

The IM – PRESS Project – Katharine Childs

The **IM_PRESS Project** is a student-centered literacy initiative that uses passion as a springboard to learning by giving students the opportunity to become authors and illustrators of their own books.

The project began in the 2004-2005 academic year when two students decided that they wanted to become authors of books that they felt would be interesting and attractive to younger students. They believed they enjoyed reading so much as adolescents because they had had wonderful books read to them when they were younger, books that were colorful and easy to read – and that because of this, they had begun to love reading in general. They figured that if they could write books that children would enjoy, then perhaps they could get children involved in reading and help them to love it, too. Since then, over 17 books have been published by this project. More are planned.

This project blends personal growth and a sense of community with entrepreneurial skills. Perhaps the most original and innovative aspect of this project is that it operates on the assumption that *believing that students CAN become authors actually makes it so*: students can and do become authors – and do so beautifully. From this initial success, students begin to look at themselves differently. This newly-discovered belief in themselves carries over into other areas: school, family, and community. It calls into play a number of personal and entrepreneurial skills – chief among them a sense of responsibility for, and pride in, their work and the beginnings of a vision for their future.

Project participants give back to the community by donating their books to local CLSCs, hospitals, schools, and libraries, and by giving public readings and writing workshops.

The **IM_PRESS Project** also believes in giving others a chance to grow. A portion of its profits goes into a scholarship fund. As long as the project exists, a scholarship of at least \$150.00 will be awarded annually to an adult education student to enable that student to continue his or her education or training.

The **IM_PRESS Project** originated in the Cowansville Academy for Lifelong Learning, a rural alternative school – an adult education center which specializes in helping marginalized and disaffected students experience and achieve individualized academic and personal success. We are part of the Eastern Townships School Board and proud partners with the *Quebec Association for Adult Learning (QAAL)*, and the *Townships Association*, among others.

For more information on the project or outreach services (public reading or mentored writing workshops), please contact Katharine Childs, Educational Consultant, McGill University.