

# BC Teachers' Federation Teacher



Sept | Oct 2021



**Teaching for  
reconciliation**

pages 20–26

**Local profile:  
Burnaby**

pages 14–17

**Ally is a verb**

pages 18–19

Lauren Hutchison photo



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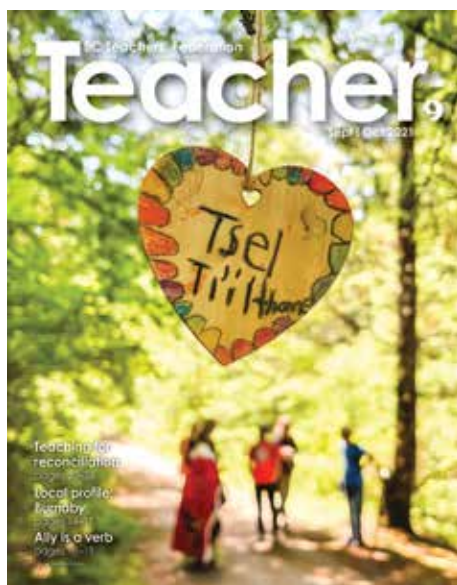
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Articles reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily express official policy of the BCTF. The BCTF does not endorse or promote any products or services advertised in the magazine. Advertisements reviewed and approved by the BCTF must reflect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



## ON THE COVER

This edition's cover photo shows a heart decorated by a student from Silver Creek Elementary School in Hope as they learned about residential schools. The heart, which says Tsel Ti'ithome (I love you in Hala'éméylem), was hung near Alexandra Bridge.

**URLs and QR codes are hyperlinked in the digital version of Teacher magazine available at [bctf.ca](http://bctf.ca).**

# THIS IS YOUR MAGAZINE

## WRITE FOR TEACHER

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](http://bctf.ca). We also welcome letters to the editor. Email [teachermag@bctf.ca](mailto: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.

## Copy deadlines

Nov/Dec 2021	September 17, 2021
Jan/Feb 2022	November 5, 2021
March 2022	January 7, 2022
May/June 2022	March 25, 2022

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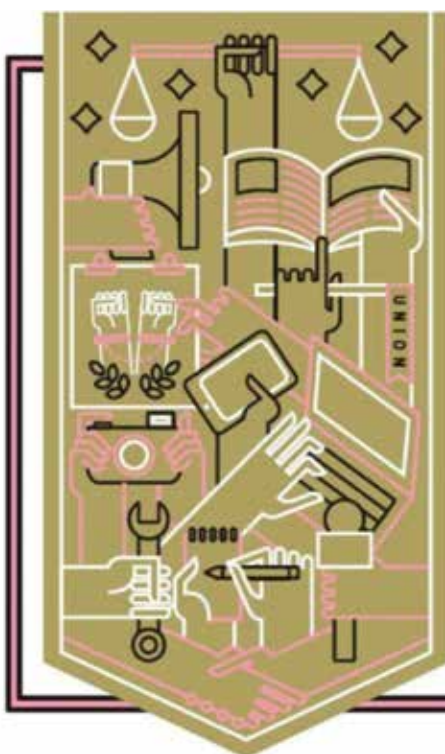
**Assistant Editor/Designer** Sarah Young  
ISSN 0841-9574

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## CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF LABOUR MEDIA

### THE 2021 KATIE FITZRANDOLPH AWARD Best overall regular print publication in English

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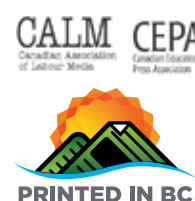
British Columbia  
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## TEACHER WINS AWARD

In June 2021 the Canadian Association of Labour Media awarded *Teacher* magazine the 2020 Katie FitzRandolph Award for best overall regular print publication by a union.

Congratulations to our 2020 Editors Sunjum Jhaj and Jennifer Brandt, as well as Sarah Young, the Assistant Editor/Designer.

Thank you to all members and staff who support the publication in creating content, organizing advertisements, editing, proofreading, and printing of this award-winning publication.





# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Teri Mooring, BCTF President



## Welcome back to another not-so-normal year!

I hope you all enjoyed some well-deserved down time with friends and family over the summer break.

When COVID-19 first hit, I don't think any of us thought we'd still be navigating the evolving conditions of a global pandemic 18 months later. Yet here we are, continuing to adapt, and continuing to model resilience for our students through these unprecedented and highly challenging times.

This past year-and-a-half has reinforced the all-important role of public education, and you as teachers, in supporting the mental health and well-being of our students. I know parents throughout BC are infinitely grateful for the roles each of you play in the lives of their children, your students.

In order to do this important work, it is essential that we also prioritize our own health and well-being. At school, this entails keeping the lines of communication open with your local union teams, including school-based health and safety reps, to ensure any concerns that may arise can be properly documented and addressed. Though it is ultimately the employer's responsibility to provide a healthy and safe work environment that adheres to all provincial guidelines, your school and local union representatives are there to provide information, support, and advocacy on your behalf.

I encourage all of you to spend some time getting to know your local union contacts and exploring opportunities to get involved. I also encourage you to attend both school and local union general meetings to get updated information, not only on health and safety issues, but also to stay informed regarding the upcoming round of bargaining.

Lastly, I urge all of you to make a deep personal commitment to honouring the first-ever National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and to engaging your students in meaningful conversations about residential schools. There are many age-appropriate resources available to support you in this work, including on the BCTF, FNESC, Caring Society, and National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation websites.

I look forward to working alongside, and on behalf of, all of you in the coming year.

In solidarity,

Teri Mooring  
BCTF President

## MESSAGE DE LA PRÉSIDENTE

### Bienvenue dans une autre année « pas si normale » !

J'espère que vous avez tous et toutes profité de moments de répit bien mérités avec vos amis et votre famille pendant la pause estivale.

Lorsque la COVID-19 a frappé pour la première fois, je crois que personne ne croyait que nous serions toujours dans ces conditions de pandémie mondiale aujourd'hui. Pourtant, nous y voilà, nous continuons de nous adapter et d'être résilient(e)s pour nos élèves en cette période très difficile et sans précédent.

Au cours de ces derniers 18 mois, nous avons mis l'accent sur l'importance du rôle de l'éducation publique et sur le soutien à la santé mentale et le bien-être des élèves. Je sais que les parents de la C.-B. sont infiniment reconnaissants du rôle que chaque enseignant(e) joue dans la vie de leurs enfants, vos élèves.

Pour ce travail, il est essentiel de prioriser notre propre santé et bien-être. Cela implique de maintenir la communication avec vos équipes locales et les représentant(e)s de santé et sécurité de l'école, pour s'assurer que toute question soit documentée et traitée adéquatement. Même si la responsabilité d'un milieu de travail sain et sécuritaire respectant l'ensemble des directives provinciales incombe à l'employeur(e), les représentant(e)s des écoles et des syndicats locaux sont là pour vous fournir de l'information, du soutien et des revendications en votre nom.

Je vous encourage à prendre le temps de connaître ces représentant(e)s et d'explorer la possibilité de vous impliquer. Aussi, je vous encourage à assister aux assemblées des écoles et des syndicats locaux pour obtenir des renseignements à jour et connaître les objectifs de la prochaine ronde de négociations.

Enfin, je vous prie de prendre un engagement personnel afin de souligner la toute première Journée nationale de vérité et de réconciliation et d'impliquer vos élèves dans des conversations sur les pensionnats. Des ressources sont disponibles pour vous appuyer dans ce travail, notamment sur les sites de la FECB, du FNEEC, de *Caring Society* et du Centre national pour la vérité et la réconciliation.

J'ai hâte de travailler avec vous et en votre nom au cours de la prochaine année.

Solidairement,

**Teri Mooring**  
Présidente de la FECB

## Letter to the editor

### Burnaby teacher finds family history in *Teacher*

I am the niece of Bill and Jack Wong, who are mentioned on page 31 of the May/June 2021 edition of *Teacher* magazine. I'm a Burnaby teacher, so luckily I was able to see this article. Thank you for including my uncles in this article and highlighting them. I didn't know that my uncle Bill was part of the Linocut Club, but it doesn't surprise me as he had a good eye for visual layouts.

My dad Milton also went to Van Tech and had lots of stories to tell about the track team and "rumbles" back in the day. I also recognize that my dad's success was because of the sacrifices his older brothers had to endure. My uncles Bill and Jack were much older than my dad and helped raise him.

My family is really proud of my uncles and their long careers as tailors in Chinatown. Their children would have liked to take early retirement but didn't feel they could when their dads were still working into their 90s. My uncle Bill never retired. He went in to work even when his health was declining. The last person he measured for pants was my nephew, who was 10 months old at the time. My uncle Bill passed away a few days after that, but his apprentice Mia completed the pants (pictured above) in time for his celebration of life.

Thank you for this thoughtful article about the rich history of Van Tech and what we can learn by looking at the diversity that exists in the histories of our schools.

Sincerely,  
**Sarah Wong, Burnaby teacher**

Sarah Wong photo



### READ THE ARTICLE

Scan the QR code (below) to read about Sarah's uncles Bill and Jack Wong and the history of Van Tech's Linocut Club in Janet Nicol's article "The hidden histories of schools" in the May/June 2021 issue of *Teacher*.





# Al Blakey remembered: The right president at the right time

By Christina Schut, Maureen MacDonald,  
and Patricia Gudlaugson, former VESTA presidents

**BEFORE HE BECAME A TEACHER**, Al Blakey worked in a small bakery, a five and dime, for the City of Victoria, where he got his first taste of being a union member, and in the shipyards where his father was the union president.

He did his teacher training at Victoria Normal School and spent a year teaching in a two-room school in Cranbrook. Then he moved to Prince George to teach for another year. In 1959, having done his hinterland service, as was the pattern in those days, Al Blakey was hired in Vancouver where he spent the rest of his teaching career.

Three years later he was elected to the executive of the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association (VESTA). He brought with him to VESTA, and later to the BCTF, his passion for teaching, for the rights of the working class, for grassroots decision-making, and for making the world and society a better and more equal place.

Blakey, as he preferred to be called, was patient and tenacious, a master strategist and a grassroots organizer. He knew that the power of the organization lay in the solidarity and involvement of its membership, and that the organization could not achieve its goals by top-down decision-making. Blakey's solutions to the problems individual teachers brought to him as VESTA president often led the school board to change its policy so the solutions applied to all teachers in the district.

One of Blakey's early achievements was the role he played in negotiating the learning conditions contract between Vancouver teachers and the Vancouver School Board. Once Vancouver and Burnaby negotiated those contracts, the BCTF encouraged other locals to do the same, and many did. The provisions that those contracts contained were later

moved into collective agreements when the locals of the BCTF gained union status.

It delighted him when teachers came together to stand up for themselves. Whether it was the establishment of the Surrey Kindergarten Commission or the Terrace teachers' walkout in 1981, Blakey, as BCTF president, was right there on the line and brought the support of the province's teachers with him.

He was a voracious reader, loved political history, opera (especially Puccini), and murder mysteries (especially political ones), and had vast background knowledge that he was always willing to share with the many new activists who called him a mentor. Through his work, many learned the ropes of parliamentary practice, the need for policy, and the solidarity that could be achieved by such processes. He was a listener; with his arms crossed and his eyes down, he would hear suggestions and opinions and always provide a serious and helpful response. An astute bargainer, he negotiated the first two collective agreements for VESTA adult educators.

Retirement brought new opportunities, and he continued his activism with four terms on the Vancouver School Board. He became involved in international activism with CoDevelopment Canada where he served as president and made many visits to Central America.

Blakey joined an association and retired from a union. A union whose formation and democratic structures benefited in no small measure from his passion, advocacy, and leadership.

May your memory be a blessing, Blakey. 9

**Learn more about Blakey's legacy  
at [bctf.ca/alblakeytribute](http://bctf.ca/alblakeytribute).**





# Al Blakey tributes

## A mentor to students, teachers, and activists

Through all the years of his activism and advocacy, Al was a mentor to hundreds of young leaders. He loved to support and teach, and to share his political experience and wisdom. Al was always a socialist, a trade unionist, a fighter for social justice and for international solidarity. Blakey—as almost all of us called him—had an impact on teachers, on students, and on the progressive movement in BC that will long endure. He will be missed.

— David Chudnovsky,  
BCTF president 1999–2002

## A lifetime of political action

Eleven-year-old Al Blakey joined the Candy Bar Strike that began in Ladysmith and spread across the country in 1947. Children were protesting the post-war 60% rise in the price of a chocolate bar. In Victoria on April 30, he proudly joined the approximately 200 children who stormed the BC Legislature demanding action. That was the first of many times Al went to the Legislature to make demands. Perhaps he got a taste for political action from this first demonstration. He was a proud socialist. His love of humanity, of justice, of equality was what drove him, always. He never stopped fighting. And, he taught us: we must not stop, either.

— Gale Tyler,  
former BCTF Executive Committee member

## A thoughtful and committed teacher

Mr. Blakey had a genuine desire to connect with his students. For me, he was the ideal teacher: logical, patient, observant, direct, open to any conversation, with a matter-of-fact attitude that gave me the confidence to strive for more and to be more.

To be brutally honest, I was trouble and headed for bigger trouble. He recognized it, and by my estimation, saved my life. It was only years later that I realized I was his special project. He spent what seems like every day after school with me, sitting across the table over a chess board, discussing life and the world as we played. It was a perfect example of mentorship, social work, and child psychology rolled into one.

His one-to-one guidance continued throughout Grade 6. The next year in Grade 7, I was still struggling, and he made himself available again to help. A lot of who I am today, along with my successes, in large part, I owe to Mr. Blakey.

— Raymond Louie,  
former student and former councillor, City of Vancouver

## A leader who helped shape the life of BC

Al was the best type of leader: inspirational, motivating, and always encouraging. He was a loving, caring, and committed man whose influence was enormous, shaping both the individual lives of students and friends, but also, in no small measure, the life of this province.

— Susan Lambert,  
BCTF president 2010–2013

**Opposite:** Al Blakey speaking at the BC Legislature in 1980.

**Above:** Blakey at the Teachers in Peace March to Fund Human Needs.

**Left:** Blakey on the picket line in 1987 with a young Alex Peters, now a Burnaby teacher and Local Rep.

**Below:** Blakey on the picket line in Cowichan. Photos provided by Geoff Peters.

The toolkit is available at [bctf.ca](http://bctf.ca) or by scanning the QR code below.

# K–12 Workplace Violence Prevention Toolkit

By Toni Grewal (she/her), BCTF Health and Safety Officer

iStock.com/PeopleImages

**SCHOOLS ARE HEARTS** of communities; teachers support students as learners in safe and welcoming spaces. Schools are also workplaces and teachers are workers who have the right to be protected from risks and hazards. Workplace violence is an unfortunate reality for our members. Violent incidents in schools can involve teachers supporting students with diverse abilities/disabilities. These violent incidents can cause physical and/or psychological injury to teachers, which can affect their short- and long-term health and well-being. Violence prevention is essential to keep teachers healthy and safe. School districts need to have robust and comprehensive violence prevention programs.

## Background

In March 2019, at a WorkSafeBC K–12 sector meeting, a working group including key education stakeholders took on the task of creating a workplace violence prevention strategy. The goal of the working group was to provide school districts with tools and resources so they can take steps to prevent workplace violence. Initially, the working group had anticipated completing the K–12 Violence Prevention Toolkit in the spring of 2020. However, because of the emergent health and safety issues in schools precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the launch was delayed until 2021.

## Who are the members of the working group?

- BC Teachers' Federation
- Canadian Union of Public Employees
- BC Public School Employers' Association
- BC School Superintendents Association
- BC Principals' and Vice Principals' Association
- School Safety Association of BC
- WorkSafeBC
- rural and urban representatives from district occupational health and safety staff.

## What is the key messaging?

The working group developed the following as key messaging with regards to violence prevention:

- Reporting violence will help prevent future violence in schools.
- Responding to a violent incident will help prevent future incidents.
- Evaluating prevention practices helps minimize the risk of violence.

WorkSafeBC is currently working on a poster and video campaign featuring this messaging. The posters and videos will be shared on the BCTF website.

## How does current regulation support the scope and content of the toolkit?

As per Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 4.29-2,<sup>1</sup> employers are expected to have a Workplace Violence

Prevention Program. The following are elements of a violence prevention program:

- a) Policy
- b) Risk Assessment
- c) Written Supplementary Instructions
- d) Worker and Supervisor Training
- e) Incident Reporting and Investigation
- f) Incident Follow-up
- g) Program Review.

These elements have been incorporated into the resources in the toolkit.

## What is in the toolkit?

The toolkit contains many resources, templates, and forms.

Here are some key documents:

- Workplace Violence Prevention Procedure
- Workplace Violence Incident Report and Review
- Workplace Violence Risk Assessment
- Refusal of Unsafe Work Process.

## How were the resources in the toolkit developed?

Members of the working group supplied existing documents and templates. These documents were adapted and thoroughly reviewed by the group.

## Who vetted the resources in the toolkit?

Every single resource was reviewed by employer representatives, union representatives, and WorkSafeBC staff. Furthermore, leadership of all the partner organizations had an opportunity to provide feedback on the messaging, review all the documents in the toolkit, and participate in a WorkSafeBC video.

## What are the next steps?

The working group will continue to meet regularly. It will be essential to assess how the resources in the toolkit are being used by school districts to prevent violence in the workplace. The resources in the toolkit will be updated and revised annually, or sooner if needed.

## Reporting violence in the workplace

If you are a teacher and have experienced violence in the workplace, report the incident to your principal and your school health and safety rep. If you are a school health and safety rep, report the violent incident to your principal and health and safety committee. The principal (as the employer's representative) is responsible for the health and safety of all workers at the school or school site.

Members, school health and safety reps, and members of health and safety committees can obtain advice and support from their local union president, BCTF staff, and WorkSafeBC prevention services. Violence prevention is everyone's responsibility. 🗣️







# Reform to transform: The role of education in fighting the climate crisis

By **Sophia Bi** (she/her, Grade 11 student), **Sara Bauman** (she/her, Grade 11 student), and **Matthew Huang** (he/him, Grade 12 student), Vancouver

**WE ARE STUDENTS.** From Monday to Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., we go to school to learn about quadratic equations and how to analyze literature in the name of preparing us for our futures.

A crisis cannot be won without a unified front. Our generation, at this decisive turning point in history, must be mobilized under a common vision. Right now, we are losing this battle; despite conference after conference, pledge after pledge, emissions have plowed forward on an unrelenting upward trend—all because policies fail to pass in the face of a divided, ignorant public.

Perhaps it is not the politicians but the teachers and educational institutions that have the power to change this narrative.

Climate change is complex. Information circulated on the internet, where young people are forced to turn to, is easily misleading, disempowering, and overwhelming. Additionally, by failing to centre climate conversations and climate activism in the curriculum, schools promote complacency: what is implicitly taught is that climate change is something happening on the sidelines, that climate activism is just an extra-curricular activity for those who happen to have the time and interest.

Though our generation appears to lead the movement, only a minority have a true sense of the urgency of the crisis, and even so, are too busy with other concerns like homework or the upcoming math exam to regularly and authentically engage. How ironic is it

that the institutions meant to prepare us for our futures simply distract us from protecting them?

Climate Education Reform BC (CERBC) is a youth-led, grassroots initiative advocating for the integration of comprehensive climate justice education in BC's K–12 curriculum. Inspired by the passion, energy, and acumen of youth in activism spaces and motivated by the gaping discrepancies between the active and the passive, we took it upon ourselves to bring our hopes and concerns to the Ministry of Education.

In April we released an open letter, which our team had drafted over the course of several months, informed by a series of intensive meetings among ourselves and with a diverse range of community members. In the aftermath we built up our signatures, secured endorsements from key organizations like the BC Teachers' Federation, coordinated mass public emails, and wrote articles like these. Our work has received positive feedback and interest from the community; climate education was a cause that clearly resonated with many.

A month or two into the campaign, the Ministry of Education responded. After a long spiel about all the work the province was already doing, which was not new or particularly impressive to us in any form, the email did concede, "the Ministry of Education... recognizes that further work is required to empower teachers in BC to better integrate climate change, adaptation, and Indigenous epistemologies into classroom instruction." Sometime later, they agreed to meet with us.

In August we talked with Jennifer Whiteside, the Minister of Education. There we brought our radical ideas to the table, wary of attempts to water down our calls to action and determined to defend the integrity of our vision. This is the beginning.

Small actions have ripple effects that make a big difference. This was and continues to be a grassroots fight. Community members, parents, teachers, and youth alike, will continue to be essential.

Our website ([climateeducationreformbc.ca](http://climateeducationreformbc.ca)) includes links to toolkits for all to access demographic-specific action items, such as donating, spreading the word, signing the letter, and sparking conversations about climate change with friends or in the classroom. We also have a newsletter for those who wish to stay up-to-date on our work.

Before we end, to all teachers, we want to say: the future of youth is in your hands. Classroom discussions and lessons will help today's youth fight climate change as tomorrow's leaders. Together, teachers and students can experiment, learn and unlearn, and work together to shape the future of education and the planet.

As for youth: if you want to make a difference, then take the first step. The most powerful and concrete way is to join a local youth-led organization, perhaps even reach out to us. Regardless of your background, identity, and level of knowledge, we invite you to join us in our collective fight for change. There is something truly special and transformative that happens when you enter this space. 🌱



# Mathematics and the arts: A powerful, productive pedagogical pairing

By Susan Gerofsky (she/her), Associate Professor of Mathematics Education, UBC

**MANY OF US** grew up with a school curriculum that separated the “hard” disciplines of mathematics and sciences from the “soft” disciplines of the visual and performing arts. This binary still exists in our society as people talk about the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), and sometimes have difficulty understanding STEAM (STEM plus arts). While there is no doubt that mathematics and science have close connections, I’d like to introduce you to the equally close connections mathematics has to the arts, and to suggest that arts-based math pedagogy can help you reach students who are more oriented toward the arts than the sciences.

I was one of those students in my secondary school years in Hamilton, Ontario. My strongest subject was mathematics; I found it easy and natural to understand its logical patterns, but what I loved was poetry and language, music and theatre. It took an amazing math teacher to make me see that these subjects were intimately linked. Bob McVean had us learning about the beauty of math through the arts and history, philosophy and games, with projects that had many of us “artsy” students falling in love with mathematics.

Thinking about arts-based mathematics pedagogy is easier if we think of mathematics as more than just calculating and solving equations. Einstein called math “the poetry of logical ideas”; mathematician Keith Devlin describes math as “the science of patterns”; and I see math as “the study of patterns and the patterns-of-patterns.” If we think of mathematics in these ways, we are immediately transported to the world of rhythmic and tonal patterns of music and dance, visual patterns of arts and design, and patterns of sounds and words in poetry. It becomes natural to experiment with mathematical patterning through pedagogical activities as diverse as weaving, drawing, map-making, theatre, and photography.

We can think of in-depth mathematical understanding as being able to represent and experience a mathematical pattern in several different forms, and grasp and communicate how and why they are equivalent. These representations of mathematical patterns go beyond T-charts, graphs, and equations to include poetry, sculpture, painting, and beadwork. Mathematical structures become inspiration for creating innovative art, and art reciprocally inspires deeper understanding of mathematics.

But how to bring the arts into our math teaching in meaningful ways? I suggest starting small, stretching ourselves as teachers by adding just one or two arts-based activities each year to more familiar math pedagogies. Some starting points are suggested on the next page. After a few years, each of us will have a good handful or two of math-arts learning activities in our teaching repertoire, ready to share with colleagues—activities that have the power to transform our students’ experiences and lifelong attitudes about mathematics. It is important to integrate assessment of this work into our math learning evaluations, along with more conventional tests, quizzes, and homework. As teachers, we already have many assessment strategies for project work, including rubrics and self- and peer-assessment.

Arts-based approaches can be woven into regular lessons and into take-home projects, so that they don’t require extra instructional hours. Galleries of student mathematical art displays can enliven our classrooms, hallway displays, and performance evenings, and spark interest in others who are moved by beautiful mathematical patterns. Arts-based work can also stimulate collaboration between teachers specializing in math and the arts, and encourage appreciation and exchange with our colleagues.



# RESOURCES

## ONLINE

One very rich source of mathematics and arts ideas is the **Bridges Organization** ([bridgesmathart.org](http://bridgesmathart.org)) that has brought together mathematical artists, teachers, and makers for 25 years. The Bridges galleries, archives, short film festivals, mathematical fashion shows, and poetry readings are all available for free online, and offer almost limitless inspiration for teaching mathematics via the arts (and vice versa). It's also worth checking out the affiliated *Journal of Mathematics and the Arts*, which often has free issues and articles available.

I also strongly recommend the many fascinating and inspiring videos available online by mathematical artists like Vi Hart and her dad, Bridges and Museum of Mathematics co-founder George Hart, spanning topics from mathematical food to hexaflexagons to juggling, bell-ringing and music boxes.

The **National Museum of Mathematics** ([momath.org](http://momath.org)) in New York City is another excellent resource for free, live online programming involving the arts. There are plenty of great starting points for designing K–12 lessons, activities, and projects.

## PEDAGOGY PROJECTS

I'd like to introduce you to some of the math and art pedagogy projects from UBC teacher candidates from my classes in recent years (some of whom you might know as colleagues in your schools now), and to my own short film:



Ali Hasan (who is also a *Jeopardy!* star) and Colin Grabowski, along with John Hawthorne, explore the pedagogy of binary and other bases through Marc and Marion Chamberland's art in ***New Math Teachers Riff on Kandinsky in Binary***.

Sam Milner and Carolina Azul Duque show ways to learn classic geometry through whole-body movement by ***Dancing Euclidean Proofs*** on the beach.



My 2021 Bridges short film contribution is an exploration of a mathematical braid pattern through music, poetry, and weaving: ***Seven Strands of Alphabetically Braided Crows***.



## BOOKS

**Fibre arts:** *Making Mathematics with Needlework: Ten Papers and Ten Projects; Crafting by Concepts: Fiber Arts and Mathematics; and Figuring Fibers* (three books co-edited by sarah-marie belcastro & Carolyn Yackel)

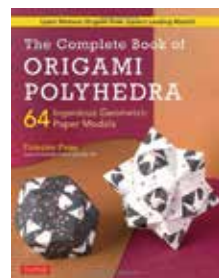
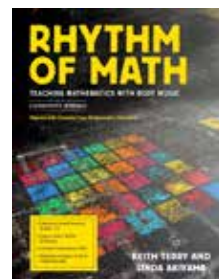
**Dance:** *Math Dance with Dr. Schaffer and Mr. Stern: Whole Body Math and Movement Activities for the K–12 Classroom* (Karl Schaffer, Eric Stern & Scott Kim); *Discovering the Art of Mathematics: Dance* (Christine von Renesse et al., available for free download); *Math on the Move* (percussive dance and math, by Malke Rosenfeld)

**Music:** *Rhythm of Math: Teaching Mathematics with Body Music* (Keith Terry & Linda Akiyama); *Discovering the Art of Mathematics: Music* (Christine von Renesse et al., available for free download)

**Sculpture and origami:** *Discovering the Art of Mathematics: Sculpture* (Julian Fleron et al., available for free download); *The Complete Book of Origami Polyhedra* (Tomoko Fuse); *Twists, Tilings, and Tessellations* (Robert Lang)

Currently, I am fascinated (one might say obsessed) with a beautiful, simple spiral called the Wurzelschnecke (pictured right), or Spiral of Theodorus, a.k.a. the Pythagorean Spiral: a construction that is amazingly simple to draw or fold with origami (see Tomoko Fuse's *Spiral Origami, Art, Design*), and can be understood by students from Grade 8 up, needing only an introduction to the Pythagorean Theorem. I've been collaborating with others to explore the Wurzelschnecke through art and design forms including mathematical furniture-making, fashion, and culinary arts.

Wishing you and your students many artful, mathematical years of learning and enjoyment ahead! 🌀



Susan Gerofsky photo



# Providing safe spaces for LGBTQ2S+ activism

iStock.com/Imagean

By Michelle Hernandez (she/they/her/them), teacher, Coquitlam

**AS TEACHERS** we strive to foster safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments that encourage our students to embrace their true selves, while they navigate the waters of their own personal journeys. We want authenticity in terms of self-expression for our students. Unfortunately, the same authenticity we seek for our students is something that many teachers from the LGBTQ2S+ community are not afforded, because they fear professional repercussions if their sexual orientation or gender identity are made public to their employer.

When reflecting on the first 20 years of my professional career, I acknowledge that I wore a "mask" of what society expected from an elementary school teacher and played the role of a straight, cisgendered woman. Out of fears of negative repercussions, I became adept at denying parts of myself by burying my truth deep within. My fears of being judged and marginalized were not irrational, as many teachers who are out as members of the LGBTQ2S+ community report feelings of isolation and marginalization in their place of work, while other teachers from the queer community decide to remain closeted because they do not feel safe.

This year I decided to take the risk of authentically expressing myself in my professional life by applying to be a member of the BCTF Committee for Action on Social Justice (LGBTQ2S+ Action Group). This decision was not taken lightly. I knew that being appointed to the action group would require a degree of outing myself. Being

open about my own identity would not only affect both my professional career, but also my personal life, as my family dynamics would be open to public scrutiny. However, after much introspection and discussion with my family, we collectively decided that this was a great opportunity to become a part of a community that is committed to addressing the barriers of discrimination, isolation, and marginalization faced daily by people who identify as queer.

In the spring of 2021, the BCTF hosted its very first LGBTQ2S+ issue session. It was an opportunity for teachers who self-identified as being a part of the LGBTQ2S+ community to collaborate with one another. Given the sensitive nature of the sessions, the teachers were assured their anonymity outside of the group, allowing for freedom to express their truths. Because of COVID-19, sessions were held virtually over the course of two days. It was an incredible opportunity to make connections with fellow educators from across the province as we shared a common passion for acknowledging, questioning, and challenging the barriers that we face as LGBTQ2S+ people in our professional lives.

On the first day of the issue session, we had the fortunate opportunity to have Cicely Belle Blain as a facilitator. Cicely is a highly regarded diversity and inclusion consultant who applies an intersectional lens when it comes to LGBTQ2S+ activism. Throughout the course of exploring our narratives it became abundantly clear that even though we all identified as LGBTQ2S+, the community itself is incredibly diverse.

Some members of the community experience a higher degree of acceptance from mainstream society, while others are challenged with the daily onslaught of glares from strangers, misgendering, and transphobia. Our unique experiences as queer teachers are also affected by many other intersecting factors, such as our race, the region where we teach (urban/rural), our age, as well as our employment status (TTOC/temporary contract/continuing contract).

A hot topic that arose out of the LGBTQ2S+ issue session was for us to consider the necessity of our community members to be visible, vocal, and proud by coming out. This sparked much debate. On the one hand, visibility is key to any social justice movement; on the other hand, personal choice and safety must be made a priority. I agree that increasing the visibility of the LGBTQ2S+ community is incredibly important as so many of us are not out. However, the consequences of being out may harm our relationships with family members and friends, as well as potentially limit our workplace opportunities.

The final day of the issue session was highly productive. LGBTQ2S+ participants collaborated on recommendations focusing on equity and inclusion within the BCTF, as well as recommendations that addressed trials in the workplace. In the end, there was an overwhelming sense of accomplishment and a rising hope that our continued efforts through the BCTF can make a difference in the professional lives of queer educators. I am forever grateful to be a part of the BCTF where LGBTQ2S+ collective voices and narratives matter. 🍌



# STRIPPED

By Karlan Modeste (she/her), BCTF staff lawyer

**THREE DAYS** before Black History Month, Mamadi Ill Fara Camara was pulled over by City of Montréal Police for allegedly using his cellphone while driving. During the stop, Mr. Camara witnessed another man suddenly attack the police officer. The assailant assaulted the police officer and took his firearm. Mr. Camara remained in his car and called 911 to report the assault. When additional police officers arrived, Mr. Camara provided a statement and left the scene. Shortly thereafter, police officers stopped Mr. Camara once again while other officers ransacked his home in search of the officer's service weapon. Mr. Camara was arrested and charged with disarming, assault, and attempted murder of a police officer, the same officer on whose behalf he had called 911. He was taken into police custody, strip searched, and detained for six days and nights. Mr. Camara was only released after video surveillance and DNA evidence proved that he was not the assailant.

In our quiet horror, we whisper amongst ourselves that he did everything right. Mr. Camara is a husband and expectant father of twins. He is an engineer by training and a PhD student at Laval University. Prior to his arrest, he oversaw a laboratory at Polytechnique Montréal. He was not required to be perfect to have the protection of the state. Yet, he nearly was.

I was pained to look at his small face behind his pandemic mask, but I needed to look. We all need to look. I imagine the fear he felt. Small. Black. Man. A tenuous legal standing. An immigrant without the protection of Canadian citizenship.

Many in the Black community live in a constant state of low-grade and sometimes high-grade fear. This is especially true for Black men. Insidious stereotypes invert reality by depicting Black men as dangerous and threatening. In fact, it is they who live in fear. Fear of a wrongful accusation, fear of appearing imposing, fear of being themselves. Black men are socialized to live with and deny this fear—a defensive posture that can be debilitating. We impose this standard on them rather than demand that our systems treat them with the respect they deserve.

In the case of Mr. Camara, the criminal law system moved with the arrogance reserved for a Black or Indigenous accused. Double-down. Defend. Apologize. When we think about this case, we need to think about all that Mr. Camara lost that night and in those ensuing six days—what he can't get back. His dignity, his sense of safety. As lawyers, we advocate vigorously in defense of our clients and work to secure recovery on their behalf. But we cannot reset the clock.

I started my legal career in criminal law with Nova Scotia Legal Aid. In 2017, I returned to Nova Scotia for the swearing in of a former Legal Aid colleague and fellow African-Canadian lawyer, Judge Rickola Brinton. While there, I had a chance to reconnect with another judge whom I had appeared before in youth court. He reminded me of a moment that stays with him to this day. He recalled my colleague's submissions on whether a custodial sentence should be imposed against his client. In my colleague's words, "You only have your

first strip search once." The judge refused to send that youth to jail.

A primary narrative about Black families centres on poverty, crime, single parents, and a lack of opportunity. A less discussed ethos that guides many Black households is the importance of education, compliance, respect, and submission—particularly to state powers and specifically for Black males. I know these lessons. I have three brothers.

Each has a different physical stature that renders them vulnerable in different ways. To my horror, each has faced sexual aggression, physical aggression, and assaults in part because of the bodies they inhabit.

Like any other household, parents approach child rearing with caution, care, and a profound hope that their children will lead good lives. In Black homes, these lessons are also primers for protecting one's safety and, in some cases, one's life. But, we can't contract out of racism, not through education, poise, or training.

Consider this: we live in a country where your call to 911 to report a crime can lead to your strip search and detention for six days and nights. As a nation, we must demand better. 🗣️

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karlan Modeste is a staff lawyer with the BC Teachers' Federation, an LL.M. Health Law candidate at Osgoode Hall Law School, Graduate Fellow of the Law Foundation of BC, and a sessional instructor at the University of the Fraser Valley.

# LOCAL PROFILE

## BURNABY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

# Engaging members for positive change

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

**EVERY TEACHER KNOWS** the key to a successful lesson is engagement. When students are engaged, the learning takes on new meaning. The classroom feels full of energy and excitement. The same goes for unions. Members are at the heart of all union work, and member engagement brings that work to life.

For the past few years, boosting member engagement has been an important goal for the Burnaby Teachers' Association (BTA). "We want to make sure teachers feel they have a home in the union. Their involvement is important and goes a long way," said Daniel Tétrault, BTA President.

The BTA took a multifaceted approach to get members more involved in the union. They work to get new members engaged early on, but teacher workload is an obstacle.

"Asking people to volunteer time outside of their busy schedules is a hard ask, especially for new teachers who are just getting their feet wet. It's important they know they can start out small. You can join a committee or volunteer to work on something you are passionate about," said Daniel.

The BTA has over 10 committees working on a wide variety of issues affecting education. They also tackle issues in the broader community, for example, affordable housing. Housing inevitably affects the school system.

"Families have to leave Burnaby because of affordability, and teachers who work here can't afford to live here," said Daniel.

The BTA recently participated in a task force on affordable housing in Burnaby. The task force produced a report and recommendations with some of the most progressive tenant protection policies in Canada. The report is just the first step on a long road to make Burnaby more affordable for the people who live and work there.

Making the union accessible to all members is also an important part of boosting member engagement. For Shanee Prasad, BTA First Vice-President, fighting for equity and challenging oppression have been part of her identity long before she became a union leader.

"Usually unions try to get younger members involved, but Shanee is a young member who is getting older members re-engaged. She advocates for changes that are antiracist and anti-oppressive," said Sabha Ghani, BIPOC Committee Chair.

These changes include working with members to create spaces where BIPOC members can feel heard and respected.

"As an equity-seeking woman, the system told me who I was and where I belonged because of my identity. Antiracism gave me my story and allowed me to tell the world who I am. I want to help other people experience that," said Shanee. "Hopefully, brown and Black teachers are seeing this and saying I can do this too."



**"Unions are not top-down structures. Members do a lot of the work that has positive impacts."**

**– Daniel Tétrault, BTA President**





## FIGHTING FOR EQUITY: THE BTA BIPOC EDUCATORS COMMITTEE

If you look around the room (or virtual space) at most union meetings, it's easy to see that the diversity represented at the meeting does not correlate with the diversity of our membership. BIPOC members are often underrepresented at all levels of union engagement. Burnaby's newest committee, the BIPOC committee, aims to change that.

This committee got its start after a handful of members came together to advocate for racialized seats on the BTA Executive Committee. Ultimately, they were unsuccessful in securing seats for racialized members; however, their fight for equity is not over.

"I disengaged when we lost the vote. I was disappointed when I heard some colleagues dismiss and deny that racism is a problem. I didn't have the stamina to educate my colleagues on this, and at that time, there wasn't a space for BIPOC colleagues to support each other," said Sabha.

Shanee saw that BIPOC members needed a safe space to fight racism together, so she mobilized members to

start a new BIPOC committee in 2020. The committee quickly grew from the newest and smallest committee to the largest committee in the BTA. They tackle a wide variety of issues using an equity lens and an antiracism framework.

"We need new strategies to tackle old problems. If you have been navigating racism your whole life, you know how to navigate a challenge," said Shanee. "We used to deal with racism in isolation and now we have a safe space where we can share our experiences and put our heads together to find solutions, all without having to justify our feelings or face denial."

The committee also serves as a supportive place for members to learn how to navigate the structures and processes of a union. Last year, the committee passed a motion through the BTA annual general meeting to have the school district revisit their relationship with the RCMP.

"Many of our committee members are new to union activism and have never

**Above:** Sabha Ghani, BTA BIPOC Committee Chair (left) and Shanee Prasad, BTA First Vice-President (right).

**Opposite:** BTA members at the Coldest Night of the Year walk with Burnaby Mayor Mike Hurley (centre). **Opposite below:** BTA President Daniel Tétrault.

spoken at an annual general meeting. But, when someone spoke against the motion, their names all popped up on the screen, ready to speak, one after the other. They were willing to get up there and speak to this motion even when they were nervous," said Sabha. "This was the proudest moment for me as committee chair."

Another big success from the BIPOC committee's inaugural year is the Black Futures Forum. This moderated panel, including Black high school students and Black educator and activist Markiel Simpson, addressed the racism that exists in our school system and the changes we need to make so students feel heard.

This school year, the BIPOC committee is looking forward to collaborating with colleagues from other committees in the BTA to decolonize the union and work to create a more just society for students and teachers.

"It gives me hope to see folks saying despite the odds, despite the dominant narrative, I'm going to try to make things better," said Shanee.



## SHARING LEARNING: A COLLABORATIVE PD EVENT

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed a lot of our usual practices; professional development is one area where the changes created an opportunity to try something new. Last school year, Burnaby and Coquitlam happened to have their district professional development days scheduled for the same date. For Holly Loyd, BTA Second Vice-President and last year's PD Chair, and Meggan Crawford, the Coquitlam Teachers' Association (CTA) PD Chair, it was the perfect opportunity to collaborate.

"I'm pretty sure this wouldn't have happened in normal times. When we realized we're going virtual, we didn't have to worry about space," said Holly.

This joint professional development day grew bigger and bigger as more people got on board with the new, collaborative approach.

"The collaborative piece makes my heart swell," said Holly. "It wasn't just the PD committees from Coquitlam and Burnaby locals, but also so many

other teachers and district staff who wanted this event to be a success."

Ultimately, the virtual event grew to include seven different keynote speakers and over 100 presenters. With so many learning opportunities, attendance skyrocketed. Over 4,000 people attended this virtual professional development day—by far the most well-attended district PD day Burnaby and Coquitlam have ever seen. With no constraints on space, educational assistants and school administrators were invited to join their teacher colleagues for more collaborative professional development opportunities.

The feedback forms that participants filled out were overwhelmingly positive. The virtual nature of the event, diverse keynote speakers, and wide variety of workshops to choose from all contributed to the event's success.

Talks between the BTA and CTA PD committees led to other opportunities as well. Through Meggan, Holly learned about new BCTF grant opportunities. After applying and receiving

grant funds, Holly pulled in a few other BTA members to help revive the annual trivia night for Burnaby teachers to raise money for the Burnaby Children's Fund. They moved the trivia night online, and added an art night with the help of the Burnaby Art Gallery.

Holly and Meggan have also started a Facebook group with all the PD chairs from locals in the metro west zone.

"I hope this leads to more collaboration. With things happening online, there are more opportunities to collaborate. We can share ideas, bring in keynote speakers together, plan other events, and collaborate on future district PD days," said Holly.

While there are no definite plans for the next district PD day yet, the committee has certainly begun thinking of ways to get more members interested. If it's safe to do so, they are considering a hybrid model. This would allow for a large event that includes members from different locals, but also gives those who are comfortable with it an opportunity to connect in-person.

"Being virtual opened the door for us to try something this large," said Holly. "It was a great opportunity and a great success."



## GROWING TOGETHER: A COHORT MODEL FOR MENTORSHIP

Supporting a mentorship program has been part of Heather Skuse's role in the BTA for several years, first as elementary rep on the BTA Executive Committee, then as BTA Vice-President for the last three years. In recent years, the mentorship committee has gone through some major remodelling to better serve the needs of mentors and mentees.

"There was always a problem in getting release time for mentors and mentees to connect," said Heather. "With a one-on-one program, if a mentor and mentee don't connect, so much learning is lost."

This inspired the shift to a cohort model for mentorship. Now, three mentee teachers are paired with one mentor teacher. Mentees not only learn from their mentor, but also from their fellow mentees. Mentors also learn from their mentees. It creates a learning community that facilitates more shared conversations and collaborative learning.

Throughout the year, the BTA and the Burnaby district host seven after school sessions. The sessions include guest speakers and ample time for mentors and mentees to talk.

The goal of this mentorship program is to foster career-long relationships so mentors and mentees have a professional network they can connect with for years to come. One big change the mentorship committee introduced is to transition from a one-year program to a two-year program, with the goal of adding an additional third year.

The creation of a two-year mentorship program was made possible during the last round of bargaining. The BCTF successfully bargained for additional funds to support mentorship around the province. When deciding how to spend the additional funds, the



**Above:** Heather Skuse, BTA Mentorship Chair. **Opposite:** Holly Loyd, BTA Second Vice-President. All local profile photos by Sunjum Jhaj unless noted.

mentorship committee focused on the five guiding principles of the program:

1. Relationships and learning
2. Non-evaluative support
3. Responsive and evolving
4. Building capacity
5. Sustainable.

"Going forward, we'll have opportunities for mentors and mentees to connect in the second year so they can continue to build those relationships and grow together," said Heather.

New voices on the mentorship committee have also helped the committee look at ways to be more inclusive and antiracist. The committee raised questions such as, how can we better support BIPOC teachers? How can we incorporate antiracism in our mentorship program? How can we help white teachers understand BIPOC perspectives and experiences?

Next year's mentorship cohort will be the first to participate in new antiracism training sessions, have access to antiracism resources, additional mentor training time,

additional release time for antiracism learning, and days for BIPOC teachers to meet and connect.

"Antiracism is connected to all of our guiding principles, so it's important we embed it into the program," said Heather.

Because of COVID-19, participants in the mentorship program may miss out on some of the in-person learning, such as visiting mentor or mentee classrooms to observe or attending a mentorship retreat at Loon Lake Resort. However, despite the virtual nature of last year's program, both mentors and mentees appreciated the support of colleagues, the new ideas and learning opportunities they experienced, and the sense of community they were able to create even over Zoom.

"Our goal is to support a program where we walk alongside each other, acknowledging the importance of collaboration, evolving needs, reciprocal relationships, and lifelong learning," said Heather. "We want to empower our teachers to change the system." 9

# Ally is a verb

By Donna Morgan (she/her), retired teacher, Burnaby

**THE DOCUDRAMA WE WERE CHILDREN** tells the story of two residential school survivors, Lyna Hart and Glen Anaquod (available to stream on CBC Gem and Netflix). In a poignant scene, one of the teachers at the residential school, a nun, sneaks the hungry children to the kitchen for a snack. Watching the film, an idea rolled around in my mind. For a long time in my teaching career, my relationship to Indigenous students (and others who are oppressed) was similar: I was a “good nun” who, like most teachers, worked to be kind and supportive of my students. Although kindness may make us feel less complicit with systemic harm, kindness alone does not make us good allies.

To ally with Indigenous students, parents, and colleagues, we must actively work to change the systemic nature of racism and colonial structures. We must move beyond being the “good nun” to walking side-by-side in the struggle for a more just system.

In the early 2010s, I noted that the student teachers were coming with a mandate and an enthusiasm to learn about Indigenous perspectives and how to support Indigenous students in class. I was keen to join them, but I was fearful of my own lack of knowledge. Luckily, I had many wonderful colleagues who were engaging in this work and we moved forward together to develop new understandings, and to find where place-based learning, Indigenous knowledge, and support for students could come together. As with much of what we do as teachers, this work is ongoing, and there are supportive colleagues to learn alongside if we look for them.

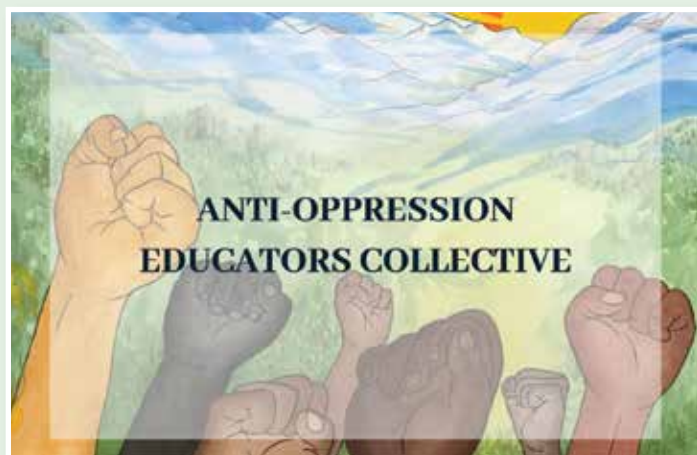
## What are some steps we can take to effectively ally?

### Know ourselves

All learning starts with knowing our own identity, experiences, and motivations. We are required to dig deeply into our lifelong views and relationships with Indigenous Peoples. It is difficult to confront the mistakes and racism we may have been part of in the past. A good resource to do this work comes from Susan Dion ([vimeo.com/59543958](https://vimeo.com/59543958)) who challenges us to honestly look at our knowledge, relationships, and background. Start by thinking about social location, the combination of factors that inform our identity, including gender, race, social class, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation, and geographic location. Our social location is unique; it affects how we see the world—and how the world sees us.

### Do our own work

Asking our Indigenous colleagues for background, resources, and lessons every time an issue arises is very exhausting for them. This has especially been the case as the Western scientific verification of unmarked graves at residential schools has recently featured in the news. Remember that almost every single Indigenous person we know has felt the intergenerational impacts of residential schools in some way, including some of our colleagues who were forced to attend them. This is a time of mourning as the truth they have always known is painfully shared on every newscast.



## Resources

Good resources can be found via our Anti-Oppression Educators Collective (AOEC), who urge us to read, learn, and reckon ([aoec.ca](https://aoec.ca)). All BCTF members have access to these resources, and we can also all join AOEC to learn and do more.

AOEC membership gives you access to opportunities for professional development and networking, an interactive annual conference centred on unlearning colonial structures, and a community of like-minded teachers concerned about social justice.

**Visit [aoec.ca](https://aoec.ca) for more information!**



## “...kindness alone does not make us good allies.”

Start with the simplest of Google searches or using the BCTF resources such as Project of Heart and Gladys We Never Knew ([bctf.ca](http://bctf.ca)) to do our own learning. Read Indigenous news sources such as APTN ([aptn.ca](http://aptn.ca)) or IndigiNews ([indiginews.com](http://indiginews.com)). Make sure to read the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission—their website ([nctr.ca](http://nctr.ca)) has a wealth of primary documents, oral stories, and the recommendations of the commission. This website has such a depth of resources that reading and re-reading uncovers more with every visit.

### Listen

Take time to listen—to students, colleagues, Elders, spokespeople for Indigenous groups. When we feel a need to respond, we need to listen more. Talk less and listen more is the first motto for allies. Even when supporting students or colleagues, let them do the talking while perhaps using your privilege to get their voices heard and their concerns acted upon.

### Take risks and act

Our own privilege may be small, but it is there. Work out a way to share. Literally and metaphorically, stand besides Indigenous folks when they speak. Stand up to those in power where you can. Stand down from running for positions or taking special responsibilities where Indigenous people are also interested. Whiteness is immeasurably privileged, whether it is in the school system or in the union—we must stay aware of that in all facets of our work.

We can act to decolonize classroom practices and school culture. Teachers are acting: changing books

and resources to reflect history and diversity; ensuring power and social justice are taught across the curriculum; involving students in the creation of learning plans; designing assessments to be inclusive and culturally responsive; changing union structures for better representation; and engaging with the broader community to advocate for equity.

### Take feedback

It is very difficult to hear we have messed up. None of us want to be called out for racism, but we must take feedback to be better allies. We cannot expect Indigenous colleagues, students, or friends to always call us out with kindness and grace. We need to be able to take negative feedback without reacting to tone. We can thank the person for pointing it out, then sit with the concern or criticism for a few days, consider how our privilege and the system may intersect, and what we can change to become more effective allies.

Our Indigenous colleagues and students do not need us to speak for them. They need us to walk beside them and take up the work of dealing with other settler/immigrant people to raise issues of concern and confront racism in our systems and communities. ♻️

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

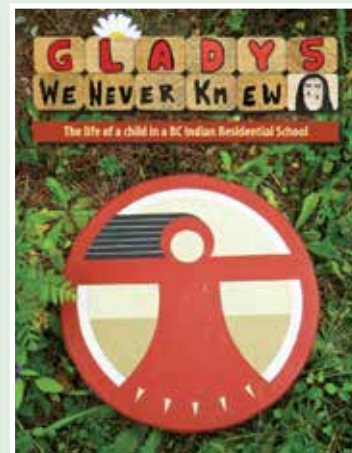
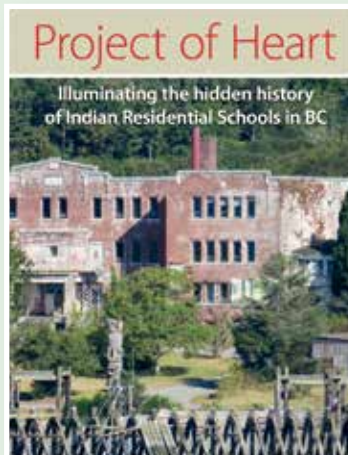
Donna Morgan is an immigrant/settler and recently retired science and math teacher from the Burnaby School District on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish First Nations. She has worked in social justice, environmental, and union activism.



**The Indigenous Ally Toolkit** from the Montréal Urban Indigenous Network is also an excellent read ([reseauumtinetnetwork.com/resources](http://reseauumtinetnetwork.com/resources)).

**Project of Heart** and **Gladys We Never Knew** are two BCTF resources that teach about the history and ongoing trauma of the residential school system.

Turn to pages 20 and 24 to read about BC teachers who used these resources to help students reckon with the 215 unmarked graves located in Kamloops.



# Hearts toward reconciliation



By **Cheryl Carlson** (she/her), teacher, Hope

**FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS**, I have been teaching my Grade 2/3 classes at Silver Creek Elementary about residential schools using the modules from the BCTF resource *Gladys We Never Knew: The life of a child in a BC Indian Residential School*. When the 215 unmarked graves were located on the grounds of Kamloops Residential School, I felt it was time to extend our learning in order to understand the significance of the recent revelation. Our students were very saddened by the news, but also eager to do something to let the world know about the atrocities that occurred at residential “schools” and honour the children who attended these so-called schools.

As a class, we discussed what we could do to let the truth of what happened in residential schools be known. The children thought it was important for the entire school to learn about residential schools, so we planned a project that would involve everyone in Grades K–7. I asked all the teachers if they would be interested in making orange t-shirts (made of paper and laminated) that we could attach to the schoolyard fence. Everyone was on board! With help from Alicia James, the First Nations support worker at our school, every child designed an orange shirt, incorporating illustrations and powerful phrases. The shirts were

later hung on the fence of Silver Creek Elementary for all to see.

The second project we took on was to decorate 215 wooden hearts. The hearts were taken to Spuzzum and hung on the traditional grounds where Gladys Chapman was from. The children took a great deal of pride in creating the hearts and worked lovingly to decorate and include heartfelt, personal messages. Some of the messages were, “I care for you” and “I want to go home.” This project was completed by the Grade 1/2 and Grade 2/3 classes.

While creating their hearts, we had many discussions about residential schools and some of the abuses and atrocities that took place there. Throughout the lessons and heart-decorating activity the students were very engaged. They understood that this project was a meaningful way to honour and remember all the children who lost their lives at Canadian residential schools.

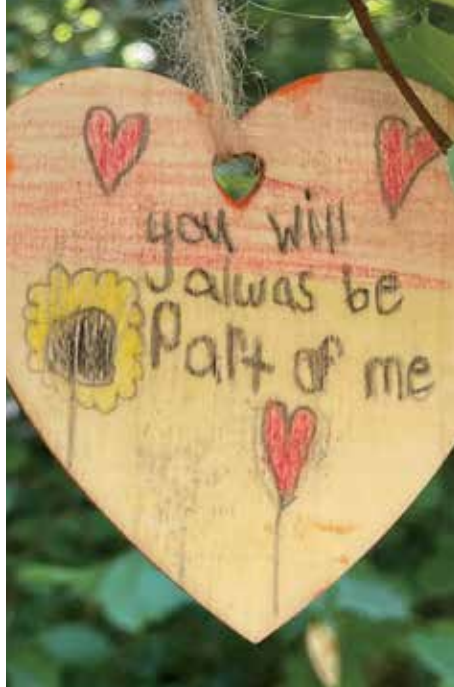
On June 18, we held a commemoration event at Spuzzum First Nation. The gathering included members of the Nlaka'pamux First Nation, Chief Jim Hobart, teachers from across BC, social workers from Xyolhemeylh First Nations Child Services, BCTF staff, and the superintendent of

School District 78. After a moving message and welcoming by Chief Jim Hobart, we all walked together along the trail leading to the historic Alexandra Bridge, decorating the trees along the way with the 215 hearts. We chose this trail to hang the hearts because hundreds of people walk along it every summer, so the location provided an opportunity for public dialogue about residential schools. This trail is also located in the traditional territory of Gladys Chapman, whom the students spent the entire year learning about.

This fall my class will be following up on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action. In order to seek ways to implement them into the classroom, we will be looking at module six of the *Gladys* resource, titled “Life at Residential School,” discussing the way the children were treated at the Kamloops school, looking at Gladys's death certificate, and examining how it was written. As a class, we will then connect our learning to the TRC's Calls to Action to better understand how to move forward with reconciliation.

At the conclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015, Justice Murray Sinclair stated that, while approximately 6,000 deaths formed part of the official record,





Sunjum Jhoj photo

the actual number of deaths could be much higher. For those of us who have been teaching about residential schools—and those who experienced the horrors or live with the intergenerational trauma—the recent revelations did not come as a surprise. However, it has brought to light the responsibility teachers hold in ensuring the next generation understands the genocide that took place in Canada. We need to do more than just learn the history that was intentionally ignored; we need to actively participate in reconciliation and heed the TRC's Calls to Action. 9

### REMEMBERING MAGGIE

Gladys's older sister Maggie also attended Kamloops Indian Residential School. Maggie vanished while attending the school; there is no record of her disappearance or death. It is possible Maggie is one of the 215 children laying in unmarked graves at the school.



Cheryl Carlson with illustrated orange t-shirts created by students at Silver Creek Elementary. Lauren Hutchison photos unless noted.





Angela Marcakis photo

*BC students honour the  
Indigenous children who  
died in residential schools...*



Lauren Hutchison photo



Students in Fort Nelson held a Day of Memorial and painted stones with messages of support.  
**Above:** School display at Creekside Elementary in Surrey. T-shirt design by Yasakw Yakujanaas Designs.  
**Left:** Heart by a student at Silver Creek Elementary in Hope.

David Johnstone photo



*When I understand and hear what  
[residential school] is, I feel my heart crack.  
– Natasha Purvis, Grade 5*

Jill Byrd photo

*Whenever I hear about what is going on in residential schools, I  
feel frightened. When I hear about it, I think of how scared you  
would be to get taken away from your family. It hurts just to hear  
about. I can't imagine going through it. And to all of the families  
who had children that went to a residential school and didn't come  
back, I'm terribly sorry. – Molly Powers, Grade 4*

**Above:** A memorial at Robert L. Clemitson Elementary in Kamloops.  
**Below left:** An illustrated t-shirt by a student at Silver Creek Elementary in Hope. **Below right:** Primary students at Charles Dickens Annex in Vancouver observed 215 seconds of silence to honour the graves located at Kamloops Residential School.

*Dear residential schools, why did you have to be so cruel?  
Normally kids go to school to learn, not to get tortured. I  
can't believe residential schools were invented. And I can't  
believe that there is still racism everywhere. I wish I could  
change that. – Mirri Riva Dostie, Grade 4*

Lauren Hutchison photo

Anne Miller photo

# Project of Heart

## Teaching for truth and to honour the lives of children who died at residential schools

By Carol Arnold (she/her), teacher, Salt Spring Island

**EVER SINCE** the BCTF published the resource *Project of Heart: Illuminating the hidden history of Indian Residential Schools in BC*, I have been using it in my various social studies classes to teach about residential schools. In May, the news about the locating of 215 unmarked graves at Kamloops Residential School added poignancy as well as timely importance for this unit of study.

My practice had been to teach this unit at the very end of the semester (or last quarter during COVID), so the lessons learned about residential schools would stay with students longer. This year, well ahead of the usual schedule, I began the unit the Monday after the first revelation of previously undocumented graves shocked the nation.

I introduced the unit by starting with the Blanket Exercise for each of my two Grade 9 Social Studies classes. The Blanket Exercise is an excellent and interactive means of providing students a sense of historical context and helping them understand that the creation of Indian Residential Schools was part of the colonization of Canada, a chapter written in the 20th century but part of a process that began long before the Indian Act of 1876.

As a class, we examined the 94 Calls to Action and summarized the work of the

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). I included the fact that Justice Murray Sinclair had always stated that the number of recorded deaths, over 6,000 lost lives, was underreported and could easily be three times greater. I shared with the students that those of us who participated in these hearings and closely followed the work of the TRC had believed the "official" number was low, because many survivors had reported witnessing events resulting in student deaths as well as unexplained and sudden disappearances.

The next step in our classroom learning was the *Project of Heart* resource. The resource can be broken up into five topics, each supported by a short video and together they lend themselves as an effective means of study using a modified jigsaw method. The class is divided into five groups and their task is to learn the material in their assigned section of the book, view the video, create a poster, and then teach the class about it. The week-long study culminates in student presentations, a gallery walk, and an essay responding to the following prompt: "Discuss the history and legacy of residential schools in Canada."

The essay served to support deep learning and provided students with an opportunity to express their empathy for survivors and their children. It was

also important that students understood and reflected in their essays the lesson that residential schools never defeated the spirits of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Resistance and resilience were demonstrated in many ways by the children throughout the history of residential schools, and they continue to be a force for healing, justice, and change today. As one student put it, "They can't just get over it [the experience of residential schools] because of all the abuse, and it amazes me how much they had to go through and their resilience to keep on fighting." (Jacqueline W., Social Studies 9 student)

Students worked in class for over three days on their final essays, and the resulting papers were far beyond my expectations. The essays were well written and detailed, and more importantly, demonstrated a sense of connection to the children subjected to the cruelties of the residential school system.

The gravity of the unmarked graves "hit home" with the same kind of impact as the 2020 murder of George Floyd.





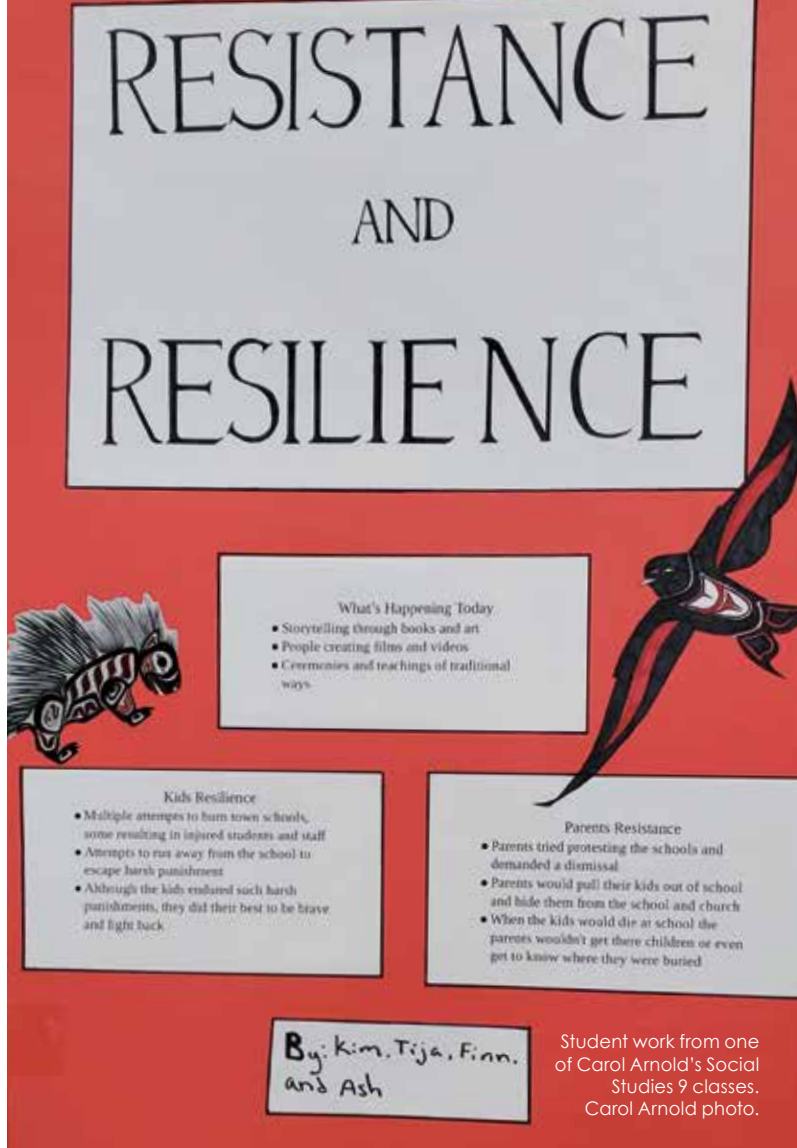
There are events that suddenly become a tipping point for the collective imagination, a moment when people can no longer bear the degree of injustice without responding. This was the case for my students.

In preparation for Orange Shirt Day on September 30, I will share the students' essays with colleagues in my school. The lessons they provide on the history and legacy of residential schools will be helpful in teaching staff and students in other classes as preparation for the commemoration activities we are sure to have in my school district.

One of the Calls to Action reads, "We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, to establish, as a statutory holiday, a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process." While we now have the statutory holiday, more work is needed to ensure everyone understands the truth about the genocidal policies that created residential schools. Orange Shirt Day is an opportunity to learn and reckon with the history of this nation that resulted in thousands of unrecorded deaths of children at residential schools. We are reminded, too, that we still haven't learned everything there is to know about this history. 🐾

### WATCH

Scan the QR code (right) to watch Justice Murray Sinclair's response to the news about the 215 unmarked graves in Kamloops in this 10-minute video that addresses the connection to the work of the TRC.



Student work from one of Carol Arnold's Social Studies 9 classes. Carol Arnold photo.

## Student reflections on residential schools

*Residential schools are a chapter in our history; however, viewing them as such can be problematic because it dismisses them and the effect they had on innocent people as events of the past, and not something that is still causing pain today. ...With all of this on the forefront of our minds, there is still the divine resistance. The resilience Aboriginal people show after being pushed into all this mud, they come out soaking but alive. Alive with stories to tell, evidence to expose, art to create, traditions and ceremonies to uphold. They have so much culture being awakened. Aboriginal people in Canada show more resilience than anything we have ever seen. They pass on their teachings, they tell us their stories. They still stand, they still fight for those who they have lost.*

– Stephanie C., Social Studies 9

*Concluding on a personal note, my grandmother was a residential school survivor. It aggravates me to see the extent people have to go to just be listened to. First Nations people have to die, and not only a few but an entire genocide must be conducted for any change to happen. This is not right, this is not humane, this is evil.*

– Clementine D., Social studies 9

*Residential schools have haunted our minds for as long as people of this century can remember. Our favourite saying seems to be, "It was a dark chapter," as though a chapter could be ripped out or forgiven and forgotten. Despite our efforts to push it into the past and reconcile for the future, it resurfaces every time. This is no chapter we're talking about, this is the whole damn book. This is the story of the ones who never got to tell theirs. This is the story of the ones who will never be forgotten.*

– Sophia H-G, Social Studies 9

*In Kamloops, BC, people have recently uncovered remains of 215 children buried at the site, when the school only recorded 52 deaths. It goes to show how truly evil these schools were, and why we need to learn the truths about them. ...Gladys was one of these children. This 12-year-old died alone in a hospital with no one to comfort her, bleeding and struggling for breath. Her parents never got to see her before her death, know where she was buried, nor what the cause of her death was until somewhat recently. Gladys was only one of many children who experienced a terrible way to part this world.*

– Lucie L., Social Studies 9

# Reconciliation is all of us!

## Learning resources from the Caring Society

By **Madelaine McCracken** (she/her), Métis; M.Ed.; Education and Public Engagement Co-ordinator, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society

**RECONCILIATION IS ALL OF US** and we, at the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society (Caring Society), care deeply about empowering children, youth, the public, and educators to actionize reconciliation. We offer initiatives for teachers and schools to reflect upon learning and enact reconciliation-based lessons with students, and beyond.

### Calls to Action

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released their Calls to Action, which is a list of 94 ways truth-telling and action-taking can take place in educational settings, government institutions, community organizations, and in society overall. These calls were created by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples who are residential school Survivors, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members.

### Spirit Bear

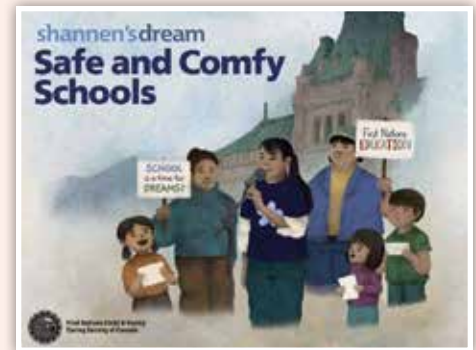
As the esteemed former Senator and Chairperson for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Murray Sinclair says, "Education got us into this mess and education will get us out of it." We believe in this statement wholeheartedly with compassion, love, kindness, and truth. Spirit Bear, the Caring Society's Ambearrister, who personifies these values, shares Spirit Bear's Guide to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action that can teach children and youth, through accessible language, how they can take

up the Calls to Action in their own ways. Spirit Bear shares his experiences of understanding justice, inequities, residential schools, Truth and Reconciliation, and generational learning from his family and friends like Era Bear, Mary the Bear, Uncle Huckleberry, Cindy the Sheep, and children too. Spirit Bear's books are accessible online for free, or you can order and buy your own copy. To accompany the books, there are learning guides and films that teachers can use that share key concepts and understandings from his stories. Spirit Bear now has a movie that tells the story of how he and children bear-ed witness at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal for Jordan's Principle, and how this work is still being done today. We also offer the Reconciliation Ambearristers program that guides educators and groups to host their own Ambearrister, who is a friend of Spirit Bear's, and take up the Caring Society's initiatives with their classrooms and communities.

### Shannen's Dream

It is important for educators to learn about, teach, and commemorate intergenerational residential school experiences of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. It is also a time to honour the children who have been found in unmarked graves at former residential schools. Even today, schools ought to be a safe and comfy place for all. Shannen Koostachin and her friends showed Canada the bad conditions of her school at Attawapiskat First Nation. First Nations children and youth deserve equitable access to schools on their territories, free from unsafe learning environments and from barriers.

Shannen's Dream is a campaign that continues Shannen's work for all First Nations children and youth. Canada needs to better fund schools on and off reserves for First Nations students so they can be as successful as any other Canadian student attending school: to



live their dreams in ways that uplift their cultural identities. School is a Time for Dreams offers educational resources for teachers to take up with their classrooms to make Shannen's dream a reality for First Nations children and youth across Canada.

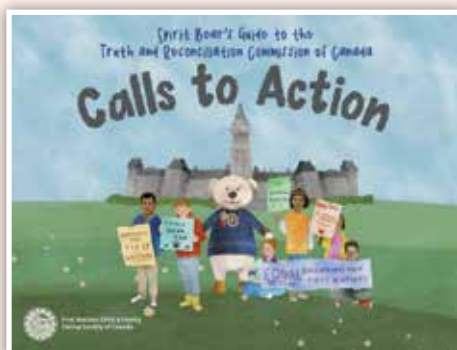
### Letters to Dr. Henderson Bryce

In light of Orange Shirt Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30, we are asking the public to reconcile history, and to send letters to Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce, who was a whistle-blower that brought attention to the terrible conditions of residential schools back in 1907. Send your letters to c/o Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce, Beechwood Cemetery, 280 Beechwood Avenue, Ottawa, ON, K1L 8A6. To this day, we are grateful for Dr. Bryce's efforts to make a difference for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

Spirit Bear cannot do this work alone; this is why we encourage educators and school communities to participate in our initiatives to actionize reconciliation and make a difference! 🐻

### FIND THESE RESOURCES

Scan the QR code (right) to access educational resources from the Caring Society shared in this article and for additional resources for Truth and Reconciliation.





# Documentary about queer South Asian youth teaches us to put love first

By Annie Ohana (she/her), teacher, Surrey

**SEVERAL YEARS AGO**, I was at an event about community safety and heard from parents that teaching 2SLGBTQ+ curriculum was wrong, went against parents' wishes, and that being queer was a sin and had no place in their home.

My thoughts, believe it or not, were not of anger but rather of sadness that love had not conquered the hearts of these parents. That they could not see that schools were safer, students healthier, bullying lower, rates of substance use lower, and that spaces were more inclusive for all.

This is why I am so proud to have been part of a team that helped build the official teacher's discussion guide for *Emergence: Out of the Shadows*, a feature documentary film by one of the very few South Asian 2SLGBTQ+ support groups and charities in Canada, Sher Vancouver. Under the guidance of Founder Alex Sangha, his second film celebrates faith, identity, love, and family. It is very much built for a secondary classroom. The coming out stories of Kayden, Jag, and Alex himself, along with their families and how they dealt with their children living their truth, are truly special. I believe they make the film a game-changer.

Upon watching the film, my heart and mind soared as I realized how many conversations this film would spark. Without judgment and without denigrating parents, this film and the accompanying guide are tools for teachers and students to start a conversation around why being proudly

out is the most empowering and uplifting experience of all.

Within the families depicted in the film, I see heroes and teachers that lead the way in supporting students and our communities. Their journeys help wrench away the settler-colonial racist mindsets that created queerphobia in the first place and formed a doubling down of oppression on QTIBIPOC\* folx. It celebrates faith and cultural identity as powerful amplifiers of how "loving the child first" unifies and strengthens families.

This film also provides much needed representation. This is one of the very few films on 2SLGBTQ+ issues that feature families of colour. The film is also directed by Vinay Giridhar who is an immigrant from Kerala, India. Vinay is making his directorial debut with *Emergence: Out of the Shadows*.

In addition, queer families, like Jag's family, allow us to normalize all love and all families. The choice made by Jag and Alex's parents to "love the child first" will tear down the fear and anger that is still prevalent in so many homes.

I thank Alex, Jag, Kayden, and their families. They have given me a positive way to "call in"—instead of calling out parents. The film allows us to use traditions, cultures, and identities in a positive way to start conversations. It also provides avenues to support students who may fear how they emerge in their truth.

Let the conversations begin. 9

## WATCH

*Emergence: Out of the Shadows* can be viewed at [emergencefilm.net](http://emergencefilm.net), where you can also find the teacher's discussion guide.



Sher Films Canada stills from *Emergence: Out of the Shadows*

\* The acronym QTIBIPOC refers to folx who are queer, trans, and intersex and Black, Indigenous, people of colour.

# A community approach to mental wellness

By **Lauren Rotzien** (she/her), teacher, Coquitlam

**THIS LAST YEAR AND A HALF** has been a roller coaster for teachers and students. Remote learning, wildfire smoke, changing COVID protocols, cohorts, and heat waves had a large effect on our community's morale. As a school that always values collaboration, at École Maillard Middle we knew we needed to find a way to build community school-wide despite being completely separated from each other.

We began to rebuild our community with a collaborative mural project titled *Together We Soar*, funded by our parent advisory council. Our school is divided into four separate teams. For the mural project, each team created a bird representing their core values. We also enlisted our district's Indigenous Education Department to introduce our students to the symbolism behind each bird: Raven—Humor, Owl—Wisdom, Heron—Tranquility, Hummingbird—Joy. Using stories and class discussions, we connected these values to our perseverance and resilience through COVID. We also connected these themes to colour theory and watercolour painting techniques, so that every student could contribute a painted feather to the final bird images. The result was a beautiful, commemorative display that will remind us of our strength during COVID for many years to come.

Through our continued discussions on the reasoning behind the mural project, we realized that we wanted to further build our community while continuing to educate our students on

mental wellness. As a result, we developed a Mental Wellness Fair focusing on the effects of stress on the body and coping strategies during this tumultuous time. Our overarching goal was to create a common language school-wide, as well as provide specific techniques students could apply to their daily lives to reduce stress. We also wanted to bring some joy and excitement to an otherwise challenging year.

We chose six main themes and recruited experts from our school and district to guide us on each theme. We included brief introductions on the topics during morning announcements, and then teachers discussed these ideas further with their classes at appropriate times throughout the day. The theme presentations were prerecorded to allow flexibility for teachers. Daily optional reflection activities were also provided for teachers who wanted to delve deeper into these topics.

Students were also encouraged to check in with their feelings, practise mindful breathing strategies, write positive affirmations, and reflect on their gratitudes daily. We incorporated mindful breathing into our daily morning virtual announcements to encourage as much of the school to participate at the same time as possible. The Mental Wellness Fair ran for three consecutive weeks and incorporated the following theme days (two each week): learn, breathe, energize, connect, create, laugh.





## Learn

We kicked off the fair explaining how our brains and bodies are affected by stress. We also discussed intentions and encouraged students to set an intention for what they hoped to gain from the fair. Follow-up activities included exercises to build emotional vocabulary and a brain scavenger hunt encouraging students to take pictures of things that cause them stress, represent happy memories, show resilience, etc. We shared these pictures with the school at the end of the first week during our virtual morning announcements.

## Breathe

Mindfulness was a key focus for our fair. During this session, we explained the Mood Meter, a tool that helps build emotional awareness and provides new vocabulary words to express feelings. We also discussed the amygdala, prefrontal cortex, and hippocampus and how they relate to the fight, flight, freeze response. Our school community participated in daily mindful breathing exercises for the duration of the fair. By connecting these topics to mindful breathing and the importance of a calm amygdala for learning, we ensured the students understood the importance of these coping strategies.

## Energize

We discussed how dopamine is released during exercise and the positive feelings it elicits in our bodies. We then encouraged classes to increase their activity levels that week by challenging them to a daily walk. We also invited a local martial arts studio to teach our students new stress-relieving techniques. In case of inclement weather, we provided in-class yoga activities.

## Connect

Our daily walk challenge helped get us outdoors connecting with nature. Some classes also chose to grow small plants to further their connection with the outdoors. They served to remind us that to grow our brains, we need to nourish them and provide them with an environment that allows for growth,

just like our plants! We also wrote letters to loved ones that we hadn't seen in a while and created a collaborative chalk mural outside allowing students to connect with friends outside of their cohorts.

## Create

We discussed staff members' creative outlets, many of which the students were unaware of before the fair. And we challenged students to create something new over the week. Students chose various projects that were of interest to them, from trying new recipes, to learning how to sew, or making new worlds in Minecraft. We also connected the create theme to mindfulness by trying out various mindful art challenges.

## Laugh

Our final theme day was meant to bring joy to our students and staff. We talked about laughter and its effects on our bodies—the benefits of dopamine again! We created meme contests and played dad joke bingo. We ended our Mental Wellness Fair with a virtual spirit assembly full of fun activities that were meant to get us laughing together as a community. It was a great way to finish the fair on a high note!

Although the last year and a half has been a bumpy ride, we learned a lot about mental health alongside our students. We learned the value of brain-based learning and mindful breathing practices, as well as the importance of bringing joy to each day. We also managed to rebuild our connections with others outside our cohorts by having common activities to share and discuss, either through virtual announcements/spirit assemblies or through similar shared experiences.

Student reflections after the conclusion of the fair indicated gratitude and enthusiasm for learning different strategies to cope with stress, many of which they plan to continue to use in their daily lives. As a staff, we plan to carry these ideas of mindfulness and coping with stress forward into the new year to continue this journey. We're excited to see where the adventure takes us next! 🌀





# *Practising patience*

**By Denise Rauda** (she/her), TTOC, Richmond

**AFTER A LONG YEAR** with the weight of the pandemic on our shoulders, I have worried about what starting my teacher education and then my career would mean for me. The work is there, and we need teachers, but will I be able to live up to the expectations I have set for myself? Am I ready to be what my future students will need after feeling so frayed and like an impostor for so long?

When I received my acceptance letter into the teacher education program at UBC, after the first lockdown, I remember thinking to myself that hopefully things would “go back to normal” by September and I would get to start the term on campus. As the summer rolled on it became clear that my program would be entirely online and soon enough, we had that confirmation. I was worried: I had never been very good at online learning.

My experiences with online learning had been well before the Zoom era, and after taking my last online course for my undergraduate degree I vowed never to do it again. But given our unprecedented circumstances, I accepted that this is how things would have to be for now, and that I needed to shift my thinking from “I can’t do online courses” to “I will learn how to do online courses.” Growth mindset, after all.

Getting over that fear was my first big hurdle, and if I could get over that, certainly I could overcome whatever else the unknown future would bring, right? The short answer is yes, but like most journeys, there would be a lot of ups and downs, sleepless nights, running on fumes, and endless second guessing of myself and my abilities. Thank goodness for caffeine and community.



## “...if I wasn’t expecting perfection from my practicum students, and no one was expecting perfection from me, why was I being so hard on myself?”

The first few months of the teacher education program were a challenge. Every teacher knows that embarking on that first stage of your career and teacher education is hard work and can be very intense. Add to this our collective stress and anxiety over the uncertainty of what was going on with the pandemic, it felt like we were headed into a very long winter that had no real end in sight. What would this mean for teachers working in schools, what would this mean for our families?

There were times when I really didn't feel like I was going to be able to make it through, and a couple of times I found myself saying, "I don't think I can do this," and truly believing it. I found myself wondering, if I can't keep up with this program, how will I ever be able to teach a classroom of kids? Being vulnerable about these moments to my peers and colleagues was scary, and so important. It's not the kind of thing you want to carry around in your heart, and talking to someone about it reminds us that other people have struggled with those feelings too. *You're not crazy! You're just tired.*

In the last year, the importance of community has been emphasized to me time and time again. First, through finding understanding and solidarity amongst my peers in the B.Ed. program. Then, with support and encouragement from colleagues and mentors during my practicum. Finally, through my community field experience working with the BCTF. I was blessed with the opportunity to attend a women's wellness event where I got the chance to meet, talk with, and listen to, some very strong and inspiring women in education. I have witnessed how crucial it is to find a strong community, learn to contribute to that community, and lean on them for support when you need it.

With the support of the different communities that I have become a part of, I was able to get through the hard times. I felt a lot of gratitude for being able to continue working toward my goal to become a teacher when I knew that so many people's lives had come to a halt. And at the same time, I had to work on being more kind and patient with myself.

One of the First People's Principles of Learning is "Learning involves patience and time." Working in a Grade 1/2 split class for my practicum, I found myself reminding the students of this a lot. Sometimes kids get stuck on this idea of "getting it right," especially when they are first trying something new. I hate to admit it, but I have been this kind of student many times in my life. I have struggled with accepting the possibility that I won't be good at something right away—and dare I say it?—that I might even be bad at it sometimes. To me that was always completely unacceptable, but if I wasn't expecting perfection from my practicum students, and no one was expecting perfection from me, why was I being so hard on myself?

I remember one day during an art lesson in the fall, I had the students follow along in a guided drawing. One student, we'll call him Caleb, asked, "Ms. R, what happens if I mess up?" I responded and said, "Nothing happens. Mistakes are okay and sometimes in art cool things can come from what you think might be a mistake." At the time I didn't think what I had said made much of an impact. I was just trying to get the kids to let go of their fear and practise taking risks in their work.

Fast forward to late May, when the students and I were doing one of our final art lessons before the end of my practicum, and one of them exclaimed, "Oh no! I made a

mistake!" I barely had time to figure out where the voice had come from when I heard Caleb say, "Mistakes are okay because sometimes good things come from them." At this point in my practicum, I was struggling with a lot of self-doubt about what my future in teaching would look like. A lot of the time, I felt like every move I made was the wrong one, and I was worried about whether I would be able to be the kind of teacher I had always hoped I would be. When I heard Caleb offer this reassurance to one of his peers, I felt like he was talking to me. It was a big reminder that I must stop being so hard on myself and practise what I teach.

People always tell you that when the road ahead looks full of too much uncertainty and too many obstacles, to look back and see how far you have come. After some much-needed rest and self-compassion, I took some time to reflect on my journey so far. It's hard to believe how fast the last year and a half went by. It feels like a lifetime ago that I started this first leg of my journey and it is incredibly empowering to look back at everything we have faced and overcome.

Even though sometimes I still feel like I have no idea what I am doing, I know that's okay. I'm still learning, and perfection is not what matters—showing up and being committed to doing your best does. We have the support of some amazing communities full of dedicated and caring people. If we can get through such a difficult year, then surely, we have a lot more strength than we may give ourselves credit for.

Patience and time. 9



istock.com/Ponomareva\_Maria

# Building communication ramps through SLP-educator collaboration

By Evelyn de Castro (she/her), speech language pathologist, Langley

**I'M A BIG FAN OF RAMPS.** As an itinerant speech language pathologist (SLP) working at many school sites each week, my rolling cart is always in use. While I do not have a physical disability that prevents me from using the stairs, ramps make my work much easier. It's hard to believe at one time ramps weren't as ubiquitous as they are today. Not only do they make our schools safer, more inclusive, and more accessible, they benefit everyone, as is generally the case with accessible design. The same goes for learning.

Are there ways that we can create language and communication "ramps" in our classroom designs? And can such ramps create more equity in our classrooms by allowing all students to access the curriculum?

This is something that has been on my mind as I've been on a journey to incorporate the principles of universal design for learning (UDL) and multitiered systems of support (MTSS) into my practice as an educational speech language pathologist. Despite the disruptions and great stresses that have been brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, I've been blessed to experience collaboration successes in partnering with educators to build communication ramps.

## A communication tool for one student

Our communication ramp story started with just one student; we'll call him Jordan. When Jordan first began Kindergarten last September, he was non-speaking and struggling with social interactions. As part of his communication intervention plan, I worked one-on-one with Jordan to build his language skills, focusing on using sounds, gestures, and words more intentionally to communicate.

I introduced Jordan to a resource called a "core board," which is a laminated board with common "core words" and related pictures. Core words are the most used words that make up 75–80% of what we say in our everyday speech. Some examples of core words are go, like, me, and in. This contrasts with fringe words that are used much less frequently in casual, everyday conversation: for example, words such as elephant, purple, and pencil. To better understand the concept of core vs. fringe words, think about a tree. The trunk of the tree represents the core words, and the branches and leaves represent the fringe words. You can find many different versions of core boards online that are free to download.

We noticed Jordan loved walking, jumping, and riding the tricycle at school, so we used his core board to model how to comment and discuss these activities. We did this by



highlighting the word as we spoke, emphasizing the word with more volume and varied intonation. We also simultaneously pointed to the core word picture on his board, so Jordan's attention was drawn to the visual representation of the word. After several repetitions across different motivating activities, Jordan started to point to the core word and even say the word "go." In time, his use of the core board became more purposeful and intentionally communicative.

We placed a classroom-sized poster version of Jordan's personal core word board in a visible location in the classroom where all students could see and access it. Doing so allowed Jordan's classroom teacher, Gerri-Lynn De Boer, to incorporate the core board in classroom communication.

Just a week or two after I shared the classroom core board, Gerri began to introduce a "word of the week" to the entire class. She also used the removable core board pictures during some instructional routines. For example, the class often used poems to learn new high-frequency words. Gerri adapted the poem to include Jordan's core words and created a chart to display the written words alongside the core word pictures.

In addition, Jordan's education assistant, Marijana Pismetrovic, found many creative ways to incorporate his core words into his daily one-to-one activities with her. One such activity was a popsicle stick activity where Jordan worked on his fine motor skills by picking up and inserting the sticks into slots on a container. Marijana wrote out a different core word on each individual popsicle stick to increase opportunities for her to model and encourage Jordan to imitate and learn the words.

Jordan's peers took interest in this activity and would engage in taking turns with him, another opportunity for social interactions while providing multiple models for core word learning.

By the end of the year, Jordan was speaking more frequently using intentional words and even some short phrases. He was more engaged with his peers, who included and accepted him. And, his mother told me, he loves going to school.

### A communication ramp for all students

As it turned out, many of the core board words overlapped with common high-frequency words in Kindergarten. So, Jordan's core board was also supporting conventional literacy skills for all students. There were also several students in the class who were learning English as an additional language. The visuals on the core board were supportive to these students as well. Just like our physical ramps, Jordan's core board became a communication ramp for the whole class, giving them all an opportunity to participate and learn language and literacy skills.

I'm so proud of my school team for the creativity and work they put in to build a communication design that benefited everyone. Next year, Jordan will continue working with an SLP, but one-on-one time is limited. Knowing the entire school team has developed resources and skills to provide intentional language supports for Jordan throughout the whole school day is amazing. And knowing that all students in the classroom will benefit from this encourages me to continue collaborating with other educators to introduce new tools and strategies in the classroom.



Jordan's core board is a collection of core words (words that make up 75–80% of everyday speech) and corresponding pictures. Evelyn de Castro photo.

### Strategies to build more communication ramps

- Integrate explicit and daily phonemic awareness activities to build sound skills that are important for decoding print language.
- Develop a classroom sound wall to support learning of letter-sound correspondences in primary grades. A sound wall can act as a visual guide during instruction to help students make connections between speech sounds (and how they are articulated) to the printed letters that represent those sounds.
- Provide SLP instructional lessons for Kindergarten or Grade 1 students on how to pronounce sometimes tricky speech sounds, such as "th" or "r."
- Use semantic word maps to display connections between key vocabulary from a read-aloud or curricular unit and other related words.
- Introduce and use visual tools or graphic organizers to support both oral and written narrative skill development.
- Integrate mini-lessons on morphological awareness or word parts such as prefixes (e.g., dis-, un-, re-), suffixes (e.g., -ful, -ness) and root words (e.g., play). 📌

### MORE INFORMATION

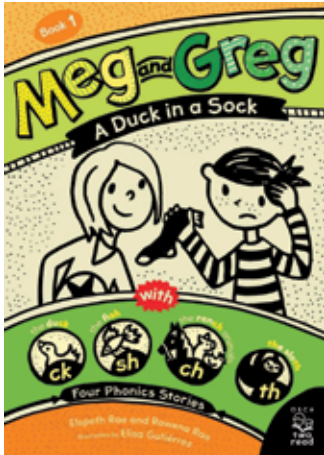
Speech and language impairments affect 3–16% of children, depending on the age and type of impairment. Approximately two students in every classroom have a developmental language disorder, i.e., a disorder that is not due to a biomedical condition ([radld.org](http://radld.org)). The need for speech language services is significantly increasing as more children are being diagnosed with speech and language impairments that require SLP support for complex communication needs. For more information about language impairments and the role of SLPs, check out Speech and Hearing BC's letter of advocacy for speech and language services in BC schools by scanning the QR code (right).



# BOOK REVIEWS

## Graphic novel series for learners with dyslexia

By **Andrea Cramer** (she/her), resource teacher, Vancouver  
*Meg and Greg: A Duck in a Sock* published by Orca Book, 2020



**RICHMOND TEACHER** Elspeth Rae Carter has written a very clever and incredibly strategic *Meg and Greg* series for children ages six to nine, starting with *A Duck in a Sock*. Elspeth and her sister Rowena Rae have created these dyslexia-friendly, high-interest young person adventure series, specifically targeted for children who are learning to read at an older-than-typical age because they have dyslexia or other language-based learning difficulties, or because they are learning English as an additional language. This creative duo has put together more helpful strategies in their books than I have ever seen!

Children have a book full of sure-success experiences and positive feelings when they pick up these books. Elspeth Rae Carter is a trained Orton-Gillingham teacher and uses the research-based approach to teach reading and spelling. Her book includes several hidden dyslexia-friendly features, such as shaded paper to cut down on contrast, a font that mimics printed letters, extra spacing, and the two-read method. I highly recommend this graphic novel as a guided-reading resource or as a confidence-boosting classroom book selection. 🐾

## Division and disruption: The politics of borders

By **Amrit Sanghe** (she/her), teacher, Surrey,  
Anti-Oppression Educators Collective Member-at-Large  
*Border and Rule* published by Fernwood, 2021

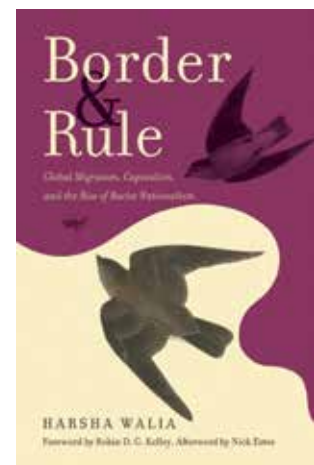
**HARSHA WALIA'S** *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism and the Rise of Racist Nationalism* is a comprehensive systematic analysis of migration "crises" brought about by capitalism, imperialism, and climate change. Walia begins by examining the violent formation of the US-Mexico border through interrelated logics of white supremacy, namely genocide and slavery. Walia not only examines how Indigenous genocide and land dispossession shape contemporary borders, but also draws clear linkages between past bordering practices, rooted in anti-Black spatial control, and present-day immigration policies and practices.

Part One of *Border and Rule* explores how US domestic and foreign policy, based on principles of neoliberalism, expand the prison- and military-industrial complexes and render migration inevitable. Part One provides educators with a wealth of historical and political context for current migrant and refugee "crises" and also invites us to

reflect on the ways we police othered bodies in our schools and communities.

After reviewing how migrants are displaced by inherently unequal trade agreements and climate change in the Global South, Part Two turns to a study of the mechanisms of exclusion and criminalization used by the Global North to restrict migration.

In Part Three of *Border and Rule*, Walia finally delves into one of the main functions of restrictive bordering regimes: cheap and expendable labour. Migrant workers, often with no path to citizenship through programs such as Canada's Temporary Foreign Workers program, provide "liberal capitalist interests with cheapened labour without altering the racial social order through permanent immigration." This section forces middle-class Canadian readers to confront their own complicity with regards to the exploitation of migrant labour. It also provides teachers with a concise critique of Canadian multiculturalism that may help some



to move away from superficial cultural celebrations and embrace more critical and antiracist pedagogies.

Walia's breadth of knowledge and astoundingly nuanced structural analysis makes *Border and Rule* an absolute pleasure to read. After experiencing decades of neoliberal assaults on public education and surviving a pandemic year that has brought into sharp focus the crises of climate change and systemic racism, *Border and Rule* is a necessary read for BC teachers and labour activists invested in a more humane future for all people. 🐾





# Revived and inspired: BCTF women's wellness event

By **Caris Nickerson** (she/her), teacher, Hope

iStock.com/ArtistGNDphotography

**I'VE ONLY JUST BEGUN** my teaching career, and people always admire the energy and optimism of my youth. I appreciate that teaching takes all of you, and that over the years this enthusiasm can fade. When I applied to attend the BCTF women's wellness event, I was anxious to engage in something that would help me continue to care for myself in the way I needed. I want so badly to be able to give my best self to my students and to my staff, and I felt that this event would connect and inspire me in all the ways I needed after a particularly challenging year.

I was eager to spend my Friday among other women educators, taking the time

to share our experiences, encourage one another, and create space for listening as we process the unbelievable year we've just had. I sat on my porch with a cup of tea, ready to listen and to share with my fellow educators. And it was truly one of the most wonderful experiences for me.

Even over Zoom, the power of the camaraderie and shared experiences that come with teaching was palpable! It was so powerful to see women from across BC displaying their pronouns proudly, and meeting in breakout rooms to share their experiences, both positive and negative, from their past year. I was inspired by the

workshops and the women who lead them with wisdom I sought to soak up. I went to one workshop that engaged reflection, and another one that brought me into the natural world. I learned so much not just from the content of the workshops, but from what other women shared within them.

The most powerful moment for me though was the Poetry Slam, where a few talented individuals used their art to move our minds and hearts back to our centre, back to where we knew we were going to be okay again. It was healing and beautiful, and I hope to attend again. 🍀

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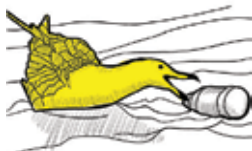
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- Self-knowledge
- Being a leader
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To nominate a student, contact Ashley Milbury (Youth Programs Manager) at [ashleym@minervabc.ca](mailto:ashleym@minervabc.ca)

To learn more and apply, visit [minervabc.ca/learning-to-lead/](http://minervabc.ca/learning-to-lead/)

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Contact provincial hub coordinator Jillian Bradley  
[jbradley@inclusionbc.org](mailto:jbradley@inclusionbc.org)



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All workshops run from 9am-4pm Central Time.

<b>Regulation Strategies for Children and Youth in Crisis</b>	Oct 14
<b>Attachment – Strategies for Fostering Connections</b>	Oct 19
<b>Anxiety in Children and Youth</b> Practical Intervention Strategies	Nov 6
<b>Trauma-Informed Care</b> Building a Culture of Strength	Nov 10
<b>Gender and Sexual Diversity in Youth</b>	Nov 23–24
<b>Self-Injury Behaviour in Youth</b> Issues and Strategies	Nov 30 - Dec 1
<b>Social-Emotional Learning</b> A Whole-School Approach	Dec 7
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