



makes you think

Lisa de Wilde
Chief Executive Officer, TVO

Notes for the

Ontario Teachers' Federation
64th Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors

Tuesday August 19, 2008

(Check against delivery)

“Engaging and inspiring the people of Ontario – including our youngest citizens – is what I hope we do well.” - Lisa de Wilde, TVO Chief Executive Officer



I am pleased to be here this morning to share with you the story of how we are

transforming TVO and, more specifically, how these changes are helping better prepare Ontario’s kids to be successful in the classroom, and in life.

Creating more impact

Over the last two years, [TVO](#) has made a strategic shift, from pure TV station to multi-platform educational media organization. We're investing in innovation and risk-taking in order to create greater impact, and provide a smart alternative to mainstream broadcasters.

And what kind of impact is it we’re trying to create? Just this: as the button says, “TVO Makes You Think”. In a cluttered, commercially-driven media universe, that’s our unique promise to the people of Ontario.

Our mandate is to help Ontarians of all ages become more engaged around the issues that really matter to our communities and our Province.

One such issue that is certainly being discussed right now is: what can parents do to prepare their early learners – and themselves – for the brand new world of kindergarten.

For TVO, this is an opportunity to build on two of our greatest strengths: first, creating programs that make kids think in a way that's fun, relevant and interactive. And second, making parents think by equipping them to play an active role in their kids' education.

As many of you know, TVO has long been recognized for its educational programs for young kids. Over 70% of our programming day is devoted to children’s content. We help boost kid's abilities with learning opportunities that are safe, commercial-free, uninterrupted and most important, trusted.

What you may not know is that everything we produce for kids is developed with educators, and starts with an educational objective. We challenge kids to work harder when they watch *TVOKids* or play on TVOKids.com. And they deliver.

Get Ready For School

Right now as I speak, [Gisèle's Big Backyard](#) is focusing on getting kids ready for kindergarten. The centerpiece of what we're calling our [Get Ready for School](#) programming package is an original 6-episode series. It features Sticks, a squirrel who lives in *Gisèle's Big Backyard*, and his younger friend Jay, the blue jay.



Sticks has a lot of questions about beginning kindergarten. He's concerned

about things like, How will I make friends? What if I have a question? What happens when I get hungry?

Meanwhile, his friend Jay is jealous that Sticks is going to school without her - something parents with both school-age and pre-school age children will certainly identify with.

To break down these common fears of children and parents alike, we show them actual schools. We share the perspectives of other preschoolers on the transition ahead. And we introduce some of the adults that kids will encounter in school: teachers, the principal, and even the custodian.

This unique programming is fully supported by extensive resources on two of our web sites: TVOKids.com and TVOParents.com.

One of my own favourites is the [Get Ready for School](#) game, where a welcoming virtual kindergarten classroom environment is waiting to be explored. I urge you to check it out at

TVOKids.com. It's very informative – and a lot of fun.

Parents can also tap into their own [special section](#) of our TVOParents.com web site. Our early-learning experts, including noted curriculum advisor Moya Fewson of the Sheridan High/Scope program, have teamed up with TVO's own in-house educator to create tip sheets, articles and videos. With these resources, families will make the transition to school life better informed, and better prepared.

As I mentioned earlier, another of our unique strengths is engaging parents in their child's education. Parents are a crucial link in a child's early development. That's why we launched [TVOParents.com](#). This online community for parents with young children entering or already in the school system serves two valuable functions:

The first is to create a forum where parents can learn about TVO's educational web games and activities for children. Our strategy is to use our

media toolkit to surround the school and support and reinforce the learning that takes place in the classroom.



Secondly, *TVOParents* responds to something we learned directly from parents. In focus groups, they told us there were few resources online that addressed the needs of parents with 4, 5 and 6 year olds – especially in terms of the transition from an early learning phase to a school age phase.

Parents told us this is what they wanted, and this is what we deliver: expert advice, discussions and practical resources for those with young, school-age kids.

TVOParents.com is also host to the world's only live, interactive program for parents who want to help their kids succeed in school and in life. It's called [Your Voice](#), and its webcast on TVOParents.com live every Tuesday, with a new 9pm start time beginning this fall. And if you miss the program,

there is an “on-demand” archive of past episodes.



This month TVOParents.com is launching a new feature, called [The School and You](#). It brings together some of the TVOKids school readiness videos I mentioned earlier, plus useful advice on things like Tackling the First Month Back in school, and Parent-Teacher Interview Tips.

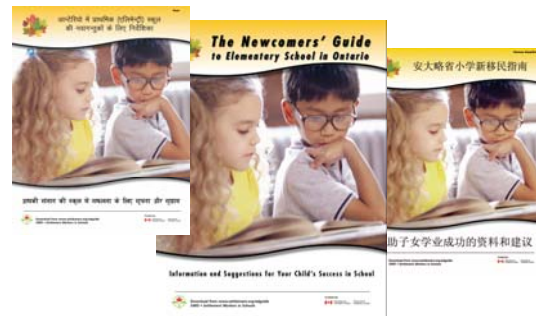
Please check it out, and let me know what you think.

Some of these resources are offered in multiple-languages, including our much-downloaded [Newcomers' Guide to Elementary School in Ontario](#). This recognizes that new Canadian parents need information and tools to not only

help their kids, but to help them learn about the Ontario school system.

In addition to creating these *Get Ready for School* programs and web resources, our TVOKids team has been busy all summer with another project.

Embracing our commercial-free, distinctively educational character, we are making sure our viewers – not just the kids, but their parents and caregivers too – understand exactly what the educational outcome of each program or activity is. So before each show begins, we will state the educational objective right up front: for example, “*Up Next, learn math with Numberjacks.*”



And the breaks that surround each program will support the same educational objective. For example, you

will frequently see a *Lotta Numbers* episode directly following the math series *Numberjacks*.

Consulting the experts

We are continually looking for new curriculum advisors and content partners to strengthen our early-learning knowledge base. To existing relationships with organizations like the Art Gallery of Ontario and Let's Talk Science-Wings of Discovery, we've created a Big Backyard Book Council. This council, made up of school and community librarians, as well as children's book store owners, will be recommending age-appropriate books for *Gisèle's Big Backyard* [Book Club](#).

Also, Dr. Margaret Sinclair, an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at York University, will be advising us on early childhood math and science understanding.

And from the Oakville Academy for the Arts are Kim Speer, dramatist and Director of Kinderschool Programs, and Shannon Remes, Visual Artist and Head

Preschool teacher. Kim and Shannon will be joining us as consultants for our children's Arts programming.

This is in addition to the quarterly meetings we have with our TVOKids Council, a special eight-member advisory group of teachers, parents and community partners.



You'll notice as the year progresses that *Gisèle's Big Backyard* will be introducing an educational concept called scaffolding. What this means is that over a week we will program segments so that each one builds on an educational objective.

For example, a child can learn what the number two means on Monday, how to count to two on Tuesday, how to write to two on Wednesday, and so on. Each day will build on the knowledge of the day before, but does not necessarily rely on it to be understood.

In addition, there will be lots of [new programs and returning favourites](#), covering all areas of the Ontario Kindergarten Curriculum.



I've focused on early-years education this morning, but at TVO, the learning doesn't stop at kindergarten. For kids age 6-9, TVO is the only place on TV that

comes to them live and interactive every afternoon in [The Space](#).

The Space makes learning cool outside the classroom. But as we like to say, they're having so much fun they don't even realize they're learning!



Moving back online, TVOKids.com now has over 160 curriculum-based [online games](#) and activities. Each month, we get more than 300,000 unique visitors and 4 million page views.

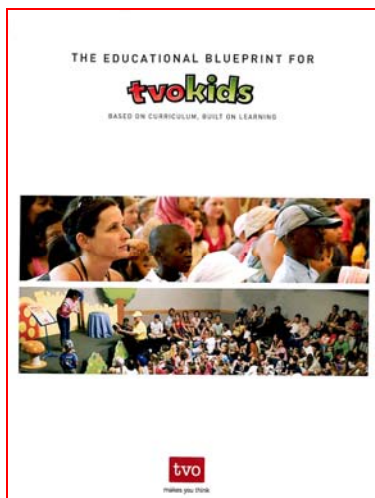
And not long ago, TVOKids.com was added to the American Library Association's Great Web Sites for Kids – and is nominated for a Canadian New Media Award.

As CEO of TVO, I'm proud of all these accomplishments. Engaging and inspiring the people of Ontario – including our youngest citizens – is what I hope we do well.

Gauging our effectiveness

People sometimes ask me how we gauge the impact and effectiveness of our content. We begin by testing, right in Ontario classrooms, all of our children's content that features new curriculum learning objectives.

By the way, focus-testing in real classrooms is just one example of how educators play an active role in the creation of our children's media. To see how each stage of production is informed by the input of curriculum experts, I invite you to read through this booklet, *The Educational Blueprint for TVOKids*. I hope you'll discover a thing or two about TVO's educational promise to its youngest viewers.



"Frankly, I was blown away by the commitment of TVO to the development of young children and the support of their parents."

- Dr. Charles Pascal, Special Advisor to the Premier on Full Day Early Learning

But don't take my word for it. I just received this email from Charles Pascal, the Premier's advisor on early learning: "Lisa, thanks again for your superb briefing. Frankly, I was blown away by the commitment of TVO to the development of young children and the support of their parents. The variety of activities and TVO's commitment to diversity is remarkable. I have bookmarked TVOParents.com!"

Something that blew me away when I first became CEO was the extraordinary value that TVO offers the province. TVO costs each person in Ontario \$3.00 a year from our taxes. That's less than the cost of renting a DVD. I believe that's good value!

We have never had a big budget. But in its place we use creativity and innovation - AND our unique

commitment to you: TVO makes you think.

I'd like to leave you with a sneak preview of a week-long feature on TVO called [Growing Minds](#). It will be kicking off our new fall season.

Growing Minds is based around this question: How far will parents and society go for our children's education?

With this provocative theme, a full week of primetime documentaries, dramas and current affairs programming will explore the most important time in anyone's development – their school years. It's content that will, I'm sure, make you think.



Growing Minds runs from Sunday, September 14 to Saturday, September 20 – only on TVO.

Whenever and wherever I meet with TVO viewers, invariably someone will ask me: What can I do to support public

educational media in Ontario. How can I help spread the word about the unique citizen engagement role you play in the province? And my answer is: you can do a lot. And it's easy.

You can take a new look at our content. You can sign up for the [TVOParents e-newsletter](#), or suggest it to a colleague. You can make a [donation](#) at [tvo.org](#). You can tell your friends about the new TVO, and ask them to tell theirs. Word of mouth is the oldest kind of network there is.

I hope I have made you think about the role of educational media in our lives, and the importance of TVO in fulfilling that role, especially as it relates to young learners and their parents. And I also hope you'll join me in making more people think about TVO.

Thank you.