BC Teachers' Federation

Teacher

May/June 2022

Big Power Films photo

IN THIS ISSUE

Volume 34, Number 5—May/June 2022

Articles reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily express official policy of the BCTF. The BCTF does not endorse or promote any products or services advertised in the magazine. Advertisements reviewed and approved by the BCTF must reflect BCTF policy and be politically, environmentally, and professionally appropriate.

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

THIS IS YOUR MAGAZINE

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
ISSN 0841-9574

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*.

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.

2022–23 deadlines

Sept/Oct issue	July 29, 2022
Nov/Dec issue	September 23, 2022
Jan/Feb issue	November 4, 2022
March issue	January 6, 2023
May/June issue	March 24, 2023

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Teri Mooring, BCTF President

Thank you teachers, for all that you do

As the end of another school year comes into view, I want to thank all of you for the care and professionalism you have demonstrated over the course of another difficult year.

There is a lot going on in the world right now, on top of the stress and trauma of the pandemic. As teachers, we do our best to help students make sense of their world, even when it doesn't make sense to ourselves. We help to give them solid ground and safe learning environments to be curious, learn, and grow.

Your impact is profound and makes a lasting, positive difference in the lives of your students.

Our work on key priorities continues

When we're in the middle of a pandemic, it can be hard to remember the other issues going on and some of the advocacy successes we achieved as a union and profession.

For starters, our provincial bargaining team—after several months of hard work—has crafted and tabled an excellent package of proposals and continues to negotiate on our behalf. Bargaining updates and tabled language are available on *bctf.ca*.

We're working closely with other public sector unions on shared advertisements and public messaging to push for wage increases that address the rising cost of living.

MEET THE 2022–23 BCTF EC

Learn more about the members of the 2022–23 BCTF Executive Committee by visiting *bctf.ca* or scanning the QR code.

We also achieved some breakthroughs on long-standing issues with government this year. Our advocacy and efforts at decolonization finally brought results as the government announced a new graduation requirement for Indigenous coursework. This is an incredibly important milestone that speaks to our work with other partners in pushing for this addition. We're working to ensure this important change is implemented in a collaborative manner, is properly resourced, and includes in-service, all to ensure it is a success.

Our advocacy also paid off in getting a delay of the new reporting order to allow for a proper implementation period, as well as a new round of the Advisory Group on Provincial Assessment to finally make some progress on changing the FSAs in order to address our long-term concerns, including how the data are used. We were also successful in our advocacy to delay the implementations to online learning. We are participating on the government committee and seeking to have a number of concerns addressed.

Looking ahead to new leadership and a new year

As my last term as BCTF President comes to an end, I am very proud of what our union has done together over the last three years. We negotiated and ratified a collective agreement without job action, and we defended our members' rights and professionalism in the face of the ever-shifting pandemic.

As I look back, one of things I am most proud of is the work the BCTF has done to advance equity and inclusion inside our union. Led by BIPOC members and members from other equity-seeking groups, we have begun the important work of transforming our union to ensure it is more representative and inclusive.

I'm especially proud of the Executive Committee's decision to create an Office of Antiracism and Anti-Oppression within the BCTF. This will ensure our continued learning in support of equity, diversity, and inclusion is embedded within the organization and results in meaningful change.

As I get ready to step away as President, I am very much looking forward to spending more time with my grandchildren after nine years as a BCTF Full-Time Table Officer.

Thank you to everyone across the Federation, and my amazing local of Quesnel, for the support and mentorship over the years.

Teri Mooring
BCTF President

MESSAGE DE LA PRÉSIDENTE

Merci à vous, les enseignant(e)s, pour tout ce que vous faites

À l'approche de la fin d'une autre année scolaire, je tiens à vous remercier tous et toutes pour le soin et le professionnalisme dont vous avez fait preuve au cours de cette autre année difficile.

En plus du stress et des traumatismes causés par la pandémie, beaucoup de choses se passent en ce moment dans le monde. En tant qu'enseignant(e)s, nous faisons de notre mieux pour aider les élèves à comprendre leur monde, même lorsque cela n'a pas de sens même pour nous. Nous contribuons à leur offrir des bases solides et des environnements d'apprentissage sûrs afin faire fleurir leur curiosité, leur apprentissage et leur croissance.

Votre impact est profond et fait une différence positive et durable dans la vie de vos élèves.

Notre travail sur les priorités clés se poursuit

Lorsque nous sommes en pleine pandémie, il peut être difficile de se rappeler les autres problèmes en cours et certains des succès que nous avons obtenus en tant que syndicat et profession.

Pour commencer, notre équipe de négociation provinciale, après plusieurs mois de travail acharné, a élaboré et déposé un excellent ensemble de propositions et continue de négocier en notre nom. Les mises à jour sur les négociations et le libellé sont disponibles sur le site Web *bctf.ca*

Nous travaillons en étroite collaboration avec d'autres syndicats du secteur public pour diffuser des annonces et des messages publics afin de réclamer des augmentations salariales qui tiennent compte de la hausse du coût de la vie.

Nous avons également réalisé des percées sur des questions de longue date avec le gouvernement cette année. Notre plaidoyer et nos efforts de décolonisation ont finalement porté leurs fruits lorsque le gouvernement a annoncé une nouvelle exigence de diplomation pour les cours autochtones. Il s'agit d'une étape extrêmement importante qui témoigne de notre travail en collaboration avec d'autres partenaires pour faire pression en faveur de cet ajout. Fait important, nous nous efforçons de veiller à ce que ce changement important soit mis en œuvre de manière collaborative, qu'il soit doté de ressources adéquates et soit intégré au service, tout cela dans le but d'en assurer le succès.

Notre plaidoyer a également porté ses fruits en ce qui a trait au report de la nouvelle ordonnance de rapports pour permettre une période de mise en œuvre appropriée, ainsi qu'une nouvelle ronde du Groupe consultatif sur l'évaluation provinciale pour enfin progresser sur la modification des EHB afin de répondre à nos préoccupations de longue date, incluant la façon dont les données sont utilisées. Nous avons également réussi à retarder la mise en œuvre de l'apprentissage en ligne. Nous participons au comité du gouvernement et nous cherchons à obtenir des réponses à un certain nombre de préoccupations.

RENCONTREZ LE COMITÉ EXÉCUTIF DE LA FECB 2022–2023

Pour en savoir plus sur les membres du Comité exécutif de la FECB 2022-2023, visitez bctf.ca ou scannez le code QR.

Vers un nouveau leadership et une nouvelle année

Alors que mon dernier mandat à la présidence de la FECB s'achève, je suis très fière de ce que notre syndicat a accompli au cours des trois dernières années. Nous avons négocié et ratifié une convention collective sans moyens de pression et nous avons défendu les droits et le professionnalisme de nos membres face à la constante évolution de la pandémie.

En rétrospective, l'une des choses dont je suis le plus fière est le travail accompli par la FECB afin de promouvoir l'équité et l'inclusion au sein de notre syndicat. Sous la direction des membres BIPOC et d'autres groupes en quête d'équité, nous avons entrepris l'important travail de transformation de notre syndicat afin de s'assurer qu'il soit plus représentatif et inclusif.

Je suis particulièrement fière de la décision du Comité exécutif de créer un Bureau de l'antiracisme et de la lutte contre l'oppression au sein de la FECB. Ainsi, notre apprentissage continu en faveur de l'équité, de la diversité et de l'inclusion sera intégré à l'organisation et entraînera des changements significatifs.

Alors que je m'apprête à quitter mon poste de présidente, j'ai très hâte de passer plus de temps avec mes petits-enfants après neuf ans à titre d'officière à temps plein de la FECB.

Merci à tous les membres de la Fédération, et à ma formidable section locale de Quesnel, pour le soutien et le mentorat apportés au fil des années.

Teri Mooring
Présidente de la FECB

Seamless Day Kindergarten supports students and families

By Melia Dirk, Kindergarten teacher, and **Alaina Smith**, early childhood educator, Oliver

"THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STORYTELLER IS TO THE CULTURE OF THE COMMUNITY."
– BARRY LOPEZ

KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOMS are magical places with exceptional adventures in learning! Seamless Day Kindergarten (SDK) is a program within the school that incorporates before- and after-school care in a licensed Kindergarten classroom. Early childhood educators (ECEs) lead the before-school care, transition the children into their school day, work as additional educators in the Kindergarten classroom, and provide after-school care in a variety of environments, including the Kindergarten classroom, outdoors, the school gym, or library.

The benefits of this program are tremendous for children. We have seen amazing growth in their capacity to self-regulate and the pace of their social and emotional development. There are fewer peaks and valleys for these learners because there are more consistent eyes and hearts supporting them at this critical stage.

The team approach makes the work more thoughtful and less stressful. We can do it all as educators, but we can't do it all alone.

Kindergarten students outside during a seamless day.

Left: The students honour their classroom. Alaina Smith photos.

A KINDERGARTEN TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE: MELIA'S REFLECTIONS

In 2019, I was approached with the idea of having a seamless day program in my classroom. At that time, I had no idea how it would work: What was the day going to look like? What were the expectations of the morning ECE? What about the afternoon ECE? How would we share our space? Who had which responsibilities? How would we work and plan together?

I knew this program had the potential to be amazing for children and families, so with an open heart and open mind, I agreed to lead this program in my classroom. With three adults working in a collaborative learning environment, the children would thrive, having more personal connections to caring adults; and families' worry and anxiety would ease, having secure before- or after-school care and transportation to childcare sites.

My experience as a teacher reminded me that collaboration would be the key to our success. I wanted to ensure children and families saw myself and the ECEs as equals in this education environment, not as teachers and helpers in a hierarchical sense. We are all educators and want the best for the children.

AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR'S EXPERIENCE: ALAINA'S REFLECTIONS

My role as the ECE in the classroom has changed and developed as I have grown in my position over the past three years. I have learned an extraordinary amount by observing, wondering, and talking about teaching strategies with our team of educators.

Over time, I assimilated into the philosophy and pedagogy of the classroom. Melia became comfortable with my strengths and provided me time and space in the classroom to develop and share my ideas and invited me to lead in areas where I felt confident. I began to feel like I also had ownership of the space. It is my happy space where I am making meaningful connections with the children and families.

My profession as an early childhood educator has been held up by those around me in the most outstanding ways as well. I feel appreciated for my expertise as an ECE. The professional development that I am part of, and the learning alongside and from these teachers, has made me a better educator and team member.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SEAMLESS DAY KINDERGARTEN

"TEACHERS HAVE NO CHOICE IN PARTICIPATING IN SDK"

Teachers do have choice. The school district receives Ministry funding for the seamless day and there is a list of criteria for implementation, one of which is that Kindergarten teachers must have the choice to participate in the program. In our school district, all Kindergarten teachers were asked if they wanted to participate in SDK. Some chose to participate, some did not, and some were curious to watch and learn. Currently, we have three SDKs in our district. For this program to be successful, all educators involved must be willing to work in a positive, collaborative manner.

"TEACHERS HAVE TO SHARE SPACE, PERSONAL BELONGINGS, AND RESOURCES IN THE CLASSROOM"

Our belief is that the classroom belongs to the children, not us. We all treat the materials and resources as if they are our own, so this is not an issue. The classroom is a shared space with shared resources. We all have the same invested interest in the children, the program, and each other.

"TEACHERS HAVE NO TIME ALONE IN THE CLASSROOM"

We have arranged the schedule so the teacher does have time alone in the classroom. Here is our schedule: the morning ECE starts the day at 7:15 a.m. in the classroom. As the children arrive, they eat breakfast and play co-operative games until 8:00 a.m. Next, the ECE takes them to the gym, outside, or to the computer lab so the teacher has 25 minutes to get set up for the day (if the ECE did not have time to get things set up already). After school the children have their snack inside the classroom with the afternoon ECE, then go to other areas of the school or outside for 45 minutes or more so the teacher has the classroom to themselves. Strategically placed transition times allow for personal space.

"TEACHERS' PREP TIME WILL BE TAKEN AWAY"

From the beginning, I felt it was very important for the ECEs and Kindergarten teacher to meet as a team each week for 25–30 minutes to discuss and plan. I choose to use part of my prep time for this. Of course, we are always talking and planning, but for this program to run smoothly we need to meet intentionally each week. We discuss our observations, where we want to take our learning, and how we can support each other. Preparation time is not lost, but rather includes other voices that help make the program as successful as it is. It just looks different. Again, this is the teacher's choice, and not an expectation from our leadership team.

Our Seamless Day Kindergarten is a magical space. There is a beautiful collaborative relationship between the adults in the room, which positively affects the children. They see their teachers truly care about them and each other. Is this program for everyone? Maybe not, but if you are willing to foster collaborative relationships with the adults who work in your room, the possibilities are endless! ●

YOU CAN GET A GLIMPSE INTO OUR CLASSROOM BY FOLLOWING @SEAMLESS_DAY_KINDY ON INSTAGRAM.

Developmental language disorder in the classroom

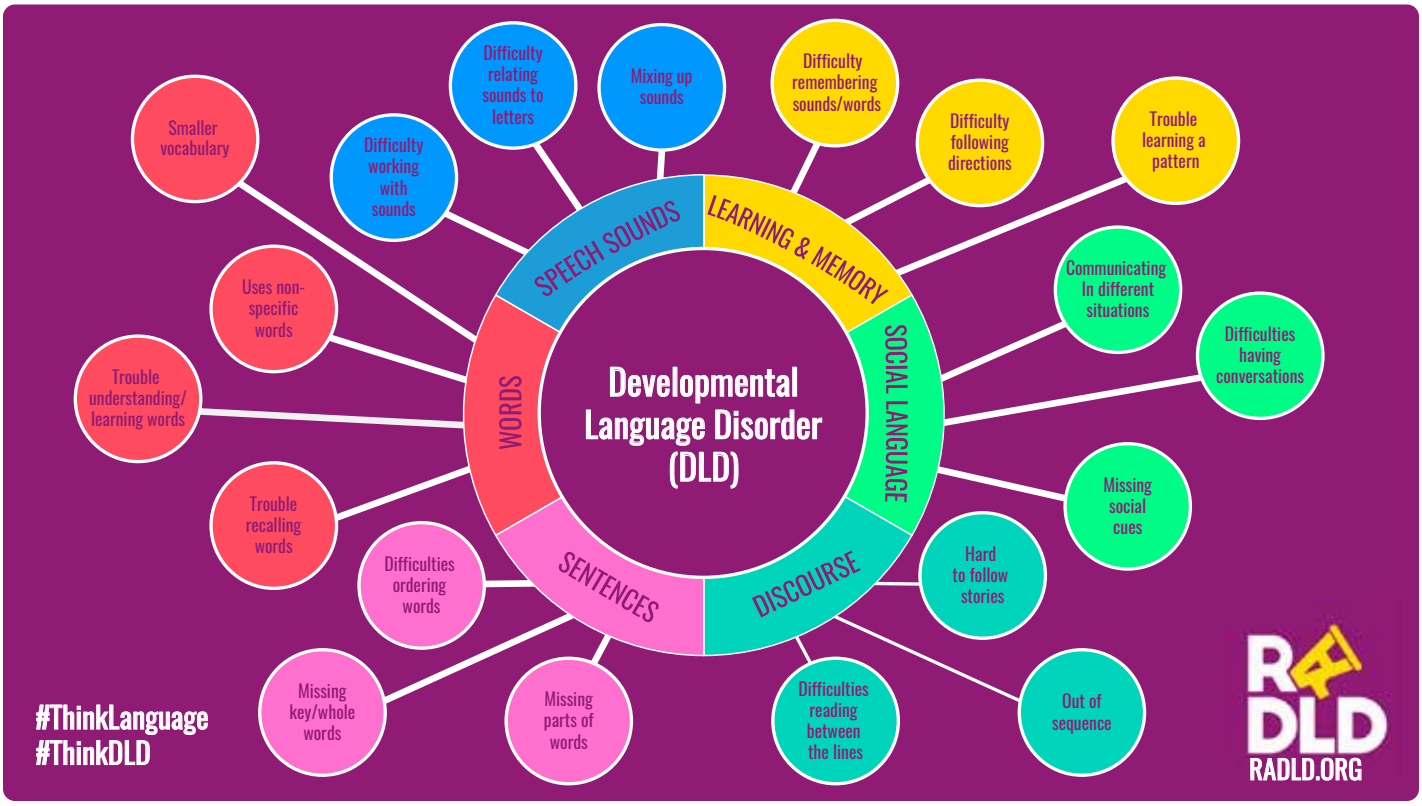
By Caitlin Malli (she/her), speech language pathologist, Saanich

THERE IS A HIDDEN DISABILITY that you may see in as many as two children in every classroom. This disability is called developmental language disorder (DLD). People with DLD have difficulties with language *without* another biomedical condition, like autism or moderate intellectual disability. DLD emerges in childhood but is a persistent, life-long condition. DLD has a genetic and biological basis, such as subtle brain differences. These risks can be mediated by environmental input.

While the language challenges experienced by students with DLD may not always be as obvious as other language impairments, such as speech sound disorders, studies estimate that 7–10% of children present with a language disorder without a known cause (i.e., DLD). This could be as many as 40,000 students in the BC public school system! As students with DLD do not "sound" different, they are not always identified prior to school or in early school years, continuing with a "hidden disability."

With DLD being so common, it is important for educators to talk about it in schools, learn more about its effects, and learn how to identify students with DLD early on. Until recently, there was no agreed-upon term to describe DLD. Instead, there were several different terms used to describe this condition, including receptive-expressive language challenges, language processing difficulties, speech language impairment, or a language delay. Developmental language disorder is the term selected by a multinational and multidisciplinary consensus study.[1] Through common terminology internationally and across professions, we can better raise awareness about this condition and advocate for supports and resources.

In the classroom, children with language difficulties may struggle with learning, literacy, social relationships, mental health, and behaviour. Each student with DLD will have a different profile of language strengths and stretches (see Raising Awareness of Developmental Language Disorder's infographic below). Awareness of DLD characteristics is especially important for children with mild language challenges. Just because a student can hold a conversation does not mean their language is "fine." Subtle challenges with learning new vocabulary, following complex directions,



and applying language to academics may also indicate a language disorder. Potential difficulties that suggest a student could benefit from further observation or assessment include:

- Shorter and less complex sentences.
- Difficulty organizing ideas.
- Limited vocabulary/ use of non-specific language (e.g., that, stuff, thing).
- Difficulty interacting successfully with other students.
- May appear to understand and then get lost in multistep classroom routines or they may not successfully follow routines at all.
- Off-topic or incorrect responses to questions.
- Challenges developing literacy skills at the same rate as their peers. Although DLD affects spoken language, individuals with DLD are six times more likely to have reading difficulties, six times more likely to have significant spelling problems, and four times more likely to struggle with math.[2]
- DLD occurs across languages. For English language learner (ELL) students, talk to caregivers to look for persistent errors in *all* languages.

As a speech language pathologist (SLP), I work with many students with DLD every day. A diagnosis of DLD is most commonly provided through speech language pathology assessment. While direct support from an SLP is crucial, one-on-one support time is limited in schools. Speech language pathologists can provide support for students with DLD in collaboration with teachers to improve language and literacy skills. My focus for the past few years has been working with teachers in my schools to develop tier-one supports for all students in the classroom, including students with DLD.

Alisa Russell, a Grade 3/4 teacher in one of my schools, beautifully described the benefits of this approach in a classroom. She said, "Detecting disorders or challenges in learning for children is hard and time consuming. When you know a child is struggling, you need to work with as many knowledgeable experts as you can. It takes a village to diagnose the barriers for struggling learners." Collaboration and awareness among professionals, including SLPs, are crucial to identifying and supporting students with DLD.

Together, Alisa and I brainstormed whole-class oral language and literacy strategies "meant for one but accessible by everyone." Using visual and kinesthetic cues helped students learn vowel spelling patterns by providing additional supports to connect mouth position to the sound produced. Alisa created "Ready-Do-Done" visuals, to help students organize their resources (Get Ready), plan the sequential steps (Do), and picture the end result (Done) in multistep directions. Planning how to pace and present lessons at a level accessible to all students allowed Alisa to include all students in classroom activities.

One of the largest projects that Alisa and I have completed together was to implement a school oral narrative language program through grant funding. Alisa and Melissa Bourdon, the teacher-librarian at our school, taught the first phase of the program, which targets foundational story elements, such as character, setting, and take off (a different way of describing the problem or initiating event of a story). The lessons are simple and repetitive with many examples and icons to illustrate the concepts, all useful strategies for children with language disorders or learning challenges. Alisa integrated hands-on opportunities to demonstrate learning with the program. Through these structured learning opportunities, all students improved their narrative abilities. Although written language was not explicitly targeted, these improvements transferred to their written language output, as oral language is a foundational skill for literacy development.

Building awareness of the term developmental language disorder in schools and in the public is crucial to help children get identified and receive supports. Early screening of language and literacy in Kindergarten aids identification. If you have students in your classroom who you are wondering about, reach out to your school SLP to ask questions. They can provide you with strategies, suggestions, and a potential assessment if needed. General strategies to support language learning in the classroom include:

REPETITION—research suggests that students struggling to learn language need to hear a new word 36 times to remember it.

USE MULTIMODAL SUPPORTS—students with DLD have challenges with oral language. Visual supports allow them to compensate for these difficulties and join in classroom activities. Use visual supports, such as visual schedules, Ready-Do-Done charts, and gestures. Peer models are also helpful.

EXPLICITLY TEACH LANGUAGE STRUCTURES AND VOCABULARY—teach written and oral language structures in the classroom. Explicitly teach phonics patterns, narrative structure, and grammatical rules, such as suffixes or prefixes.

WATCH FOR NON-LITERAL LANGUAGE, LIKE IDIOMS AND METAPHORS—common instructions, such as "keep your eyes on the board," may be confusing for children with DLD, as their literal interpretation is different than the intended meaning.

CONSULT WITH YOUR SLP—SLPs are specifically trained to identify, diagnose, and provide intervention for language and literacy disorders. •

MORE INFORMATION

Visit *dldandme.org* to learn more about DLD and to find resources.

Watch and share Raising Awareness of Developmental Language Disorder's video by visiting *qrco.de/bcxnMz or* scanning the QR code.

1 D. Bishop et al., "Phase 2 of CATALISE: a multinational and multidisciplinary Delphi consensus study of problems with language development: Terminology," *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry, and allied disciplines*, 58(10), 2017, p. 1068–1080.

2 A.R. Young et al., "Young adult academic outcomes in a longitudinal sample of early identified language impaired and control children," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 43, 2002, p. 635–645.

New ad campaign launched to support bargaining

ON MAY 2, 2022, the BCTF started its latest advertising campaign to help support the Federation and our bargaining team in achieving a good deal in provincial negotiations. This campaign is in addition to the joint advertising the BCTF has done with other public sector unions who are all calling for wage increases that help address the rising cost of living for the workers who kept BC's economy and public services open during the pandemic.

Our latest campaign will run until the end of June and focuses on the need to improve working conditions, address the teacher shortage, and improve wages.

The ads will run on more than 70 radio stations in over 40 communities across BC. There will also be ads on Mandarin, Cantonese, and Punjabi language radio stations. The campaign will also feature some special guest spots by well-known radio DJs and their kids.

In addition to the radio component, members and the public will see billboards and transit-shelter ads in over 30 communities, as well as a significant digital and social media presence, including video, streaming audio, and podcasts.

You can help the campaign by visiting ***ItTakesATeacher.ca*** and sharing a story about a teacher who inspired you. •

Don't forget, BCTF members can see all of the confidential bargaining updates, as well as all the proposals, on the Bargaining Updates and Information page on *bctf.ca*. Visit *qrco.de/bczZ2U or* scan the QR code.

SCAN ME

Out of whose pockets? Out of Our Pockets

By Dan Laitsch, Chairperson, Institute for Public Education/BC

WE ALL KNOW teachers spend an enormous amount of their own money on their students, their classrooms, and their schools. But how much?

To try and better understand just how much money comes into the system from educators, the Institute for Public Education/BC (IPE/BC) is launching a new project: we call it Out of Our Pockets, and it is designed to track teacher spending of their own money on their students, classrooms, colleagues, and schools.

IPE/BC is an independent, non-partisan society that provides high-quality information and leadership to build a strong public education system for BC's children, families, and communities. As a core part of our mission, we have been tracking funding for education in BC and across Canada since our founding in 2016.

We know that teachers spend hundreds and, in some cases, thousands of dollars of their own money ensuring their students have access to adequate food, clothing, hygiene products, as well as curricular and extracurricular resources. During the pandemic, educators have spent their own money on PPE and cleaning products to ensure safer learning environments for their students.

All this money covers core services that should be provided by the provincial government. We hope that with this tracking we can better understand spending needs and patterns, which will allow us to advocate for changes in policy and funding to ensure that the basic health and learning needs of all public school students are met.

Our website (*ooop.ca*) is currently being pilot-tested as we move to scaling up the project for full implementation this summer. We invite you to check out the website and join us in our effort to track teacher out-of-pocket spending.

At *ooop.ca* you'll create an account where you can easily enter and track your spending across five categories: COVID-related, teaching materials, student learning materials, extracurricular materials, and financial support for students. Designed to be compatible with smart phones, you can easily enter your data, even while you're standing in line at the store.

The system allows you to monitor your spending to better understand your school's resource needs. You can also look back on what you've spent over the year, which can be helpful at tax time.

Registering now will ensure you are part of the full system once it is launched later this year. All information entered on the website is held in confidence and, as a user-driven system, your participation is entirely voluntary: you can add, delete, and revise any of the data entered, and close your account at any time.

We invite you to check out *ooop.ca*. Sign up to record your out-of-pocket spending. Send us any questions you have through our feedback link. We also encourage you to visit the IPE/BC website (*instituteforpubliceducation.org*) and look at all of our work to support BC's public school system. Together, we can shine a bright light on the structural funding gaps built into the system as we advocate for change. •

iStock.com/ritchiedigital

"AOEC is showing all members, no matter their background or experience, they have a home in this organization and in this union."

Clockwise from top left: Jelana Bighorn, AOEC Member-at-Large; Shanee Prasad, AOEC President; Karine Ng, AOEC Treasurer; Preet Lidder, AOEC Vice-President. **Opposite:** AOEC members remind us to "Read, Learn, Reckon."

Anti-Oppression Educators Collective:
A BCTF provincial specialist association profile

By Sunjum Jhaj (she/her), Editor, *Teacher* magazine

THE FIRST TIME I MET Jelana Bighorn, Member-at-Large on the Anti-Oppression Educators Collective (AOEC) Executive Committee, she shared the radical notion that oppression could be eradicated in one generation if our education system was designed to address the injustices inherent in society. This is, no doubt, true. Schools play a critical role in preparing students for the future. The question is, are we preparing students for a future that looks like the present, where white supremacist, colonial, patriarchal systems of power predominate, or are we preparing students to challenge normalized oppressions and create a more just society?

Oppression can be defined as unjust treatment that disadvantages certain groups. There are many different forms of oppression: sexism, racism, homophobia, and economic oppression, just to name a few. Systems of oppression are the structures within society that allow unjust treatment to continue and perpetuate the inequalities that have plagued our society for centuries.

AOEC is working to change the ways in which we are all, to some extent, complicit in supporting systems of oppression.

So, how does one even begin to dismantle these systems of oppression and work toward creating socially just communities? The first step is to learn to name and recognize oppression. For the AOEC, this means engaging in ongoing learning both collectively and individually.

Reflective (un)learning

AOEC members meet regularly for anti-oppression book club meetings to continually learn, unlearn, and share. Together, they learn about anti-oppression struggles and reflect on their work and personal experiences related to oppression. Last summer, they read Harsha Walia's *Border and Rule*. This spring, they read Mariame Kaba's *We Do This 'Til We Free Us*.

"We intentionally choose books that may not seem immediately related to education," said Karine Ng, AOEC Treasurer. "We want to challenge the idea that education is disconnected from larger social movements."

The book club meetings are open to all AOEC members and any teachers interested in learning more about oppression and anti-oppression movements. This not only gives members an opportunity to learn from each other and from experts in the field, it also opens the door to personal reflection and unlearning.

So much of the oppression we see in schools today is normalized by larger social practices. This internal reflective work is a long journey, and as any AOEC member will tell you, there is always more to learn and unlearn.

Working toward a just society

Over the past few years, the AOEC has created several opportunities for teachers and community members to participate in the work of dismantling oppression and creating a just society. On an individual level, AOEC members offer workshops and facilitate learning as needed in their schools and local communities. On a provincial level, AOEC has organized and hosted virtual events for teachers to learn from students and marginalized people about what is needed in order to dismantle oppression in schools.

Past virtual events include a workshop centring Black student voices titled Confronting Anti-Black Racism in Schools, a conference called Teaching to Dismantle Borders: Neutrality Is Not an Option, and a climate justice webinar.

Following the confirmation of unmarked graves at residential schools across Canada last spring, the AOEC launched a campaign for two in-service days each school year to create time and space for settler teachers to read and understand the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

"As an organization, we're looking at ways to develop tools and process so we can move beyond dialogue and discussion to real accountability," said Shanee Prasad, AOEC President.

Their request for dedicated in-service days was denied after meeting with Minister of Education Jennifer Whiteside. However, the campaign did not end there. Many teachers from across the province heard the AOEC's call to "Read, Learn, Reckon" and took it upon them-selves to engage in reconciliation and decolonization on in-service days throughout the school year.

"Teachers want to do better and know more, but we're seeing that we can't always rely on systems to create opportunities for us to dismantle oppression," said Preet Lidder, AOEC Vice-President.

Finding community

The work of dismantling oppression can be difficult. The daily struggle against people and systems that deny your right to equity is heavy. AOEC members have encountered resistance to anti-oppression work and new barriers at every step. However, the community they've created has helped them all find support and joy in this work.

"I was planning my exit from the teaching profession," said Karine. "It's magical I found this community. It has given me new energy. The fight isn't easier together, but it's more meaningful."

Each AOEC member I spoke with shared a story of finding belonging, solidarity, and compassion within this organization. "There's so much racism in all of the spaces we occupy, and we see so much backlash to anti-oppression work," said Shanee. "AOEC is a place of hope and encouragement. It's a shelter in so many ways, especially for BIPOC women."

That is not to say that the AOEC is a group of like-minded teachers with similar backgrounds. Rather, they're a diverse group with one shared goal: to create a more just world for everyone. And as an organization, they are modelling what true inclusion and anti-oppression looks like.

What happens when we eliminate barriers and give everyone a safe, fair, and equitable way to participate? For starters, we increase participation from all groups, including marginalized groups whose voices tend to be excluded. With increased participation, we see better representation in leadership. In the AOEC's case, we see a leadership team that represents the diversity of BC teachers. The AOEC is showing all members, no matter their background or experience, they have a home in this organization and in this union.

"There is so much to be gained by bringing together people with different perspectives, opinions, and insights," said Jelana. "We will stay in this cycle of hurt and oppression unless we're willing to push through together." •

Sunjum Jha photos

Hear us speak our truth

By Twyla Frid Lotenberg, Jayden Seamans, Zoie Bhalloo, Maeya Jones, Anthony Lam, students, and **Aaron Anthony and Kimberley Jung,** teachers

We would like to acknowledge that we are fortunate to have collaborated, studied, shared, and written as we are gathered on the unceded, ancestral territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, specifically, the Squamish Nation on which West Vancouver schools reside.

EVERYONE, TAKE YOUR SEATS. It is time to learn. Whether you are an expert on all things diversity, equity, and inclusion, or if it is the first time you have ever seen the word intersectionality, you need to hear this.

Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw over 30 years ago, outlines how people's social identities overlap, resulting in compounding inequities and privileges. As such, not all marginalized peoples experience marginalization in the same way. This article is not a comprehensive account, but it covers some experiences and perspectives of what it means to be different and bold members of Rockridge Secondary's Youth Alliance for Intersectional Justice Club.

The Intersectional Justice Club follows the values of the Youth Alliance for Intersectional Justice (YAIJ) non-profit organization, started by Carolyn Tinglin and her son, Jantz Richards. The non-profit is a Black, youth-led collective that works to amplify the voices of Black and Indigenous youth at the intersections of race and ability through community-based projects and research.

The club and non-profit organization allow students and teachers to work together to create safe spaces where all members of our community can find connection and belonging with other marginalized people and allies.

Maeya Jones photos

Jayden Seamans: I am mixed race, neurodivergent, and a pansexual woman, so what does this mean?

As a person who is mixed race, half Black and half white, I feel really lonely. The tensions that form within each of those communities can make me feel left out. I am treated differently within the Black community because of my lighter skin, but I still face racism in white spaces. I am also in multiple communities when it comes to sexuality and gender identity, since I am pansexual and use she/they pronouns. Additionally, I am neurodivergent. The intersections of my identities have caused people to have low expectations of me. All of these parts of my identity mean that I have few spaces where I feel a sense of belonging. One of the few spaces where I have a sense of belonging is in the Advisory Committee for the Youth Alliance for Intersectional Justice non-profit organization, because there are other Black neurodivergent youth there.

Anthony Lam: I am Asian and an ally, so what does this mean?

As an Asian, I have always lived with a set of racial assumptions and stereotypes perpetuated by media and the communities around me, isolating me from the dominant groups. Living with this has made it tougher for me to succeed, to fit in with my predominantly white community, and to show people who I truly am.

My experiences as a person of colour inspired me to be an ally. Being an ally is recognizing your own identity and the unearned privileges you have been given. Allyship also requires recognizing all social injustices, using this awareness to gain a better understanding of what it means to be marginalized members of a community, and supporting social justice.

Twyla Frid Lotenberg: I am mixed race, neuro-divergent, and a woman, so what does this mean?

I have always been different. I was the kid who couldn't read and write. The kid who doesn't look like everyone else and who doesn't understand how other kids relate to the world. These differences have been a steady undercurrent in my life, and it is a direct consequence of marginalized social identities thrust on me. These are social constructs with life-altering implications. The coalition of identities projected onto me shaped both my sense of self and how I interact with the world around me. In response, I strive to be empathetic and compassionate, because I know how it feels for people to make unfounded assumptions about who and what you are based on only a few components of your identity. Additionally, I have experienced how it feels to be consistently underestimated and undermined because of a diagnosis that actually expands my cognitive ability while limiting my fluency to decode and encode written language. Yet people assume it makes me incompetent and destined for failure. "What are you?" is a question I am all too familiar with. My response: I am Twyla Bella Frid Lotenberg, and I am here to make a difference.

Maeya Jones: I am an ally and a woman, so what does this mean?

As a woman, I have been treated unfairly, sexualized, and diminished. This experience of discrimination has helped me to realize that while my gender puts me in a position of disadvantage, other parts of my identity put me in a position of privilege. I did nothing to obtain the advantages that I have, they were given to me by a society shaped by systematic bias and inequality. This perspective has inspired me to be an ally to those who do not experience such advantages. Being an ally means having awareness of the dynamics of my identity in relation to another person's and recognizing the ways in which privilege and power may be unbalanced. As an ally, I continually listen, learn, and work to deepen my understanding of the experiences of marginalized people.

Zoie Bhalloo: I am a woman of colour and an ally, so what does this mean?

As a woman of colour, I have become highly aware of the biases and microaggressions that exist in our society. As a young girl, I always felt that I was looked at differently. Feeling a sense of isolation, I lacked the capacity and confidence to advocate for myself. At times my identity became a confusing subject, internally I felt uneasy when discussing it. Living in a highly privileged environment surrounded by predominantly white students and teachers, I found it at times hard to comfortably and openly appreciate my background, so often it was easier to bury it and avoid the subject, hoping to blend in. By surrounding myself with others that I feel close to and teachers who understand me, I have gained the confidence to speak up for myself and what I believe is just. A support system, whether that is inside or outside of your household, is so important as it helps you to celebrate your differences.

Kimberley Jung: I am a teacher who is a woman of colour, so what does this mean?

Being an Asian woman may position me to be a role model whether I choose to be or not, and creates pressure to advocate for students, especially when it comes to racial and gender inequity. I often see partial reflections of my own identity mirrored back at me through my students. I feel that when I communicate concerns regarding racial or gender injustices on behalf of students, colleagues have a difficult time differentiating my identities from the situation, and it becomes personal, because I cannot escape who I am when it comes to seeking to protect students from sexism or anti-Asian racism. Being a woman of colour for me is something that I visibly wear every day with no space to really breathe and just exist as a human being. Because of the myth of the model minority, I am left with little grace for mistakes and am expected to be silent and complacent. I have to actively work against the myth and break free from being a cog within the wheel of white supremacist structures that demand perfection and divide other marginalized groups from one another: it is a call to dismantle hierarchy and unite in allyship.

In the context of my English classroom, I find that every year I unpack more about how our perceptions of the spaces where we spend approximately 70% of our week revolve around hierarchical structures that were established centuries ago. Ever since colonization, the Canadian education system has been built upon and moulded around dominant social groups in society: able-bodied, neurotypical, Eurocentric, male, cisgendered, heterosexual, and middle to upper class. We see this play out in the content and curriculum as well as in our assessment practices and standardization. In fact, there are even historical implications that are not as visible, such as classroom management practices, behavioural responses, school decorum, dress codes, and discipline.

Whose history, knowledge systems, and narrative is prioritized and centred in learning? Does the validity of knowledge shared change in reception depending on the identities of teachers who share it? How are students understanding diversity, identity, and the world—and how are we preparing them to be educated and engaged in society? If we keep saying students are not ready, when will they be?

Aaron Anthony: I am a teacher who is a person of colour, so what does this mean?

As a person of colour, I know what it feels like to work through your identity as a racialized person in Canada. In turn, I realize that each of my students is going through a similar but often different process in regard to their own identity. James Baldwin once said, "You have to decide who you are and force the world to deal with you, not its idea of you." This quote resonates with me because as a brown man I have had to work on my own identity while contending with the way I am perceived by others. As a youth in the 1980s and 1990s, I could not rely on the educational system for affirmation of my identity, nor could that system give me adequate historical context for my place in society.

Now that I am a teacher, I am exploring ways to make my practice more meaningful for the diverse children that I teach. In my specialty, secondary science, BIPOC contributions and perspectives are rarely included. Not only that, but it is important to critique the role that Western science has played in colonialism. Because scientific rationality was held up as evidence of European superiority over Indigenous Peoples, there is a strong connection between Western science and violent colonial oppression. When those colonial contexts are left out of analyses of science, the histories and perspectives of oppressed peoples are erased. Meanwhile, our students are struggling to see themselves in our education system. We must go beyond simply tolerating diversity. When they are provided a space, like YAIJ, where they can engage with their identities, my students are honest about their experiences. Even though I often feel like I might know where they are coming from, I try to reserve judgment until they tell me how they really feel. I would like to support my students as they develop positive identities.

Call to action

Students often experience marginalization for the first time at school and even more so, if they are Indigenous, Black, differently abled, neurodiverse, 2SLGBTQ+, non-binary, female, or with less access to socio-economic benefits. It's important we throw away any and all preconceptions about students. Schools need to create safe spaces and acknowledge less visible forms of violence upon communities that are already facing discrimination. Ensuring students can see themselves in the content, curriculum, and assessment methods is a great way to begin. For neurodiverse students, implementing multiple modes to demonstrate learning can help build feelings of self-efficacy and belonging.

As we dive deeper, students also need to feel protected and supported in the structures and systems available for access in schools, whether that is in the contexts of mental health, physical health, behaviour, or education. Confronting systemic inequity can often be met with resistance and fragility. This stems from the idea that privileged individuals will somehow have something taken away from them or no longer benefit from the systems that work for them. In order to right as many wrongs as you can and to be an active ally, you have to move forward, and that begins by addressing the feelings of defensiveness and fragility. Systemic inequity is not about individuals, but a collective system.

As the bell rings and you rush to the next part of your day, we appeal to you to make one change, whether that be changing one aspect of one lesson to make it more accessible for a neurodivergent student, or something larger, like inspecting the biases within your lessons to disrupt ableism and white supremacy. It is attainable, it is doable. Class dismissed. •

BCTF WORKSHOPS

BELOW ARE JUST A FEW EXAMPLES OF BCTF WORKSHOPS available for school staffs, districts, locals, parent groups, and conference/PD days. Visit *bctf.ca* and click on "Services and Guidance" for more information.

Addressing Ableism

Ableism is a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities and often rests on the assumption that disabled people need to be "fixed." Participants will learn about the ways we view disability and how to identify and fight the stigma that people with disabilities face every day. Teachers will discuss and reflect on how an understanding of ableism can guide their practice to cultivate a culture of disability pride.

Antiracist Strategies for Educators

This interactive workshop equips teachers with a better understanding of antiracism and how it can be incorporated into their daily teaching practice. Participants will consider key skills students and teachers need to discuss and implement antiracism and will have the opportunity to explore teaching strategies and resources to integrate this approach into their classrooms.

Creating a Gender-Inclusive School Culture

This workshop will help develop an understanding of the risks facing trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse students; gain increased familiarity with terminology used by the trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse communities; and increase awareness of gender identity and gender expression. Best practices for supporting a student through gender transition within the school system will be covered. Although the focus is on trans, non-binary, and gender diverse-students, gender-inclusive schools help all students to feel safe at school.

Engaging Men and Boys to Prevent Gender-Based Violence

Participants will begin by examining the varying degrees of violence against women and girls. After considering the concepts of gender identity, power, and privilege, participants will reflect on their own values and begin to develop a plan to uphold them. Teachers will leave the workshop with a deeper understanding of the role men and boys can play in overcoming violence and an enhanced commitment to taking on this role. This workshop session will be offered to participants who identify as men. Another session will be offered for all teachers.

Poverty Is a Classroom Issue

In 2019, the BC government finally moved to implement a poverty reduction plan that will begin to help the 20% of children who live in poverty. This workshop helps teachers to develop an awareness of the issue of poverty and its implications for our students. It will challenge the assumptions we make about children living in poverty and provide strategies on how to support children who may be experiencing discrimination at school because of their socio-economic status.

Sixties Scoop

This workshop invites educators to open their hearts and minds to understanding the colonial impact of Canada's history on Indigenous families and their children. Educators will be challenged to unlearn the history taught to them and relearn how to value the lives of Indigenous Peoples. Educators will follow the lead of Indigenous educators who may be directly connected to the lived experience of the generations of stolen children.

Schools as hubs of community:

Making healthy food accessible for all families

By Sunjum Jhaj (she/her), Editor, *Teacher* magazine

WHAT COMES TO MIND when you think of a food bank? A lot of people picture shelves packed with mismatched non-perishables collected from food drives and donations. In reality, food banks look more like your local Costco.

The Greater Vancouver Food Bank (GVFB) has a warehouse in Burnaby filled with pallets of fresh fruits and vegetables, walk-in fridges and freezers to store dairy and meat, and, of course, shelves of nutritious non-perishables like grains and legumes. Food banks offer fresh, nutritious ingredients for wholesome meals that enable families, seniors, and all members of our communities to access a balanced diet.

The need for food banks has been higher than ever in recent years. In 2021, food bank visits across Canada increased by over 20%, with more than 1.3 million visits just in the month of March.[1] The GVFB supported 16,133 people throughout the year, 25% of whom were children.[2]

Food banks sourced additional food to meet the greater demand for services. However, there are still thousands of people living in food insecurity who do not or can not access the food bank because of accessibility challenges, the ongoing stigma associated with food bank use, or other cultural and personal reasons. Increasing access to healthy food throughout our communities is one of the GVFB's key goals.

Community agencies play an important role in helping establish connections between food banks and community members who need them. Community agencies are organizations that receive food, and sometimes resources such as fridges and freezers, from the food bank and in turn prepare and distribute hampers, meals, and snacks to community members. Schools' well-established relationships with hundreds of families and students make them ideal community agencies.

Community agencies have the flexibility to set up a food distribution program that works best for the staff involved and the community they serve. Across the city of Burnaby, the community agency program looks different at different school sites.

Mavis Anthony, a home economics teacher in Burnaby, got her school started as a community agency in 2020. Mavis's home economics students use food from the food bank to cook and prepare large quantities of freezer-ready meals. The meals are stored in a family support freezer in the school, where students and families can pick them up anytime they need. Future plans include high schools reaching out to address food insecurity in nearby elementary schools as well.

"There's a lot of stigma, uncertainty, and shame associated with food insecurity," said Mavis. "The family support freezer allows students to take what they need without drawing attention to themselves. It's done with dignity."

No matter what a school's food distribution program looks like, the theme of ensuring dignity is always present.

Gayle Beavil, President of the Association for Community Education in BC, noted that community schools are uniquely positioned to provide community supports, including food.

"Every community school is different because it's responsive to the needs and interests of the specific community," said Gayle. "We try to bring the community into the school and the school into the community through partnerships and involvement."

1 www.hungercount.foodbankscanada.ca
2 www.foodbank.bc.ca/about

To respond to unique needs, some community schools have a community school co-ordinator on staff. Some co-ordinators, like John Nanson, are teachers seconded from the classroom to work on community programs. The co-ordinator's role includes organizing community programs at the school, finding and securing funding and partnerships to keep the programs running, and building capacity with parents and the community.

"One of the community co-ordinator's most important jobs is building relationships," said John, referring to relationships with community partners, volunteers, community members, and families.

Relationships are what allow the programs to thrive. The food program in Burnaby's community schools is called the South-East Food Hub. It is one of nine food hubs across Burnaby run by community agencies. Thanks to well-established relationships, the South-East Food Hub was able to pivot quickly in March 2020 when the pandemic began.

The families who relied on the Food Hub were quick to volunteer and keep the program running in uncertain times. Families volunteered to sort and package food and deliver it to other families in the community. This shift to a community-run food hub turned out to be so successful it became standard practice. Every other Tuesday, several parents and volunteers meet at Edmonds Community School to co-ordinate the food hub and ensure families in their community have access to nutritious ingredients and food staples. "Many of the people running the food program are the people receiving the food. They are models for us all. They're addressing needs of the communities they live in," said John.

The Food Hub program supports families through the summer months as well, even when school is not in session. Food delivery continues for families that need it most, and resources are made available to all other families so they can access food from various pick-up locations around the city.

Partnerships between Burnaby schools and the GVFB highlight how effective and important schools are in supporting their communities.

"We want to make this happen across the province," said Cynthia Boulter, the Chief Operating Officer at the GVFB. "There's so much surplus, healthy food ending up in landfills. We want to get this food to school districts so kids and families can easily access it."

Schools have always served as hubs of community where students can access supports that extend far beyond academic learning. Food programs are just one example of the many supports schools provide.

"There are so many caring teachers in every school and the kids trust them," said Mavis. "We support kids in so many ways. Making sure they're fed and healthy is important to address if we want to help them learn and grow." ●

What happens to unused food?

In landfills and compost facilities, the surplus food from the food bank would produce greenhouse gases, further contributing to the current climate crisis. For a more environmentally friendly approach to food recovery, the GVFB has partnered with ReFeed Farms.

ReFeed Farm's Langley facility recycles tens of thousands of pounds of healthy, surplus food from retailers and recovers what it can for food banks first. What isn't safe for people to eat is sent to local farms as nutritious livestock feed.

The food that cannot be recycled into animal feed is instead used to create a perfect environment for worms. The worms recycle the food waste into nutrient-rich castings that can replace synthetic fertilizers. This circular nutrition model ensures zero waste and benefits food security efforts, farm animals, and the soil in which our food grows.

OPPOSITE: Community school co-ordinators Balraj Dhillon, John Nanson, Sheri Brattston (managing director), and Gayle Beavil (L to R). **BELOW:** Community members and volunteers Ikhlas El-Ezzi, Ahmad Al Barho, and Fatemeh Darvishi (L to R) help assemble packages for delivery. Despite having moved out of the community, Fatemeh still buses in every other Tuesday to volunteer.

Sunjum Jhaj photos

THE CLIMATE CRISIS IN

***Goodbye World* by Zoe Manson, Grade 9, Guildford Park Secondary, Surrey (teachers: Florence Carlsen and Allison Johnson) The reason I painted this is because I believe people are using this world as their trash can and society is building over our mistakes.**

***Mother Nature's Vengeance* (right), Gabrielle Canhe, Grade 11, Sullivan Heights Secondary, Surrey** (teacher: Christina Farrant)
Mother Nature's Vengeance is inspired by the heat dome that affected BC last summer. My artwork depicts a personified Mother Nature ruining carnival constructions as a consequence of humans contributing to the warming climate. Creating this artwork has taught me to acknowledge the severity of climate change all around us. Although lighthearted, satire opens people's eyes to the severity of climate change.

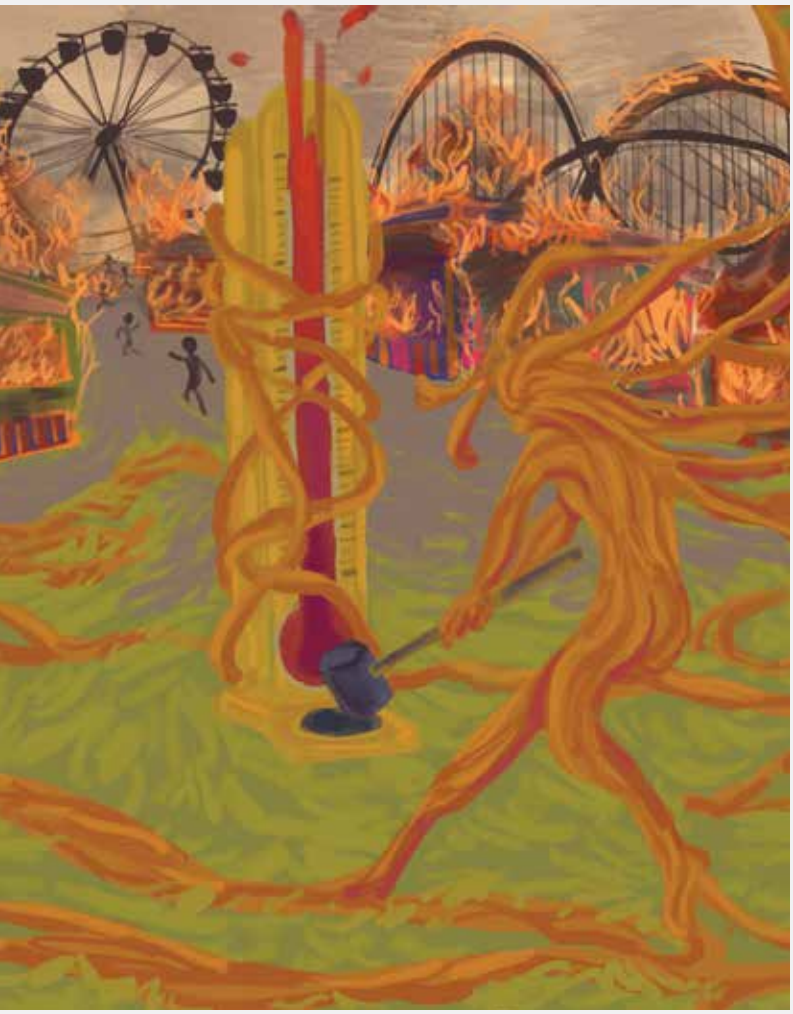
***Smoked Fish* (far right) by Ayva Wile, Grade 9, Guildford Park Secondary, Surrey** (teachers: Florence Carlsen and Allison Johnson)
This painting is inspired by Dr. Seuss and surrealism. With the use of fantasy imagery, this piece highlights the effects of deforestation and water and air pollution on our planet.

***Power Stacks Up Pollution* (below), Teagan Chow, Grade 11, Sullivan Heights Secondary, Surrey** (teacher: Christina Farrant)
My piece is inspired by the cargo ship that spilled toxic chemicals and shipping containers into the ocean near Victoria in late 2021. I saw how the containers resembled toy blocks, and used creative proportions to show a man knocking them over, while a young girl tries to keep them up. I aimed to show how capitalism and large corporations currently waste resources and cause mass pollution, conveying that everyone needs to contribute to fight climate change.

***Expansion of Humanity* (below right), Justin Laquip, Grade 9, Guildford Secondary, Surrey** (teachers: Florence Carlsen and Allison Johnson)
This painting is inspired by one of the environmental issues we are facing: urban sprawl. Urban sprawl is the rapid growth of low-density housing caused by population increases. This idea inspired me to paint an artificial bubble that re-creates the same environment on Earth, but it's built in space and holds a limited number of humans. I imagined there will be no more space on Earth in the future, and humans will have to build megastructures to support life in space.

STUDENT ART

Surrey secondary students create works about their critiques and fears around climate change.



THROUGH HELL AND HIGH WATER

The climate crisis comes to Merritt —and its schools

By Nick Kzanoski (he/him), teacher, Merritt

I woke at 4:00 a.m. *to police banging on our door telling us that we need to evacuate. The Coldwater River, 200 metres from our house, had reached the top of the dike. We began packing some clothes and food, connected our travel trailer to our truck, and 20 minutes later we were leaving; the river had breached the dike and was halfway up our truck tires.*

– Josée Warren, teacher, Merritt Secondary School

This was the reality for thousands of Merritt residents on Monday, November 15, 2021. Merritt Secondary School, Merritt Central Elementary School, and Diamond Vale Elementary School all flooded, with Merritt Central taking on the most water and suffering the most damage. Schools on higher ground were safe from flooding, but one, École Collettville, was cut off from the rest of the city because of bridge washout and sewage line damage. The Coldwater River had never seen that volume of water moving down it in recorded history.

By 9:00 a.m. Merritt city officials declared an evacuation order for all of Merritt because homes were flooded, bridges were unstable or washed away, water was unsafe to consume, and the sewer system had been compromised. Residents were instructed to take 72 hours' worth of supplies, report to Emergency Support Services, and proceed to Kamloops or Kelowna if they did not have friends or relatives with whom to stay in other communities. The Coquihalla highway was closed because of washouts, so nobody could access the Lower Mainland.

Within a couple of days, school staff checked in with administration and learned of major damage to some of our schools. It was clear that we would not be back in Merritt after 72 hours. Then teachers began doing what teachers do: worrying about the welfare of our students and colleagues. By the end of November, many teachers were in contact with students and families and consoling each other, offering support ranging from educational resources to food and supplies.

Flood waters ravaged the homes of hundreds of our students and colleagues. About 10 days after the flood, people with homes on high ground unaffected by the flood waters were granted access back into the city. At the same time thousands of other residents were told it was unsafe to return, and access to their homes was restricted. Some houses required extensive repairs, while others had suffered irreparable damage and were uninhabitable.

It became abundantly clear to teachers from two elementary schools and the one secondary school that things were not going back to normal anytime soon. We were not permitted access into the buildings to gather supplies or check on damage until early December. School board officials had to creatively rethink how education was going to be delivered. Three weeks after the flood, some schools resumed varying degrees of instructional programming for students. Two of the unaffected schools were able to welcome back their staff and students—if those staff and students had homes to which they could return.

It was really difficult to contact some students' families, because their lives had been turned upside down and they had lost their homes. Some were cut off from the community because bridges or whole sections of highway had been washed away by a raging river. "We lost everything, we had to run for our lives," said one parent whose son would not return to school as we tried to resume some educational programming. "School is not a priority right now. Our priority is survival: finding a place to live and food and clothing."

Left: Merritt Secondary School on the morning of Monday, November 15, 2021. Photo provided by author.

Thankfully, the school board continued to pay contract teachers, TTOCs, EAs, and all support staff throughout the school closures and allowed staff to prioritize home rebuilding and family over employment responsibilities. We were all affected and the only way to get through it was to work together, support each other, and help each other.

Many teachers and other colleagues came out to assist flood victims. Strangers came out to help strangers. A colossal amount of mud came down the Coldwater River and entered homes, but community spirit was strong. People showed up at affected houses and started shoveling heavy mud, moving destroyed furniture, piling heaps of destroyed possessions at the roadside, pulling out drywall and flooring, and helping to console devastated families.

It took four weeks until a member of the BC government, Deputy Premier Mike Farnworth, came to Merritt to survey the devastation. When the Prime Minister came to BC to survey flood damage he only visited the Fraser Valley, ignoring BC's Interior. These delayed actions and inactions really frustrated Merrittonians. We realized that citizens of rural communities need to be prepared to help each other and work together without expecting immediate government assistance. Eventually, military personnel were deployed to bolster temporary dikes.

All the while, donations from people all over BC and Canada poured in to help affected families and individuals. Several teacher unions sent donations to the Nicola Valley Teachers' Union, totaling thousands of dollars. The generosity of other locals helped many of our members with immediate costs related to devastated homes. Both the Canadian Red Cross and the Rotary Club quickly distributed hundreds of thousands of donated dollars to help victims, and they still continue their support. At the heart of our devastated community, the Nicola Valley Food Bank accepted monetary donations, food, and supplies from around the country to help our local citizens, many of whom relied on this generosity as they had been left with nothing.

These community supports were important for Merritt locals, but also Lytton locals in Merritt. Just six months before the catastrophic flooding, an extreme heat wave swept over the region, bringing the temperature close to 50°C and contributing to the wildfires that devastated Lytton and other local areas. Many Lytton evacuees relocated to Merritt until the flood forced them to evacuate for a second time in less than a year.

Following the winter break, school board management made arrangements for all students and staff to be back in buildings. Students and staff were split among three locations because some school sites are still unsafe for occupation. The logistics of transporting people in so many directions became a challenge for our bus driving staff, but they took it in stride and worked hard to keep students safe and going to all the right places. Many teachers travelled daily between locations, carrying with them the supplies needed to deliver education to students.

After spring break, Merritt Secondary and Diamond Vale Elementary returned to their respective buildings to resume instruction. Unfortunately, Merritt Central Elementary staff and students remain displaced because of the nature of the extensive damage to their school; they are expected to return to their building in September.

Below: Merritt shortly before the evacuation order. Big Power Films photo. **Opposite:** The author, centre back, and several teachers and community members helping shovel mud from a colleague's home. Photo provided by author.

"It was clear that we would not be back in Merritt after 72 hours. Then teachers began doing what teachers do: worrying about the welfare of our students and colleagues."

So, what have we learned from all of this?

Nature is powerful and swift, and we humans are at its mercy. The November 15 flood far exceeded the City of Merritt's 200-year floodplain limit map. Nobody expected a flood of this magnitude to hit Merritt, inflict this much damage, and create so much trauma. Climate events of this magnitude are staggeringly powerful and should cause us to re-evaluate how we live and how we affect our natural world. Humans have inflicted untold damage on the world's ecosystems, precipitating extreme disasters. Our footprint is everywhere as we cut down forests, pollute waters, invade pristine wild places, and burn fossil fuels that alter the chemistry of the atmosphere.

Being displaced from home is traumatizing, especially when one's home has been partially or fully destroyed. The whole city was evacuated for a few weeks, but some people are still displaced five months later, living in hotels or with family or friends. Upon returning to school after the winter break, some students and staff had to deal with the rigours of academic expectations combined with rebuilding their homes, replacing lost possessions, and relying on the generosity of others for food and clothing. Trauma takes a toll on people, often seriously affecting their ability to function and behave as expected, but we endured.

Routine is essential during traumatic experiences. School provides a safe place for children to be, whether they are in Kindergarten or Grade 12. Displaced children need stability and caring adults to be there for them and their families. Even though many of our students and staff have been teaching and learning in facilities that were not their normal places of education, and even transferring between locations midday, the care and attention that staff showed for students and for each other is remarkable.

Educators are tenacious. Despite devastating and traumatic events, we adapted. Our school board secured alternate facilities and educational resources for all students while our teaching and support staff provided quality education and assistance for our students wherever they were placed. As one Merritt Secondary School staff member, Melissa Pinyon, stated, "I see so much resilience, but I also see tired students and tired staff. I see everyone showing up even when they feel like there isn't much more to give. I see people coming together and making adjustments to support those who need it the most. I see the big wins and small wins are all celebrated the same, small steps back to whatever normal looks like. Everyone shows up, and for that I'm thankful."

We care for each other. This experience has demonstrated that humans respond with compassion and care in emergencies. In the words of another colleague, Amanda Lamothe, "Through all this, I've learned to always be kind. Chances are people are going through hell or high waters in their daily lives. All we can do is be kind."

A flood is not something I wish for anybody to experience. The flood has profoundly affected Merritt as a city and has taken a serious toll on education, but we have persevered with support from neighbouring communities, many British Columbians, and Canadians far and wide. We have demonstrated that education goes beyond foundational academic skills. Our school system is a crucial component of a well-functioning, healthy society that provides stability for children and social and emotional wellness for many. As the climate crisis worsens, the role of schools in helping students cope with climate anxiety and trauma from climate events will only grow. We have a responsibility to our natural world and our children to respond expeditiously to climate impacts in order to mitigate future disasters.●

Remembering Sumas Lake: Perspectives on a cultural landscape

By Glen Thielmann (he/him), teacher, Lheidli T'enneh territory

IN NOVEMBER OF 2021, the south coast of British Columbia was hit by yet another rainstorm. This one was special, though, and would leave behind a path of destruction in many locations and place it among Canada's most costly natural disasters. In the lower Fraser Valley, this storm hit after an already wet fall, with the ground saturated from heavy rain in October, and a quickly melting snowpack in the adjacent mountains. This storm, and others that followed, introduced the term "atmospheric river" to many in the province. Like its terrestrial equivalent, an atmospheric river carries a massive amount of water: it is a warm air mass, hundreds of kilometers wide and thousands of kilometers long, perhaps more familiar in BC as the Pineapple Express. They can carry—and release—as much water as the biggest rivers on Earth. In November, the massive precipitation unleashed by the atmospheric river flooded low-lying areas of Sumas Prairie, affecting farms, residences, animals, and people, and was a reminder that this area was once Sumas Lake.

As a geographer and social studies teacher, I was drawn to the media coverage on the processes and conditions that resulted in flooding at Sumas Prairie, and the attention that was focused on the history of the area. Certainly, it is no surprise that the large floodplain of the Fraser will experience flooding from time to time—my father grew up in Chilliwack and clearly remembers the flood of 1948 that inundated the family farm. But this time around, the coverage highlighted new dimensions to the story of Sumas Prairie, including the lake and wetlands that used to occupy what is now primarily farmland and the Indigenous Peoples who have lived there through many phases of human change.

> "Learning about cultural landscapes is a great way to involve students in cross-curricular, place-responsive inquiry and perspective-taking, and the Sumas Prairie provides a compelling case study."

In geography, we sometimes use the term "cultural landscape." This refers to areas that have been shaped and affected over time through human actions. These changes are usually expressed in layers, some of which are available for observation and interpretation through direct evidence, while other layers remain hidden or obscure and require more information, and others still are undetectable and may never be understood with certainty.

Learning about cultural landscapes is a great way to involve students in cross-curricular, place-responsive inquiry and perspective-taking, and the Sumas Prairie provides a compelling case study. In this particular cultural landscape, there are many kinds of evidence that can be considered, including direct observation (if you happen to live close by), oral and written history, photos and maps, media articles, government records, and a variety of online primary and secondary sources.

There are also many dimensions to the "story" of Sumas Prairie, including its geologic history both deep in time and since the retreat of glaciers 13,000 years ago: land use over time by Indigenous Peoples and settlers; the successive stages of colonization, development, and land title issues in BC; and the history of land reclamation by government. Students could also consider the characteristics and resilience of natural vs. culturally modified ecosystems, the action of rivers and the role that topography plays in the history of flooding in the Fraser Valley, or the past and present engineering challenges of flood control. The recent environmental events provide an opportunity to learn about atmospheric rivers and other dramatic weather events, to consider political and humanitarian response to natural disasters, and to examine how media covers stories with complex themes. The story of Sumas Lake/Prairie is a chance to probe the ethical dimensions related to a land that has never been ceded by its original title-holders, and the interrelationship of climate change with many aspects of the recent flooding, and other factors that have influenced the cultural landscape. There is also an angle that deals with the relationship with Washington

Opposite: Floodwaters begin to recede at Sumas Prairie, December 2021. Image source: BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Right: A picnic at Sumas Lake ridge, 1901. Image source: City of Vancouver Archives.

Below right: A map from 1913 of the Fraser Valley at Sumas Lake, shortly before it was drained. Image source: City of Vancouver Archives.

State: the flooding at Sumas Prairie was largely due to the overflowing Nooksack River just over the American border from Sumas Prairie. The Nooksack, like many rivers in BC, was swollen with rainwater from the atmospheric rivers and burst its banks on November 14.

For me, at the heart of this story is Sumas Lake, the body of water that used to fill the low-lying flats between Sumas Mountain to the south and Chilliwack Mountain to the north. The lake was part of the homeland and traditional territories of the Sumas First Nation or Semá:th people, who are in turn one of the 11 nations of the Sto:lo. Sumas Lake was a rich wetland environment that provided the Semá:th people with animal and plant-based resources and a means of transportation. Their villages were located on high ground to avoid seasonal flooding, and they maintained an elaborate sturgeon weir where the Sumas River left the lake.

Non-Indigenous settlers did not generally appreciate the wetlands; their accounts are filled with complaints about mosquitoes! The BC government, or more precisely, the Minister of Agriculture Ed Barrow, was convinced of a plan to drain the lake to reveal productive farmland. The cost would be recovered through land sales, and the mosquito problem would go away. Opposition from the Sumas First Nation was ignored. Things did not go exactly as planned: there were huge cost overruns, and the farmland was not as lucrative as they thought it would be. But the lake was drained by 1922, and soon the first land sold at $60–$120 per acre to grow hops and hemp. The Sumas First Nation were compensated at $7 per acre for their loss of land.

Fast forward to recent decades and through many layers in the cultural landscape, and the pumps at Barrowtown continue to lift water from the Sumas Drainage Canal into the Fraser River. After large storms, all four pumps are engaged to move the water equivalent to that of an Olympic swimming pool every minute, working to keep Sumas Lake from re-forming in the shallow former lake bed. The pumps almost failed in November 2021, and the floodwaters did indeed fill many parts of the old lake bed. This resonated with the memories and stories about the loss of Sumas Lake held by the Semá:th people, who recall that it once provided ample food for their people, like a grocery store.

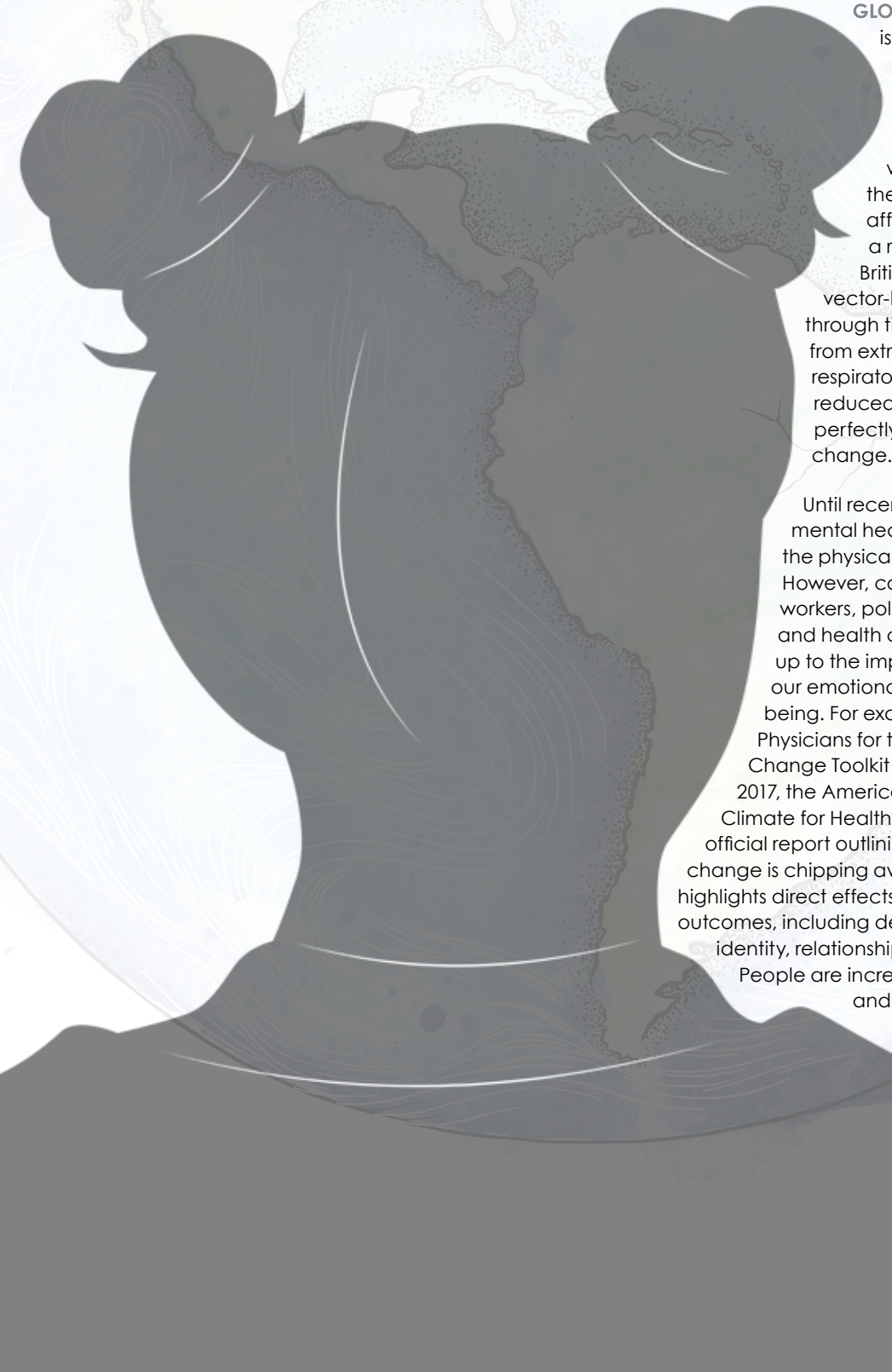
In 2013, the Sumas First Nation filed for a Specific Land Claim to seek compensation for the loss of Sumas Lake. It is not likely that the lake will ever be allowed to return to its days as a rich wetland, but there are many ways in which the future layers of the cultural landscape at Sumas Prairie can and should feature new contributions and equities for the Semá:th people. The atmospheric rivers, the impact of flood events, the layers of the cultural landscape, the cultural perpetuity of Indigenous Peoples, and the need for reconciliation and climate justice are all themes that might emerge from student inquiry on Sumas Prairie and Lake. Feel free to jump on to the BC Social Studies Teachers' Association Facebook group to join discussions on how to conduct these kinds of inquiries with your students. •

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Glen Thielmann is a long-time social studies teacher on Lheidli T'enneh territory, a Member-at-Large on the BC Social Studies Teachers' Association Executive, a Lecturer in the UNBC School of Education, and the Professional Development Chair for the Prince George District Teachers' Association.

Climate change and mental health

By Gina Martin (she/her), Assistant Professor, Faculty of Health Disciplines, Athabasca University; and **Kiffer Card** (he/him), Assistant Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University and Director, Mental Health and Climate Change Alliance



GLOBALLY, experts agree that the climate is changing and that these changes are caused by human activity. Climate change is a critical threat to the health and well-being of every person on the planet. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, and the places in which we shelter will all be affected by climate change. Indeed, as a result of climate change, people across British Columbia will be exposed to new vector-borne diseases (such as those spread through ticks and mosquitoes), stress and injury from extreme weather events, and greater risk for respiratory illnesses as a result of forest fires and reduced air quality.[1] With all of this in mind, it's perfectly normal to be worried about climate change.

Until recently, the impact of climate change on mental health has been overshadowed by threats to the physical security of individuals and communities. However, counsellors, psychologists, therapists, social workers, policy-makers, researchers, educators, and health care providers are beginning to wake up to the impacts that climate change is having on our emotional, cognitive, and psychological well-being. For example, the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment has released a Climate Change Toolkit for Health Professionals.[2] Similarly, in 2017, the American Psychiatric Association (APA), with Climate for Health and ecoAmerica, published their official report outlining the variety of ways that climate change is chipping away at our mental health. Their report highlights direct effects of anxiety on a host of mental health outcomes, including depression, stress, substance use, loss of identity, relationship strain, grief, and post-traumatic stress. People are increasingly experiencing loss of identity and hopelessness as their communities face increasingly dismal outlooks because of climate change.

The impacts of climate change are three-fold:

- Mental health issues that arise because of the **direct impacts** of intensifying acute weather events, such as floods, storms, heat waves, and fires.
- Mental health issues that arise because of **indirect impacts** of social and economic challenges, such as migration and reduced food security.
- Mental health issues that arise because of an **awareness of climate change** and the threat it poses to the planet and the future of humanity. This awareness can cause feelings of anxiety, sadness, and dread—even if they are not directly or indirectly affected by climate-related changes to the environment.

In BC, and across Canada, evidence shows that climate change is having impacts on mental health and well-being. For example, the Mental Health and Climate Change Alliance recently published a study showing that the 2021 North American heat dome caused a 13% increase in average levels of climate anxiety among people living in BC.[3] Experiencing some worry or anxiety about the climate crisis is a rational response that can be functional in signaling an oncoming threat that motivates action. But for some an awareness of climate change and its consequences may be overwhelming and interfere with an individual's ability to function.[4]

IMPACTS ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Children and youth are more susceptible to the health impacts of climate change.[5] This increased vulnerability arises both from their psychological development and dependence on adults, and because they are often not empowered by their communities to manage the threats of climate change. Further, children and youth are increasingly exposed to information about climate change. In fact, between 2007 to 2017 media coverage of climate change has increased by 78%.[6] As a result, teachers are being called upon to play an increasingly important role in educating children and youth, to help them better understand climate change and climate-related information.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Helping youth manage their emotions and reactions to climate change is important to their healthy development. This is especially true given that climate change and worries about climate change may influence children and youth's behaviours, limit their ability to function, and influence the decisions they make about life.[7] More work is needed to supply evidence on how to best support children and youth mental health as they face the climate crisis.[8] However, there are some ways that you can support children and youth today.

TAKING ACTION

First, because children and youth will experience the greatest consequences of climate change, adults must honour their duties and responsibilities to protect the environment for future generations.[9] This may come in many forms, including calls for pro-environmental policies at the local, provincial, national, and international levels; making changes to personal behaviours that affect climate change (such as biking, walking, or taking the bus rather than driving your car); and starting climate friendly initiatives at your school (such as food waste reduction programs).

LISTENING TO CONCERNS

The concerns that children and youth experience are founded in the undeniable scientific evidence that climate change is happening and that it will have dramatic impacts on individuals now and in the future. It is important not to dismiss their concerns but rather support them in building self-efficacy (the belief that they can contribute) and collective efficacy (that through working together, people can make a difference) to build hope that is rooted in reality. It may be helpful to highlight other points in history when large societal shifts took place through collective action (such as women's suffrage).[10]

EMPOWERING THEIR INTENTIONS

It is important that children and youth feel empowered to engage in healthy coping behaviours and to undertake activities that are within their spheres of influence. These actions can help them develop a sense of purpose, control, and security. Children and youth are powerful messengers for climate justice. For example, children and youth have led large demonstrations and school strikes all over the globe (such as the Fridays for Future movement). In some countries, children and youth have also filed lawsuits against governments for their inaction related to climate change. For many children and youth, taking action may aid in alleviating some of the mental health issues that stem from the climate crisis.[11] However, it is important that children and youth are supported in ways that prevent burnout or feelings of being overwhelmed. Adults can help youth by sharing responsibility for climate action and facilitating healthy coping strategies.●

1 World Health Organization, "Climate change and health," 2021, *www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health*.
2 Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, "Climate Change Toolkit for Health Professionals," 2019, *cape.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Climate-Change-Toolkit-for-Health-Professionals-Updated-April-2019-2.pdf*.
3 A. Bratu, et al., "The 2021 Western North America Heat Dome Increased Climate Change Anxiety Among British Columbians: Results from A Natural Experiment," *The Journal of Climate Change and Health*, 2022,100116.
4 G. Martin, et al., "The impact of climate change awareness on children's mental well-being and negative emotions–a scoping review," *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 27(1), 2022, p. 59–72.
5 Ibid.
6 K. Hayes, et al., "Climate change and mental health: Risks, impacts and priority actions," *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, 12, 2018, p. 1–12.
7 S. Clayton, et al., "Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance," American Psychological Association, Washington DC, 2017, *www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/03/mental-health-climate.pdf*.
8 G. Martin, et al., "The impact of climate change awareness on children's mental well-being and negative emotions–a scoping review," *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 27(1), 2022, p. 59–72.
9 J. Nguyen, "Intergenerational Justice and the Paris Agreement," *E-International Relations,* 2020, www.e-ir.info/2020/05/11/intergenerational-justice-and-the-paris-agreement/.
10 A. Sanson, et al.,"Responding to the impacts of the climate crisis on children and youth," *Child Development Perspectives*, *13*(4), 2019, p. 201–207.
11 Ibid.

iStock.com/sources

2021 year in review:
Assessing the climate emergency

By Tara Olivetree (Ehrcke) (they/them), Environmental Justice Action Group, Committee for Action on Social Justice

IN 2021, climate change became very real for many of us. From fires to floods, we were affected on an unprecedented scale. Teachers experienced the personal loss of homes and belongings, the anxiety and stress of evacuation or living under evacuation alert, the tragedy of communities literally burnt to the ground or under water, and the personal and professional toll associated with emergency measures.

As this year of climate disasters and political failures demonstrates, without significant action, we are set to see an increase in climate catastrophes. Already the pandemic has put enormous stresses on the public education system and the students we teach. The climate crisis is now layering onto it and is set to supersede the pandemic in terms of the disruption to our work and lives.

As years of broken promises and failed climate action demonstrate, we simply cannot rely on our leaders to "do the right thing" and correct course. It is, rather, long past time that we start to leverage our power as workers to force change.

COP26: A TRAGIC PERFORMANCE

After a one-year delay because of the pandemic, world leaders convened in the fall of 2021 to address the ongoing failure of governments to meet the challenge of the climate emergency. Billed by some as our "last best chance," the conference fell far short of what is needed.

It was the whitest and wealthiest UN climate conference to date. And the final agreement did little to close the growing gap between what countries need to do and what their current commitments are.

The latest scientific consensus of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change tells us that we are on track to reach 1.5°C of warming by or before 2030. Meanwhile, governments around the world continue to delay, by setting far-off targets with little immediate action.

CLEANBC: TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

Also in the fall, the provincial government updated its CleanBC plan. This provincial government climate action plan has been in place for three years and replaced climate legislation introduced by the BC Liberals in 2007. Despite a goal to reduce emissions from the 2007 baseline, emissions have instead increased.[1]

We shouldn't be surprised, although it is frightening that the projected risks are happening so fast. In 2019, the BC government produced a report estimating our climate risks by the year 2050. They found "…the greatest risks to BC are severe wildfire season, seasonal water shortage, heat wave, ocean acidification, glacier loss, and long-term water shortage. Other risks that have the potential to result in significant consequences include severe river flooding and severe coastal storm surge."[2] The "greatest risk" groups will happen with a "high likelihood," meaning "almost certain" or "likely," with the others having a likelihood of "possible" or "unlikely." Interestingly, severe river flooding is in the "unlikely" category, but has happened 29 years early, in 2021, along with the more "likely" heat wave and severe wildfire season.

Tragically, the current plans in CleanBC will do very little to prevent this projected reality. The targets are far too distant, they rely primarily on incentives rather than regulations, they do nothing to address our ongoing destruction of old growth forests, and they continue the subsidization of our rapidly expanding natural gas industry. Just one project, LNG Canada, will add between four and six million additional tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions when operational in 2025.[3] And this is only Phase One of the project.

It is not that hard to figure out what needs to be done: Immediately stop subsidies to fossil fuel companies. Nationalize and phase out all fossil fuel production. Invest heavily in a public renewable energy system. Ban the production and purchase of products reliant on fossil fuels—gas appliances, heating systems, and cars. Massively expand public transit. Stop logging old growth. Retrofit all buildings. Decarbonize industry. Yet there is almost none of this in the CleanBC plan.

INDIGENOUS LAND DEFENDERS AND FOREST PROTECTORS: A BRIGHT LIGHT

In the midst of government inaction, some folks on the ground are simply taking matters into their own hands. They represent a growing climate justice movement that simply will not accept a future of climate catastrophe.

A bright light in the 2021 landscape was the renewal of Indigenous land back movements—critical to a just transition that both respects Indigenous land title as well as acknowledges that Indigenous communities have historically been the best stewards of the planet's ecosystems.

In 2021, the Wet'suwet'en people continued to courageously defend their traditional territories in an effort to prevent the construction of Coastal GasLink's (CGL) natural gas pipeline. Facing repeated arrests and intense police violence, they nevertheless continued to build blockades and do everything in their power to stave off CGL. In the height of irony, the RCMP chose to launch an all-out assault on the Wet'suwet'en people in the very days when they should have been putting all resources into emergency operations due to the floods and landslides. They arrested over a dozen land defenders during the raid. Despite the police repression, the Wet'suwet'en people continue their land defense and they, along with allies, are showing unprecedented resistance to the construction of this natural gas pipeline.

Similarly, last summer Fairy Creek saw the largest mass direct action to protect old growth forests since the protests at Clayoquot Sound, with over 1,000 arrests. Youth and elders, Indigenous and settler, these forest protectors braved the onslaught of an aggressive RCMP presence seeking to enforce an injunction and placed themselves directly on the trees they hoped to protect.

Old growth trees are a critical piece of our low-carbon future. They represent one of the most significant carbon sinks and are incomparably more valuable than newly planted trees for this purpose.

THE TASK AHEAD

The BCTF has signed on to the principles of the Just Recovery and a Green New Deal. We understand the need for an immediate, sustainable, and socially just transformation to renewable energy and a sustainable economy. What we haven't yet committed to is leveraging the power needed to make it a reality.

Yet as workers, we are an indispensable part of the climate justice movement. As 2021 has shown us, the climate crisis is here. The question we need to ask ourselves is, in the face of government inaction, what are we going to do about it?

We can look to some fantastic examples from workers around the world. UNISON, the union representing public sector workers in the UK, recently published a program for decarbonization of the public sector. It includes detailed analysis of what is needed for a just, carbon-free school and health care system. It is a tool to start the political work of forcing the UK government to make the investment necessary to do this work.

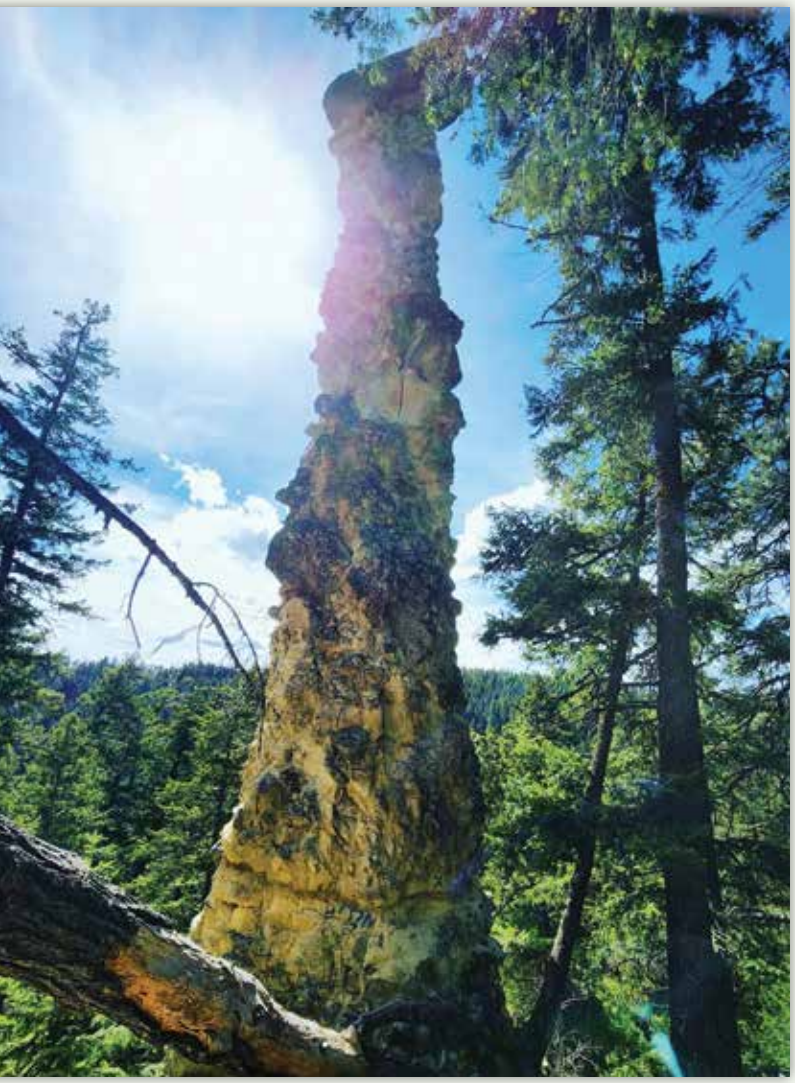
In New York State[4] and Texas,[5] groups of trade unions have pooled their resources to develop comprehensive just transition plans. Critically, they have also pooled their bargaining and political power, understanding that plans are all well and good, but don't mean anything if no one is actually going to implement them. These are models for the kind of action we need to be taking here in BC. •

1 *www.env.gov.bc.ca/soe/indicators/sustainability/ghg-emissions.html*
2 *www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/climate-change/adaptation/climate-risk-summary.pdf*
3 *www.thetyee.ca/Opinion/2021/09/06/BC-Climate-Plan-Now-Not-Enough/*
4 *www.climatejobsny.org*
5 *www.txclimatejobs.org*

iStock.com/Buenaventuramariano

Grounding ourselves and recognizing roots

By Katlia (Catherine) Lafferty (she/her), Dene/Cree Métis from Northwest Territories, novelist and law student, currently residing on Lekwungen territory



EACH AND EVERY square inch of so-called British Columbia was inhabited, well taken care of, and respected by Indigenous Peoples before colonization interrupted our sustainable way of living. Sustainability and Indigenous knowledge systems go hand in hand, and it's important that educators acknowledge this when teaching environmental concepts.

Place-based teachings can show students how to care about their surroundings and may foster a desire to protect the environment they live in. Submersing students in nature should be done through the guidance of local Indigenous Peoples who carry a deep, intrinsic understanding of the history of the area. This type of education is vital to students knowing their place in the world, and it's up to teachers to facilitate and support this process.

Place-based teachings are grounded in stories. Indigenous stories hold lessons and metaphorical values that align with natural laws of protecting the land, water, plants, and animals. As such, Indigenous legends and historical landmarks go hand in hand with environmental sustainability. There is a story behind every rock face, every creek, every river that only Indigenous Knowledge Keepers know. We may share these stories in order to educate others, but only if that knowledge is respected, used for good, and not culturally appropriated. Having a non-Indigenous educator teaching Indigenous knowledge systems is a type of cultural appropriation in and of itself, because there is no shortage of Knowledge Keepers in the community.

As educators, it's important to ask if you and your students know the stories behind the mountains you look at through your classroom window from Monday to Friday. Do students know that the shortcut they take to school might be located on top of a sacred burial ground? For educators in Vancouver, do you know the story of the two sister mountains? They are not the lion mountains, as many so incorrectly refer to them. Do students know about Camossung (who Cammosun College is named after), who she was and where her spirit still lives to this day? Do you know about Coyote Rock in the Shuswap Nation territories? Do you know about the significance of the salmon run to Indigenous Peoples going back to time immemorial? Or the story of the Trout Children in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc? If not, I would recommend you learn alongside your students.

Invite Indigenous knowledge holders from the local community to share those oral histories and stories, so the next time a student looks out the school window they might see a significant landmark from a different viewpoint; one that will give them the tools to be able to work alongside Indigenous nations to protect the lands and waters as they have been doing for millennia. This act of respecting Indigenous traditional knowledge as equal to, and possessing teachings absent from, scientific knowledge will help to also eliminate racism and stereotypes.

As the Climate Writer in Residence at the West Vancouver Memorial Library this past winter, I made it my duty to learn about the territory that the library occupies and visited the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) Nation to collect their thoughts on the climate crisis. During my visit, the Elders shared with me concerns about encroachment of their lands due to the never-ending development that settlers often refer to as progress. One Elder, now 85 years old, told of a time when he was a child, cupping his hands in the Capilano River and drinking straight from the banks on the shore. He can't do that anymore for fear of contamination because a busy highway runs right through their backyard. Speaking to the Elders filled me with urgency: we must pay attention to what Indigenous nations have to say because they are most affected by the majority of environmental disasters, especially considering large amounts of industrial pollution are released in the vicinity of reserves. Environmental racism is rampant in Canada.

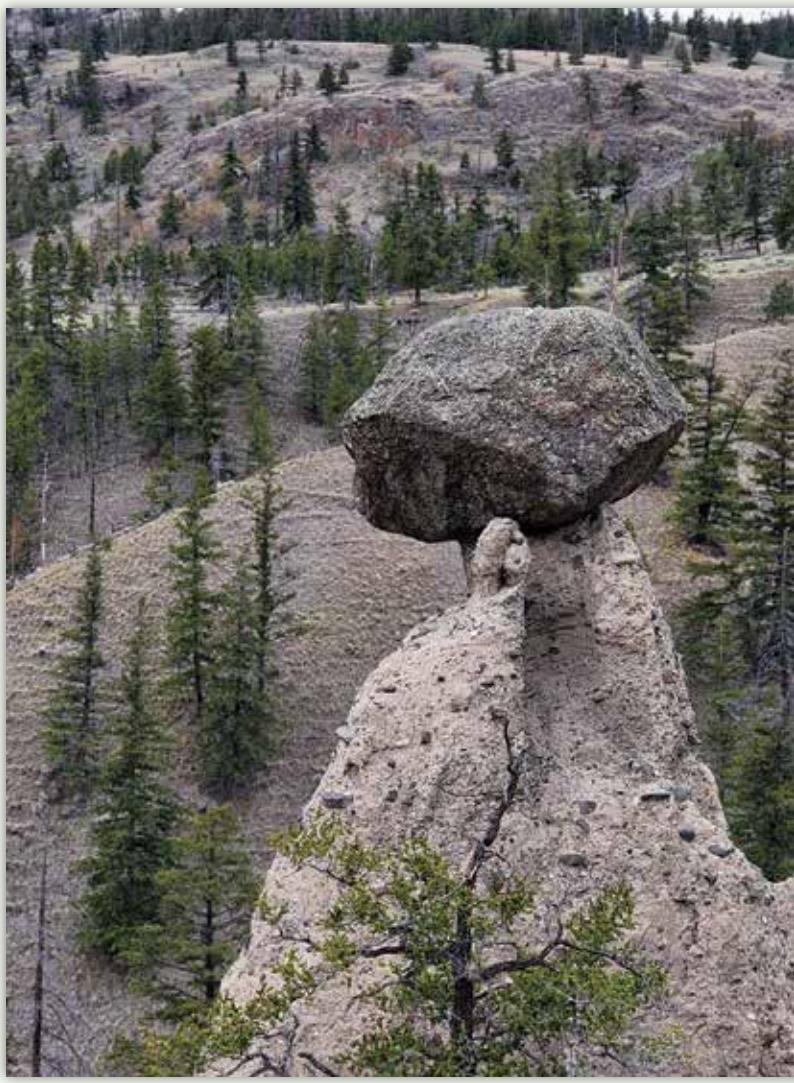
Every evening when I returned to my accommodations after visiting with the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Elders, I was able to relax in the sauna where I was reminded of my own home in the Northwest Territories, the subartic. When on the land (Dechinta), I was able to go into sweat and prayer while listening to my relatives drumming. Afterward, I could go outside and jump into the freezing lake, a glacial pool, to cool off if only for a moment. That is where I am able to feel most connected to the land.

Rooting ourselves in our natural surroundings gives us an understanding of the significance of the territories we live on. Students will only act as change-makers in the future if they learn and care about these issues now and build their own personal connections to the land. Learning with and from the land can and should be done across all subjects and courses. Indigenous knowledge systems do not divide subjects, like history, socials, and science, because we know they are all connected. These categories all intersect with climate change.

There is a great opportunity for schools to address climate issues through the eyes of those who have witnessed the changes over centuries. Indigenous Peoples know the old stories and hold the key to solving the climate crisis. We know what it's going to take to protect the land for future generations. We have always valued nature over greed. Had Indigenous Peoples been respected from the start of contact and had our knowledge of stewarding the land been heeded, we would not be in the climate crisis we currently find ourselves in, but it's not too late. We must all work together and start to abide by Indigenous ways of being that do not pilfer the land and waters. We must seek out the teachings of local Knowledge Keepers and learn how to walk forward in the world, some of us as leaders, some as learners, all blazing a new trail together. •

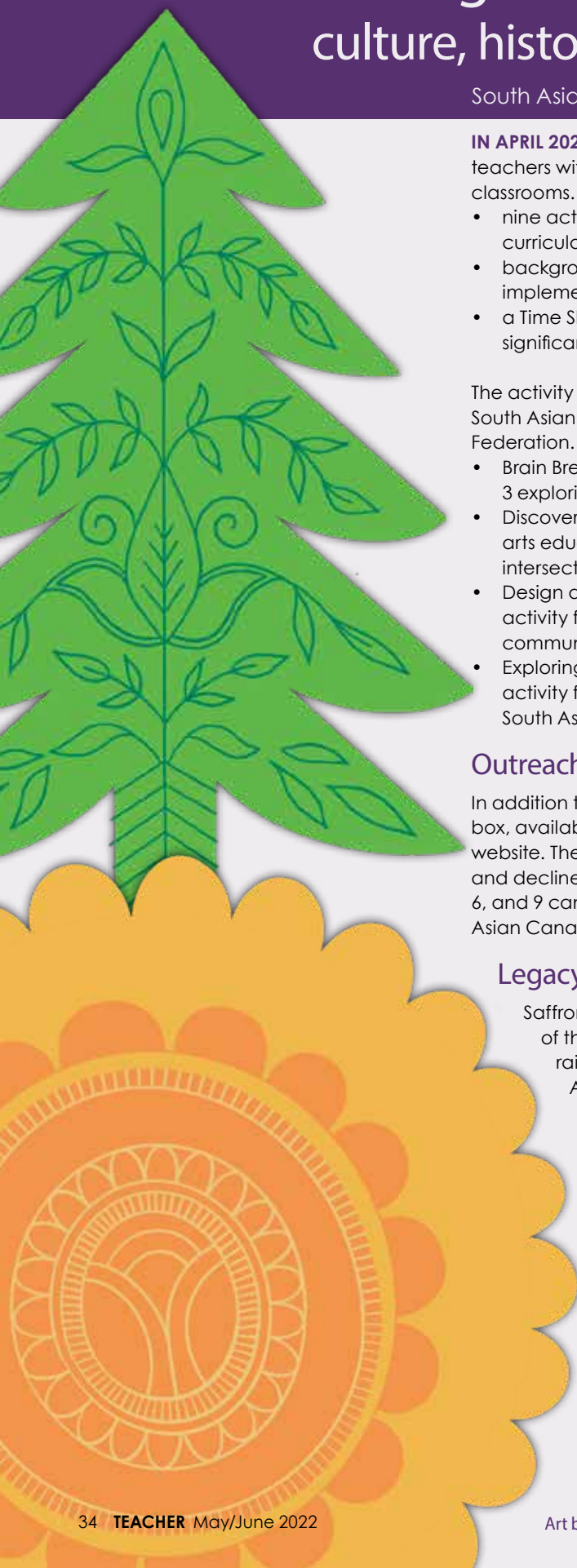
"Place-based teachings are grounded in stories. Indigenous stories hold lessons and metaphorical values that align with natural laws of protecting the land, water, plants, and animals. As such, Indigenous legends and historical landmarks go hand in hand with environmental sustainability."

Opposite and below: Two Coyote Rock sites, natural pillar rock formations, on the traditional territory of the Secwépemc Nation. Photos provided by author.



Embedding South Asian Canadian culture, history, and heritage in the classroom

South Asian Studies Institute at the University of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford



IN APRIL 2022, Saffron Threads launched as a free educational resource to support teachers with integrating South Asian Canadian culture, history, and heritage in classrooms. Saffron Threads currently features:

- nine activity plans, with resources for Kindergarten to Grade 12 across different curricular areas
- backgrounders, with information on history and culture to support activity plan implementation and learning
- a Time Shuffle timeline card game, featuring 35 important events and historically significant people from South Asian Canadian history in BC.

The activity plans were developed in collaboration with eight teachers from the South Asian Canadian community in BC, with support from the BC Teachers' Federation. Some of the activity plans included are:

- Brain Breaks: a physical and health education activity for Kindergarten to Grade 3 exploring mindfulness as a practice
- Discovering, Uncovering, and Celebrating Identity: an English language arts and arts education activity for Grades 4–6 exploring how identity and community intersect and are interconnected
- Design a South Asian Canadian Museum Exhibit: a social studies and ADST activity for Grades 7–9 exploring the culture, history, and heritage of their communities
- Exploring South Asian Canadian Culture through Food: an ADST (food studies) activity for Grades 10–12 exploring the origins of popular foods and recipes for South Asian meals.

Outreach box

In addition to Saffron Threads, the Royal BC Museum has developed an outreach box, available for loan at no cost to schools in BC through the Royal BC Museum's website. The kit has three units exploring who and what affected the beginning, rise, and decline of Paldi, now a ghost town on Vancouver Island. Students in Grades 4, 6, and 9 can explore images and objects to piece together this once vibrant South Asian Canadian community.

Legacy project

Saffron Threads, developed in partnership with Open School BC, is one piece of the larger South Asian Canadian Legacy Project (SACLP). SACLP aims to raise awareness and knowledge of the valuable contributions of South Asian Canadians to British Columbia's diverse culture, history, heritage, economy, and society. This two-year, grant-funded initiative includes:

- the South Asian Canadian Digital Archive
- a new social history book
- historic sites documentation and further engagement
- labour heritage research
- the Haq and History travelling exhibit
- Saffron Threads.

Saffron Threads will continue to grow in the coming years, and we hope you'll find an opportunity to bring South Asian culture, history, and heritage into your classroom.•

Resources

Links to the above resources can be found at *linktr.ee/saffronthreads* or by scanning the QR code.

SCAN ME

Art by Sandeep Johal

Inspiring and giving hope to LGBTQ+ youth one story at a time

By Trevor Ritchie (he/him), teacher and editor of *Alphabet of Hope*, Burnaby

"WHERE ARE ALL THE QUEER PEOPLE?" This is a simple question I remember asking myself as a teenager, and sometimes still find myself asking today. I grew up in the heteronormative world of sports and was attempting to live up to the expectations of presenting as a cisgendered, heterosexual teenager in modern Canadian society. Meeting those societal expectations means understanding cultural nuances, all to help mask my identity as a way to keep myself safe. The emotional labour involved in hiding my identity for such a long period of my life was stressful. That stress would inevitably lead me back to the question: where are all the queer people?

More recently, society has made significant gains in legal recognition and protections of relationships and queer identities. People are coming out at a younger age than before. At the same time, there are still too many stories of queer youth being forced to flee their homes or communities because of the discrimination they experience. Queer people in the United States are experiencing even more turbulence in their lives in the face of transphobic executive orders in Texas, demanding investigations of child abuse into parents who provide gender-affirming care to trans youth, and the "Don't Say Gay" bill in Florida.

These parallel thought patterns birthed *Alphabet of Hope*, an anthology of short autobiographical stories written by members of the queer community from all over the world. Our stories are written by people from all walks and stages of their lives. This anthology shows that no matter where you come from or what you're going through, people and place can change and become more hopeful. We want to give hope to queer youth and show them that they can be seen in their communities. Whatever issues they are wrestling with relating to their sexual orientation or gender identity, they can feel supported and know that others have considered and faced those same issues.

Many of the stories in *Alphabet of Hope* discuss the coming out process. Several of the coming out stories discuss the process of telling other people about the author's sexual orientation or gender identity. Others take the reader on a more personal journey through the author's realization process of their own identity and the stress that realization caused. The last series of stories were written about home communities and how social change is coming to all parts of the world, not just the cosmopolitan cities more commonly associated with LGBTQ+ communities in the media.

As teachers, we strive to create environments that are as welcoming as possible for our students. We want students to feel they can be their authentic selves and not have to hide who they are for fear of being judged or treated differently. *Alphabet of Hope* shares a similar message for students that goes beyond the classroom and into the rest of their world.•

Resources

Alphabet of Hope can be found by visiting *qrco.de/bcyp1H or* scanning the QR code. If you are interested in submitting a story for the next edition of *Alphabet of Hope,* or its fictional sister anthology, email *submissions@hopepagespress.com*.

SCAN ME

iStock.com/FG Trade

CLASSIFIEDS

GULF ISLAND GETAWAY, Pender Island BC Website: *ainsliepointcottage.com*. Contact Alma at 250-629-3008.

POTLATCH BLANKET FOR A CHINA MAN embodies the power of story. Engage with Social Studies 11&12 students: in person, online. More info and free samples of strategic theme planning: *AzimuthBooks@shaw.ca*

THE CLIMATE CRISIS IN STUDENT ART

See pages 20–21 for art by Surrey secondary students that addresses their critiques and fears around climate change.

Let us know about student art being made in your school!
Send photos to *teachermag@bctf.ca* for a chance to be featured in an upcoming issue.

***Dr. Seuss* (above), Anna Su, Grade 9, Guildford Park Secondary, Surrey** (teachers: Florence Carlsen and Allison Johnson)
This painting draws on Dr. Seuss, surrealism, and water pollution issues. This image shows the effects of humans on the sky and water. I enjoyed the process of making this piece, building ideas, and asking for advice from friends.

Canada Post Corp. Agreement No. 40062724
Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to
BCTF, 100–550 West 6th Avenue,
Vancouver, BC V5Z 4P2
email: *teachermag@bctf.ca*