that would address that issue specifically. They had to come up with a proposal first about how they spend the money. I would give them A+ for what they did in fact. If you go to the website, the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario- they're called E.T.F. I'm sure there was something about their poverty reduction strategy and I'm sure you will see a lot of what I'm talking about there.

But to me it is a matter of trusting the professionals, giving them some clear guidelines, letting them come back with a proposal about what they plan to do and letting them do it. We also made sure that they had a university professor, for example, to help them evaluate how they were doing. By the way I have not said much about the role of faculties of education and universities in our improvement agenda. We could not have been successful without their support and guidance around what works.

When I look back on my career that is one of the things I still smile about. That I had trusted the unions - and they delivered. They never disappointed me. They did what we would never have been able to accomplish - because of the resources and the expertise that exists within the associations. If people think we can improve schools without teachers or teachers' unions, it won't happen. So we just have to recognize how important it is to work collaboratively,

however difficult that may be in certain settings. Let's work in partnership with those leaders, because when you think of it, they are representing the teachers. We need teachers to implement the agenda. If we value our teachers we must also value those who represent them.

I hope I am not coming across as naïve. I know how challenging this can be. But we cannot give up. We must work even harder at building good relationships with the hope that there is a reciprocity.

It is also very important to make sure that all children have access to high quality education regardless of background. This means not cutting back or taking out the essential objectives. We should cut back on the number of goals we have or just the number of initiatives we foist on teachers at a given time. We must have high expectations, but we must limit what they are expected to implement at any one time. We should all have competent and qualified teachers who can make decisions around curriculum, strategies and assessment as they do in Finland. Teachers must be confident to make the decisions about the curriculum, but I think we also need to say what the essential knowledge should be within our curriculum. In other works, what should all students know, be like, and be able to do?   What is essential for all students? What is optional or nice to know?

This means that the fast learners can go on to the next level or additional activities. But there must be essential knowledge for all children. We should invoke the discourse of the 19th century philosophers as they struggled with the issue of "What knowledge is of most worth or of most value - in society today?

Let us not forget the wellbeing of students. When we heard someone speak this morning about the difficulties and the challenges inherent in teaching today, we must ask ourselves questions such as, how do we teach tenacity. How do we teach people to be resilient? That young lad who spoke to us today demonstrated resilience at its best.

When I say let's focus on the soft skills in schools we have to now begin to think of how we teach those skills that we have not addressed fully in education often because we feel we do not know how to assess them. That should not be the deterrent that it has become. There is no one way of assessing skills. They do lend themselves to practical, problem solving demonstrations of the expectations in relevant settings.

Let me tell you about one of the things that works very well in Ontario. I was a member of the Royal Commission on Learning in 1994. After spending 18 months speaking to people across the system, we made many recommendations.   One of them was that every student should have forty hours of community service as a part of their graduation requirements. At first people were upset at the thought. "You want my child to do volunteering?" We insisted that this requirement benefited both the individuals and society. Moreover, many students would use the setting for career exploration as they try out the occupations that they were interested. Career exploration should be an important aspect of a good education.

A systematic and intentional career development program helps students to see the relationship between learning and earning, among loftier objectives. It can be very motivating especially if students are bored with school and want to drop out as is sometimes the case. If teachers are able to connect their subject areas with occupations, students tend to perk up with renewed interest.

Career development is also an equity imperative. Think of our children from working class backgrounds. How many occupations are they going to be exposed to, compared to children from wealthy families who are taking their children to theatres, libraries, vacations in other countries, and so on? If we want to look at equity, we have to look at career development and how we're going to expose our children to a wider range of occupations to expand their repertoire of choices.

I will tell you one more story. I was once a guidance counsellor in a very poor area, working. I wanted every child to have access to a good career development program. Sometimes I had to ask for a class from the English teacher or the math teacher as there were not regularly scheduled guidance classes. I simply wanted to have access to all children through a "whole class" career development format. I wanted all of those children to raise their aspirations and expectations because I say this as an equity issue. Middle class children can aspire to and expect to have certain occupations.   Kids from the working class may aspire but often don't expect. My own study of the aspirations and expectations of 1200 high school girls in Ontario attested to this fact.

Career development is an important aspect of schooling. It should begin in kindergarten where students learn about jobs in the neighbourhood, the importance of work and other such topics. In kindergarten, it's about awareness, not choice. Parents became worried, in those days, when they thought career development was about choosing occupations. They did not realize that career development is an age-related educational strategy, developmental in nature, leading to exploration as students are assisted to become aware of their interests, aptitudes, values and dispositions. Later on in their school career, they enter the decision-making and choice phases.

But I digress- I was talking about something else when I went on to career development- community involvement. We said that students should have forty hours of community service before they graduate. Many were upset at the thought. Initially many baulked at the idea but once students got into it, they loved it. I understand they did a study, more recently in Ontario. On an average, students were doing a hundred hours, not forty as was required. They're going to the hospitals, they volunteer, they get to know their communities while they explore occupations. I've heard students say, "Miss, I thought I wanted to be a doctor until I volunteered in the hospital and realized that's not for me."

In support of this idea, I remember a parent who told me, 'I kept my child in University for five years, and he now says, "No, I don't want to do that"'. Career exploration would have helped this young man become aware of his interests, aptitudes, values and how they merge.   So career development is essential and

teaching the soft skills like resiliency and so on - must all become part of a strong educational program for all children, especially those from poor backgrounds, because as I said before, poverty should not determine destiny.

A good story to make sure that all children have access to high quality education regardless of background, so don't cut back or take out the essential objectives, cut back on the number of things or just the number of objective we expect of teachers. Or they have teachers develop the maturity enough to make decisions about the curriculum and teachers must be confident to make the decision about the curriculum but I think we also need to say here is essential knowledge for everyone. Here is what's really recommended and here's what's nice to know. We should spend time doing that with the curriculum so that they know that this essential knowledge goes to cover all children. Those who are fast learners or whatever, they can go on to the next level, but there is essential knowledge for all children and I think that's what curriculum needs to look like internationally. What is it we want all children to know, be able to do and to be like? And the dispositions are important. And what's nice to know… not everybody needs to cover the nice to know. If I had a child at school I would want essential knowledge for all and I think we need to determine that through the curriculum.

How do we teach our own empathy? So we have to now in education begin to go more into the soft skills, more than we have done in the past because they are the hard skills and they're the skills that will create the best leaders, the best teachers, who will have empathy and caring and so on- those things are important.

Let us not forget the wellbeing of students. When we heard someone speak this morning about the difficulties, the challenges, how do we teach tenacity. How do we teach people to be resilient? That young lad today demonstrated resilience.

When I say let's focus on the soft skills in schools we have to now begin to think of how we teach those qualities that in the past we have not looked at because we feel we can't assess them - but let me tell you about one of the things that works very well in Ontario. I was on a commission years ago as an educator and we made a number of recommendations - one of them was every student should have forty hours of community service as a part of their graduation. At first people were so upset. You want my child to do volunteering? We insisted that that's important, it's a matter of career exploration -that's an area I haven't talked about but I hope you find it in my book.

It's what's important- career development for students to be able to see the relationship between learning and earning, that can be very motivating especially if they want to drop out of school, because my character development, if teachers are able to connect their subject areas to occupations all of a sudden they perk up. So career development is an equity imperative. Think of our children from working class backgrounds- how many occupations are they going to be exposed to, compared to children from wealthy families who are going to the theatres and who are going to the libraries and so on? If we want to look at equity, we have to look at career development and how we're going to expose our children to a wider range of careers. I will tell you one more story. I was in a

very poor area, working, and I wanted every child to have career development. At that time I was a guidance counsellor. Sometimes I had to steal a class from the English teacher, the math teacher, just so I could do whole class career development because I wanted all of those children to raise their aspirations and expectations- because this is a class difference, middle class can aspire and expect, the working class can aspire but don't expect. Very important, career development, you must mention how important that is, in a systematic way from kindergarten. In kindergarten, it's awareness, it's not choice- parents get upset, awareness. Then exploration as they get in touch with their interests, their aptitudes, their values and then later on, choice. But it starts early and it's time the people see, that career development needs to be at every aspect of schooling.

But I digress, I was talking about something else when I went on to career development- community involvement. Forty hours, people were so upset, they didn't want to do it but once students got into it, I understand they did a study, more recently in Ontario. On an average, students were doing a hundred hours, not forty anymore that they were fighting me over, on an average, one hundred hours. They're going to the hospitals, they volunteer, they get to know their communities, they get to explore occupations. I've seen kids and 'Miss, I know I wanted to be a doctor until I volunteered in the hospital, that's not for me'. One parent told me, 'I kept my child in University for five years,' and he said, 'No, I don't want to do that'. Career exploration would have helped them to become aware of their interests, aptitudes, their values and how they merge, so character development is essential. Career development is essential and teaching of all the soft skills like resiliency and so on- all of those must be put together with a strong academic program, and for all children, especially those from poor backgrounds, because as I said this morning, poverty should not determine destiny.

AB:

So the way that you've painted that picture, that's giving me the impression that that is your design in terms of excellence and equity- that's what it would look like. That is your definition, almost.

AG:

Absolutely. Making sure that all children's life chances are enhanced and that no child is left behind by virtue of social class, or other background factors.

In one of my books, I also write about the need to expand our notion of literacy. We used to think there to be only one or two literacies, but today's children need multi literacies or emergent literacies. These include, according summey, computer literacy, cultural literacy, game literacy, media literacy, multi literacies, multimedia literacy, network literacy, social literacy, visual literacy, web literacy, information literacy, new literacies and digital literacies (e.g. locating and filtering, sharing and collaborating, organising and curating, creating and generating, reusing and repurposing). So we cannot say we've done literacy, ee must go broader and deeper.

We need to do more in the areas of enhancing creativity and fostering entrepreneurialism. you also need a more complete understanding of entrepreneurism. We need to really explore the question of how do we create that entrepreneurial spirit, in children?

Most of our children today will have to create their own jobs, but are we fostering entrepreneurialism in our schools?   We need to work with business, labour and industry to do more.

We need to debunk many myths about education and educators.   When I was in Norway recently, I had four statements from the literature, and I asked the Norwegian educators, let's see how we're going to prove these people wrong. What are the statements?

1. "The longer our children are in school, the less curious and the less creative they become." (Zhao)
2. "High school students who exhibit creative personalities are more likely to drop out of school than other students." Wagner).
3. "Schools are complicit with oppression." (Kumisharo)
4. "Statistically speaking, the best advice I would give to a poor child eager to get ahead through education is to choose richer parents." (Connell)

AB:

What are your views on these statements?

AG:

Kumisharo is the one who talks about the whole issue of oppression, and that schools foster oppression and are complicit with oppression. That's awful. Sexism, racism, homophobia- he is saying schools do not address these issues the way they should.

Connell, in the 4th statement- statistically speaking, the best advice I would give to a poor child, eager to get ahead through education, is to choose richer parents- is also saying, and I hope tongue in cheek, that schools are not addressing the issue of poverty adequately.

To me it was a matter of how are we going to prove them wrong?   Because these are seminal researchers in education and they're saying that about us, that we're complicit with oppression, that the longer students stay in school, the less creative they become, that high school students who exhibit creative tendencies are more likely to drop out than others – I am really bothered by this. Let's turn our concern in to concerted action and set us to prove all these statements wrong.

Our work in education is never done until **all** children, regardless of background or personal circumstances are achieving at their potential. Our work in education is never done until we build the capacity of **all** teachers to teach **all** children to achieve success. Our work in education is never done until all principals have the

necessary skills to lead schools in the most challenging circumstances to achieve success. Our work in education is never done until all those who make policies realise the importance of listening to the voices of those who are closest to children in identifying what it takes to improve schools and classrooms. Our work in education is never done until we realise that it will take the collaboration of all partners and those with a vested interest in a successful education system to build the best possible coalition to support our schools and to do this with a sense of urgency.

Our children deserve no less.