

BC Teachers' Federation

Jan/Feb 2023

Teacher



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BCTF

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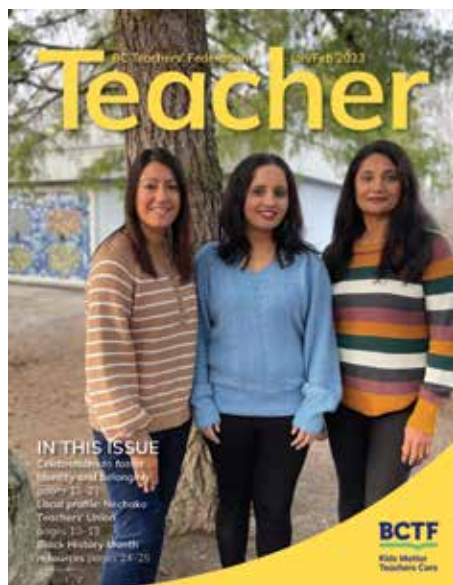
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THIS IS YOUR MAGAZINE



ON THE COVER

Harjit Chauhan, Sukhdeep Birdi, and Kawaldeep Ghuman (left to right) started a video project to bring Diwali and Ramadan celebrations into their school communities as a way to honour and welcome English language learners who celebrate these holidays at home. Read more about this project on pages 22–25.

SUBMISSIONS

Do you enjoy writing? Have a story to tell? Know of a project at your school or in your local you want to share with colleagues? Then consider writing for *Teacher*, the flagship publication of the BCTF! Submission guidelines are available at bctf.ca.

Live links are available in the digital version of *Teacher* magazine: bctf.ca

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irene.roland@gmail.com

CONTACT US

BC Teachers' Federation
Toll free 1-800-663-9163
Email teachermag@bctf.ca
Web bctf.ca
Editor Sunjum Jhaj, sjhaj@bctf.ca
Assistant Editor/Designer
Sarah Young, syoung@bctf.ca
Advertising
Delaney Steel, dsteel@bctf.ca
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Mahima Lamba	Kristin Singbeil
Robyn Ladher	

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We also welcome letters to the editor.
Send your letter to teachermag@bctf.ca.

Teacher reserves the right to edit or condense any contribution considered for publication. We are unable to publish all submissions we receive.

Deadlines

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A new year and a new collective agreement

I'd like to start by thanking you all for your participation in the bargaining process over the past several months. More than 35,000 members returned their ballots in the ratification vote. This member-led decision-making is key to the democratic nature of our union, and member engagement is what makes our union strong.

Now that ratification is successful, you can expect to see salary improvements, enhanced pregnancy/maternity benefits, better extended health benefits, and increases to professional development funding and preparation time. I encourage all of you to spend some time familiarizing yourself with your new collective agreement and engaging with your local to learn more about how the changes will affect you.

I am proud of the historic salary gains we've achieved through this round of bargaining. This will go a long way in helping BC teachers keep up with our teacher colleagues from across Canada. I am hopeful the salary improvements will help recruit and retain teachers; however, there is additional work that needs to be done in order to fix the worsening teacher shortage and the impact it is having on our working conditions.

When specialist teachers like counsellors and teacher-librarians are pulled from their work to provide classroom coverage because of a shortage of teachers teaching on call, students miss out on important supports and learning opportunities. Schools must be adequately staffed for students to receive the supports they need and to support the retention of teachers.

In the months ahead, the BCTF will continue to push for transparency from government on impacts of this shortage and for changes that meaningfully address its causes.

I hope the winter break provided an opportunity for rest and connection with family and friends. Thank you for all you do to support your students and colleagues.

In solidarity,

Clint Johnston
BCTF President

Clint Johnston
Sunjum Jhaji photo.

MESSAGE DU PRÉSIDENT

Une nouvelle année et une nouvelle convention collective

J'aimerais commencer par vous remercier tous et toutes pour votre participation au processus de négociation au cours des derniers mois. Plus de 35 000 membres ont retourné leur bulletin de vote lors du vote de ratification. Ce processus décisionnel dirigé par les membres est essentiel à la nature démocratique de notre syndicat, et l'engagement des membres est ce qui fait la force de notre syndicat.

Maintenant que la ratification est acceptée, vous pouvez vous attendre à voir des améliorations salariales, des prestations de grossesse/maternité améliorées, de meilleures prestations de santé complémentaires et une augmentation du financement lié au développement professionnel et au temps de préparation. J'encourage chacun.e d'entre vous à prendre le temps de vous familiariser avec votre nouvelle convention collective et à communiquer avec votre section locale pour en savoir davantage sur la façon dont les changements vous toucheront.

Je suis fier des gains salariaux historiques que nous avons obtenus au cours de cette ronde de négociations. Ces gains aideront grandement les enseignant.e.s de la Colombie-Britannique à se maintenir au même niveau que leurs collègues de partout au Canada. J'ai bon espoir que les améliorations salariales aideront à recruter et à retenir le personnel enseignant. Toutefois, il reste encore du travail à faire pour remédier à la pénurie d'enseignant.e.s qui s'aggrave et à ses répercussions sur nos conditions de travail.

Lorsque des enseignant.e.s spécialisé.e.s, comme les conseillers et conseillères ou les enseignant.e.s-bibliothécaires, sont retiré.e.s de leur travail pour assurer la couverture de la classe en raison d'une pénurie d'enseignant.e.s suppléant.e.s, les élèves sont privés d'un soutien important et de possibilités d'apprentissage. Les écoles doivent être dotées d'un personnel adéquat pour que les élèves reçoivent tout le soutien dont ils ont besoin et pour favoriser la rétention des enseignant.e.s.

Dans les mois à venir, la FECB continuera à faire pression pour que le gouvernement fasse preuve de transparence quant aux conséquences de cette pénurie et pour que des changements soient apportés afin de s'attaquer sérieusement à ses causes.

J'espère que les vacances d'hiver vous ont permis de vous reposer et de vous rapprocher de votre famille et de vos ami.e.s. Merci pour tout ce que vous faites pour soutenir vos élèves et vos collègues.

Solidairement,

Clint Johnston
Président de la FECB



Susan Croll
Karen Steel
photo.

Former editor funds educational opportunities for homeless folks

MANY BCTF MEMBERS AND STAFF fondly remember Susan Croll, teacher-librarian, local union leader, former editor of *Teacher*, and passionate believer in the power of education to change lives. Before she died in January 2020, Susan endowed a fund to provide homeless people with low-barrier, trauma-informed learning opportunities through the Lookout Housing and Health Society.

One of the many people benefiting from Susan's legacy is Clare, a feisty, articulate woman who was working on her MA at SFU when her life fell apart. She was struggling to support herself and her son while suffering severe abuse at the hands of her former brother-in-law. "The violence escalated to the point where it seemed like hitting the street was the best way to hide from him," she said.

Over the next seven years, homelessness multiplied the trauma from the abuse, and Clare was in a very vulnerable state. Luckily, she connected with Lookout Society workers, moved into supportive housing, and enrolled in the Lookout Ethical Employment Program. Thanks to a grant from Susan's fund, Clare could take driving lessons and get her license back. Now she works as a driver for the Lookout Food Hub, which distributes food to programs in the Downtown East Side, Surrey, and Port Coquitlam.

Susan's education fund has helped many other people improve their literacy and numeracy skills, life skills like budgeting and time management, or work skills such as Food Safe. One woman recently completed a course in forklift driving. An Indigenous man received funding for soapstone carving tools so he can get back to his cultural artwork. Another man received tuition toward a diploma in equine studies, with an eye to working at a racecourse or stable.

Susan's partner Jim Sinclair says the positive impact of her fund in the lives of marginalized people "really speaks volumes to who Susan was all her life."

To donate to the Susan Croll Education Fund, visit www.lookoutsociety.ca.



Q&A

An inside look at bargaining with BCTF Bargaining Team members

Interview with **Tammy McKinley**, Chilliwack; **Carla Wilson**, Nelson; and **Sarah York**, Port Alberni, BCTF Bargaining Team members

What made you want to be a part of the bargaining team?

Carla: My motivations were curiosity and the desire to make a difference for the membership. I have a lot of experience of how things work at the local level and wanted to have a deeper understanding of what went on at the provincial table. I also wanted to address some issues and roadblocks I see in education. Despite our 2016 court case win, teachers in many districts report increasing workloads and declining resources and classroom supports. The pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges resulting in an unacceptable level of teacher burnout. Collective bargaining provides a means to push the employer and government to do better.

Tammy: I have always had an interest in bargaining, as I believe that through bargaining we can create positive change for teachers today. Improvements made through bargaining continue to benefit teachers in the future. I have been involved in many roles of the local executive, and I have been a classroom teacher for 25 years. I brought that perspective to the BCTF Bargaining Team.

Sarah: The main factor that made me want to be a part of the team was my long-term curiosity about the bargaining process at the provincial level. So, when the posting came out, I decided to apply. I have experience collaborating with teams on large, complex projects in other sectors and in contract negotiation. I thought those skills might be useful. My advice to folks who want to be on the team, but aren't sure they should apply, is to apply.

What surprised you the most about the bargaining process and sitting across the table from the employer?

Carla: In previous rounds, we all heard about the acrimony at the table and the employer's attempt to strip our contract. As a result, I was prepared for more of a fight. So, I was surprised that, despite the employer being resolute on certain issues, in other areas they were open and collaborative.

The other thing that surprised me is what a large support system the team has. Much of the focus is on the team members and the discussions at the table, but there is so much that happens prior to that first meeting and between meetings with the employer. The BCTF has great staff that play a huge role behind the scenes.

Tammy: Sitting across from the employer, I was surprised to find out that their team is not released to do this work; instead, the bulk of the work falls on one person from the BC Public School Employers' Association. I was also impressed with the knowledge and information on costing and legal advice that the team was able to gain from BCTF staff. The staff that we have employed at the Federation are a great asset.

Sarah: I can't decide if my answer here is everything or nothing. At the table, the thing that surprised me the most is that the employer's representatives were just normal human beings doing a job. Just like us. No acrimony. In terms of the bargaining process, what surprised me was the wide variety of work involved in being on the team and how the work evolved over the trajectory of bargaining. As this project concludes, I am thankful for this opportunity to represent the membership. I'm amazed by what we were able to achieve, and I am grateful for the support provided by the staff of the BCTF.



What are you most excited about in this new collective agreement?

Carla: It's hard to pick. We accomplished so much, and I am proud of the team's work. We finally have a salary increase that gets us closer to equity with other provinces. We were able to shorten the salary grid, which will help new teachers. The addition of DEXCOM continuous glucose monitors to our extended health benefits package will be life-changing for some of our members and their families. We made progress on numerous fronts to address reconciliation. I was also very pleased that there was mutual interest in looking for ways to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. We were able to do all this in a relatively short time and without job action.

Tammy: There are many things that I am excited about in this collective agreement: articles to address reconciliation, Maternity Supplemental Employment Benefits (SEB), salary improvements, and professional development (PD) funding. The one I will expand on is the improvements to PD funding. We were able to get the employer to use the terms "establishing a provincial minimum." Locals will be able to adopt this language when their funding falls below the minimum standard. The improvements for PD funding will allow teachers who had very low and stagnant funding the opportunity to attend workshops that will enable them to keep current with their professional learning.

Sarah: I am excited that there is so much to be excited about in this agreement. The provincial SEB plan at 100% is a big deal. My pregnancy/maternity EI benefit period was in a remote district with no paid waiting period or top-up. So, a provincial SEB plan at 100% feels like we have finally addressed a long-term inequity.

I am also excited that there was mutual interest and agreement about the updates and improvements to Letter of Understanding (LOU) 4, related to employment equity for Indigenous Peoples, and the new LOU for employment equity for groups that face disadvantage.

There is one more thing, because I like surprises: there will be additional improvements to the provincial extended health benefits plan in Years Two and Three. Details on this will come out sometime after April.

PHOTOS: BCTF Bargaining Team members Carla Wilson, Tammy McKinley, and Sarah York (L to R). Clint Johnston, BCTF President; Robin Tosczak, Second Vice-President; and Sherry Ditttrick, Comox, made up the rest of the team.

What now? When do we start seeing improvements? What's next for you?

Carla: After ratification, both parties will work on melding the provincial language into local agreements. Some improvements will start immediately following ratification, such as the pregnancy/maternity SEB top-up provisions. Salary and the elimination of the bottom step of the grid will be retroactive to July 1, 2022; meaning that members will get back pay for any work they did between that date and the date of ratification, as well as a bump to their salary going forward.

As for myself, I am looking forward to some down time over the holidays with friends and family, and then I will return to my local to serve as president.

Tammy: Improvements to health benefits begin on January 1, 2023. Salary and benefits will see continued improvements in each year of this agreement. The PD improvements will be effective July 1, 2024.

Personally, I am getting ready to return to my Grade 3–4 classroom in Chilliwack. I have enjoyed the opportunity to represent teachers in this role, but I am looking forward to getting back to teaching.

Sarah: One provision that is a little different is experience recognition. After ratification, teachers will be able to have their experience working in First Nations schools recognized. For the purposes of placement on the salary grid, this provision is retroactive to July 1, 2022. There is also a window of opportunity for having that past experience recognized, and that closes on June 30, 2023. If members have questions about a particular provision, they can check out bctf.ca for details or contact their local president.

There is plenty to appreciate in this agreement, but no deal has everything. So, I expect that there will be discussion about next steps soon. As for me, I will be gearing up to be back in my classroom and working on making up for lost time with family, friends, and the forest. •



On behalf of BCTF leadership, President Clint Johnston (centre) moved the donation to CUPE; Surrey LR Annie Ohana (above) amended it to \$1 million; and members of the Representative Assembly passed the historic motion unanimously.

Rich Overgaard photo

BC TEACHERS OFFER GOLD-STANDARD SOLIDARITY TO ONTARIO COLLEAGUES

AT THEIR FALL MEETING, the BCTF Representative Assembly (RA) voted unanimously to make a historic gesture of solidarity with CUPE Ontario school support workers in their fight for a fair collective agreement and against back-to-work legislation that overrode their Charter rights.

President Clint Johnston and other Federation leaders had been closely watching events in Ontario and growing increasingly concerned about their implications for the labour movement across Canada. “We saw the urgency of the situation and the great need for solidarity,” he said.

On October 30, after months of fruitless bargaining and a 96.5% strike vote, CUPE issued strike notice on behalf of their 55,000 school support workers. The response from the Conservative government of Premier Doug Ford was swift and vicious. The next day they introduced Bill 28, the *Keeping Students in Class Act*, which imposed a contract that would do nothing to lift them from their \$39,000 per-year average income. Bill 28 also called for crippling fines of \$4,000 per worker, per day of job action, for a potential daily total of \$220 million. Most egregious of all, it invoked the notwithstanding clause, which allows Parliament or provincial legislatures to temporarily override Charter rights.

Despite these heavy threats, CUPE members walked out on November 5, and thousands of other Ontarians joined their protests in solidarity. Coincidentally, the BCTF RA was meeting

that very day in Victoria. The Executive Committee agreed to bring a motion before the RA to donate \$500,000, which Johnston brought to the floor.

“We were in a serendipitous position to respond boldly and quickly,” said Carolyn Howe, Local Representative (LR) from Victoria. “I felt the absolute clarity of everyone in the room that if we let CUPE lose in that moment, we would all lose. The use of the notwithstanding clause to suspend union and Charter rights is a shocking move that could impact human and labour rights across the country.”

Surrey LR Annie Ohana “saw the actions of the Ford government as an existential threat to all workers and to our democracy.” She moved to double the donation to \$1 million. Some LRs asked the BCTF Treasurer about the Federation’s financial status, and he assured them that there were more than sufficient funds in the Collective Bargaining Defence Fund.

“When they invoked the notwithstanding clause, it truly became a national issue,” Ohana said. “Solidarity has to involve sacrifice, where we take meaningful action that supports our education colleagues and acknowledges the severe punishments they are taking.”

Ohana described the donation as “an investment for our future and a clear clarion call to our own BC government to defend public education, not destroy it.”



She noted that the Ontario teachers were there for BC teachers. "At our lowest they picked us up, and now, as we approach a ratification vote without a strike, we're blessed that we can be there for them."

Indeed, when BC teachers faced unconstitutional contract-stripping, unions across Canada stepped up to help. During the 2014 strike, unions and individuals donated almost \$3.4 million to the BCTF collective bargaining and hardship funds. Of that total, \$2.36 million came from the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, and the Ontario Elementary Catholic Teachers' Association.

The strong support from Ontarians and from unions across the country forced the Ontario government to back down the very next day. At a news conference, public- and private-sector union leaders celebrated that "Ford blinked."

"We can confirm that the premier will introduce and support legislation to repeal Bill 28 in its entirety. It will be deemed that it was never a law in Ontario in the first place," said Laura Walton, President of the Ontario School Board Council of Unions, which represents the CUPE education workers.

"We are so very grateful for the solidarity. Now our goal is to get a fair deal that respects workers, students, and families."

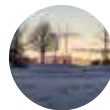
Howe noted that there's still a lot of work to do before support workers achieve fairness on the job. "I do wonder what it means for CUPE, when they're still fighting for a living wage and working for such an intransigent employer as the Ford government," she said. "But parents and the public get it, about the great value of the work school support staff do, and how important it is that we stand with them." •



OSBCU-CSCSO

@osbcucscso

There are truly not enough ways to say thank you for this support & solidarity.
@bctf we will continue this fight and be beside you when you need us as well!
#PeoplesProtest



Aleida B.

@aleibote

Replying to @bctf @CUPEOntario and @OSBCUCSCSO

I am part of the CUPE union, and from the bottom of my heart I want to say THANK YOU SO MUCH, you can't imagine what this means for us. ❤️🙏
Thank you for your support!!!



Shawn L. Bird

@ShawnLBird

Replying to @bctf @CUPEOntario and @OSBCUCSCSO

Glad some of my union dues are supporting the fight in Ontario. CUPE workers do such important jobs and they should be compensated appropriately and have decent work conditions.



LOCAL PROFILE NECHAKO TEACHERS' UNION

By Anna Chudnovsky (she/her), BCTF staff

JENNIFER KOSTIUK makes dinner for all the Nechako Teachers' Union (NTU) members who attend NTU Annual General Meetings (AGMs), or at least before COVID-19 she did. She is the sole released local officer, so she fixes the printer at the office, sorts out the modem when the internet is down, and drives from school to school checking in with teachers. She knows all the roads in the area and checks in with teachers to make sure they got to school okay if she knows their route is treacherous. She knows how many non-certified teachers are at any school at any one time, she knows their names, and has supported some of them with their education so they can become certified teachers. Jennifer has been NTU President for 8 years, was in the classroom for 26 years, and has retirement on her mind.

But before that, she's got work to do.

Jennifer's local is made up of three small communities: Fraser Lake, Fort St. James, and Vanderhoof. These three communities are served by 240 teachers, and Jennifer knows almost all of them by name. A survey of her membership she conducted in June showed that her members are struggling. The results suggest that more than a third of teachers aren't sleeping well, don't have positive physical health, and don't feel supported by their school district. Their jobs are hard, busy, and chaotic. Members take on a lot of stress trying to fill gaps in services and supports for their school communities.



LEFT: NTU President Jennifer Kostiuk and her husband, Garry.
ABOVE: W.L. McLeod Elementary in Vanderhoof, one of the three communities served by the NTU. Anna Chudnovsky photo.

“Ultra-conservative parents are organized and motivated. I’m worried about our community, our union members, and the kids at schools in our district.” – Jennifer Kostiuk

The community is struggling with local issues, including rural poverty from industrial layoffs, job insecurity, struggles with unsupported health issues, challenges maintaining minimum medical staffing in the community, and a deeply religious population insistent on blocking social justice initiatives brought forward by progressive and committed union members.

And on top of all that, the municipal election went sideways.

On October 15 Vanderhoof was the only municipality in the province that elected two ParentsVoice BC school board trustees. These trustees ran on an anti-SOGI platform. Before the election, they spoke vociferously against the May 17 Share the Love Day that teachers had organized to support the International Day Against Homophobia. The event continued despite the loud voices speaking out against it. However, it was a moment of real concern for teachers as they witnessed the anger and escalation of this vocal minority. It was as if teachers were being put on notice, and they heard the message loud and clear.

People associated with these ParentsVoice candidates didn’t stop there. The evening after a new rainbow sidewalk was installed at a crosswalk adjacent to one of the schools in the district, it was vandalized. The student body was confused and disappointed, as were the teachers who had supported this initiative.

A school board meeting was disrupted when students were presenting a proposal for additional courses, similar to the one called Diversity 8, to be added to course options for secondary school. The student presenters experienced verbal harassment, and their ideas were attacked, insulted, and belittled at the meeting. The situation was so intense, and the conservative parent lobbyists so escalated, that the school board chair adjourned the meeting.

“Ultra-conservative parents are organized and motivated,” said Jennifer, “I’m worried about our community, our union members, and the kids at schools in our district.”

Teacher activists in Vanderhoof are similarly anxious. Having grown up not too far away, and in a very conservative family, Yoshi Sawatzky, an elementary teacher in Vanderhoof, is familiar with these dynamics.

“I came back here because I love it here. I appreciate so much of what this community has to offer,” he shared. “That said, we’ve got some challenges.”

The teachers leading the way against conservative parent groups represent all sorts. Some are members of the equity-seeking groups whose lives and rights are being undermined by ParentsVoice and other far-right candidates associated with them. Others are allies, showing up and taking action to support their colleagues and students. Either way, the

teachers all feel protective of the work they’re doing with students to build a more just and equitable world. They see their work as an essential service to all the unique and wonderful kids in their classes. These teachers were deeply disappointed with the results of the election, and now they’re ready to defend all that they’ve built. Jennifer Kostiuk is right there with them.

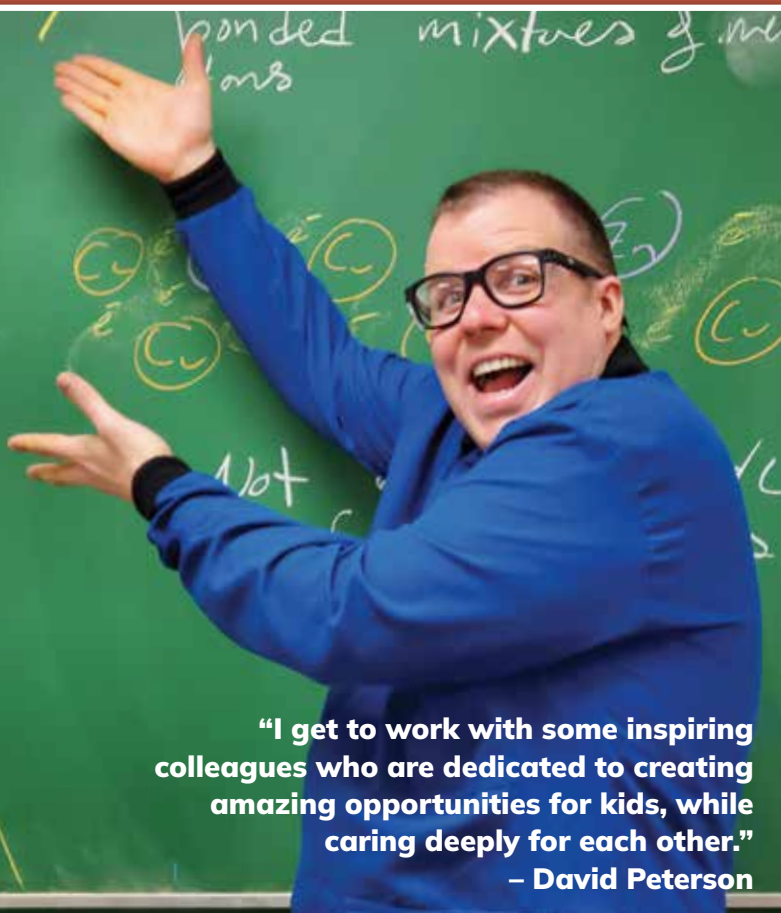
So, what can teachers do when faced with a school board that stands in the way of social justice initiatives? Teacher activists in Vanderhoof are organized and acting quickly. Jennifer and three staff reps from the NTU attended the inaugural school board meeting and were highly visible. Wearing Red for Ed and Every Child Matters shirts, Moosehide and BCTF pins, and, with rainbows everywhere, they made their presence—and their close eye on the board—known.

They’ve organized a rotation of teachers to attend every school board meeting and are actively reporting out to the wider membership about what actions these new trustees are taking. At the very first meeting the teacher attendees saw these newly elected trustees making moves: one nominating the other for vice-chair, which was defeated by secret ballot; volunteering for both finance and policy committees; and questioning the delivery of support to the most vulnerable learners in the district. The quick and regressive work by these trustees was telling and worrisome.

Across the province, municipal elections seem to be fertile ground for right-wing conservatism these days, and it’s up to teachers, union activists, and all those on the side of justice to stand up for public education. Of the 125 candidates associated with far-right ideology focused on anti-vax and anti-trans agendas (e.g., ParentsVoice, VIVA Victoria, and others), only 14 succeeded in getting elected across the province in the October elections. Though the alt-right didn’t make headway in terms of actually electing very many people, significant headway was made in terms of expanding their base. Furthermore, in no uncertain terms, school boards have become the convergence points for alt-right infiltration into electoral politics, as is being seen in Vanderhoof. In ridings where the People’s Party of Canada ran candidates in 2021 and where an alt-right candidate ran for school board trustee in 2022, the expansion of this support is clear. In some municipalities, their vote share has increased by almost ten times.

What is happening in Vanderhoof is not unique, though we can look to their example as motivation to stay energized around politics at the local level. Teacher activists from the NTU are showing up, monitoring, organizing, and taking action in response to the hateful and oppressive tactics being employed by the alt-right. Thanks to Jennifer Kostiuk and her intrepid membership, teachers intent on supporting social justice initiatives and work around equity and inclusion, we have a great example to follow.

MEET SOME NECHAKO



"I get to work with some inspiring colleagues who are dedicated to creating amazing opportunities for kids, while caring deeply for each other."

– David Peterson

DAVID PETERSON has been teaching in Nechako Lakes for eight years. He has been on the NTU Executive since 2016. David teaches science at Nechako Valley Secondary School in Vanderhoof. One of his favourite labs to teach is "the cornstarch flamethrower," where students create plumes of fire from blown starch dust. It's an exciting example of how surface area speeds chemical reactions, but also a serious lesson in a region where four workers lost their lives because of sawdust explosions in the mills of neighbouring communities. Many students have weekend clean-up jobs at the local mill, and this helps them understand the "why" behind this important job: they are not just sweeping, they are keeping their co-workers safe. It's one thing to know the theory; it's another to have experienced dust combustion first-hand in a safe, laboratory setting. Learning science can be exciting, fun, and locally relevant all at once.

Fun fact: David has one of the only chalk boards left in the district, which he loves to use (as you can see). He says this about chalk: "Chalk is mostly calcium carbonate, the active ingredient in Tums," a fact he has taken advantage of in moments of desperation. Incidentally, he's pretty sure that eating a whiteboard marker would not work as well.



YOSHI SAWATZKY is a real firecracker. His voice is loud and friendly; he welcomes students into his classroom with warmth and humour. He's funny, making jokes with colleagues in the hall, and high-fiving students from other classes. Yoshi has a history in Vanderhoof. His parents met there, and after years away he's come back home to teach. He spent years teaching in the private religious system he grew up in, but has now been teaching in the public system as a member of the NTU for a few years. He's glad he made the change.

He's incredibly committed to his community, having grown up there, but he knows that there is prejudice and discrimination that must be dealt with. His knowledge of the very communities that NTU finds itself opposed to at school board tables gives Yoshi a particular perspective on the work he's committed to doing in the local. He's deeply protective of Vanderhoof, but also honest about the divisions that have come to the fore. He's the political action contact for the NTU and he's raring to go.

Yoshi is excited about teaching geography and uses project-based learning to help kids express their knowledge and support their curious inquiry.

TEACHERS



ELIZABETH BENNET teaches a multigrade class of Grades 2, 3, and 4 at Mapes Elementary. The school sits on 150 acres of forested land in the rural area outside of Vanderhoof. Mapes only has 3 teachers and 56 students, but the place is absolutely buzzing. Liz runs much of her programming outdoors and relishes the opportunity to teach about science in nature. Her students are experts on the accumulated thermal units of salmon fry and love to learn about nature. They are connected to the land they live on in deep and meaningful ways.

Liz grew up in the area, then left to complete her teaching degree on Vancouver Island. She came back to serve the community she loves, because she sees the inspiring potential of connecting with kids in her hometown and supporting their learning. Liz engaged with the local immediately upon joining the district. First as a staff rep, then as a health and safety rep for a small rural school. She went on to serve as the social justice chair, as a local bargaining committee member, and she's attended multiple BCTF AGMs as an NTU representative. Liz is also one of the rotating teachers attending school board meetings and reporting her findings to her colleagues.

Liz is part of the community theatre in town and is also on the volunteer fire department. She's involved in the community in so many ways and has emerged as a real leader since her return to the area. •

Anna Chudnovsky photos





Reflections on the Tri-National Conference in Oaxaca, Mexico

By **Lena Palermo** (she/her), teacher, Victoria; **Annie Ohana** (she/her), teacher, Surrey; **Marilyn Ricketts-Lindsay** (she/her), teacher, Surrey; **Karen Andrews** (she/her), teacher, Terrace; and **Maria Teresa Foster Luengo** (she/her), counsellor, Vancouver

THE TRI-NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE DEFENSE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

was created in 1993 in response to the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). With its focus on social, economic, and public policy, NAFTA opened the door for corporate enterprises to direct education reform, particularly by privatizing aspects of public education. At the Tri-National Conference, union activists from Canada, Mexico, and the United States meet in solidarity to discuss and exchange knowledge and ideas on how, together, we can rebuild community through public education. The largest delegations in attendance from outside of Mexico were the BCTF, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, and the Chicago Teachers Union.

This year's conference took place in Oaxaca, Mexico, historically notable for being the birthplace of Benito Juárez, the first Indigenous president of Mexico. So many folks fall for the trope of Mexico as a nation in need of support. The BCTF's international solidarity model moves away from problematic ideas of charity and, instead, engages in exchanges between colleagues and values the expertise and knowledge of all teachers. The Tri-National Conference reminds us that we have much to learn from our teacher colleagues in Mexico and across all of Turtle Island.

Oaxaca has a long-standing tradition of being a centre of resistance to government-imposed legislation, policies, and privatization. Within public education, teachers and unions are resisting neoliberal agendas that support privatization and erode social practices. Public schools are important social institutions that are essential in supporting the community. Teachers in Oaxaca are also fighting to safeguard their professional autonomy, resisting centralized power that excludes community consultation, and advocating for their communities on a variety of issues, including food insecurity, negative impacts of the mining industry, drug-trafficking disputes, and destruction of housing. It is important to acknowledge that these teachers risk their safety, and sometimes their lives, to take a stand for justice.

SCHOOL VISITS

Prior to the start of the conference, we participated in school visits. The delegation was split up to visit several different schools from across the region. While each school was unique in its challenges, approaches, and demographics, the schools had a shared passion for community learning that was easy to see.

We noticed many similarities between Oaxaca schools and BC schools: teachers using innovative practices to deliver an inquiry-based curriculum through interdisciplinary projects. The teachers are personally and professionally invested in creating positive outcomes for students despite the limited resources they have access to. Student voice is largely considered when choosing topics and inquiry questions for the class to investigate.

Tri-National Conference participants were greeted by Indigenous and Mexican dancers. Annie Ohana photo.



Oaxaca teachers fought extensively to have autonomy over the curriculum, though this autonomy came with a cost. Teachers in Oaxaca are paid less than the national average because they teach their own student-centred curriculum, rather than the one approved by the Ministry of Education. There is a focus on educating the whole child and building an understanding of community. Instead of “teaching for schooling,” they are “teaching for life.” To do this successfully, teachers draw on their strong relationships with community and understanding of the land and culture. The schools use pedagogy and curriculum that elevates their identities, emboldens their fight for justice, and empowers the teachers and schools to change education at a much larger scale.

Eldership plays a key role in much of the learning and across all subjects from English to science, languages to math, and more. Teachers actively work to bring community members, Indigenous businesses, and Elders into the schools for students to learn from.

A majority of the parents sold food in the nearby market during the day to support their families. Often, students help in the market during the afternoon. To accommodate students’ family obligations, some schools organize classes from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. In the afternoon, there are enrichment possibilities in music or athletics for students who are able to attend.

Parents are also involved in schools in a deep and connected way. Families provide support as needed throughout the school year. Parents and teachers also help to supply the school with resources. This is necessary because the government does not provide adequate funding. A highlight of our visit was when parents hosted a feast for us. The parents were extremely generous with their time and culinary skills and made an abundance of local dishes for the delegation, students, and teachers to share in true Oaxacan style.

RESISTING TRANSNATIONAL TECH COMPANIES IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Many of the classrooms we visited were underresourced, especially when it comes to digital resources and computers. This highlights the inequitable access to technology that exists in our world. We also saw this happen in BC, when the pandemic forced us to transition to online teaching. Not all students had laptops or internet access to participate in online learning from home, drawing attention to inequities and barriers to public education that technology can produce.

With the expansion of technology in our classrooms, we saw a need for discourse on teachers’ duty to protect student privacy. This topic was highlighted at the conference as well.

Some apps allow large corporations unfettered access to student data and surveillance. For example, Google Classroom has over 120 million teachers’ data housed in their cloud. Corporate greed and power are driving new technology to be integrated into our schools and classrooms.

Rather than rejecting the use of technology outright in our classrooms, we need to be more aware of how it is being used to drive the homogenization of our pedagogy and create a global curriculum. As teachers, we need to defend our autonomy to use technology in our classrooms. Together, teachers' unions can work in solidarity to push back against corporate infiltration of public education.

SUPPORTING STUDENT TEACHERS

The most poignant moment for many of us at the conference was when a student teacher from La Escuela Normal Rural Carmen Serdán, the Carmen Serdán Teacher College, spoke of the horrific state violence faced by student teachers as they resisted attempts to privatize their teacher college—a move that would make it exceedingly difficult for low-income students to participate in the teacher education program. Thirty-two students from Carmen Serdán, and some from other rural colleges were illegally arrested and experienced degrading and inhumane treatment, as documented in a report by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission. This student-activist network is a legacy of the Mexican revolution and, since 1910, has been a beacon of hope in liberation of people living in poverty, resisting privatization in education, and preserving Indigenous languages and cultures.

The BCTF delegation quickly put together a private collection of funds to support their fight. Within 24 hours, we had a plan for how to support the students' fight at every level of our union. This wasn't an act of charity, though the students did need basics like food; it was an act of solidarity, as our newest colleagues stand on the front lines to defend public education in the war against it.

COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS AS TOOLS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Teachers from across Canada, Mexico, and the United States spoke of collective agreements in a way that many may not have considered before: the collective agreement as a tool for social change and bargaining for the common good. So, what does this mean? Essentially, it entails using the bargaining process to demand more from governments than wages and benefits. From fighting for climate justice, food security, Indigenous sovereignty, and more, unions are using their collective voice to demand social change and transformation.

The Chicago Teachers Union suggested best practices for bargaining for the common good. This means including our students, families, and communities when we bargain our collective agreements. For this to be successful, we need to hire someone who has community organizing experience. We need to create focus groups to include and engage the broader community.

This idea is something we must apply here as well. We can stand with communities to fight for affordable housing, health care, migrant rights, and more. This is what is best for *all of us*. We need to make governments understand that we fight for all, and our bargaining priorities extend beyond the classroom.


While the conference covered many topics that intersect with public education, we believe the experience can be summed up with one chant: *El maestro luchando también está enseñando!* (The teacher fighting is also teaching!) This

chant is popular in many parts of the world where the teacher collective is a prominent leader of social movements in defense of democratic values and human rights. Teachers can call out and act against oppression through curriculum, pedagogy, and activism. If we do not teach for liberation and transformation, what do we teach for? Just as there are no walls to our classrooms, there are no walls stopping us from liberating ourselves. Let us liberate ourselves and, in turn, empower the students we serve. •

LEFT: 2022 Tri-National Conference participants. Photographer unknown.
OPPOSITE: An Oaxaca classroom. Marilyn Ricketts-Lindsay photo.



El maestro luchando también está enseñando!
The teacher fighting is also teaching!



THE COLOUR
OF BEAUTY

BLACK HISTORY MONTH RESOURCES

FILMS

National Film Board's Black Communities in Canada: A Rich History

This collection covers a variety of topics related to Black communities and Black Canadians. Here are some favourites:

Ice Breakers

This film shares the story of a promising teen hockey star in a sport where Black players are underrepresented.

Remember Africville

A spotlight on a small, Black settlement in Halifax that was demolished in the name of urban renewal.

The Colour of Beauty

This short documentary examines racism in fashion.

Jackie Shane: Heritage Minute

Jackie Shane was a pioneering Black trans soul singer in the 1960s. This Heritage Minute celebrates her unapologetic and authentic presence.

CURATED COLLECTIONS

British Columbia's Black Pioneers

This online exhibit of 20 stories, 9 videos, and 86 gallery items highlights the struggles and achievements of Black pioneers in BC. All items are available in French and English. Visit the BC Black History Awareness Society for more resources.

Black History in Canada

This collection curated by the Canadian Encyclopedia features articles, podcasts, and timelines. Be sure to check out the collection of articles on Black female freedom fighters.

PODCASTS

The Secret Life of Canada


This podcast highlights Canadian history and contemporary issues. Check out episodes such as "Crash Course on Nora's Place in Hogan's Alley," "Crash Course on Black Nurses," and "What's the Deal with Blackface?"

Portraits of Black Canadians

This series of vignettes spotlights prominent Black Canadians from the past and present.



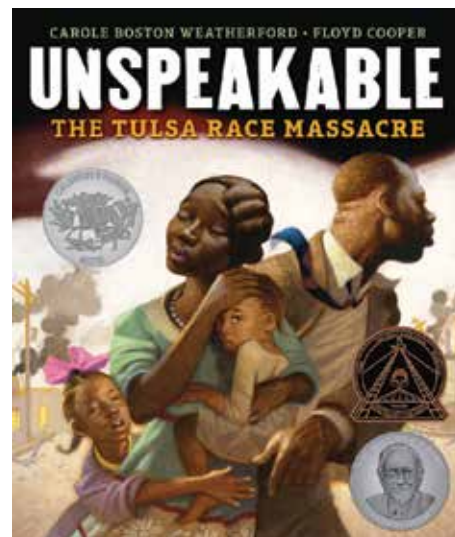
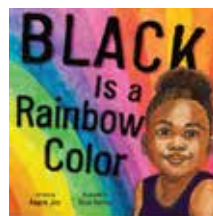
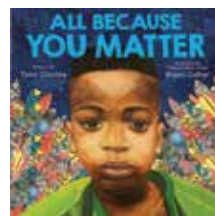
REMEMBER
AFRICVILLE



JACKIE SHANE:
HERITAGE MINUTE

Turned down Ed Sullivan because they asked me to remove my
makeup

BOOKS BY BLACK AUTHORS



CHILDREN'S READING LIST

The 1619 Project: Born on the Water by Nikole Hannah-Jones and Renée Watson

We Shall Overcome by Bryan Collier

Amazing Black Atlantic Canadians: Inspiring Stories of Courage and Achievement by Lindsay Ruck

Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre by Carole Boston Weatherford

I Affirm Me: The ABCs of Inspiration for Black Kids by Nyasha Williams

All Because You Matter by Tami Charles

Black Is a Rainbow Color by Angela Joy

TEENS' READING LIST

Bitter by Akwaeke Emezi

Ace of Spades by Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé

Hurricane Summer by Asha Bromfield

One of the Good Ones by Maika Moulite and Maritza Moulite



ADULTS' READING LIST

Shame on Me: An Anatomy of Race and Belonging by Tessa McWatt

Butter Honey Pig Bread by Francesca Ekwuyasi

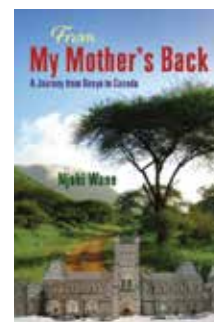
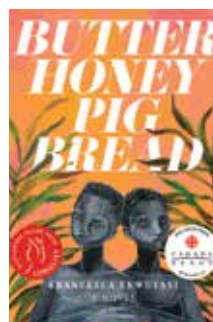
From My Mother's Back: A Journey from Kenya to Canada by Njoki Wane

Until We Are Free: Reflections on Black Lives Matter in Canada edited by Rodney Diverlus, Sandy Hudson, and Syrus Marcus Ware



FIND THESE RESOURCES

Visit linktr.ee/BHMresources2023 or scan the QR code to find links to the films, exhibitions, and podcasts listed here. If you would like to write about how you used any of these resources in your class, or review any of the books listed, send an email to teachermag@bctf.ca.



linktr.ee/BHMresources2023

2023

CELEBRATIONS AND RECOGNITIONS

This is a list of days to consider acknowledging in your school to show students and colleagues that their identities are seen, accepted, and welcomed. This list is by no means exhaustive!

January

Tamil Heritage Month

- 1 New Year, Shogatsu
- 16 Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- 22 Lunar New Year
- 27 International Holocaust Remembrance Day
- 29 International Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia



Lunar New Year is January 22

February

Black History Month

- 5 Shangyuan Festival
- 20 Louis Riel Day
- 22 Pink Shirt Day



January 16 is MLK Day and February is BHM



Holi is March 8

March

- 8 Holi
- 8 Hola Mohalla
- 8 International Women's Day
- 20 Nowruz
- 23 Ramadan begins
- 31 Transgender Day of Visibility
- 31 National Indigenous Languages Day

April

Sikh Heritage Month

- 4 Mahavir Jayanti
- 5 Passover begins
- 13 Songkran
- 14 Vaisakhi
- 20 Eid al-Fitr
- 21 Ridvan begins
- 22 Earth Day



Vesak is May 5

May

Asian Heritage Month Jewish Heritage Month

- 5 Cinco de Mayo
- 5 Vesak
- 17 International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia
- 25 African Liberation Day



Int'l. Women's Day is March 8



Eid al-Fitr is April 20

June is Indigenous Heritage Month and September 30 is the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation



June

Indigenous Heritage Month
LGBTQ+ Pride Month
Filipino Heritage Month
Deafblind Awareness Month

- 1 Gawai Dayak
- 19 Juneteenth
- 21 National Indigenous Peoples Day
- 22 Dragon Boat Festival
- 28 Eid al-Adha

June is Deafblind Awareness Month and Dec 3 is International Day of Persons with Disabilities



July

- 1 Land Back Day
- 3 Dharma Day
- 14 National Non-Binary Peoples Day
- 18 Islamic New Year
- 20 Chinese Cultural Heritage Week begins

August

- 1 Emancipation Day
- 9 International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

September

- 23 Bi Visibility Day
- 30 National Day of Truth and Reconciliation and Orange Shirt Day

October

Canadian Islamic History Month
Latin American Heritage Month
Women's History Month

- 2 Mehragan
- 4 Sisters in Spirit Day
- 11 Coming Out Day
- 12 Dia de la Raza
- 13 Pchum Ben
- 15 Navratri
- 24 Dussehra

November

- 2 Dia de los Muertos
- 12 Diwali
- 20 Transgender Day of Remembrance
- 27 Guru Nanak Dev ji Gurmurb



Hanukkah is December 7–15



Dia de los Muertos is November 2



Transgender Day of Remembrance is Nov 20

December

- 3 International Day of Persons with Disabilities
- 6 National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women
- 7 Hanukkah begins
- 22 Dongzhi
- 26 Kwanzaa begins



Diwali is November 12

Send photos of your class celebrating or learning about diverse holidays and recognitions to teachermag@bctf.ca for a chance to be featured in *Teacher* magazine!

iStock.com/sources

Cultural video project fosters identity and belonging

By **Sukhdeep Birdi, Kawaldeep Ghuman, and Harjit Chauhan,**
English language learner teachers, Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows





Students and colleagues of Kawaldeep celebrate Diwali. Photo provided by authors.

AFTER YEARS of teaching English language learner (ELL) students, we noticed one common theme when it came to celebrating calendar holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter: students drew from their families' celebrations to excitedly make and share their own cultural connections related to the holidays. Students often felt comfortable sharing their cultural celebrations, festivals, and holiday traditions during small group literacy times, but outside of these small groups, many students didn't know how, or felt too shy, to share with their peers. Together, we explored how to create authentic resources highlighting student experiences to help all students feel welcome and included in school spaces and celebrations.

HOW IT STARTED—DIWALI

We started with a festival all three of us are familiar with: Diwali. Diwali, a festival of lights, is celebrated around the world by Sikhs, Jains, and Hindus. Traditional stories describe Diwali as a celebration of light over darkness.

We searched our school and community libraries and investigated online resources to find ways to integrate Diwali celebrations into classroom learning. Our search was successful and resulted in a variety of resources including books, worksheets, and educational videos, but we wanted to further amplify our students' voices. The idea we settled on was a video project.

Because of the global pandemic, we had to take extra safety precautions as we created the first video. First, we wrote a script using kid-friendly language to explain how and why Diwali is celebrated. Next, we collected and took photos to provide further visual representation. Most of the photos were from our own personal Diwali celebrations with our families, but we also took additional photos of student art and local community celebrations.

Finally, we found a videographer to document the project. We decided to include ourselves and our families in the video to create an authentic experience. Speaking in front of a camera for the first time was new and nerve-wracking, but, for us, authenticity is being able to use a platform to share our voices, first-hand experiences, and personal knowledge about celebrations that we don't see on our school calendar.

Once the project was complete, the Diwali video was shared across our school district. To further supplement the video, we also created a Diwali lesson plan for teachers to use as a part of their instruction.

Teachers (L to R) Sukhdeep Birdi, Harjit Chauhan, and Kawaldeep Ghuman. Sunjum Jhaj photo.



ANOTHER HOLIDAY VIDEO CREATION— RAMADAN

After watching the Diwali video, some students who celebrate Ramadan shared their interest and desire to create a second video about their experiences of Ramadan. Ramadan is celebrated in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, and it begins on the first sighting of the new crescent moon. It is a month of good deeds, charity, such as sharing with those in need, and a new beginning for many Muslims. A significant part of Ramadan is fasting as a sign of gratitude and to cleanse the body. At the end of the Ramadan month, there is a three-day celebration called Eid Al-Fitr, which means “the festival of the breaking of the fast.”

Students were keen on taking the lead for the Ramadan video. Since we now have fewer gathering restrictions from the pandemic, we structured this project to be student-led rather than teacher-led. This took off some of the pressure that we experienced with the first video; however, a student-led project has its own set of challenges. We used many recess and lunch breaks to help students prepare and rehearse their lines, practise public speaking skills, and communicate with families to get everything organized.

Students were thrilled to share their personal experiences and knowledge about Ramadan and Eid. The district videographer visited the schools to put the video together. The final product took many hours of work to compose, and we are so appreciative of all the support we received from colleagues across the district. We also asked one of our colleagues from the ELL department to join the video project and share her personal experiences about Ramadan and Eid. Like the Diwali video, this video was also shared as a district-wide resource.

LEFT AND ABOVE:

Screen shots of the video celebrating Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr the authors made in collaboration with students.



FEEDBACK FROM THE SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

We've noticed more openness to dialogue and teaching about Diwali and Ramadan in our schools. Classroom teachers felt more comfortable using provided resources to teach about these celebrations, especially some teachers who had not previously celebrated Diwali or Ramadan. In this way, the videos were a great starting point for Diwali and Ramadan celebrations in our schools. Some schools had school-wide assemblies where students' families were invited to share about their celebrations, opportunities for students to participate in and ask questions about the celebrations, hallway displays to showcase and explain artifacts associated with the holidays, bulletin boards that combine both personal and informative photos, and classroom activities ranging from book studies and video discussions to crafts and food tastings.

The students we work with were excited to see themselves and their traditions represented in the videos and in school celebrations. We could see students' pride in their identity. We also heard from several families who reached out to share their gratitude and express how they felt welcomed, celebrated, and honoured.

We feel a sense of accomplishment because, we were able to give voice to a group of students and create an opportunity for students to showcase their culture within our schools. The videos have prompted discussions about the changing demographics in our schools, how to acknowledge the growing diverse population, and how to foster identity and belonging.

Looking into the future, we are excited to collaborate again and create student-led videos that celebrate and acknowledge more of our students' identities. We hope to empower students through this platform that is both authentic and educational. •



RESOURCES

To watch the videos created for Diwali and Ramadan scan the QR code or visit linktr.ee/CulturalVideoProject.



ABOVE: Students present their Diwali candles.
Harjit Chauhan photos.

Body talk



By Kristin Kimiko Dorey,
teacher and plus model, Surrey

WE'VE NOW OFFICIALLY ENTERED every fat person's least favourite season: the season of New Year's resolutions. Perhaps that's a bit hyperbolic, but it is the time of year when we become privy to the myriad ways and extreme lengths people will take to avoid looking like us.

While most adults have moved past open jeers and taunts, the more insidious (and sometimes more traumatic) fatphobia seems omnipresent. The same people who know better than to directly shame us often feel perfectly valid in disparaging their own bodies in front of us, inadvertently telling us all the things they'd like to change about us. We notice the way celebrities are dog-piled when they gain weight: a never-ending barrage of insults ranging from name-calling to pity. To be honest, I'm not sure which is worse. We see how (often the same) celebrities are celebrated and lauded for their weight loss and their pursuit of conventional beauty.

We hear you say that you feel fat—even though fat isn't a feeling—when what you really mean is sluggish, lazy, and bloated. We notice when the only fat characters in a book or film are objectively terrible people (I'm looking at you, Dursley family) or when a fat character's only concern is weight loss. We are listening, and so are your colleagues and the young people around you. Here are some tips for navigating the topic of bodies, at this time of year and beyond:

REFLECT ON HOW OFTEN YOU REALLY NEED TO TALK ABOUT OTHERS' BODIES.

I think you might find that the answer is almost never. This isn't just for the sake of fat people. Thin people, tall people, short people, etc., already know what their bodies look like, and they don't actually need to be told—mirrors exist. Remarking on someone's weight loss or weight gain can be incredibly hurtful, even if you mean it to be a compliment. Commending someone's weight change sounds a lot like, "Wow, I like your body more now because it is more closely aligned with society's beauty standards, and I'm proud of you for finally getting on board."

Also, it should be noted that weight loss or weight gain can be a sign of other things that someone may not want to discuss, like an eating disorder, illness, chronic stress (late-stage capitalism, a pandemic, and environmental degradation will do this to a person), depression, etc. Last year my body changed when I was sick and waiting for surgery; I can't tell you how many people congratulated me on my weight loss. To which I replied, "Thanks, I've never felt worse, and this is the least well I've ever been." Now it's awkward for everyone.

iStock.com/SerglyMoichenko

REMEMBER THAT PHYSICAL APPEARANCE IS NOT AN INDICATION OF HEALTH.

Yes, you read that correctly. Unless you are someone's doctor or possess X-ray vision, you don't really know what's going on in their body, even if you've been conditioned to think that you do. Also, if someone does have health problems, that's their business. What they will need from you is compassion and support, not "health" advice. Leave that to the professionals.

ASK FOR CONSENT BEFORE ENGAGING IN DIET TALK.

Sure, it might seem like a nice, light lunchtime topic, but for some, it's the last thing they want to talk about. Take a temperature check before diving into it. And for the love of Jason Momoa, please never tell anyone to go on a diet or assume other people will want to join in eating grapefruit, black coffee, and nutritional yeast, or whatever food restriction is trending these days.

BE THOUGHTFUL ABOUT HOW YOU SPEAK ABOUT FOOD.

It's deeply embedded into our culture to moralize food as "good" or "bad." We do this without thinking. How often do we say that we can't eat something because we've been "bad" this week or we can now splurge and have a sinful piece of cake because we've been so "good"? When we speak this way about food, we tell those around us that there should be guilt and shame associated with particular foods. When we label things as "good" or "bad" we are passing judgments about the way others eat. Also, stay away from calorie talk. If you want to count calories, that's between you and your body; however, talking this way gives young folks the impression they should also be counting calories and thinking of food only based on its caloric value.

It should also be noted that sometimes students who bring "bad" food to school do so because those foods tend to be less expensive and easier to pack for lunch. This doesn't mean that we can't address a student's nutritionally insufficient lunches. If we have a concern that a student's lunch is lacking in the type of nutrition that makes learning possible, we can frame it as such when speaking to the parent(s) or guardian(s), rather than telling them their child's lunch is "bad." The former opens a dialogue with curiosity; the latter is shaming.

BE MINDFUL OF DRESS CODES AND HOW THEY'RE ENFORCED.

Dress codes are a hot topic, and I understand why. For some, a dress code is viewed as a means to protect the safety of students; others feel dress codes have the potential to be body-shaming and sexualizing, among other things. It's possible that both are true. While I won't get into a debate about the existence of dress codes, I will implore you to reflect on the messages that are sent to students when we tell them what they're wearing is inappropriate. Is it a comment on their clothing or a comment on their body? If it's about their body, please go back and read the first tip.

ADDRESS BODY-SHAMING LANGUAGE, BUT BE CONSCIOUS OF HOW AND WHEN.

It's a nightmare when a student says something to another student that is unkind and everyone in the class hears it. It's especially sensitive when what's said is something the student can't change, like their physical appearance. While the conversation needs to be shut down immediately, the follow-up chat with the person who said it should take place privately. There should also be a follow-up with the person who was hurt. It's hard to walk away from a potentially traumatic interaction and have no one acknowledge that it even happened or ask if you're okay.

WHEN CHOOSING READING MATERIALS, CONSIDER THE WAY BODIES ARE REPRESENTED IN THE TEXT.

While we know we should be choosing inclusive texts that reflect the diversity of our student body, often body type is left out of the mix. If you choose texts that portray specific bodies in stereotypical or antagonistic ways, use the opportunity to unpack bias.

Ultimately, when it comes to bodies, the biggest advice I can give is to remember that when talking to the people around us, we all come to those conversations with different experiences and baggage. We are all inundated with images of toxic beauty standards everywhere we look, but what we don't have to do is project those onto others or pass those on to the next generation. I hope 2023 is the year we can make peace with these beautiful and imperfect bodies of ours. •

FURTHER READING

FOR ADULTS

The Body is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love by Sonya Renee Taylor
You Have the Right to Remain Fat by Virgie Tovar
Shrill by Lindy West
Lessons from the Fat-O-Sphere: Quit Dieting and Declare a Truce with Your Body by Kate Harding and Marianne Kirby
Hunger by Roxane Gay
Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia by Sabrina Strings
Fat Activism by Charlotte Cooper

FOR STUDENTS

Fat Chance, Charlie Vega by Crystal Maldonado
Being You: The Body Image Book for Boys by Charlotte Markey, Daniel Hart, and Douglas Zacher
Her Body Can by Katie Crenshaw and Ady Meschke
Beautifully Me by Nabela Noor
Lovely by Jess Hong
Shapesville by Andy Mills and Becky Osborn
All Bodies Are Good Bodies by Charlotte Barkla
Celebrate Your Body (And Its Changes, Too!): The Ultimate Puberty Book for Girls by Sonya Renee Taylor

Teach the Columbia



By Lorene Keitch (she/her), Wildsight communications specialist, Kimberley

ON THE THIRD DAY of our four-day adventure, we paddled up a beautiful glacial-sourced tributary that tumbles its way to the Columbia River, one of countless water sources that pour into the vast Columbia River watershed. Hands stretched to bind us together, our canoes knocked gently as the water swayed our boat brigade. While analyzing our final descent back to camp, Creston high school teacher Trevor Marzke spoke up.

"Do you know," he asked the group, "what the root of the word *curriculum* is? From Latin, curriculum means a running course. Taken from *currere*, to run."

It seemed a fitting anecdote as the waterway we were learning about ran underneath our boats, dripped from our paddles, and filled our vision. At the end of last summer, we spent four days and three nights learning in an immersive environment as we explored Teach the Columbia, a newly developed curriculum package that deepens student understanding of this amazing watershed we call home.

I was lucky enough to join the field course as a participant through my role

as a communications specialist with Wildsight. Wildsight is a non-profit organization focused on environmental education and conservation initiatives in the Kootenay and Columbia regions of BC. For more than 20 years, we have offered a suite of environmental education programs to engage learners from Kindergarten to Grade 12 in the natural world.

Our Teach the Columbia curriculum was born out of a desire to connect many students across the Columbia Basin with the deep learning already experienced by a handful of students through our two-week immersive summer educational experience, Columbia River Field Course (CRFS).

CRFS participants learn the twists and turns of the Columbia River's history: how its depths and banks play an essential role in shaping the lives of the communities in this watershed; how it has provided for Indigenous Peoples for millennia, and how it has been changed by the millions of people that now live around it; how its geography, ecology, and hydrology can be studied and interpreted. Through this unique, immersive program, youth are

empowered to help shape the future of the Columbia Basin. Alumni have gone on to become youth ambassadors, community leaders, and advocates for stewardship.

In 2021, Monica Nissen, Wildsight education director, and Graeme Lee Rowlands, environmental programs co-ordinator, developed the Teach the Columbia curriculum to bring our CRFS learning into the classroom. The curriculum contains 11 adaptable lessons split into 4 different cross-curricular modules. Each lesson includes an overview, guiding questions, learning goals, materials and suggested preparation, detailed instructions, an appendix, BC curriculum links, and optional extensions. While some of the lessons are specific to the vast Columbia Basin, many could be used in classrooms across BC or to teach locally specific issues. Our lessons are flexible, adaptable, and can be used individually or as a package.

The summer field course was an opportunity to roll out this curriculum with educators. We welcomed 14 participants, ranging from primary to secondary school teachers, learning

support staff, outdoor educators, and Indigenous educators, from across the Columbia Basin for this inaugural event.

During the course, we camped alongside the Columbia River and workshopped several Teach the Columbia lessons. During one lesson, we investigated the physical and human geography of the basin while gathered around a giant floor map on the sandy shores of a slough off the main stem of the river.

Another lesson walked us through the natural and human-made rise and fall of the river in various locations; meanwhile, the longest undammed portion of the Columbia River rippled past us. With more than 60 large dams in the Columbia River watershed, this lesson helps learners understand not just seasonal water fluctuations, but how we humans bend nature to our will.

We explored how attitudes about wetlands and rivers, and humans' desire to control the water, have changed over time; shifting values from seeing the return of salmon to the Upper Columbia as a lost cause to one that, under Indigenous leadership, is gaining momentum and even success.

Deep and meaningful discussions took place as stream water trickled under our feet and along rocky paths to the Columbia, each drop passing by eventually making its way to the Pacific Ocean.

We spent time paddling our canoes deftly through the main stem of the Columbia River and meandering through the vast Columbia wetlands; we saw first-hand the power, beauty, and rich history of this region as we gained valuable canoe skills from master instructor Roger Warnatsch.

At the end of the field course, as we packed up tents and loaded canoes to head home, teachers were already brainstorming about how to incorporate the curriculum into their classes.

South Slokan middle school teacher Carly Christy joined the field course to help increase her own knowledge of the region.

"Learning about the Columbia while on the Columbia provided such powerful context...It moved us to care even more because we were experiencing what we were learning. The Pro-D also provided such rich interdisciplinary learning and connected me with other like-minded educators," says Carly. "Being immersed in this place, with this experience, has given me a more comprehensive experience."

For Cranbrook middle school teacher Orrin Hawke, the curriculum will help ground his students in where we live.

"It will help students feel connected to place," says Orrin. "They'll hear the story, and become part of the story, and recognize their place within it."

For me, participating in this field course deepened my own understanding and

appreciation for this watershed in which I live, and inspired me to continue advocating for its protection. We hope the same is true for students, as teachers explore Teach the Columbia lessons this year. As students are grounded in a sense of place, and how this watershed connects us, we hope they will recognize the important roles they can play in its protection too. •

MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about Teach the Columbia curriculum or to sign up for future field course opportunities, visit wildsight.ca/teach-the-columbia.

Opposite: Participants in Wildsight's summer field program. **Below:** Creston teacher Trevor Marzke studies a hydrology graph; the sun sets on a Wildsight campsite. Lorene Keitch photos.



Helping migrant children access school

By Julia MacRae (she/her), BCTF staff

THE CANADIAN LABOUR SHORTAGE CRISIS has brought up a lot of talk about immigration, migrant rights, and temporary foreign workers. Unfortunately, our immigration system is still a labyrinth. Refugees can be in limbo for years, awaiting interviews and appeal processes. Other migrants may overstay visas or arrive irregularly. In all this, we sometimes forget that children migrate with their parents. These children and youth are living in our community but may not be accessing school because families living with undocumented status in Canada are often afraid to approach any agent of the state for fear of deportation. Teachers and other school staff have a role to play in helping these kids attend school.

School staff care that the neighbourhood children are in school. However, it is not our role to be an extension of border enforcement, because a family's immigration status is none of our business. In one instance, a family came to Canada as refugees, and since being a refugee is a status, they had no particular difficulty registering their children in school. Several months later, the parents had their refugee hearing and were rejected. They launched an appeal process, and finally, after three long years, they were admitted to Canada. All that time the children were in school, learning English and everything else they needed to have a chance to succeed. What was going on with the refugee application and appeal process was no business of the school or the district. There is no difference when considering the rights of children from families without immigration status.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS MUST ACT!

Children and youth whose families may have precarious immigration status in Canada have the right to attend public school in BC. Section 82 of the *School Act* mandates the provision of free education to every school-age student if they and their guardian are "ordinarily resident" in BC.¹ The term "ordinarily resident" was included in the *School Act* specifically to protect the rights of undocumented children and families, and children and families with precarious immigration status. When the *School Act* was drafted, early drafts limited education funding to citizens and permanent residents; however, the BC Teachers' Federation, the BC Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association, and the BC School Trustees Association mobilized to keep the language "ordinarily resident" in the act.

Despite this *School Act* right, schooling is still not accessible to all. In April 2022, the BC School Trustees Association Annual General Meeting (AGM) enthusiastically passed, with 93% support, a motion to develop a template to help school boards remove barriers to registration. Hopefully this galvanizes boards to do away with their current ineffective and inequitable "case-by-case" method of admitting students.

School districts should not fear the Ministry of Education's provincial audit when admitting students who are ordinarily resident because the Ministry does not request specific immigration documents as a part of its compliance audit process. Instead, compliance reviews follow the Eligibility Policy that says, "Student files should contain reference to the documentation used to support eligibility for funding." The Funding and Financial Accountability Branch at the Ministry says that boards are responsible for complying with *provincial* law and regulations. The Ministry and boards of education do not have the authority to enforce *federal* immigration law.

First day at school in BC.

“Section 82 of the *School Act* mandates the provision of free education to every school-age student if they and their guardian are ‘ordinarily resident’ in BC. The term ‘ordinarily resident’ was included in the *School Act* specifically to protect the rights of undocumented children and families...”

GETTING INTO THE WEEDS

Using my Spanish language skills and privileged access to senior administration in Surrey, in my spare time I advocate to help some families register their kids in schools. I can report from personal experience that it is not always straightforward to register in our schools.

Parents who contact me via WhatsApp usually don't give their full names because of fear. After checking which school is their catchment school, I try to alert the district to their special situation. When they show up at a school to register their child, with me sometimes interpreting over the phone, school staff often try to refer us back to the online registration procedure. This procedure requires uploading more documents than are necessary to prove that the family is ordinarily resident, and the form cannot be completed without these extra documents. Other times, school-based staff refer us back to the district office or welcome centre, confusing things further. These referral loops are very frustrating and cause more fear.

Thankfully, all the children I have assisted have been able to start school quickly. However, sometimes parents call me

again later because they have received a district request for their documents or their status. It is obvious that front-line staff are trained to complete files and are missing training on these children's rights.


After these experiences, I wonder how many migrant families don't have an advocate to help. I have no idea, but I know Spanish speakers are probably not the majority language group in need of advocacy. Individual advocacy has its limits. For broader institutional change, school boards must develop clear policy that is communicated and enforced so that every child in the community can be in school. Thankfully, meaningful changes to registration procedures are now in process in Surrey.

Can you recall a moment of rejection from your childhood? Perhaps it was a moment when you were picked on or excluded? A child who is rejected from an institution that they dearly wish to attend can carry that feeling of rejection for a lifetime. I know my colleagues do not want that experience of rejection to be a legacy of trauma in a student's life. As teachers, we have strong values of inclusion and acceptance.

WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO TO HELP REMOVE BARRIERS?

Migrant workers with precarious immigration status are probably present in almost all of our communities, not just in large cities or near the border. A small group of teachers or a couple of representatives from a union local could pressure their district to improve practice in this area by doing the following:

- Understand the issues more deeply. A useful FAQ is available here: schoolforallbc.wordpress.com/about
- Ask for a meeting with your trustees on this particular issue, reminding them of the motion passed overwhelmingly at their last AGM.
- Demand specific improvements to the district website and registration process, for example, to facilitate access without fear.
- Request specific training of all administrators and school office staff about children's rights under the *School Act* to register as ordinarily resident. This training should:
 - clarify that declaring immigration status is not required.
 - include clear and inclusive ideas about what documentation should be accepted: a phone bill, rental contract, letter from a community member, etc.
- Recommend that information about the alternate path to register be communicated in several languages.
- Advocate for district policy that includes meaningful guidance highlighting that staff have a positive duty to not disclose information to parties such as the Canadian Border Services Agency unless they are legally compelled by a court order to do so.
- Follow up your meeting with a letter that emphasizes these demands! •



“My strength comes from having a strong personal support network of family and friends. ... Not everyone is as fortunate as I am ...”

A troubled teacher

By Amanda Kong (she/they), teacher, Vancouver

AS I PEN DOWN MY THOUGHTS in my safe space, I struggle to come up with words that can cohesively describe my bullying experience. Being a teacher gives me the power to shape classroom cultures where students are treated with mutual respect. I pride myself on allowing my students to be who they are by helping them find out who they want to be. Some students struggle with their socially constructed identities, including gender, ethnicity, and so forth. It takes courage to be authentic, as well as to stand up against bullies. If a student confides that they are being bullied, I would immediately try to help them. However, as an adult who has been bullied in a workplace, I did not have the privilege of having others help me in a way that a teacher would. This is ironic given my profession.

I wanted to write this article to address sensitive issues such as workplace bullying and mental health. Other victims of bullying may feel validated, as being bullied as an adult is challenging. I do not believe that we should stay silent on controversial topics. I understand that every single person goes through their own struggles, including bullies themselves. We are still living in a world without equality, so people have valid reasons for their unhappiness and dissatisfaction. Underneath each bully, there is a person who is in pain but chooses to hurt others to relieve themselves. As much as I feel we should have empathy for those hurting, I believe we have to learn to prioritize self-care and preservation. As a victim of bullying, I am not responsible for the bully's pain and unhappiness.

From a teacher's lens, when our students are being bullied, we jump right into helping diffuse the situation by conflict resolution. Very rarely do we ask

the victim to leave the classroom. This does not hold true for adults who are being bullied in their workplace. When I was asked to perhaps leave so that I could work in peace, I thought to myself, why must we continue to tolerate bullies, especially loud ones?

In my experience, when bullies are supported, intentionally and unintentionally, a toxic culture develops. Do we continue to stay silent because some people are too loud and refuse to be silenced? Would we act the same if the victim was a child? These are questions that remain unanswered. I spoke up, but I needed support from my co-workers as well. If someone intentionally tries to make another feel unsafe, it is important to support the victim so that the toxic culture is not supported.

It is extremely challenging to stand up against a toxic work culture, and I am proud to express myself here. My strength comes from having a strong personal support network of family and friends. My partner and mom are the sources of my strength. I can stand tall on my own because I have them in my life. Not everyone is as fortunate as I am, so I would like to encourage others to foster positive working relationships.

As teachers, we must stand up against things that we consider to be wrong. We live in a shared world, and I firmly believe in adopting kindness as a lifestyle. Together, we must help one another by creating communities within schools, so our students and colleagues can have a safe space to reach their authentic selves. •

MORE INFORMATION

For more information on workplace health and safety, visit bctf.ca/topics/services-guidance/health-and-safety.

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Perpetuating the teacher shortage

By Kip Wood, teacher, Nanaimo

We have contacted all 60 school districts and there is no overall teacher shortage in BC.
– Ministry of Education statement, September 2018

IN THE LATE 1990s, teachers were talking about a looming teacher shortage. Enrolment was up and baby boomers were going to start retiring in the next decade. Teacher shortage conversations ended when new legislation suddenly created a teacher surplus. This engineered “surplus” lasted for 15 school years.

In 2002 and 2003, the BC K–12 system cut about 3,500 teachers. After the Supreme Court of Canada judgment (November 2016) restored teachers’ working conditions provisions, about 3,700 teachers were added back to the system.

Northern and remote districts in BC have had teacher shortages for decades. But now, most districts in the province are dealing with (or not dealing with) teacher shortages. The nature of teacher’s work—large class sizes, poor working conditions, lack of autonomy, and lack of support—has historically contributed to high rates of attrition. A perfect storm of baby boomer retirements, the pandemic, the court judgment, increasing enrolment, rising societal expectations, and the high cost of living, has resulted in a massive teacher shortage. We’re now in year six of that shortage.

In California, some districts are offering new hires \$7,000 to cover moving expenses. The state of Nevada is spending \$20.7 million to help prospective teachers finish their education and student-teaching requirements. These efforts indicate a desire to fix the situation.

In 2018, a Ministry of Education task force studied the issues of recruiting and retaining teachers and made six recommendations. The task force report was released in year two of the shortage and provided some hope that the government would act. Instead, the “budget and fiscal plan” prevailed, and all the recommendations of the task force were shelved.

In BC, it’s becoming clear that employers, and more importantly the government, are interested in perpetuating the teacher shortage. Which begs the question, how is the teacher shortage benefiting the employer?

Labour shortages, in some cases, lead to higher salaries. Indeed, recruiting workers is more effective when the compensation is attractive. But retaining teachers is not just about salary. Other matters—working conditions, health benefits, a pension plan, affordable housing, student loan payments, and many others—determine whether a teacher remains a teacher or does something else. It costs money to recruit and retain teachers. Dealing with the teacher shortage will cost the government millions of dollars.

The 15 cutback years meant there were fewer contract teachers and more “on-call” teachers. For teachers starting out during the cutback years, steady work was hard to find, and many left the profession. From a short-sighted employer perspective, two things were accomplished in these years. The obvious is that costs were reduced. The less obvious “benefit” is that the employer had more power in the workplace.

The five years following the court decision should have seen more investment in education and more stable and satisfying work for teachers. This has not been the reality. Thousands of “failure to fill” situations (when a teacher is not replaced when absent) have led to daily triage in schools where counsellors, librarians, and support teachers are directed to leave their assigned work and cover another teacher’s class.

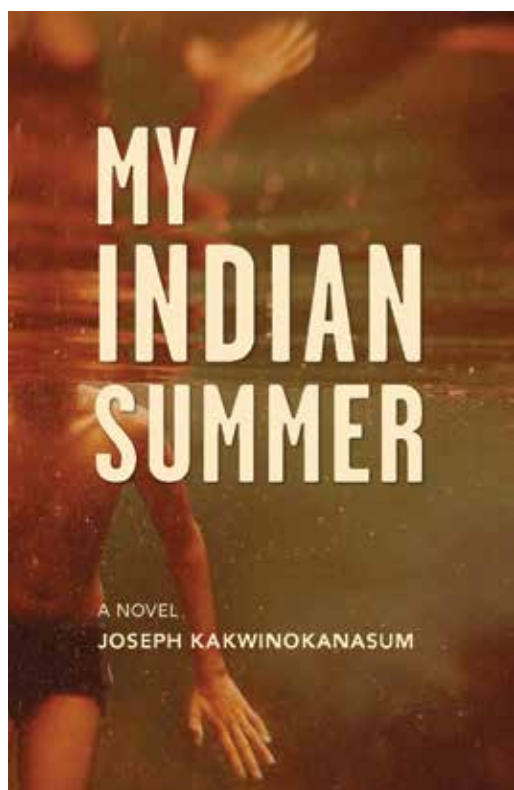
Arizona reported that last year more than half of teaching vacancies were filled with educators who were not certified. The state of Washington currently has almost 2,000 “limited teaching certificate” holders working in schools. Here in BC, “non-certified teacher replacements” are being employed because certified teachers are not available.

It’s been four years since the Ministry made the statement quoted at the beginning of this article. The government can take immediate steps to address the teacher shortage, or it can facilitate a continuation of the teacher shortage. Sadly, that too could have been stated four years ago. •



In conversation with *My Indian Summer* author Joseph Kakwinokanasum

By Marian Dodds (she/her), retired teacher, Vancouver



Marian: Welcome Jo. When we met in 2018 in the Creative Non-Fiction Cohort at Simon Fraser University Writer's Studio, I found your writing compelling. Four years later, you've launched your first novel, *My Indian Summer*, a fictionalized story emerging from your lived experience. Congratulations! Let's start with what it's about.

Joseph: Twelve-year-old Hunter, coming of age in the late 1970s in a tiny, predominantly Indigenous town in northern BC, is desperate to escape a family still reeling from the aftershocks of colonization. It's an entertaining, adventurous story of survival, about how one ingenious kid, using humour, street smarts, and allies, refuses to be defeated by poverty and racism.

Marian: Your story begins with Hunter's enraged mother escaping with her kids to northern BC to evade social workers. Three years later, it's 1979 and we meet Hunter at twelve, hiding his odd job money in a Crown Royal bag in his mattress and plotting his own escape from his abusive home. After several unsuccessful schemes to earn money in small town Red Rock, Hunter and pals Jacob and Eric are hoping to cash in during the Labour Day rodeo weekend, when things take a dangerous turn. A thread of humour propels readers through your high-stakes drama. Tell me about that.

Joseph: Laughing at the human condition is a survival strategy. It can be dark and ironic. Many of the funniest scenes in *My Indian Summer* occur when the three boys are together, with Hunter and Jacob teasing Eric, who is white, about his unbelievable naiveté and entitlement. Humour can be self-deprecating too. For example, when the three boys are hiding in the woods and Hunter pisses on his shoes in the dark.

“My book is a microcosm of a more universal experience suffered by many affected by trauma across generations.”

Marian: Author Darrel J. McLeod, who selected you as a 2022 Writers' Trust Rising Star, said, “He draws you into his gossamer web of his vibrant storytelling.” What influenced your writing?

Joseph: Being immersed in nature. I would run away to the forest, observing the natural world, looking up through tree branches at stippled light, the sound of the wind in the branches, watching birds. If you watch animals, they're never relaxed, always on the lookout for danger, preparing for the worst, hoping for the best. My protagonist Hunter is always in flight or fight mode. He needs to read a crowd and be alert to triggers, to flee from bullies. In the forest, my grandfather shared secrets about medicinal plants. There's some of him in my Crow character.

I read a lot too. We called the school librarian “Dragon Lady” because she made us stay silent and wouldn't let Native kids take books home. Sometimes I got a white friend to take out books for me or used the public library. My sister gave me Stephen King's *Night Shift*. One Grade 12 remedial English teacher made us feel like we were not the “stupid fucking Indians” we'd been told we were. He said we had street smarts. He read *The Hobbit* aloud, acted it out, used different voices—it was amazing. Other teachers would come by to watch him teach. I loved him like a father. I was walking down the hall one day, acting like a class clown, when he put his hand on my shoulder and said, “You know you need to harness that; you need to write.”

Marian: School isn't a safe place for Hunter, especially when he's subjected to blatant racism from Mrs. McDonald. You also include a tender scene where Mr. Gregory shows him empathy. What motivated you to write these characters into the book?

Joseph: I didn't want to paint all teachers with the same brush. In Grade 3, a teacher put an elastic around my tongue for swearing. Another time, starving and afraid, I'd stayed up all night studying for my Grade 7 remedial class spelling test—we were so poor I'd cut up paper bags and the backs of cigarette packs for paper, drawing lines on them to write out the words. When I failed that spelling test and was bawling my eyes out, my teacher sent the rest of the kids to the gym and allowed me to sit in his class to compose myself. I had good and bad experiences in school. School was half my day, and I did have friends there. Eric and Jacob are modeled on my two best friends: one Cree, one white.

Marian: What message do you hope teachers take from Hunter's story?

Joseph: Never judge a book by the cover. Sometimes the ratty, disheveled kid is crying out for help. It's not his fault. Maybe the mother had a lot of strikes against her—in my case, no

matter what I did, it wasn't good enough for my mom. I hated her, feared her, and just wanted away from her.

Marian: You've said reading the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report was a breakthrough for you in how you characterized the mother in your book.

Joseph: For sure. I read it from front to back and realized what my mother went through in residential school. She was like a traumatized war vet wanting nothing to do with her past. That TRC report illuminated the past, connected dots, explained the anger, and saved the mother character from appearing as a complete demon. Transforming her from this monster helped me let go of my anger. It mattered a lot.

Marian: *Theory of Crows* author, David A. Robertson, has said, “Art saves lives.” Do you agree?

Joseph: Listening to music and playing guitar helped in dark times. My twelve-year-old self thought, “Playing guitar could be my ticket out of here. I could become famous.” I'd visualize myself on stage, with supportive people applauding. I felt that way at my book launch last September, looking out at the crowd and thinking, “These people are here to support me.” I'd overcome beatings, starvation, and neglect. Writing saved my life, gave me hope.

Marian: What advice do you have for kids in situations like yours?

Joseph: Observe the world around you. Look to those you see succeed, ask their advice, take it to heart. Find your support system. The kokums in my book are a collage of the aunts, uncles, and grandfather, who fed me, gave me clothes, found me odd jobs to support myself, and taught me.

Marian: How can educators support Indigenous kids to thrive and flourish?

Joseph: Read the TRC report, advocate for rights and sovereignty, be an ally. Include Indigenous writing in your class. I wanted *My Indian Summer* to be entertaining and impactful, not to induce guilt.

Most Canadians didn't know this was happening until the late 1990s. The blame should fall on systems: government, church, education, and police. My book is a microcosm of a more universal experience suffered by many affected by trauma across generations. To me, teaching current students and the next seven generations truths about what happened is essential to opening pathways toward reconciliation. •

MORE INFORMATION

To read more about Joseph's work or purchase *My Indian Summer*, visit starblanketstoryteller.ca/joseph-kakwinokanasum.

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You often never know the impact you have made, but occasionally a former student will contact you to share the impact you've had on their lives.

- Kyle H, Secondary Teacher



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Lena Palermo photo.



Marilyn Ricketts-Lindsay photo.

See pages 14–17 to read about the Tri-National Conference in Oaxaca, Mexico. At the conference, union activists from Canada, Mexico, and the United States plan how to resist privatization and build community in public education.



Lena Palermo photo.



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