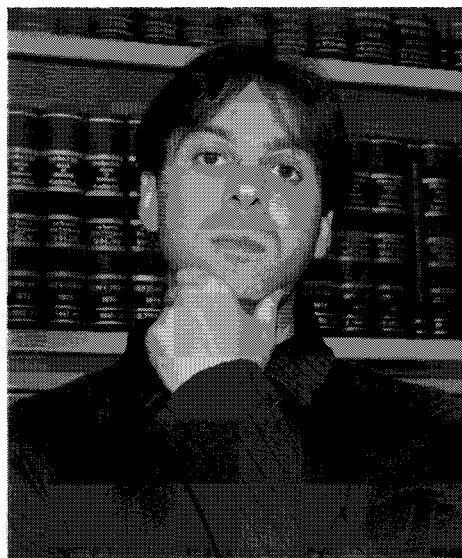


## our educational crisis and a call for action

By Dr. Carlo Ricci, Faculty of Education

In an attempt to gain popular consent, in 1995 then Minister of Education John Snobelen claimed that he would “*invent a crisis in education.*” He and his government proceeded to totally dismantle and restructure the education system. Now, seven years later, as a result of the changes his government made, the invention has become a reality. Our education system is in a state of crisis. Just to cite one manifestation of this crisis, of the 162,000 students that started grade nine in 1999 (the year that the new curriculum was introduced), 30 per cent have dropped out of school. The Toronto Star reported that this is a substantial increase in comparison to the five-year program. The current Minister of Education Gerard Kennedy has referred to these students as “*curriculum casualties.*” The party line is that the curriculum is more rigorous, but what it is, in reality, is disengaging and disconnected to students’ needs and interests. As well, over the last few years, we have seen an erosion of democratic principles to the point that our education system is no longer an education system but a training system.

In Ontario we do not educate, we train. We do not teach students, we



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teach curriculum. We have a standardized curriculum; we have standardized tests, but we have to understand that we do not have standardized students. If we value democracy and democratic principles, we should be striving to celebrate difference. We should be creating environments where students can unfold, where students can thrive, where students can create and not merely replicate.

There is hope. The hope is all of us. We created the system that we are in, and we can transform the system that we are in. We need to demand a more just and democratic system. At the university, we are in a fortunate position in that we have a forum and the opportunity to discuss ideas and, more importantly, the support to

translate our ideas into action. We need to ensure that as educators we create a community of learners, and that we offer our students a comfortable space so that they can truly engage in education. We need to ensure that we do not merely train our students to accept the status quo. We need to ensure that we do not merely train our students to be cogs that fit into the societal machine. What we need to do is give our students the place and space so that they can become confident enough to know that they can transform society for the better.

We all need to work at creating a better society: one that is antiracist, antisexist, antihomophobic, anticlassist and so on. In short, one that is in line with truly democratic principles, and teaches us that we are all connected and that if one of us fails we all fail – because the world that we share is all the worse due to this one failure.

I encourage all of us to join together in advocating for and advancing toward a better world. We can do it. As the title of Paulo Freire and Myles Horton’s speaking book suggests, we make our road by walking – let’s commit to walk in the right direction. **I**