

Report by Teacher Ambassador Cathy Quigley on the 13th Canadian Skills Competition Held in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, June 6-9, 2007.

As part of the Teacher Ambassador Program(TAP) - Skilled Trades, I was given the opportunity to attend the 13th Canadian Skills Competition held in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, June 6-9, 2007.

The Teacher Ambassador Program is a collaborative initiative of the Department of Education, Newfoundland and Labrador, Skills Canada - Newfoundland and Labrador, and a host of community partners. The goal of the Teacher Ambassador Program is to increase teachers' knowledge and understanding of the different skilled trades and the variety of educational and employment opportunities that exist now and into the future.



The week I spent in Saskatoon was a major highlight in my teaching career; a highlight comparable to my professional development experience with the Teacher Ambassador Program. It was a week of excitement and learning as I saw first hand the opportunity available to our students as they competed nationally in a multitude of skills competitions.

Gonzaga High School had four students who represented Newfoundland and Labrador: Shivam Aggarwal (Information Technology & Network Support), Ariana Kavanagh (Workplace Safety) Christine Decker (Cooking-Secondary), and Greg Squires (Outdoor Power & Recreation-Secondary). Christine and Greg were the first high school students to represent our province in these two competition categories. Christine Decker brought home the bronze medal in Cooking - Secondary to the delight of us all. All of Gonzaga's students were exceptional ambassadors for Newfoundland and Labrador as part of the provincial team. The operative word here is team- in one week that is what we all became- an integral part of Team Newfoundland and Labrador. The interesting part of all of this is that, although the competition is now over, the sense of being part of the team is not! As a delegate, I was able to interact with our secondary and post secondary students on a continuous basis and partake (to use their own words) "in an awesome experience".

From the moment I stepped off the plane in Saskatoon, I became part of a whirlwind of excitement, of camaraderie and kinship. The meeting(s) clarified the goal and kept in mind the business at hand- *do the best you can, enjoy the experience, do not give up, and bring home as many medals as you can.* With 13 medals to their credit, this team made their goals a definite reality.

Parieland was an enthralling experience. I will never forget the sight that greeted me as I came through the door - from mannequins to a small engine aircraft, computers to power tools- everything was in place for students to practice their crafts. The multitude of jobs and the individual skills accompanying each career was mind boggling. I know this experience has changed how I will approach my classroom teaching. I feel I can take back so much more to my classroom and I will do so. It is hard to explain in words the impact this experience had on me.

It is more than *in the moment* excitement. One of the delegates describe it to me as “addictive” and I now know what this individual meant. I believe it is very important for our students to take part in these competitions, to show and to prove what they are made of to both themselves and to the country at large.

Also, I was fortunate to be a judge in the Job Skills Demonstration. This was a wonderful experience. Getting to be part of the inside track only provides the opportunity for helping our students in this competition area do better. I enjoyed every minute of this experience.

Unfortunately, all good things had to come to an end and the Awards Ceremony was a great way to finish off a busy week. This ceremony was nerve wracking as we awaited the team’s result. As the candidates who won bronze, silver or gold came forward to claim their medals, the pride their team members felt for them was evidence in the cheering, the clapping, the laughter and the tears. And the ones who did not bring home a medal ... were they disappointed? Naturally yes, BUT they were proud of jobs well done. One of students (Level II) was already planning to try and come back next year; another of my students wondered if it was too late to fail so they could come back and compete next year!! Some of the comments my students made regarding their experience were as follows: “it was the best experience of my life,” “I was not aware of everything that was out there for me,” “ it has changed me,” and it was “awesome.” These comments make me, as a teacher want to promote Skills Canada on the provincial level, to get our students interested and motivated in an experience that could become an opportunity of a lifetime. To make new friendships, to be part of a team, to come into their own (whether or not they bring home a medal) are golden opportunities of lifelong learning and citizenship.

I also had the opportunity to meet Mike Holmes from *Holmes on Homes*- another highlight. When Mike autographed his book for me *Make it Right*, I was struck by how these three little words summarized the whole competition and the mandate all competitors, delegates, judges, teachers and parents have been given. As teachers, it is so important for us to continue our lifelong learning, to participate, to promote and to motivate students to take part in Skills Canada because in *making it right* they SEE and FEEL, they THINK and they DO through their “Heads and Hands” all that is needed to perfect their skills.

My own personal motto this year was a quote I found by Marcel Proust, “the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes” and that is what this competition allowed me to do. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to go to the 13th Canadian Skills Competition Saskatoon: to see first hand how our students excelled and how proud they were in representing Newfoundland and Labrador.