

April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Ms. Evelyn Novak  
Board of Education - School District #33  
8430 Cessna Drive Chilliwack, British B.C. V2P 7K4

Dear Ms. Novak,

It has come to my attention and concern that your local schoolboard has rejected some reading material provided by the Centre for Inquiry Canada (CFI), a non-profit organization. It is my understanding that CFI wishes to distribute free copies of Professor Richard Dawkins book "The Magic of Reality" (TMOR). Furthermore, it is also my understanding that the donation was rejected on the basis that it does not meet the local Administrative Regulations. I admit that I do not know what the local Administrative Regulations are, but I am hoping that I might be of some assistance to speak on the content of TMOR as a professional biologist registered with the College of Applied Biology (CAB) in British Columbia (BC) and the Alberta Society of Professional Biologists.

My credentials include a Master's degree in (MSc) in Molecular Zoology from the University of Calgary and another Master's degree (MEd) in Multidisciplinary Leadership from the University of Northern British Columbia. Having read the TMOR material, having the experience as a professional biologist in this province, and having received a MEd degree in this province gives me a unique position of understanding and speaking on this issue at hand. As such, I wholly support CFI's initiative and recognize TMOR as a wonderfully accessible scientific resource for grade 5 students.

My career as a scientist has been profitable and rewarding in this province. I can attribute a large part of my career development to reading, learning, and becoming inspired by reading many of the scientific books authored by Professor Richard Dawkins. TMOR is a wonderfully suited piece of learning material for inquisitive youth who might be interested in learning about the philosophy of science and the reality around us. There may be an inconsistent standard through your local board that the CFI has raised regarding your approval for the free circulation of Gideon bibles to local schools, yet you have rejected TMOR on grounds that it is not consistent with your Administrative Regulations. Perhaps you have misunderstood the content of TMOR and might have felt it was un-scientific, which is why I have prepared this letter. It is books like TMOR that lead to careers like the one that I have enjoyed.

The National Center for Science Education and the National Academy of Sciences hold official positions that are wholly consistent with the scientific philosophy presented in TMOR that methodological naturalism is consistent with the scientific approach, whereas "...supernatural intervention is not subjectable to meaningful tests, which require predicting plausible results and then checking these results through observation and experimentation" (National Academy of Sciences, 1999)<sup>1</sup>. This is a key point made in TMOR as Professor Dawkins aptly distinguishes between magic, reality, natural phenomena, and the supernatural as it applies to scientific understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> National Academy of Sciences. 1999. Science and Creationism: A View from the National Academy of Sciences, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Washington, DC: NAS Press).

The material within TMOR is not only age appropriate, but the work is sure to inspire young inquisitive minds to explore the magic of reality. This issue caught my attention as a professional working in this province, because I know that science education is important. Age accessible reading material on science and scientific philosophy is in short supply. I would hope that the Chilliwack board of education would be grateful that CFI would care enough to provide this type of material to grade 5 students in your district. This is a wonderful opportunity. I felt it important as a professional biologist to express my explicit support for this initiative as TMOR contains wonderfully instructive material that is wholly consistent with the scientific standards that are used daily in my chosen profession.

Perhaps you were not fully aware that TMOR is an age appropriate scientific resource? This book contains a wealth of information that is consistent with the provincial learning standards on science. The applicable provincial Integrated Resource Package (IRP) for grade 5<sup>2</sup> science states:

*“Reconciling scientific discoveries (for example, in genetic engineering) and religious faith poses a particular challenge for some students. While respecting the personal beliefs of students, teachers should be careful to distinguish between knowledge based on the application of scientific methods, and religious teachings and associated beliefs such as creationism, theory of divine creation, or intelligent design theory.”*

Professor Dawkins’ TMOR book is precisely the kind of accessible material that can be used by teachers, students, or even parents of students to address the matter outlined in the preceding quote. Moreover, TMOR is an accessible scientific piece for youth including reference material covered in grade 5 classrooms, but uses different examples of the learning outcomes that pertain to our solar system, genetics, animals, earthquakes, rainbows, electronics, and other examples that are weaved into a captivating narrative. The TMOR book provides, but is not limited to, information on prediction from models, organizing data as it is used in scientific research, and specific examples of scientists combining information on observations to draw rationally based conclusions. These are precisely the sorts of expectations that are listed in the grade 5 IRPs assessment tools.

In my role as Senior Ecologist at a consulting firm I am regularly confronted with the need for critical thinking. It is my hope that my expertise might be of assistance on this matter. It is imperative that Canada’s youth have access to this kind of learning material so that they can understand how science works. This kind of material is invaluable for advancing knowledge on science that is important for career development for burgeoning young scientists in this province.

Sincerely,



Mark D. Thompson  
M.Sc., M.Ed., R.P.Bio., P.Bio.



Cc: Mr. Adriaans, National Executive Director of CFI

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/pdfs/sciences/2005scik7\\_5.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/pdfs/sciences/2005scik7_5.pdf)