



PLAYING WITH LITERACY

Literacy outside the box



When it comes to literacy at R. S. McLaughlin Collegiate and Vocational Institute (MCVI) we're thinking outside the box this year. Sure, we're still running after school literacy programs and conducting practice OSSLT tests with our current Grade 10 students, but we're also branching out, testing some new approaches and keeping our fingers crossed that we'll see marked improvements in the results of our at-risk students. And what better way to connect with students than through their personal interests?

One unique literacy building activity is the publication of a 'zine, *The Sk8Board of Education*, again an initiative designed to give those students who would not normally have a voice, an opportunity to be heard. This group, which dubs itself an 'Urban Art Club,' meets every Tuesday after school to do stenciling, graffiti art, skateboard building, knitting, yarn bombing, tie-dying, silk screening and t-shirt making.

But they also write. They write poetry, they write songs, they

write reviews, they rant ... simply put, the 'zine is a way for these students to share their ideas and their feelings. Maybe they're more interested in building skateboards. But I'd be willing to bet that having their interests validated here at school is helping them build a lot more than just a plank on wheels.

Then we took one professional singer-songwriter, 50 eager and creative students, three acoustic guitars, one stand up bass and an autoharp and what did we get? An awesome grassroots literacy initiative, of course! With that in mind, a few members of the Literacy Committee joined forces with art teacher Theresa Wyatt (who also wears a "Student Success" hat), and the resulting initiative has been nothing short of inspiring.

Theresa invited Toronto-based musician, Peter Katz, to MCVI to visit her Student Alliance of Singer-Songwriters (SASS) group. Also invited to attend were a handful of senior students who agreed to become literacy mentors to junior students in the school. This group of 50 students were equipped with