

## ***Learn*—From the Fraser Institute to distress and embarrassment**

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Get them young and frame their ideas about economics and the social choices that we make. That is the strategy of the Fraser Institute in offering workshops for students and teachers.

The spring issue of *Learn* magazine promotes these in an ad for free Fraser Institute workshops. Three workshops are aimed at Grade 10 to 12 students and one is directed to students in Grades 7 to 9. A couple of teacher workshops are thrown in as well.

The Fraser Institute promises secondary students answers to “Why do people behave the way they do?”, and offers teachers “Myths of the Canadian economy.” It is amusing that the folks whose credo is “there is no free lunch in the economy” promise a free lunch at the seminars.

*Learn*, where the Fraser Institute ad appeared, calls itself “The magazine of BC Education.” In fact, it is the magazine of the Teacher Regulation Branch (TRB) of the Ministry of Education. The magazine publishes a disclaimer that the Branch “does not necessarily endorse any product advertised in *Learn*.”

It should be noted, as well, that the BC Teachers’ Council does not have any responsibility for *anything* in *Learn*. The BC Teachers’ Council was created by legislation when the BC College of Teachers was abolished. Although the Council has elected as well as appointed members, their mandate is very narrow and does not include *Learn*.

Discipline and communications are now entirely the responsibility of the Ministry Teacher Regulation Branch. It is the Commissioner of the TRB, not the Teachers’ Council, who controls discipline and the communications from the TRB to educators, including *Learn*.

The lead article in the spring issue provides the Ministry perspective about what is important in the new math curriculum: “Dollars and sense: BC’s new math curriculum highlights financial literacy.”

The article says little about the framework of the new curriculum, beyond making “financial literacy topics more cohesive across the grades and across subjects.”

Besides the Fraser Institute, with its own version of financial literacy, advertisers in *Learn* fit a number of categories. Some are industry programs aimed at using teachers to get their industry message to students. In this issue, that includes the mining, insurance, dairy, and agriculture industries, and the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada.

Many ads are for university programs: Douglas College, UNBC, Kwantlen Polytechnic, SFU, Queen’s, UBC, and several for Vancouver Island University. No surprise here—they are all competing for further education for teachers with certificates. With no salary increases on the grid, the one sure way for teachers to increase income is to move up in certification. For hard-pressed universities, education courses produce an important revenue stream.

Another major category of ads is jobs, mostly overseas—from the Anglo-American School in Moscow to the “Exotic Middle Eastern Culture” of Qatar. Places for field trips are promoted—from Grouse Mountain to Barkerville.

The TRB is blunt that “Its mandate is to regulate teachers.” Regulation takes up much of *Learn*—10 pages of Discipline Case Decisions in the Spring issue, one going back to an incident in 1999.

A few of the reports of discipline are obviously appropriate—those that relate to sexual relationships with students or the failure to report these.

Most of the cases, though, are in entirely different categories.

Several cases involve teachers reporting that they are sick when the days are used for vacation or volunteering at the Olympics.

Many of the cases are characterized by phrases that the teacher “caused distress and embarrassment to the student,” “disrespectful comments,” “responding sarcastically to a student,” “sexist and derogatory comments,” “he lost patience with the students,” and “made an insensitive comment to the two students who were attempting to leave his classroom without permission.”

Two things about these cases. One is to wonder if any teacher in a long career has not at some time acted in a way that could lead to a charge of one of these offences.

The other key point is that most of these teachers had already been disciplined by their employer—some to repay funds, others with unpaid suspensions or letters of direction. Yes, they may have acted inappropriately, but the discipline they already faced punished them.

What could be the purpose of adding shaming in the magazine and on the TRB website, other than to create further “distress and embarrassment” to the teacher?

From the Fraser Institute to embarrassment—is this really what “the magazine of BC education” should be about?