

SCHOLARS AT RISK / ONTARIO'S RIGHT TO READ REPORT / 1 MILLION TEACHERS

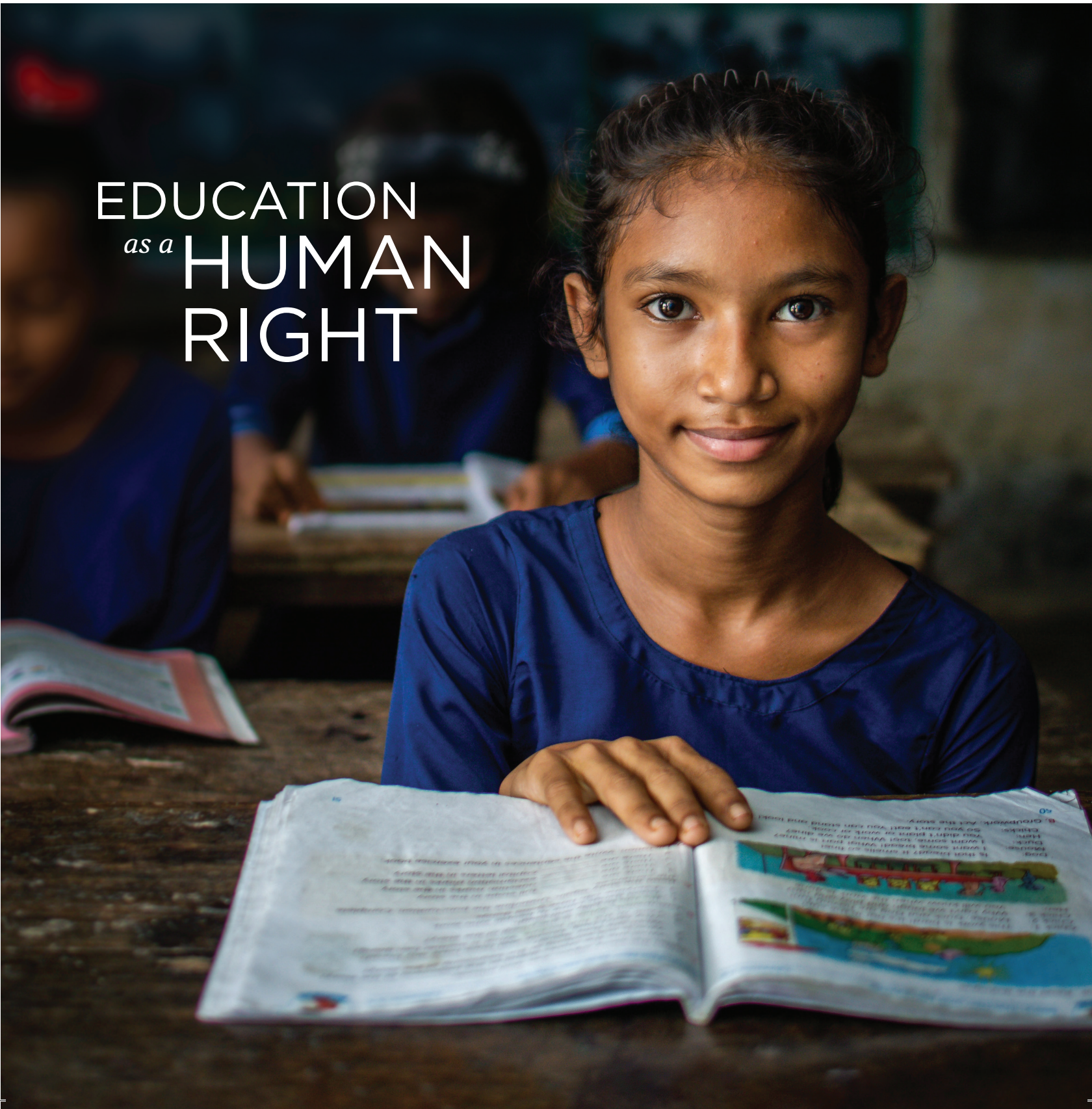


# THE Knowledge Forum

Queen's Faculty of Education

2022-2023

EDUCATION  
*as a* HUMAN  
RIGHT



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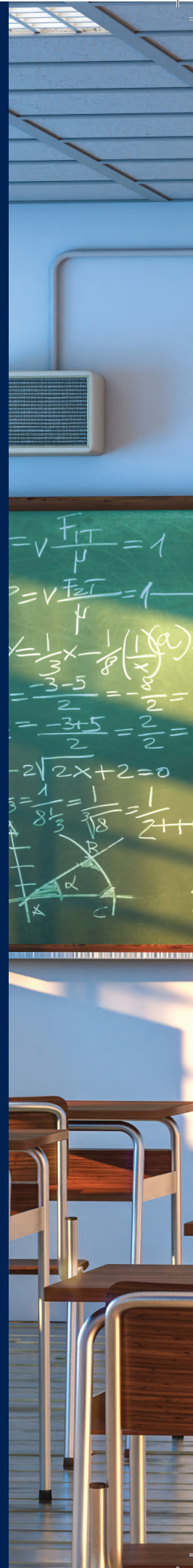
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## A Note from Dean Rebecca Luce-Kapler

**IN THIS ISSUE, WE INVITED MEMBERS** of the Scholars at Risk network and the Queen's education community to share their stories, research, and ideas about education at risk. Drs Anya Hageman and Thashika Pillay provide our readers with some of the background and mission of the Scholars at Risk community and considers how we support, navigate, struggle, and triumph when our ability to research, teach, and learn are under threat.

The articles in this issue speak to academics dedicated to teaching and working with their students despite

working under autocratic rule, explore the challenges of early literacy and the implications of the Ontario Human Rights Commission *Right to Read* report, and celebrate the success of the 1 Million Teachers project.

This is the fifth year of *The Knowledge Forum* publication and I continue to be impressed by the compassion, expertise, and ability of our community to impact change and support teaching and learning in communities near and far.

# Scholars at Risk: The Fight for Academic Freedom

Drs. Anya Hageman and Thashika Pillay

Dr. Anya Hageman has a PhD in Agricultural Economics from Cornell and is an Assistant Professor in the Economics Department at Queen's.

Dr. Thashika Pillay is an Assistant Professor in Educational Policy in the Faculty of Education, Queen's University. Thashika completed her PhD in Social Justice and International Education in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta.

**THINK BACK TO THE TIME YOU WERE IN** graduate school or professional training. You likely shared the grueling workload and the underlying anxiety with students from around the world. Where are they now? Are they establishing themselves in their chosen fields, breaking new ground, educating young minds? Or are some currently unable to freely share and question ideas? Are some now prisoners of conscience?

The Queen's Scholars at Risk (SAR) Committee advocates for academics in danger. Through the parent organization, the Scholars at Risk Network, the Queen's SAR Committee (SARC) has access to a wide variety of resources, including a vetted list of academics at risk, funding opportunities, workshops, conferences, speakers, and active learning projects on academic freedom for instructors. The Queen's SAR Committee was formed three years ago and is a group of faculty and administrators supported by the Office of the Vice Provost (International). In 2020, [SARC sponsored mixed-media artist and academic Dr. Canan Altinkas](#)<sup>1</sup>, who was graciously hosted by the Department of Fine Art together with the Agnes Etherington Art Centre. Most recently,

SARC attempted to bring an Iranian scholar to Queen's; however, his visa application was denied by the Canadian government. The learning curve is not smooth. SARC has had to consider anonymity, autonomy, immigration, and how to make the time spent in Canada most valuable for the scholar whilst also considering what may become of the scholar once their time at Queen's has come to an end.

For this issue of *The Knowledge Forum*, one scholar at risk contributed an article. Dr. Andrey Shcherbovich, a Visiting Fellow at the Center for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism at McGill University, discusses academic freedoms in contemporary Russia through a case study of The Higher School of Economics in Russia. Shcherbovich argues that the actions taken at the institution are a violation of Article 44 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation and have resulted in the dismissal and resignation of a number of academics. This is one context in which scholars at risk across the world [find](#) themselves attempting to engage in research and teaching and even after leaving these dangerous situations, many are unable to return and/or have colleagues left behind facing similar circumstances. The decision to continue to engage in the academic work that placed them at risk must be understood as an act of resistance from such scholars, as the "fortunate" may be able to escape imprisonment and death in return for displacement.

If you are interested in engaging further with Queen's SAR, please visit the [Office of the Vice Provost \(International\) web site](#)<sup>2</sup> or e-mail the Queen's SAR Committee at [global@queensu.ca](mailto:global@queensu.ca) with the subject line "Scholars at Risk." You can also follow the [Scholars at Risk Network](#) on Facebook<sup>3</sup>. Anya Hageman can be reached at [hagemana@econ.queensu.ca](mailto:hagemana@econ.queensu.ca) and Thashika Pillay can be reached at [thashika.pillay@queensu.ca](mailto:thashika.pillay@queensu.ca).

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.queensu.ca/gazette/stories/threatened-artist-and-academiccreates-new-life-her-family>

<sup>2</sup> [www.queensu.ca/provost/office-vice-provost-international](http://www.queensu.ca/provost/office-vice-provost-international)

<sup>3</sup> [www.facebook.com/scholarsatrisk/](https://www.facebook.com/scholarsatrisk/)

# Academic Freedoms in Contemporary Russian

Dr. Andrey Shcherbovich



Freedom of teaching means the teacher's right to choose and determine the teaching methods of the subject, correct them, select additional material, and express their attitude to the information that constitutes the teaching subject.



**DISCLAIMER FROM THE AUTHOR: HAVING** been at the Higher School of Economics (Moscow) for 17 years, starting from my student days, I hardly accepted my dismissal as a fact of my biography. The Department of Constitutional Law, where I was first a graduate student, then a teacher and assistant professor, ceased to exist due to the adoption of amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the events that followed. Because of this, I had to leave Russia with the support of the Scholar Rescue Fund, part of the Institute of International Education. I am a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism at McGill University (Montreal, Canada). However, this article presents the facts as I know them.

Intellectual rights derive from the freedom of creativity, established by Article 44 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation. In the second chapter, this article proclaims that everyone (regardless of citizenship) is guaranteed freedom of literary, artistic, scientific, technical, and other types of creative teaching<sup>4</sup>. The same article provides the constitutional foundations for protecting intellectual property in the Russian Federation. The following aspects of intellectual rights and freedoms are subject to consideration within the framework of this article.

Freedom of teaching means the teacher's right to choose and determine the teaching methods of the subject, correct them, select additional material, and express their attitude to the information that constitutes the teaching subject. It is the freedom to determine the nature, plan, and style of reading a topic.

Freedom of expression also ensures freedom of teaching since this opinion is expressed primarily within the framework of the taught subject. No one, including the administration of the educational institution, parents and legal representatives of students, authorities,

and local governments, has the right to try to influence the expression of thoughts, positions, and points of view of the teacher on specific issues of the subject and related topics. The only exception is the violation by the teacher of legislation and the norms of pedagogical ethics.

According to the renowned expert on academic freedom Dmitry Dubrovsky, in the modern world, the fundamental academic rights and freedoms are the right to teach and learn. It also protects knowledge from the influence of ideology and the preservation of science's logic and function as a critical understanding of society and the state. Science should be free is not an abstract requirement because all states try to use science for their specific political goals. Often behind this is a desire not only to control science but also to explain what scientists need to do. The main task of academic freedom is to protect scientists from state control<sup>5</sup>.

The same idea is laid down in the Magna Carta of Universities, adopted in Bologna on September 18, 1988. According to the document, the University is an autonomous institution underlying societies, differently organized by the peculiarities of geography and historical traditions; it creates, studies, evaluates, and transmits culture through scientific research and teaching from generation to generation. Research and education must be morally and intellectually independent from political authorities and economic pressures<sup>6</sup>[10]. We should note that the Higher School of Economics, which is the subject of our consideration within the case study framework, is not among the signatories of this Charter.

<sup>4</sup> The Constitution of the Russian Federation was adopted by popular vote on December 12, 1993 with amendments approved during the all-Russian vote on July 1, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> D. Dubrovsky, Academic rights and freedoms // Postnauka. postnauka.ru/video/95734. Date of access: September 15, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Magna Carta of Universities. Bologna, Italy September 18, 1988. bolognaby.org/images/Library/Magna\_Carta\_Universitatum\_ru.pdf. Date of access: September 15, 2022.

The Higher School of Economics was created by the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Yegor Gaidar, in 1992, initially as an economic university, which was necessary to develop financial personnel for the new Russia, which had embarked on the path of a market economy. Subsequently, the Higher School of Economics received a National Research University status and has formed more than 20 faculties, schools, and directions, from economic to technical and humanitarian. The Higher School of Economics has always been a liberal university, which is not entirely true since people of different political views are taught there. The University manifested this liberality because these views coexisted without political problems and consequences for their careers. The Higher School of Economics has always contacted foreign colleagues, adopting the best practices in scientific activity and teaching.

The Higher School of Economics has approved its Declaration of Values, according to which the University proclaims

academic freedom and political neutrality. It is stated that the University welcomes the free exchange of views and ideas based on the principles of a strictly scientific approach, mutual respect and partnership, respects the opinion of each team member, and considers the right to express one's point of view inalienable. In academic research, it is unacceptable for a university to impose a particular scientific school's educational approaches and standards. With expert support and empirical analysis of socio-economic processes, the University is free from political and ideological dogmas. The University does not restrict staff and students from forming and expressing their political views. However, any discussion of politics within the University's walls is researched and impartial and based on meaningful arguments<sup>7</sup>.

We should note that the situation, taken as a case study, in my opinion, continues to worsen. The founder and permanent rector of the Higher School of Economics, Yaroslav Kuzminov, suddenly announced his resignation on July 1, 2021. He explained this by saying that 28 years as a rector is too much, and the economist never liked the administrative activity. In recent years, the institution has been systematically losing its once well-deserved image of the "most liberal university," cutting out unreliable teachers and curtailing student freedom. These were forced steps for Kuzminov, who was tired of compromises, people who know him say<sup>8</sup>.

In November 2021, two more Higher School of Economics professors were dismissed. They are Sergei Pashin, a well-known lawyer in Russia, a retired federal judge, and Gennady Esakov, head of the criminal law department. They were fired for criticizing the Russian justice system they presented in their lectures. The contract with Pashin, a retired

federal judge, was terminated on December 24, 2021. He says that he is not resigning from his initiative. Pashin is a member of the Moscow Helsinki Group<sup>9</sup>.

The statement of the members and friends of the Constitutional Club, published on the website of the radio station Echo of Moscow, states that four lecturers of constitutional law have been dismissed at the Faculty of Law of the Higher School of Economics. Elena Lukyanova, Irina Alebastrova, Elena Glushko, and Andrey Shcherbovich (the article's author) were fired from the faculty. The fired academics knew about the dissolution of the Department of Constitutional Law by email on July 1, the day of voting on amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation. The Faculty of Law liquidated the Department of Constitutional and Municipal Law. Its long-term leader, Mikhail Krasnov, was transferred to a research professor position. The goal was to eliminate, together with the department, a small but close-knit community of people who supported the democratic tradition in constitutional law and who were ready to defend the importance of democratic institutions. The department's teachers trained good specialists and caring and responsible citizens of their country. Members of the Constitutional Club conclude that pressure from the authorities on the academic community increases. We believe that such force and the gradual establishment of ideological control over higher education in the humanities contradicts the still valid constitutional provision on freedom of teaching, weakens our higher education, and extinguishes free thought<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> The HSE Declaration of Values was approved and is on the official website. [www.hse.ru/news/life/105019933.html](http://www.hse.ru/news/life/105019933.html). Date of access: September 15, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> I'm unsure if I'll finish my studies with another rector. How HSE sees off Yaroslav Kuzminov, who built one of the best and freest universities in the country – and then sacrificed his freedom. [meduza.io/feature/2021/07/02/ne-uverena-chto-douchus-pri-drugom-rektore](https://meduza.io/feature/2021/07/02/ne-uverena-chto-douchus-pri-drugom-rektore). Date of access: September 15, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Blessed are those banished for the truth: two law professors were fired from the HSE after criticizing Russian courts. Novaya Gazeta. <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2021/11/27/blazhenny-izgnannye-za-pravdu-dvoikh-professorov-prava-uvolili-iz-vshe-posle-kritiki-rossiiskikh-sudov-news>. Date of access: September 15, 2022.





There are two extreme positions. One cannot but agree with the journalist Leonid Nikitinsky, who believes that it is necessary to define what “law” is to understand what happened at the Faculty of Law. The law is based on the individual’s natural rights and protects him from unnecessary interference from the state in his life. This doctrine is comparatively young, only three hundred years old, but today it reigns supreme. Much older is the voluntaristic view of the law as a sovereign instrument. Karl Marx only formulated for him the interest of the “ruling class”. However, since ancient times, all “ruling” understood the law this way<sup>10</sup>[33].

The faculty fired from the Higher School of Economics have created the

Free University, a free community of educators who offer quality university courses to students who want to listen to them. The Manifesto of the Free University states: “Our task is to rebuild the University, freeing teachers from all administrative dictatorship. If the University can no longer be free, a new free university is needed. Here the paths of the University and the state diverge. We are not state and not competing with state educational institutions. We do not have a campus. We will teach from home. We will teach from libraries. We will train in summer schools. We will not stop defending the freedom of knowledge and leave our students. We cannot be expelled from the University because the University is us”<sup>12</sup>[34].

Dr. Andrey Shcherbovich has a PhD from the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE). Dr. Shcherbovich was a lecturer, and then an associate professor at the HSE. In 2019, he was a CyberBRICS research fellow and visiting professor at FGV, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Currently, he is an O’Brien Fellow in Residence at the McGill Centre for Human Rights and Pluralism and a 2021-2022 IIE-SRF Scholar.

<sup>10</sup> On the defeat of the Department of Constitutional and Municipal Law of the Higher School of Economics (Statement by members and friends of the Constitutional Club). Echo of Moscow <https://echo.msk.ru/blog/rumyantsev/2693671-echo>. Date of access: September 15, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> L. Nikitinsky, Faculty of Unnecessary Professors. Novaya Gazeta. [novayagazeta.ru/articles/2021/12/04/fakultet-nenuzhnykh-professorov](https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2021/12/04/fakultet-nenuzhnykh-professorov). Date of access: September 15, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Free University Manifesto. <https://freemoscow.university>. Date of access: September 15, 2022.

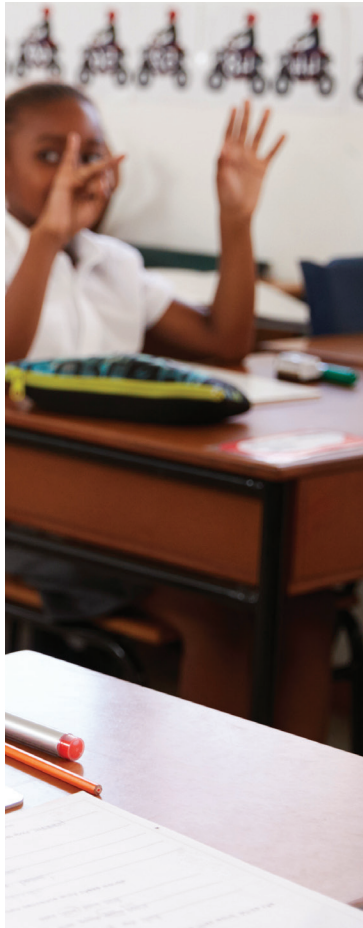


## Supporting the Development of Educational Change Agents in Sub-Saharan Africa

By Dr Jane Chin

Dr. Jane Chin is an Assistant Professor at the Queen's Faculty of Education. She teaches in the international education concentration and English curriculum and has taught previously at international schools.

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**HAKEEM SUBAIR AND RIZMA BUTT,** co-founders of 1 Million Teachers (1MT), had a vision to educate teachers throughout sub-Saharan Africa through a series of professional development modules accessible by the most ubiquitous of devices in this part of the world: the cell phone. Queen's faculty member, Dr. Jane Chin, graduate students, and teacher candidates from the Educators Abroad focus course at the Queen's Faculty of Education were instrumental in developing the initial framework and content modules for the professional learning platform.

1MT empowers teachers to enhance learning outcomes for students through the various reward-based levels of the learning platform. 1MT's approach is threefold: attracting new teachers to the teaching profession; providing training to untrained teachers who are active in the classroom but unable to access formal training due to financial or geographic barriers or other constraints; providing ongoing professional development thus encouraging continuous, lifelong learning, and development. The teachers also gain access to learning communities that allow them to connect with other teachers across the world to share knowledge and experiences.

As part of the Queen's Faculty of Education's ongoing commitment to social impact projects, and to address the UN Sustainable Development Goal # 4: Quality Education for All, a formal partnership with 1 Million Teachers and co-founder Hakeem Subair was solidified in 2018. Having left Nigeria in search of a way to improve education for children in Nigeria and throughout sub-Saharan Africa, Hakeem is a passionate and tireless advocate for quality teacher education as the most efficient way to improve the learning experience for children. "The impact of a truly empowered teacher goes far beyond what can be measured with numbers," says Subair. "As role models and community leaders, they have the power to create change that lasts for generations. Obtaining a quality education is the foundation for sustainable development. Yet without urgent action, by 2030 fewer children in sub-Saharan Africa will have access to a teacher than today." The emphasis on sustainability through supporting the growth and development of local educational leaders is what initially attracted the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Dr. Rebecca Luce-Kapler, to the partnership.

1MT currently supports about 30,000 educators from across Nigeria and 18 other African countries and to date has produced 2,500 high-capacity teachers. These high-capacity teachers have reached the final level of learning within

the platform which is the "blackbelt level." The blackbelt teachers are a key component of the mission. They are mentored by education experts from across the globe including here at Queen's to produce more capable teachers like themselves, creating a constantly growing circle of homegrown community-based educational leaders and changemakers.

I came in contact with 1MT on Facebook in 2017. Ever since then, I have become a life-long learner, always aspiring to be a better version of myself and to mentor and motivate other teachers to be positive agents of change. It broadened my knowledge and further strengthened my connection with my students which also impacted the teaching learning process and learning outcomes.

**MRS. ABIBAT MORENIKE BABATUNDE**

One of the best things that happened to me and my career this year is going through the 1 Million Teachers' training program. It was indeed an impactful and life changing experience for me being recognized and celebrated as one of the Blackbelt holders of the 1 Million Teachers organization. Now I have become a rebranded version of myself and I can tackle any problem in education. So grateful for the opportunity to learn, unlearn and relearn to be a professional.

**ABIGAIL EKOT**

1MT has impacted my life in multiple ways: mentally, emotionally, academically, and financially. It has really changed my orientation about myself and my profession. I do not see myself as someone inferior and in a shabby profession anymore. Rather, I now see myself as someone with the noblest job in the world. 1MT has made me know how to relate positively with my students, fellow teachers and school leaders. Through the course Trauma Goes To School, I've been able to apply this knowledge as I relate daily with my students. It has enhanced my knowledge spectrum, boosted my confidence and built my character. To this effect, I was nominated and eventually won a National Education Award as the Most Outstanding Lecturer of the year 2021 courtesy of Southwest Nigeria Excellence Awards (SNEAWARDS).

**ISHMAEL**

In five short years, 1 Million Teachers and Queen's Faculty of Education have accomplished an extensive amount. Dr Jane Chin and Hakeem Subair have taken teacher candidates from Queen's on annual alternative practicum trips to Ghana, Ivory Coast, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Kenya. This year's trip is destined for South Africa. Teacher candidates spend time in classrooms in underserved schools and learn from their African colleagues about the challenges in teaching and learning that they experience, as well as the best practices these teachers have to share. They go to learn, and teacher candidates return with new insights about teaching and learning as well as about the global challenges facing education.

My alternative practicum teaching in Kenya through One Million Teachers was nothing short of an exceptional experience. This trip opened my eyes to understanding diverse teaching practices in international contexts and allowed our group to make lifelong connections amongst each other as well as with those who we met along the way.

**BROOKE PARKER**

Truly a one-of-a-kind experience. Excellent enrichment for professional practice, a sense of adventure, and the heart!

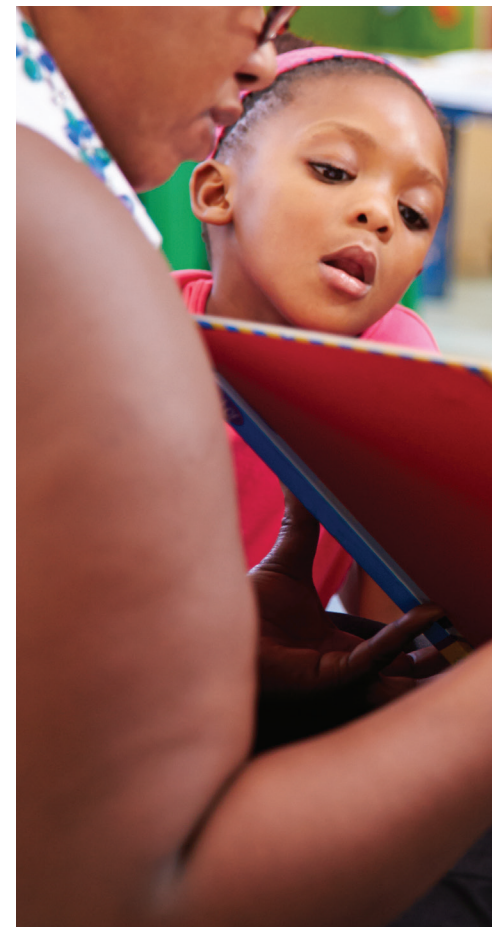
**HUNTER GOSSE**

In addition to contributing content for educators to become blackbelt teachers, Queen's is also supporting and mentoring educational leaders like Halima Wali, a female educator from Nigeria who works tirelessly to support and enhance girls' education in Nigeria. Halima describes her fully funded PhD research in the following way:

According to UNICEF, Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world. Most of these children are from Northern Nigeria and are girls. Girls in Northern Nigeria face a multitude of barriers which prevent them from accessing education. My research focuses on the key concepts of identity, power, and gender within the context of girls' education in Northern Nigeria. The goal of my research is to explore, in the lived experiences, the structures and centres of oppression for girls in Northern Nigeria, to identify any historical and structural systems of social domination, and to propose ways in which these could be addressed in order to effect positive

social change for girls in education in Northern Nigeria. My vision is for girls in Northern Nigeria to have unhindered access to education, receive the support they need to stay in school and explore their full potential, grow into women who become role models for the girls coming after them, thus creating a self-sustaining cycle of educated and empowered girls and women who make a difference in their communities, country, and the world.

In 2020, 1MT became an implementing partner in the Global Partnership for Education\UNICEF Continuing Education Through Alternate Home and Community-based Platform's initiative, where it trained 4,058 teachers as well as 185,000 students through 561 community-based learning hubs in Sokoto, Zamfara, and



Kebbi State in Nigeria. In 2021, 1MT began a collaboration with Girl Rising, and Hewlett-Packard – aimed at bringing inclusive content and curriculum to classrooms and educators in Nigeria and beyond.

Most recently, Queen’s has been on the board of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals’ challenge, put on by His Royal Highness Muhammadu Sanusi II, Emir of Kano (Nigeria), in which innovative educators from across sub-Saharan Africa are chosen and mentored to share their best practices with others to develop more out of school learning opportunities within local communities.

Finally, in September of 2022, Queen’s was part of the 1MT contingent at the UN global summit on education in New

York. In addition to presenting our own results from the Sustainable Development Goal challenge, we formed a new partnership with UNESCO and other groups to continue our work in supporting locally-grown, sustainable quality education for all – beginning with teachers. As a result, the Vice-President of Nigeria visited Queen’s campus in November of

2022 to acknowledge our commitment to UN Sustainable Development Goal #4: Quality Education for All and to give a public lecture on sustainability. We look forward to continued conversations with government officials across sub-Saharan Africa as we continue our commitment to measurable, sustainable development of quality education throughout the region.

According to UNICEF, Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world. Most of these children are from Northern Nigeria and are girls.





## Reading is a Human Right: Bring the “science of reading” to Ontario’s students

By Dr Lindsay Heggie and Kim Lockhart (MEd, OCT)

**“I DON’T BELIEVE YOU. I CAN’T READ. ALL my teachers have tried and I can’t do it. I’ll never learn to read.”** - D—, 9 years old

As soon as we met, D— told me he hated reading. Midway through Grade 3, his literacy skills were still in the Kindergarten range: he was working on phonemic awareness and letter-sound correspondences, and he had a poor vocabulary. Despite his protests, I assured him that he could learn to read – in fact, this was the year he would learn to read.

It was hard to get him to work with me at first. He loved cars and trucks, so I set up an incentive program for him: if he came to the resource room and tried his best, he would get a sticker. Once he had ten stickers, he could trade them in for a toy car. After two weeks, D— had a car and was able to identify all his vowel sounds and six new consonants. After four months of systematic, explicit instruction, D— was reading words independently and building simple decodable sentences. Best of all, his confidence soared! He was no longer saying can’t: instead he said, “this is hard, but I can do it.”

For literate adults, many of whom learned to read without much effort, it may be hard to remember a time when

they could not read, let alone the steps they took to learn. Reading is a skill so ingrained, so automatic, that as adults we process text instantaneously, seemingly without effort – and we may “take for granted the complex cognitive abilities... required to read effortlessly” (Norton & Wolf, 2012, p.428).

Reading is a vital skill, but its acquisition is not a simple or natural process. Humans are born wired for language: to learn, all we need is to be exposed to language (e.g., Chomsky, 1965; Pesetsky, 1999). But reading and writing are “optional accessor[ies] that must be painstakingly bolted on” to our brains (Pinker, 1997, p. ix) – and even then, it doesn’t always come easily. According to the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and



Development's (OECD) Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC, 2015), 16.4% of adults in Canada have low literacy, the long-term consequences of which are socially and personally devastating (Geary, 2013). From difficulties understanding everyday information (e.g., nutritional, financial, medical) to lower employment rate and

readers, early difficulties learning to read are likely to result in a reading disability diagnosis (Gallagher, Frith, & Snowling, 2000; O'Connor & Jenkins, 1999) and challenges in other areas, like vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Stanovich, 1986; Torgesen, 2002). This is not because their teachers do not care about them or try to help them – although these students have been encouraged to love reading, they may not have been taught explicitly and systematically how to read.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) recently confirmed reading as a human right with the [Right To Read report](#) (2022), a public inquiry into the issues that affect students with disabilities in the province's school system. The *Right to Read* report came at a critical time for Canadian students, not the least of which is the context of instructional loss due to the covid-19 pandemic, especially in vulnerable communities (Goldhaber et al., 2022; Haeck & Larose, 2022; Whitley, Beauchamp, & Brown, 2022). In recent years, a critical mass has been building: thanks to [the in-depth and widely circulated reporting of Emily Hanford](#), high-profile articles like Inside the ['Massive Effort to Change the Way Kids Are Taught](#)

According to UNICEF, Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world. Most of these children are from Northern Nigeria and are girls.

quality to one's health and wellbeing, the (in)ability to read affects our quality of life in innumerable ways.

For many children like D—, early struggles with fundamental literacy skills (e.g., knowledge of letters and sounds) don't improve on their own – instead, they tend to snowball. Counter to the prevailing wisdom that some children “just need more time” to become

[to Read](#) that identify learning to read as a social justice issue (*Time Magazine*, August 2022), and the tireless advocacy work of countless individuals, the evidence base on reading development is finally making its way into Canadian school boards thanks to the *Right To Read* and the “Science of Reading” movement.

The most frustrating part of this inequity is the gap between research and

Lindsay Heggie earned her PhD (Education, Cognitive Studies) in 2017 and has an extensive background in reading research spanning over 15 years, from her time as a Knowledge Officer with the Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network (CLLR-Net) to her doctoral work on word reading and the component skills that help children learn to be successful readers. Lindsay is an Academic Skills and Writing Specialist; she mentors and supports post-secondary students' academic skill and strategy development, focusing on a range of topics including self-regulation and reading comprehension.

Kim Lockhart is a French immersion, reading support teacher, and a strong advocate for students with learning exceptionalities in second language programs across Ontario. She earned her Master of Education from Queen's University in 2015 and regularly offers workshops and webinars for parents and caregivers of children with reading difficulties and dyslexia, to help them be stronger, more knowledgeable advocates for their children's rights and educational needs.

practice; the solution has, for too long, been just beyond children's and teachers' reach. Researchers working over the past several decades have uncovered the essential skills that children need to know and be able to do in order to be good readers in an alphabetic language (e.g., NRP, 2000); based on this accumulated knowledge, we should be able to successfully teach 95% of children to read (e.g., Gersten et al., 2008; Moats, 2020). In reality, about 30% of students in Western, industrialized nations experience reading failure (Snow, 2021; Hempenstall, 2013). Gaps between research and

practice are thorny, complex challenges, and they perpetuate societal inequalities. "[R]eading achievement is not as strong as it should be for most students, and the consequences are particularly dire for students from the least advantaged families and communities" (Moats, 2020, pg. 4).

A change in the way we teach reading would have an immediate impact in terms of academic achievement and for equity, social justice, public health, and human rights for all, particularly for those students who are likely to experience reading failure. We cannot allow any

children to be left behind, especially not when it is possible to know better and do better. Like the authors of the *Right to Read* report, we believe strongly that reading is a human right for all children – the world-opening opportunities that come with the ability to read can and should be for everyone. All students should have an equal opportunity, and instruction based on the "Science of Reading" will afford it.

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# The Reading Wars, Reading Science, and the Right to Read

By Dr. John R. Kirby

Dr. John Kirby has a PhD in Educational Psychology from the University of Alberta. He taught in Australia for eleven years in the Faculty of Education at the University of Newcastle. In 1987 he returned to Canada to Queen's University where he was Professor of Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Education. He was named Professor Emeritus in 2014.

**THE TEACHING OF READING HAS BEEN** controversial in the English-speaking world for hundreds of years, partly because English has roots in both Romance and Germanic languages, and partly because its writing system (orthography), in contrast to most other European alphabetic orthographies, has a less-than-consistent relationship between its letters and sounds. Whereas children in those other European systems, ranging from Greek to Finnish and Spanish to German, are taught phonics in grade 1 and are generally able to read most words in a few short months, English-speaking children receive a mixture of instructional approaches and usually take several years to catch up to their peers in other languages. As many as 25% of children in English-speaking countries struggle to learn to read effectively – many of these eventually achieve some degree of success, but do not find reading enjoyable. Regardless of language/writing system, 2-5% of children have extraordinary difficulty learning to

read, and their difficulties usually extend into adulthood – these are the children for whom the term dyslexia is appropriate. The *Right to Read* report has brought many of these issues to the fore.

Since at least the 1600s, there has been debate between those favouring phonics instruction (in which the sounds associated with individual letters are taught, with a focus on sounding out words) and those favouring whole-word reading instruction (in which individual words are learned as single units). In the 1960s, a new competitor joined the battle, an approach termed “whole language”, which saw reading as a natural development (like spoken language) and which focused almost exclusively on encouraging children to make meaning from text. This three-way fight has lasted decades and became known as the Reading Wars.

While the Wars were underway, reading science developed. This field draws on research in Education, Psychology, and Neuroscience to investigate the factors that lead to successful (or unsuccessful) reading, the effects of different methods of instruction, and what is (or is not) going on in the brain during reading. The evidence gathered in reading science has great relevance to the Reading Wars debates.

Reading comprehension and learning from text are the goals of reading, but they depend critically upon accurate and efficient word reading. Reading is seen as occurring in two distinct, but complex and interacting systems, with the reading comprehension system dependent on the word reading system.

Reading development is fostered by



factors in the home: children benefit from having access to appealing books, having books read to them, and, especially in English, being introduced to the alphabetic code that underlies reading. A variety of mental skills also contribute: phonological awareness, rapid naming, orthographic knowledge, vocabulary, and morphological awareness. Of these, the *Right to Read* report focuses on phonological awareness, because of the overwhelming evidence that (a) being aware of the sounds inside words and being able to manipulate them are necessary for learning to read, and (b) one of the key characteristics of dyslexia is poor phonological awareness. But the others are important too, especially for fluent reading. Morphological awareness is the most recent addition to the list (and my own area of study). Morphemes are the smallest units of meaning in words; for instance, *cat* consists of one morpheme, *cats* of two (*cat* + *s*). The word *education* has four morphemes: *e* + *duce* + *ate* + *ion*. Morphology helps children see meaning in words, pronounce words, and remember their written form.

This word reading system provides input to the comprehension system. During comprehension, whether oral or written, idea units are formed, assessed as main ideas or details, and formed into structures called mental models. Much of this happens automatically, while mental effort is devoted to drawing inferences, combining information with prior knowledge, and determining implications. If mental effort is devoted instead to word reading, it cannot be used for these important processes. Comprehension depends upon knowledge of word meanings and grammar, the abilities to hold information while making sense of it and keep goals in mind while

processing other information, and prior knowledge. Students with adequate word reading but poor reading comprehension are termed 'poor comprehenders.' These students are distinct from those with word reading difficulties (dyslexia).

The *Right to Read* report is morally correct that all children should be exposed to high quality reading instruction, and scientifically correct that instruction should include phonics and phonological awareness systematically. The further requirement of extensive assessment is consistent with accountability. The *Right to Read* report also favours a tiered system in which children receive high quality teaching in their classrooms (Tier 1), after which some require specialized small-group instruction (Tier 2), and then those who continue to struggle receive more intensive one-on-one specialist instruction (Tier 3); this is currently seen as best practice. However this is not going to be easy or inexpensive. Most elementary teachers in Ontario come from a whole-language world, in which they learned to read fairly easily and their teacher education programs were usually run by professors who also grew up in the whole-language world (exceptions exist!). Considerable effort will be needed to provide teachers and teacher educators with the required skills and knowledge, and the motivation to change their practice. This will not be easy, but there are teachers in the education system who could help lead the way.

The *Right to Read* authors understand that it is only a beginning. There is much more to reading science than phonics and phonological awareness: if reading is to be effective and enjoyable, it must be fluent and lead to comprehension. Phonics will help with accuracy, but orthographic knowledge and morphology are necessary for processing larger units of text and developing automaticity in word reading; these need to be addressed from near the beginning of reading instruction, not later as the report implies. Some children (at least the 2% and perhaps the 25%) require far more intensive and extensive reading

instruction than is possible in regular classrooms; reading specialists will be needed, some working with only a few children a day.

There are areas in the *Right to Read* report that are problematic. For instance, it does not address reading comprehension and comprehension difficulties. Vocabulary knowledge and the difficulties faced by children from non-English-speaking homes are largely ignored. *Right to Read* intends that assessment and diagnosis be done primarily by classroom teachers, who do not have the skills, training, or time.

The *Right to Read* report is an excellent beginning, but only a beginning.

**Further reading:** I was not able to include a full set of references in this short paper, but the following are starting points if you want to see the evidence or read further:

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