

The Newfoundland and Labrador Education System

NLEC Scholarship Essay

Gerard Gale

Bachelor of Commerce (Co-op)

Memorial University of Newfoundland

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Education on the Edges – A Reflection on School Systems in Rural Newfoundland

As I approach the end of my tenure at Memorial University, having spent four years both learning about and practicing my area of study, I feel composed. I feel this way because of the quality of education I received from some of the brightest minds in this province, along with the practical work experience that was required for the completion of my degree. I feel fully prepared for what lies ahead in my professional life, but I often reflect on how I arrived at this point. While my education since 2010 has been fulfilling and useful, the twelve years prior that I spent at a K-12 school on the southwest coast of Newfoundland feels distant and blurry. The facts and formulas I studied so diligently for my public exams have long been forgotten, the knowledge of the biological nuances of plants and animals that were required for me to pass my grade 11 biology course gone as well. I do recall several names and faces however, the names and faces of students who either did not see the point in learning advanced mathematics or simply could not motivate themselves to care. These faces did not leave their high school experience with a satisfied grin or a diploma in hand, rather, they left out of frustration with a system that they felt failed to prepare them for anything meaningful when they begin their post-secondary lives. They left uneducated, uninspired and full of angst towards a societal structure they trusted several years of their youth with. The secondary school education system, as employed in schools in rural Newfoundland, leaves countless students alienated and unable to gain relevant knowledge in fields that interest them that offer real potential for future employment.

Where I come from, courses throughout K-12 were minimal. The courses that were offered were generally offered year in and year out. Most students understood that these

courses were valuable not because of the knowledge gained, but rather because they were a means to an end. That end being a spot in a post-secondary institution, which could set the student on his/her way to meaningful employment and a comfortable wage. For the students that did not accept this paradigm, they were cast as misfits, unable to assimilate to the institution that they felt did not represent their interests. While I was still in high school, I could not possibly relate to their feelings. I knew that despite how disinterested I was in sciences such as biology and chemistry, simply having them completed on my transcript would lead me to where I aspired to go – which was a graduate of the Bachelor of Commerce (Co-op) program in 2015. But now, as I look back, I feel much more empathy for the students who could not bring themselves to spend hours studying school books they had no interest in. It is easy to say those few students who do not have their interests sparked by the course curriculum offered in rural communities should simply suck it up and put in the work, but it is much more logical to take aim at the system that perpetuates this apathetic behaviour and look to adjust it so that all students interests are equally represented.

More variability in the course offerings in all-grade schools in rural communities is essential to making the entire student body feel engaged and empowered. More variability requires more funding, but when we were speaking about students and our future, funding for public schools should be a very high priority for the provincial government. Strides are being made towards this goal, but ultimately, the issues of being able to make course offerings more diverse in rural settings is a very complex one. Young educators are not often keen on settling in a rural Newfoundland setting, so incentives for these professionals needs to be increased. The costs may seem high, but it is an investment worth making.

Currently, the education system is allowing too many young people in rural Newfoundland to slip through the cracks, and an increased investment in these youth can produce a stronger and more appreciative work force in the future. If you simply give these youth a more relatable chance at a better life, with better employment and job prospects, the type of employee that emerges on the other end is one who is humbled and grateful for the opportunity provided to them. The secondary school system in this province is not capable of doing enough for these rural youth to prepare them for their professional lives, putting these students at a distinct disadvantage in society.

In my Level 3 year in 2009-2010, I had two choices to make. Whether I did advanced math or not, and whether I did my final year of biology or not. Beyond those choices, my curriculum was chosen for me. I graduated with ten other students that year, many of which had about the same level of choice in their own education. Our choices were made with indifference, often opting to take the easier route, simply choosing cake-courses to reduce our individual workload. Much like a great employee is a passionate employee, a great student is passionate as well. Instilling and nurturing student's passion, regardless of what it is, from an early age will produce an unprecedented workforce with confidence and expertise. Education on the edges of this province needs to be reassessed to better prepare students for the professional world that is fast approaching them. That reassessment should start with the student, and a simple question: What can we teach you that you will be excited to learn?

