

POLITICS AS USUAL

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

As it is the first week of school for students from kindergarten to university, the newspapers are full of education related stories, of course.

Classroom size, funding for special events, accommodations for students with allergies, how to prepare your little one for full day kindergarten, etc. Nothing too exciting, if you'll pardon me. Just usual stuff that's printed pretty much every fall.

But one article did pique my interest, in the Globe this past weekend, that spoke to an emerging idea in education circles ? moving away from award ceremonies. Apparently there are a number of schools experimenting with the idea of doing away entirely with the annual rite of passage where student achievement ? academic, athletic and artistic ? is recognized.

It is felt that in recognizing the achievement of some students at the expense of others creates unnecessary competition amongst students and a sense of failure or diminishment in those that do not get an award.

My immediate kneejerk reaction when reading the story was that this was idiotic. For heaven's sake, not recognizing those that have achieved in areas of societally recognized areas of importance ? academics, athletics, art, music ? does not in any way act as a salve for those that don't ?achieve? in those areas. Pretending that those things don't matter does not help students.

Yes, I believe that every child is special in his or her own way. And I firmly believe that part of the educational process is to assist every child in realizing their own unique potential; to build their self-confidence and self-belief so that they can achieve in the best way possible for them.

However, that does not belie the reality that everyone is not equal, not in the sense that we're talking about. Rightly or wrongly, some people are better at some things. Or, more accurately, some people are better at some things that currently matter in terms of employment or prominence. The students with A grades get into law school. The students with Cs do not. The candidates with good resumes get the job. The ones who don't do not. The athletes that are fast win the race. The athletes that are not do not. To assert otherwise is frankly counterproductive.

Would we watch a tennis match if no one kept score? I don't think so.

However, all that being said, I also just finished watching the documentary, ?Icarus? on Netflix. It is an in-depth expose of the Russian doping scandal leading up to the Rio Olympics. If you haven't had a chance to watch it, I would encourage you to do so. It is absolutely riveting ? and infuriating.

But why I raise it in this context is that it also poses as a cautionary tale about the dangers of our obsession with winning, of being the best ? of awards. Hundreds of athletes risked their health ? and their integrity ? in pursuit of being the best. Countless political leaders, coaches, etc., sold their souls to grab the gold. And why? Because society rewards winners with money, with prestige, with fame. That is our current reality.

So, in that reality I can see why there is a desire to combat that obsession. To nip the unhealthy striving for gold at all costs in the bud and reorient it towards being one's personal best. Is doing away with awards entirely the answer? I don't think so. But, at the same time, I am not sure what the answer would be.