BC Teachers' Federation

Teacher

Sept/Oct 2022

IN THIS ISSUE

Sunjum Jhaj photo

BCTF

Kids Matter
Teachers Care

IN THIS ISSUE

Volume 35, Number 1—Sept/Oct 2022

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

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

THIS IS YOUR MAGAZINE

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

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

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

Deadlines

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

Contact us
BC Teachers' Federation
Toll free 1-800-663-9163
Email *teachermag@bctf.ca*
Web *bctf.ca*
Editor Sunjum Jhaj, *sjhaj@bctf.ca*
Assistant Editor/Designer
Sarah Young, *syoung@bctf.ca*
Advertising
Delaney Steel, *dsteel@bctf.ca*
ISSN 0841-9574

Meet the new BCTF President: Q&A with Clint Johnston

Tell us about your background and the path that brought you to unionism.

Born in Chilliwack, I grew up in a union family—though it was a different, blue-collar union. From a very early age I understood that collective solidarity was a support to individual workers that enabled them to achieve things they would not be able to alone. As a young man working in a non-union remanufacturing wood mill, I gained lived experience of the difficulties workers face without a union to back them up—particularly in terms of safety. I witnessed several life-changing accidents that were preventable, including the one that took my hand. That unfortunate accident did allow me to change my career path, and I chose to become a teacher.

Along that path I married, had two children, and worked while in college and university to complete my teaching education. When I got my teaching certificate, I worked my first five years in England, where we had two more children. My experiences teaching in England were not particularly enjoyable, but they did give me valuable insight into a very different education system. There they had four different education unions that individuals might belong to, often making it difficult to have complete agreement and solidarity between colleagues, a great lesson to learn.

On my return to BC, I was hired as a teacher in Chilliwack (where we had our last child), and I knew I needed to get involved in my local. A key belief I have about unions is that they are our (workers') voices, and if I wanted to be heard I needed to contribute. My involvement led to being elected Local President, which I served as for three years. Being Local President meant representing members on the provincial level, and seeing that work made me want to become involved at that level. I knew it was a significant commitment that would affect my whole family, so only after much discussion with my partner Holly and our five children was I comfortable deciding to run for the provincial Executive Committee (EC). I was fortunate to be successful, and to continue to be successful as I pursued further positions as a Full-Time Table Officer. It is hard to describe to others the mixture of joy, humility, and obligation felt when elected to represent my colleagues across the province. It is not something that I ever would have imagined as a young man, and it is a privilege I do not take lightly.

"The last couple of COVID years have put immense pressure on all of us, both personally and professionally. In a bargaining year, which brings uncertainty, [members] need to know their colleagues in local offices and at the provincial level are doing their best to support them and fight for their interests."

What are your priorities for advocacy on behalf of teachers this school year?

Obviously, as it is a bargaining year, advocating for the need for better working conditions and a wage increase that keeps up with COLA (cost-of-living adjustment) is at the top of the list. This includes working hard to make sure that the public understands the increasingly complex and difficult workload of teachers, the increasing rift between salary and cost of living in our province, and how these are combining to make it harder to recruit and retain teachers in the public education system.

Also important is to continue advocating for the health and safety needs of teachers as the world shifts to functioning with COVID's presence in the long term. We need to ensure that our members remain supported in making decisions about their own needs in terms of safety in their workplace. The wearing of masks and other steps that may provide layers of safety that members want and/or need must be an option supported by the employer. I look forward to working with Carole Gordon, First Vice-President; Robin Tosczak, Second Vice-President; and many other BCTF colleagues to make sure teachers' voices are heard.

Do you have a bargaining update for members?

I would definitely suggest members go to bctf.ca *to look at the updates that have been posted thus far; we have been working to provide up-to-date information regularly throughout this round in order to ensure members are fully informed. What I will say here is that while the tone and approach of the employer has been much more professional and allowed for bargaining to move forward between the parties with less needless acrimony and barriers, it doesn't mean that it has been any easier to achieve our objectives. BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) remains philosophically opposed to much of what we consider improvements to our members' workloads, and the amount of money government is providing at the table to address salary (and members' other real needs) is not nearly enough. Again, I encourage members to stay connected and engaged with updates so that they are prepared to make their voices heard when needed.*

Any final remarks for teachers as they settle into a new school year?

Just that I hope they are able to still find the joy in their profession that drew them to it in the first place. The last couple of COVID years have put immense pressure on all of us, both personally and professionally. In a bargaining year, which brings uncertainty, they need to know their colleagues in local offices and at the provincial level are doing their best to support them and fight for their interests. The classroom and the relationships we create with the students we teach are still the things that remind us why we do this work, and also give us the energy to keep doing it. Take those positive moments of connection and learning as they come, and remember that each of you is still changing lives for the better. •

Meet the VPs

Carole Gordon, First Vice-President
Carole is an elementary teacher from Kelowna who has been extensively involved in her local union and community. She has been on the BCTF EC since 2014.

Robin Tosczak, Second Vice-President
Robin is an early literacy and ELL teacher from Victoria. She has been on the BCTF EC since 2016, and held multiple elected roles in her local.

Guarantee access to mental health care for every child

By **William Nicholls-Allison**, school counsellor, Victoria

EVERY DAY, I have the great privilege of listening to children talk about their lives, their struggles, and their needs. What I hear, and what many educators and caregivers are seeing, is that many children are struggling with their mental health.

This situation is worsened by the fact that right now, in BC, many children and families cannot access mental health care. This is despite the fact that Canadian health care is, by law, universal, comprehensive, and accessible.[1] Simply put, private mental health services are unaffordable for many families, and the public services cannot keep up with the level of need.

Child & Youth Mental Health (CYMH) is the main source of public mental health services for children in BC. Those services are provided by CYMH school counsellors and community-based professionals, such as Indigenous counsellors and youth and family counsellors.

CYMH offers services for children with significant mental health needs. Although the cost is free and there are CYMH offices in 100 communities in BC, the wait times for services can be months long and not all children qualify.

School counsellors (or "teacher-counsellors") provide mental health services to *all* students. Since they work inside the school building and their services are free, they are the most accessible and affordable service for children in BC. In most districts, they are both BC certified teachers and mental health care professionals who hold a master's degree in counselling, psychology, or a related discipline. This unique combination of experience and training means school counsellors provide a wide range of services, including mental health promotion, mental illness prevention, and more.

Like CYMH, there are also barriers to accessing school counsellors. The main barrier is the limited number of counsellors available in districts, with the student to school counsellor ratio set at 693 to 1. This ratio is outdated and does not align with research evidence that recommends a ratio of 250 to 1. As BC School Counsellors Association President Dave Mackenzie wrote, "[the ratios] are a travesty and deserve attention from the Ministry of Education."[2]

These barriers to accessing public mental health care have created a precarious situation in our province, especially for families who cannot access private mental health care. Given the seriousness of the problem, it is important for educators and families to be informed about how mental illness affects children, the current state of children's mental health, and what we can do about it.

Mental illnesses are common, debilitating, and distressing. They are also a risk factor for numerous life-threatening physical illnesses, such as heart disease and diabetes, as well as suicide—one of the leading causes of death among young Canadians.

Childhood mental illnesses affect every aspect of a child's development: their growth, learning, physical health, relationships, and their future potential. Furthermore, families bear a heavy burden. Parents and caregivers experience emotional and financial stress, with many caregivers taking time off work and families paying out-of-pocket for services.

When childhood mental illnesses go untreated, they often evolve into chronic, disabling, and expensive illnesses in adulthood. These can impair a person's ability to work, to complete higher education, to contribute to the economy, and to fulfill family duties. In addition, untreated childhood mental illnesses and trauma are both risk factors for experiencing homelessness and substance use in adulthood. The fact that more than 10,000 British Columbians have died by drug overdose in the last six years illustrates the critical importance of ensuring every child receives the care they need, when they need it.

Therefore, student mental health is central to the purpose of the BC school system, to enable our students "to develop their individual potential and acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy."[3]

Although a recent study conducted in the United Kingdom suggests that some children's mental health improved during the COVID-19 pandemic,[4] research in Canada shows tremendous increases in mental health referrals and hospitalizations, as well as high rates of anxiety, self-harm, substance use, and suicidal ideation.[5] Furthermore, the children and families who have suffered the most are those who were already most vulnerable.

However, children's mental health was already in crisis before the pandemic. The Children's Health Policy Centre at Simon Fraser University states, "COVID-19 arrived with a backdrop of high children's mental health needs, coupled with long-standing service shortfalls." In the years prior to the

"Addressing children's mental health will cost money. However, the cost of neglect is far greater than the cost of care."

pandemic, researchers had already described a "silent epidemic" in children's mental health in Canada, and a growing need for youth mental health services across the country.

For decades, world-leading experts in children's mental health have urged governments to take action. In 1970, a Royal Commission declared the state of children's mental health in Canada "intolerable"; in 2000, the U.S. Surgeon General called it a "health crisis"; in 2012, the Mental Health Commission of Canada wrote, "Despite more than a decade of research that shows the benefits of mental health promotion and mental illness prevention throughout childhood, Canada does not do enough"; and, in 2021, UNICEF stated, "We can wait no longer. We cannot fail another generation. The time to act is now. Governments and societies are investing far, far too little in promoting, protecting, and caring for the mental health of children, young people, and their caregivers."

Addressing children's mental health will cost money. However, the cost of neglect is far greater than the cost of care**.** So, what is the cost of mental illness? In Canada, the cost in a single year is estimated to be greater than $40 billion, rising to $185 billion by 2041.[6] These estimates include mental illnesses in both children and adults, but are likely to be underestimates as they exclude costs created by the downstream effects of untreated childhood mental illness. For instance, both homelessness and substance use create immense costs to society.

Fortunately, children can recover from mental illnesses and trauma. Just like physical illnesses, early intervention and effective treatment can make a tremendous difference in a child's life. When we take care of small problems before they grow, we can prevent chronic, debilitating, and expensive problems later on in life.

Research shows that comprehensive mental health promotion, prevention, and early intervention services produce favourable results, not only for children, but also for families, the economy, and society. For instance, it is estimated that every $1.00 spent on upgrading mental health services can produce a return of $2.30 to $5.70 over the long term.[7]

There is also a legal rationale for guaranteed access: the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The articles of the CRC are law in Canada. By ensuring every child gets the care they need to grow and learn well, we protect their rights as outlined in articles 3, 5, 24, and 29 of the CRC.

What is guaranteed access? It means every child gets the care they need, when they need it, where they are.

Steps have already been taken by our government, including capacity-building grants, the $400 million Classroom Enhancement Fund, the expansion of Foundry BC, and the implementation of Integrated Child & Youth (ICY) teams in five school districts.

Yet, more must be done. Guaranteed access is not possible if there are not enough qualified mental health care professionals to meet the needs of the population. For guaranteed access, we must:

- improve the province-wide student to school counsellor ratio in the collective agreement to 250 to 1.
- enhance the capacity of CYMH by hiring more suitably trained mental health care professionals to meet the needs of children and youth in BC.
- implement ICY teams in every school district region.
- build, enhance, and maintain linkages between all these services.

Every citizen of BC can advocate for guaranteed access. We can start by talking to family, friends, and colleagues about the issue. Your BCTF local may also already be discussing advocacy for student mental health. Then, we can exercise our rights by writing to our local MLA to advocate for change. •

This article is a summary of a much more comprehensive overview of the subject, which you can read at www.willtobe.org.

---

1 www.sencanada.ca/en/content/sen/committee/372/soci/rep/repoct02vol6part7-e
2 www.bccounsellor-digital.com/bcot/0122_spring_summer_2022/MobilePagedArticle action?articleId=1775872#articleId1775872
3 www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/organizational-structure/ministries-organizations/ministries/education
4 www.link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00787-021-01934-z
5 www.link.springer.com/article/10.17269/s41997-021-00567-8
6 www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/drupal/MHCC_Report_Base_Case_FINAL_ENG_0_0.pdf
7 www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(16)30024-4/fulltext

iStock.com/gradyreese

Hideko Hyodo
City of Richmond Archives, Photograph #2014 6 5
Opposite: Japanese Canadian students in 1943. © Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada (2022). Library and Archives Canada/ Department of External Affairs fonds/ e999900266-u.

When the BC government refused education for Japanese Canadian children, Hideko Hyodo and the community created an alternative

By Larry Kuehn, former BCTF President and retired BCTF staff

THIS YEAR marks the 80th anniversary of Japanese Canadian internment in BC. In early 1942, more than 3,000 Japanese Canadian elementary students were ousted from their BC public school classrooms. They and their families were ordered to leave coastal BC from Vancouver to Prince Rupert and from all the Pacific Coast islands. They were interned in camps and "ghost towns" in the BC Interior during a shameful period in BC's history.

Public hysteria about the danger of Japanese Canadians potentially supporting an invasion from Japan was fomented by politicians and some competitors in occupations like fishing and garden farming. Anti-Asian racism had a long history in BC, and people of Asian ancestry were prohibited from voting and from many professional occupations, despite being Canadian citizens. Both military and RCMP reports saw no realistic danger, except for a small number who had already been identified and imprisoned.

Despite this, every Japanese Canadian was forced to abandon their home and work, and their possessions and businesses were sold for a fraction of their value. In early 1942, the animal stables at the Pacific National Exhibition (PNE) grounds became the home of thousands for several months. Later that year, everyone was removed to hastily constructed camps, buildings in nearly abandoned former mining communities in BC's Interior or to sugar beet farms in Alberta.

Some public school officials and the BCTF had resisted the expulsion of the students. The January 1942 editorial in the *B.C. Teacher* said the following:

Is the pitiful plight of young Canadians of Japanese origin being practically recognized in your school and community? Are we rising to the challenge of a supreme opportunity to show that the cause we represent deserves the love and gratitude and devotion of everyone within our borders, whatever his breed or social condition? If not, then in that regard, we are losing the war. Are we allowing public policies to be shaped by dangerous demagogues, indifferent to democracy and the basic principles of Christian ethics? If so, then in that regard we are losing the war. And, if you and I am passively acquiescing in policies of futile hatred, we are guilty of treasonable violation of vows that are none the less binding because unspoken.

After backlash to this editorial, Dr. Norman Black, the editor of the *B.C. Teacher*, submitted his resignation—but the BCTF officers supported him and rejected the resignation. Black continued to advocate for the Japanese Canadians throughout the war and years after, until the prohibition on them returning to the coast of BC was finally lifted and voting rights were granted in 1949. This was long after America allowed its Japanese American citizens to return from its internment camps in 1944 and the end of the war in 1945.

What happened to the education of the 3,000 Canadian children once they were in these internment camps?

The BC government had the obligation to educate children who were citizens of the province and Canada. However, the BC Minister of Education, H.G.T. Perry, refused to pay to educate Japanese Canadian children and supported school districts that refused to admit them or who charged tuition. Early in 1943, Perry introduced an amendment to the *Public Schools Act* to prohibit Japanese children from the schools.

It was withdrawn under pressure from the federal government, along with a promise that the feds would educate the "evacuated" children.

With this rejection of responsibility by the province, how were the children to be educated? The secondary students could take the BC correspondence courses, but the government charged $9 a course for them, in contrast to $1 a course for other students. This was well beyond the ability for most to pay. Eventually secondary school courses run by churches were set up at some of the camps and in the former mining communities.

For 3,000 interned elementary students, there was only Hideko Hyodo, the one teacher with a certificate and public education experience interned alongside them. Hyodo was the only Japanese Canadian teacher in a BC public school at that time. She taught Grade 1 in the Steveston area in the Richmond district beginning in 1926, and was a member of the BCTF. In 1937 Hyodo represented the BCTF at the congress of the World Federation of Education Associations (WFEA) in Tokyo. The WFEA was the first international organization of teacher unions and other education groups.

The BC Securities Commission, responsible for administration of the evacuees, had unsuccessfully attempted to find a white director of education for the camps. It then appointed Hideko Hyodo as director—responsible for overseeing the untrained and inexperienced principals and teachers. Most volunteer teachers were young women with, at most, high school graduation.

Hyodo visited each school spread around the BC Interior on at least a quarterly basis. She was responsible for dismissing or reassigning teachers, primarily for lack of classroom discipline. Teachers had been given a six-page article by Dr. Norman Black on classroom discipline, prepared for volunteer tutors when students were held in the PNE stables, as their initial training in classroom management. Faculty members from the schools that trained BC elementary teachers offered courses at the camps in the summer of 1943 and the following two years to provide some limited training for about 250 teachers who ran classes over the three years.

Teruko Hidaka was appointed as assistant to the director. As reported by Patricia Roy, she "had graduated from Maple Ridge and the Provincial Normal School. The Maple Ridge School Board hired her as a substitute teacher, but after some parents withdrew their children from her class, the school board decided not to hire any teacher who was ineligible to vote. Since Japanese Canadian citizens could not vote in British Columbia that ended Miss Hidaka's career as a public school teacher." Hideko Hyodo did teach in a public school in Richmond, but had only Japanese students.

Hyodo was paid $75 a month, later increased to $100, and principals of the three largest schools received $60 a month. The teachers received stipends of $40 a month, about a quarter as much as the average for elementary teachers in the public schools.

In August of 1944, Japanese Canadians were told they must either relocate east of the Rocky Mountains or "repatriate" to Japan when the war ended. By 1945, Hyodo joined many of the families who moved east and the number of students in these schools declined. By the next year, children still living in the small towns were primarily integrated into the public schools in their communities with the federal government paying tuition to the school boards.

Patricia Roy reports that, "Between 1945 and 1948 nine different Japanese names appeared on the payroll of British Columbia's public schools." These were likely teachers in schools for those "evacuated" to the Interior. A number of the teachers who moved to Ontario and elsewhere in Canada earned formal teacher education and became successful teachers and administrators.

Hideko Hyodo Shimizu (her married name) was made a member of the Order of Canada in 1982. The citation said she played "a vital and voluntary role in ensuring that Japanese Canadian children in British Columbia received a proper education." •

Sources

Norman F. Black, "*The renewal of our vows*," *B.C. Teacher*, January 1942, p. 203–206.

Frank Moritsugu and The Ghost-Town Teachers Historical Society, *Teaching in Canadian Exile: A history of the schools for Japanese-Canadian children in British Columbia detention camps during the Second World War*, The Ghost-Town Teachers Historical Society, Toronto, 2001.

Patricia E. Roy, "The education of Japanese children in the Interior Housing Settlements during World War Two," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'education*, 4, 1992, p. 211–231.

Patricia E. Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship: The Japanese and Chinese in Canada, 1941–67*, UBC Press, Vancouver, 2006.

Learning with life: Environmental education

By Brendan Chan, teacher, Vancouver

THIS PAGE: The hallway installation created for Earth Day, featuring personalized lanterns and a "River of Jars" containing wishes for sustainability. Brendan Chan photos.

THIS IS A STORY about environmental education, but it's really a story about people, place, discovery, community, connectedness, culture, and love. It is about our relationship with the natural world and how we might learn to approach this relationship with far more love and curiosity.

It's important that schools offer opportunities for students to learn about and practise using the tools needed to address the climate crisis. Environmental Science 11 and 12 are courses within the BC Ministry of Education curriculum that are designed to do just that. I wanted my students to see that science and learning aren't just processes that take place in the classroom or textbook, but happen all the time, all around us. From conversations, to shows, activities, friends, strangers, nature, and self-reflection—learning is everywhere. We just need to shift from seeing (passive) to observing (active).

Climate education is often relegated to the science courses in high school; however, I feel it is important to have a multidisciplinary approach to the complex crisis that is climate change and sustainability. Climate education must go beyond individual actions, like composting and recycling, and look at examining and prototyping solutions that address some of the deeper issues around climate change, including access to wealth and resources, race, health, and access to decision-making.

Climate Education Reform BC is a student-led organization that advocates for climate change education in BC schools. Their vision for climate change education includes creating opportunities for students to "understand how environmental well-being intersects with our society, health, economy, and security, and how climate change—and our own inaction—impacts our population, particularly the most vulnerable."[1]

Guided by this vision, together, the Grade 11 and 12 students learned about the importance of biodiversity, and how our values and intersecting identities influence the way we see and act on sustainability issues; they explored system mapping as a way to identify patterns and relationships between issues; made their own land acknowledgments; created iceberg models to help identify the root causes of various sustainability issues; practised storytelling and reflecting; and learned how to write grants.

As April neared, I let my classes know that I wanted them to work together to create an Earth Day installation that would showcase their learning and bring the school community together to re-examine their relationships with themselves, each other, and the school. I filled them in on the general idea I had for a hallway installation: handmade lanterns lining the ceiling and the hallway split into themes of environment, community, and personal. The goal was to take community members on a journey that would have them connect on a deeper level with the natural world, and reflect on their own values and how that might relate to sustainability. This amazing group of students not only made personalized lanterns that reflected their own experiences with nature, but also worked on projects around storytelling, moss art, ecosystem services, community sound mapping, vulnerability mapping, iceberg models, a class land acknowledgment, and a "river of jars" that concluded with origami boats floating in aquariums with people's wishes for a more sustainable community and world. Each project had a write-up explaining the purpose, procedure, discussions/reflections, and conclusions, and each project demonstrated how amazing students can be when given the opportunity to contribute to something beyond the classroom. This was not just a showcase of student work, but an art exhibit meant to provide an experience for all that walked through. It was a way of saying, "Hey, we can do something about the state of the world we live in."

Listen to the sound map at qrco.de/bdIXiW.

"We wish to light the way for your journey to find yourself…" This was written by students as part of the description to the final art installation and it captures exactly what the hallway installation was meant to be; to take everyone on a walking journey to explore their relationship with the natural world, their own communities, and then finally themselves. It was magical to see it all come together as their teacher. I was also so happy to see other students, staff, and teachers telling these students how impressive and creative their work was. I am grateful to be one of the many facilitators on their learning journeys. When we can become an observer of the world, the world becomes our school, and everything becomes our teacher. So, let's continue to explore the connections and complexity. Let's rethink what sustainability can be. Let's rethink how we engage with sustainability issues. •

1 *www.climateeducationreformbc.ca*

BELOW: Two of the student projects featured in the installation.

Nurturing with nature

By **Sylvia King** (she/her), teacher, West Vancouver

Sylvia King photos

AS TEACHERS, we help to support the young people in our lives by creating caring and compassionate learning environments and educating students about their physical, social, emotional, and mental well-being. Interacting with nature can improve a wide range of well-being facets, and if we want to stay connected with each other and support the physiological and psychological well-being of our students, we can look to nature to help us nurture.

In BC, the First Peoples Principles of Learning teach us that learning is holistic and is focused on connectedness and a sense of place. Connection to nature and the land as part of living and learning supports the theory that there is an innate human instinct to connect with nature and other living beings.[1] Nature is restorative and is associated with emotional well-being. However, children spend much of their time indoors away from the natural environment, which can lead to a disconnect with nature and exacerbate challenges with behaviour and emotional regulation. Spending time in nature helps to improve emotional functioning and influences human stress response by decreasing blood pressure, reducing cortisol levels, and improving immune function. Providing students with opportunities to connect with nature is associated with shifts in perseverance, problem-solving, critical thinking, leadership, teamwork, and resilience.[2] And the positive influence of nature is consistent across diverse student populations, academic subjects, nature settings, and lesson designs.

Availability and accessibility to nature differs between individuals and school settings, however, opening the door, or even the window, to bring nature inside the classroom can help to facilitate the path to connection. Finding the path to nature requires a shift in thinking that the learning space is limited to a brick-and-mortar environment. To begin this journey, teachers are invited to consider their own relationship with nature and where their comfort lies with bringing students outside. Nature is all around us: from the weather, to the ants that crawl around on the ground, to the dandelions that have pushed through the cracks in the sidewalks. Recognizing this helps to forge the path to connection and brings awareness to where we find nature. Having contact and recognizing beauty in nature are pathways for improving nature connectedness, and are more powerful than knowledge-based activities in engaging people with nature.[3] This means that increasing nature connectedness does not require experience, ecological knowledge, or vigorous exercise, but rather an open mind and a willingness to be outside and engage.

1 Ryan Lumber, et al., "Beyond knowing nature: Contact, emotion, compassion, meaning, and beauty are pathways to nature connection," *PLOS ONE*, Vol. *12*, No. 5, 2017: *www.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0177186*

2 Colin Capaldi, et al., "Flourishing in nature: A review of the benefits of connecting with nature and its application as a wellbeing intervention," *International Journal of Wellbeing*, Vol. *5*, No. 4, 2015, p. 1–16: *www.doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v5i4.449*

3 Ryan Lumber, et al., "Beyond knowing nature: Contact, emotion, compassion, meaning, and beauty are pathways to nature connection," *PLOS ONE*, Vol. *12*, No. 5, 2017: *www.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0177186*

"... increasing nature connectedness does not require experience, ecological knowledge, or vigorous exercise, but rather an open mind and a willingness to be outside and engage."

Being with nature provides the opportunity for students to understand themselves as part of nature and opens the context for learning. As such, nature-based learning ultimately strengthens the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.[4] Practices such as "walk and notice" or "sit and notice" invite participants to consistently walk or sit in the same spot throughout the year to notice the beauty, and develop gratitude and appreciation for the changes that happen in that place. The sounds, patterns, shapes, and numbers that nature offers create opportunities for students to see real-life applications of concepts traditionally taught in classrooms. Strategies for connecting with nature can begin with finding opportunities to move instruction and learning outside: a PHE lesson from the gym to the field, math from desks to the playground, or reading a story from the carpet to the courtyard. Shifts to include outdoor environments as learning spaces allows for experiential learning in authentic settings where learning is carried out in real-world contexts.[5]

Being with nature helps humans to be reminded about our sense of place and connectedness to the land. This engagement with nature also helps give students the ability to engage with one another and form connections with their peers. Nature-based learning supports a universal design approach to learning, and is tied to improving students' attention, self-discipline, interest, and enjoyment of learning.[6]

In addition, learning in nature helps with group functioning of a class, as it can bridge sociocultural differences between students and can minimize interpersonal barriers, such as personality conflicts between students. Learning outside a classroom setting facilitates co-operation and increased comfort and connectedness between students and teachers. It helps to reinforce that teachers are partners in learning. As we begin a new school year and navigate an increasingly complex world, nature reminds us of the beauty and connectedness that exists on our Earth and helps us to feel grounded and connected with one another and ourselves. •

4 "First Peoples Principles of Learning," First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2006: *www.fnesc.ca/first-peoples-principles-of-learning*
5 Orla Kelly, et al., "Universal Design for Learning - A Framework for inclusion in outdoor learning," *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*, Vol. *25, No.* 1, 2022, p. 75–89: *www.doi.org/10.1007/s42322-022-00096-z*
6 Ming Kuo, et al., "Do experiences with nature promote learning? Converging evidence of a cause-and-effect relationship," *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. *10*: *www.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00305*

When caring about students hurts

By **Lee McCall** (she/her), behaviour support teacher, Courtenay

HAVE YOU EVER had an experience where a student with whom you had a close relationship shared a traumatic personal story with you? If your heart raced or you had difficulty sleeping that night because of this disclosure, you may have experienced secondary traumatic stress (STS). STS is the immediate activation of your stress response system from these types of interactions combined with the desire to help. Other terms that are often used interchangeably are vicarious trauma, indirect trauma, and compassion fatigue.

I am a behaviour support teacher, and exposure to the trauma narratives of my students is a significant occupational hazard. Thus, when I considered a research topic for my master's degree, I very easily decided to focus my efforts on combing the literature for strategies that would help special educators like myself minimize the "cost of caring," a phrase first used by psychologist and professor Charles Figley to describe compassion fatigue.

I discovered there is no research specifically focused on STS in special educators. There is little research focused on educators in general; much more research is focused on other caring professions like medical personnel, therapists, and first responders. Most of the preventative recommendations for educators are based on research in these other areas where exposure to secondary trauma is more obvious.

Many teachers work with students affected by trauma; consequently, professional development related to trauma-informed practices to support students has received significant attention in recent years. An important next step is providing training and support for staff to manage their responses to trauma when working closely with students who have experienced trauma.

Training and awareness

Not surprisingly, as I conducted my research, I began to feel my resiliency increase in the face of STS. What I found particularly helpful was taking the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) self-score measure.[1] This online assessment is free to use and allows the individual to gauge their levels of STS, burnout, and compassion satisfaction. The two former terms are the negative feelings of working with those who are suffering; together they are components of compassion fatigue. Compassion satisfaction, conversely, is the emotional benefit generated through working in a caring profession. If compassion satisfaction scores are higher compared to the other two scores, then one's overall professional quality of life is more positive. Learning that the stress I was feeling could be measured helped me immensely, as it allowed me to acknowledge that my suffering was real, which activated feelings of self-compassion.

Furthermore, this knowledge led to increased mindfulness, which has been found to mitigate the effects of compassion fatigue.[2] Specifically, my ability to monitor how my interactions affected my stress levels improved. I found more satisfaction in my job by actively focusing my attention on interactions that bolstered my positive feelings and releasing the negative interactions.

One daily strategy that has proved to be immensely helpful is a debrief at the end of the day with my team. By acknowledging the frustrations and intentionally reviewing and celebrating the successes, I have found work-related concerns can be more easily switched off at the end of the day.

1 *www.proqol.org/proqol-measure*
2 Lori M. Sharp Donahoo, Beverly Siegrist, and Dawn Garrett-Wright, "Addressing Compassion Fatigue and Stress of Special Education Teachers and Professional Staff Using Mindfulness and Prayer," The Journal of School Nursing, Vol. 34, No. 6, 2017, p. 442–448: *www.doi.org/10.1177/1059840517725789*

iStock.com/piola666

"... we cannot 'fix' our traumatized students. Instead, students need us to model self-care, healthy relationships that observe boundaries, and emotional regulation."

Self-care

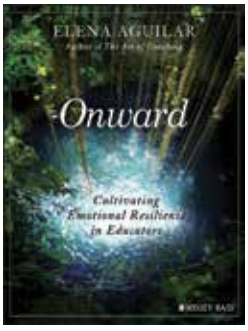
Active attention to self-care is most often touted as the first line of defense against compassion fatigue. Self-care has many different definitions, but I understand it to be any activity that one finds restorative. Getting enough sleep, eating nutritious foods, exercising, time in nature, and doing other activities one finds enjoyable are essential self-care strategies. Some suggest that stress cycles remain trapped in your body until you actively release them through activities like deep breathing, sharing affection, connection with others, and laughter.[3] This framework for thinking about stress has had a motivating effect on me. Now when I have a particularly stressful day, I automatically recognize the need to exercise, which is one of the most effective activities for release of stress.

In addition to these more traditional ideas of self-care, I have found a few other strategies to be protective. Most important was to reject the "work is my worth" mindset, to set boundaries and to say "no" more often to requests for my services. I have also hired a house cleaner and a meal preparation service periodically as an act of self-care. Furthermore, using my teacher benefits package and scheduling massage and acupuncture treatments throughout the school year helped me to combat the negative physical effects of stress. By prioritizing and by making self-care activities a habit, one is more able to neutralize stress responses as they occur, find joy, and shield oneself from compassion fatigue.

In our role as teachers, we care for others all day. We also need to care for ourselves. Therapy can be an important act of self-care if you find yourself struggling with elevated levels of compassion fatigue. Counselling support can easily be accessed through the Employee and Family Assistance Programs, which are part of our BCTF benefit packages.[4]

School supports

Symptoms of STS increase with exposure to student-trauma narratives, so special educators, administrators, counsellors, and other support staff like educational assistants and Indigenous support workers can be more at risk for compassion fatigue compared to some other school staff. However, all teachers can be exposed to STS, so universal opportunities for learning about compassion fatigue and the value of self-care are important.



Literature specific to compassion fatigue in special educators repeatedly cites administrative and school support as being critical to educators' personal experiences of compassion fatigue. One of the symptoms of compassion fatigue is a feeling of isolation. So, feeling seen, understood, and supported can be immensely beneficial. Book clubs and other supportive meetings can be an effective way to build connections within a school community. *Onward: Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators* by Elena Aguilar is a book structured around the school year and written from a coaching point of view. It provides a framework to start a supportive professional group with colleagues.

Teachers are called to the profession because they care for students. However, we must acknowledge that we cannot "fix" our traumatized students. Instead, students need us to model self-care, healthy relationships that observe boundaries, and emotional regulation. In this way we can successfully help those students who need our support the most, while shielding ourselves from the harmful effects of over-caring for those who are suffering. •

3 Emily Nagoski and Amelia Nagoski, *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*, Ballantine Books, 2020.
4 *bctf.ca/services-guidance/wellness/access-employee-family-assistance-programs*

Educational considerations for a world of fire and ice

By Lyle Hamm (he/him), Associate Professor, University of New Brunswick

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.
– Robert Frost

THE WAR IN UKRAINE has shaken the world and, at this writing, nearly five million people have been displaced from their homes, communities, and country. The new millennium is witness to many conflicts. In the past two decades, I have taught children and graduate students who have escaped conflict, poverty, and other disparaging conditions. Through my research activities, I learned about students' horrific stories of survival, escape, and harrowing experiences while en route to seemingly safer places in foreign countries—which were often not safer. Students told me, "Mr. Hamm, a rocket hit my house" … "We were cheated from our pay" … "I have seen a lot of dead people." And, "Mr. Hamm, my dad put headphones on our ears so we wouldn't hear the bombing outside."

Seeing war unfold on digital screens is one thing, but when young people describe war through their first-hand experiences, they take the listener right to the battlefield. It is hard for me to imagine how they will cope in their new lives in Canada after such experiences. But most do well when they receive the support they need. I am always encouraged and inspired by the strength and resilience of newcomer children, and I have learned they adjust much faster in Canada with the unconditional support of their teachers.

Heeding Frost's warning 100 years ago, there may be little that educators anywhere can do about the raging

iStock.com/Ikushakof

"fires" in the world. We are not at the diplomatic tables; we are not able to wave a white flag and stop the madness. And in 2022, that is what it is: sheer madness. More children will have to endure conflict, and more teachers will have to help them through their stress and trauma. The children and their families will look to educators to help them sort the confusion out, get their lives back on track, and gain renewed senses of belonging, understanding, and acceptance. In my view, that never happens by accident. Educators must be purposeful and intentional when they welcome newcomer students into their learning and social communities.

If students arrive from conflict zones, Jan Stewart says it is important that educators be able to recognize signs of trauma and understand that if they cannot support the student, then they must find someone who can, such as a school counsellor. "But remember that behind the trauma story is the story of survival. See students with an 'asset perspective' instead of a 'deficit perspective.' Help reorient students to focus on the skills, resources and power that they have to get them through difficult times."[1]

One thing I remember from my time as a teacher was how hard it was for most newcomer students to make friends at school. Many students languished on the periphery of the social network in their classes, the hallways, and even at the bus loop before going home after school. When I began speaking with newcomer students through my research, I was able to dig deeper and learn from them that they just couldn't break through the imagined and real barriers that Canadian students often imposed upon them, either intentionally or unintentionally. For many, there was an "icy" coolness that existed between the Canadian students and themselves, and this reality was confirmed by their teachers. It did not matter if the students were refugees, temporary or permanent residents, or international exchange students; it was hard for many of them to break in authentically and forge friendships with Canadian students.[2]

Let's be honest, if that ice is not disrupted between newcomer students and Canadian students, or simply between students from different backgrounds, then there is a small opening for those icy-hatred realities of suspicion, misunderstanding, stereotyping, and racism to take root. These realities can lead to discriminatory activities that often spiral out of control and are challenging to recover from. And in 2022, as the world rages once again in the fires of war sending people in all directions, this is precisely where Canadian teachers must become more professionally responsive.

Canada's ethnocultural diversity will continue to expand into all our communities. Pedagogically, that matters for all educators as we prepare students for a diverse province, country, and world as they set out on their own and meet people who are different from themselves. For teachers to prepare their students for the future social realities of the world, all educators must take steps to be fully prepared to respond to rapid change. They must commit to growing with the world and not, in any sense, work against it. And that means becoming trauma-informed. That means having a growth mindset.

Given the social, economic, and educational realities of our country and world, my non-negotiable is, and will always be, human engagement that is intentionally focused on building positive relationships and growing our intercultural understandings.

Teachers, if you are seeing newcomer students and Canadian students passing each other in your hallways, working together only superficially, it is time for you and your colleagues to act. I encourage you to create educational opportunities that speak to all your students. Bring them together and encourage them to be community builders, whatever that could look like in your school. Challenge all the students (newcomer and Canadian) to join a social action and community-building team that fosters and mobilizes the social spirit and energy of the diverse student body. Let them exchange and share stories to build mutual understanding. Teachers, learn about what engages your students, what their interests are in and out of school. Encourage them to be leaders, perhaps even the "teacher" at times in their courses.

Paulo Freire reminds us that the teacher can learn as much from students as students learn from their teachers.[3] I was not educated to be a social architect when I started teaching in 1991, but I was teaching students who mostly looked and spoke like me. My own professional growth has been enriched through my involvement with children from diverse ethnocultural and linguistic backgrounds. So can yours. It is important to never give ice a chance to suffice.[4] •

About the author

Dr. Lyle Hamm is an Associate Professor of Educational Administration and Leadership in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) in Fredericton. His teaching and research focus on demographically changing schools and communities, and intercultural education grounded in critical transformative/social justice leadership theory. Lyle served as a K–12 educator, vice-principal, and principal for 22 years prior to joining UNB in 2013. His recent book, *Turbulence: Leaders, Educators, and Students Responding to Rapid Change* can be purchased through Rowman and Littlefield.

1 Jan Stewart, "A culture of care and compassion for refugee student," *Education Canada, 57*(1), 2017, p. 20–25.
2 Lyle Hamm, "New Canadian student leadership in Canada: 'It's more than just a tour,'" in Andréanne Gélinas-Proulx and Carolyn M. Shields (eds.), *Leading for Equity and Social Justice: Systemic Transformation in Canadian Education*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2022, p. 232–247.
3 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Continuum, New York, 1970.
4 Robert Frost, "Fire and Ice," *Harper's Magazine,* 1920: *www.bartleby.com/155/2.html*

Spotlight on Cuba: Expressions of solidarity

DID YOU KNOW?

For over 20 years, the BCTF has sent shipments of much-needed supplies to Cuba for teachers, in solidarity. The pandemic, strains on the supply chain, and increased costs of shipping delayed the 2020–21 SNTECD-BCTF Cuba Solidarity Container Project. Despite these challenges, alternate arrangements were made to have the container shipped from Spain. Our solidarity container arrived in Cuba over the summer.

Below: Teachers in Cuba celebrating the arrival of supplies in 2018. Photo Courtesy of CoDev Canada.

By Karen Andrews (she/her), teacher, Terrace

SINCE THE MID-1990s, the BCTF has had a long-standing solidarity partnership to support the work of Cuban teachers through a union-to-union relationship with the National Education, Science, and Sport Workers' Union (SNTECD). As a member of the BCTF's International Solidarity Committee, I wanted to learn more about this relationship and the commonalities we share as educators.

I recently had the honour of interviewing Professor Isora Enriquez O'Farrill of the Enrique José Varona University of Pedagogical Sciences (EJVUPS) in Cuba. Professor Enriquez O'Farrill was asked on behalf of her union, SNTECD, to virtually meet with me and answer some of my questions.

I began the interview by asking Professor Enriquez O'Farrill to briefly tell me about the impacts of the United States' embargo against Cuba. Despite the United Nations General Assembly's call for an end to the embargo, it has been in place for over 60 years, making it the longest lasting economic sanction in history. Although there is no physical military blockade, Cubans see the embargo as such because the United States threatens other non-American companies away from doing business with Cuba. The effects of the decades-long embargo are wide sweeping and affect education. School supplies such as paper, textbooks, musical instruments, as well as sports and lab equipment, are very limited. Computers and tablets are older, making them difficult to upgrade. Students with diverse needs often lack the resources they need, such as wheelchairs, braille equipment, and other communication devices. However, Professor Enriquez O'Farrill explained that Cubans are very innovative and creative. For example, students are asked to bring back their materials so that they can be recycled from one year to the next. There is always a way to

repair a broken piece of equipment or find an alternative. She told me that Cubans see these as "challenges to overcome rather than problems that cannot be resolved."

Despite my reluctance to delve into the topic of COVID-19, because I wish that I could put the pandemic behind me, I was curious to know what the situation has been like for Cuban teachers, students, and their communities. Because of the embargo, medication and medical supplies (including PPE) have been difficult to source. However, Professor Enriquez O'Farrill told me that Cubans are very industrious people. In fact, they developed their own COVID-19 vaccine, which students needed to return to in-class learning. During the height of the pandemic, SNTECD supported teachers in helping health care professionals. Some schools were even turned into hospitals. Teachers and their students were also very active in their communities, doing things like helping the elderly by bringing them groceries.

DID YOU KNOW?

The BCTF often works in partnership with CoDevelopment Canada (CoDev) for its international solidarity work in Latin America. CoDev is a BC-based NGO solidarity organization working for social justice and global education in the Americas.

When schools closed, some teachers pivoted to being a "TV teacher," broadcasting their lessons on the National Cuban Educational Television network. Other teachers had their lessons broadcast on national radio, while others turned to online teaching, all of which required teachers to quickly adapt to the situation and learn new teaching strategies. Professor Enriquez O'Farrill was clear that, despite these challenges, this was a time that strengthened family relations and that parents gained a new respect for teachers. She felt honoured that the Cuban government formally recognized teachers' efforts by issuing certificates of appreciation.

When I inquired about Cuba's recent proclamation of LGBTQ+ History Month, becoming the first Latin American country to do so, Professor Enriquez O'Farrill shared with me that LGBTQ+ rights are enshrined in the Cuban constitution. However, even with governmental support for inclusivity and respect of rights for all, she explained, it will take time to shift Cuban culture as the LGBTQ+ community has traditionally endured discrimination. Professor Enriquez O'Farrill believes that education has a responsibility to enhance inclusion and that teachers would benefit from professional development in this area.

I recently found out that Cuba is one of the few countries in the world to acknowledge climate change threats in its constitution. Professor Enriquez O'Farrill told me about the effects of climate change in her country, including coastline erosion, ocean pollution, and flooding due to intense hurricanes. In school, environmental education is interwoven across the curriculum. In addition, the ministry of education has developed strategies to support the teaching of environmental education. Students participate in projects to protect the coast and the sea, including shoreline clean-up, planting trees, and recycling. These efforts are part of Cuba's 100-year plan called *Tarea Vida* (Project Life), guidelines to dealing with the effects of climate change.

When I inquired about Cuba's international solidarity work, Professor Enriquez O'Farrill told me, "Cubans share the little things that we have; we're open to share." She explained about Cuba's international medical program, bringing health care providers to Cuba for training and sending medical personnel to developing parts of the world. Other acts of solidarity include the creation of an international literacy campaign *Yo Sí Puedo* (Yes I Can) in which Cuban literacy teachers have volunteered in other countries including Haiti and Mozambique.

Professor Enriquez O'Farrill has been involved with international solidarity projects, including language learning projects with the BCTF, dating back almost 20 years. She is currently the lead organizer for the BCTF-Cuba Language Learning Project. Through the EJVUPS, the project entails a three-year virtual exchange between teachers in Cuba and a team of BCTF teachers. The participating teachers and their students will create short language videos based on themes of common interest. The final videos will be used as professional development for teachers in Cuba.

As I was wrapping up the interview and thanking Professor Enriquez O'Farrill for her time, my head was spinning. She left me with so many more questions and ideas for future solidarity projects in which the BCTF and SNTECD could collaborate. I am satisfied in knowing that professional development opportunities and learning will continue, not only for me, but also my BCTF and SNTECD colleagues. •

Thank you to Deanna Fasciani, Executive Director, CoDev Canada, for her help with this interview.

Building a better tomorrow through art: The first cross-district art exhibit for students with diverse needs

By Judy Chiao, teacher, Burnaby

OUR TEAM at Burnaby North Secondary often discuss the lack of visibility, opportunity, and meaningful engagement for individuals with diverse needs. While some students with diverse needs are included and celebrated in school events and extracurricular activities, it is often the result of advocacy from parents and teachers. And even then, the opportunities for participation are nothing compared to the cross-district opportunities available to student athletes and high academic achievers. This is not the fault of school districts, administrators, or teachers, but we all should bear the responsibility of moving toward inclusion, instead of it just being a word in our school plans.

These conversations led to an idea for a cross-district art exhibit where schools across multiple districts could connect, create, and build community around students with diverse needs. For the Access program team at Burnaby North Secondary, it is another step in our work toward intentional inclusion, which provides meaningful experiences for students, creates opportunities for students to engage with the community, and supports students and their families. Each artwork in the exhibit was created by a student artist. Together, we brainstormed and experimented with various household tools to ensure that each student artist was able to participate and create their artwork with minimal support. While some students required more support than others, we were able to maximize independence by modifying tools to support the needs of each user. The brushstrokes, patterns, and shapes were determined by the student artist—we were just there to facilitate their movements.

Finding a community partner to host our exhibit was challenging. We needed a partner that shared our values around diversity and could provide a space large enough to accommodate twelve schools across three districts. Most of the venues we approached were not interested in holding a new event with no history of success. Others were only interested if we were able to bring in media coverage. A serendipitous opportunity revealed itself through a colleague who connected us to the team at the Roundhouse in Yaletown. Their vision and mandate aligned with ours in stretching boundaries, challenging perceptions, and, most importantly, building community.

The team at the Roundhouse took this project on as a partnership for BC Youth Week, which meant they incurred all the expenses, from the cost of the venue, to the cost of the professionals involved and the staff that supported the exhibit. The team also understood the importance of providing not just a platform for our students with diverse needs, but also providing a curated, polished, and prestigious experience for the families and friends of our students and community members. They brought together visual artists, as well as professional technicians for installation and lighting, to transform their exhibition hall into an art gallery showcasing the works of 93 student artists from the Burnaby, New Westminster, and Vancouver school districts.

Students who participated in this exhibit conveyed tremendous pride in the display of their artwork. Xander Sanchez (Burnaby North Secondary) said that “a lot of fans have started loving and liking” his style. Ibolya Iakab (New Westminster Secondary) said that his family “invited friends to the show; there was a great opportunity to meet friends and spend time together.” And Lain Calfrobe (New Westminster Secondary) said “it was such a nice thing to know my art was at the Roundhouse Community Centre and my family is proud of me for making it this far.”

Opposite: Performance by Ready Dance.
Right, top down: A found-object sculpture; student artist Nikhil Ekanayake celebrated his work and his birthday at the event; student artist Ayat Abdul Sahib performed for the crowd.
Joshua Berson Photography.

For many of the families, the highlight was the evening of May 6, which brought together hundreds of families, educators, and community members to celebrate the student artists. The evening was a celebration of all the work happening in each of the participating classes, and closed the exhibit in a polished and prestigious fashion. A string quartet from Burnaby North Secondary led by the talented Kyumin Lee provided music with performances by Ayat Abdul-Sahib (Burnaby North Secondary) and Ready Dance, an inclusive dance company that brings together artists with and without disabilities. Our wonderful principal David Rawnsley provided catering for the evening, and volunteer students assisted guests and ensured everyone felt welcome.

The support of the team at the Roundhouse and their belief in this art exhibit ensured all the students and their families felt valued. The feedback we have received from this exhibit has been both heartwarming and heartbreaking: while all the families celebrated by taking copious amounts of pictures, giving us warm hugs, and showing genuine gratitude, we were also faced with the glaring reality that opportunities such as this are few and far between for students with diverse needs.

The past few years have forced us to evaluate the injustice toward Black communities, the bigotry against Asian communities, and the enduring harm that has been the reality for Indigenous communities. Perhaps, as we continue to learn from our past mistakes, we can also reflect on our continued mistakes. Creating equitable opportunities for the most vulnerable is the path toward a better tomorrow for everyone. We must each do our part if we want to see change, because doing nothing should no longer be a choice. •

This page and opposite right: the LLC after renovations. Kelly Johnson photos.

At the heart of it: Our school's journey from library to library learning commons

By Kelly Johnson (she/her), teacher-librarian, traditional and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam Nation)

AFTER 23 YEARS as a classroom teacher, I completed my library training and became a teacher-librarian at the very same elementary school where I had spent my teaching career. This is my dream job. I was overjoyed to be in this role and eager to create a space that would engage the hearts and minds of our school's 325 students.

Our library, built in 1948, was already well-loved by staff and students, but it had not had any significant updates. The space had obvious and exciting potential. It was a large rectangle with plenty of square footage, and its location in the very centre of our school made it a natural hub for student activity.

"If you have a garden in your library, everything will be complete."
– Cicero

In my first year, I experimented with ways to make the most of the existing space. The courtyard was our first school-wide library project. Funded by an innovation grant and in collaboration with every classroom at our school, we created a garden from a space previously used as a storage area. Students carried in yards of soil, and then river stones in small buckets. They dug and planted, raked, and weeded. Together, we planted indigenous-to-BC ferns and flowers, built pebble walkways, added picnic tables, weatherproof cushions, and even made a miniature Zen sand garden. This space became a natural extension of the library and a favourite place for students to read, work, and garden.

Inside the library, the rigid furniture layout was affecting our ability to move toward a true library learning commons (LLC). The oversized circulation desk and student computer workstations were occupying a sizable percentage of the library's space and offered no flexibility, as they were permanently secured in place. The fixed furniture meant that I was not able to reconfigure the space to support the kinds of activities that our library program was developing. Our new 3D printer had no permanent space, the students' worktables were heavy and impossible to move by myself, the 30 chairs were weighty and cumbersome to stack each day, and they were also taking up more than their fair share of space.

Our students deserved a space that would be able to transform quickly and efficiently into the learning environments they wanted and needed. I wanted to be able to go from a yoga session with the Grade 1 students to a 3D printing workshop with the flexibility to rearrange the space single-handedly.

Work begins on the LLC, included replacing flooring, shelving, and furniture for greater versatility.

Follow our LLC journey and adventures on Twitter and Instagram: @teacherkjohnson

A collaborative process for a collaborative space

After my initial positive experience with an innovation grant in the courtyard, I was excited at the possibility of turning our attention to changing the structure of the library. With support from our district library co-ordinator, I applied for a significant learning environments grant. In our district, innovative direction is grounded in a cycle of inquiry that starts with the question, "What is going on for our learners?" As such, the first step of our innovation journey was to collect student input on what they wanted their LLC to look like. They provided the many ideas and suggestions that eventually became the heart of our design blueprint. They asked for specific things, such as comfortable seating, cozy reading nooks, clean and uncluttered spaces, new books, and more technology that they could use. Really, they were asking for choice.

It was important that both the creation process and final product of our LLC mirrored these values by hearing and honouring students' voices. Many more brains were united in consultation: our district carpenters and mill-working folks, our district library co-ordinator Rebeca Rubio, administrators at the school, the staff, and of course—the students. This was a collaborative project on all levels. All voices were heard, and ideas were added.

Begin with the end in mind

Drawing from the data I had gathered using the spirals of inquiry, and armed with copies of *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada* and *From School Library to Library Learning Commons: A Pro-Active Model for Educational Change*, I created lists of everything the new space would need room for:

- quiet work and reading
- students working with technology, and the infrastructure to support the kinds of technology we envisioned
- story-making and storytelling with loose parts
- large groups and presentations
- displays (both student work and books)
- flexibility so the space can transform quickly and easily.

As this list of needs grew, it became apparent that the entire footprint of the library would need to change to accommodate our vision. Now, if you have ever undertaken a large-scale renovation, then you know that every reno has a few surprises! We realized that the carpeting would need to be replaced because it is exceedingly difficult to roll bookshelves on a carpeted surface. The carpenters explained that the bracket shelving no longer met the standards for earthquake proofing and the wiring would need to be updated to support the mounted projector and Apple TV. The scope of the project grew as these practical and necessary upgrades needed to be included.

Ground breaking—Breaking ground!

The time leading up to the start of construction felt long, but there was a lot to do to get ready. The first step was a major project to declutter the space so there would be room for the new equipment and new uses of space. For example, the design required a 16-foot span to be cleared from the non-fiction area of our library to make space for the mounted projector and whiteboard. This meant weeding, weeding, and more weeding! I wanted every item that would be coming back into the library to be included very intentionally.

In April 2021 we moved back into our brand-new, beautiful space. The planning and consultations had paid off with rich dividends. The space was infinitely flexible in its design. By myself I could move and rearrange the wheeled bookshelves and tables. The stools we had opted for to reduce their square-foot storage footprint were a huge hit with the students. All our technology had a permanent home at our Genius Bar. The kids were ecstatic! Their ideas had come to life in the new space. It was more than I had dared to hope for. When I went back to review the list of wants and needs that we had developed in our planning stages, I could see that our library really had made the journey to a proper LLC.

Spacious, filled with light, infinitely reconfigurable, our LLC is a hub of student learning. And it's not just the students who love it—district workshops and meetings are now a regular occurrence! This is a truly flexible space for all the diverse kinds of activities that today's LLCs facilitate. After a year of use, the space has proven to be an environment that is truly welcoming to learners, engages hearts and minds, and supports the design objectives of a library learning commons. •

Screen time and student health

By Duncan McDonald (he/him), electronics/technology teacher, Vancouver

THERE ARE negative aspects of screen time, and yet, screens are a symbol of modern-day, cutting-edge social connection. Smart phones, tablets, and personal computers have become part of our daily life, seemingly overnight. The availability of these devices, and the amount we and our children use them, has no parallel in human history. The Canadian Paediatric Society recommends that school-aged children 5 years and older should have less than 2 hours of screen time a day (they recommend no screen time for children under 2, and 1 hour or less for children under 5).[1] Compare this to a 2019 survey that found, on average, children aged 8–12 spend 4 hours and 44 minutes on screens for entertainment purposes, while those aged 13–18 spend 7 hours and 22 minutes.[2]

Why do medical professionals recommend limits on screen time? Data is uncovering that the type of screen time, the amount of exposure to screen time, and the age of the child matter. The news is not good for what screen time can do to the developing brain and the secondary consequences. There are four key things we need to do as educators when it comes to preparing students for healthy screen-time habits:

1. Stay informed by educating ourselves as data on screen time is published.
2. Recognize the amount and type of screen time we expose students to in school.
3. Place critical value on screen-free time in our classrooms.
4. Educate students and parents about healthy screen-time usage.

No teacher wants to be seen as a 21st century Luddite. School districts often encourage smart screens and laptop carts for learning. Screen time is often used as a reward in classrooms for good behaviour. It allows for the reduction of boredom, highly engaging content for students all the time, and can be an incredibly helpful support for us as teachers. So, what is the harm?

There is a growing body of scientific research that is directly linking some types of screen time with poor physical and mental health outcomes. However, a key question with screen-time research right now is the distinction between correlation and causation. Is screen time merely reducing activities that would otherwise promote healthy behaviours and outcomes? Or is the act of having screen time alone altering brain physiology? These are evolving discussions, however, it is clear that there is an effect on the brain and how you use screen time matters.

Now, if you are still awake reading this, let's talk about sleep. Good sleep is linked to many good health outcomes, and bad sleep is linked to many negative health outcomes. We sleep every day since the time we are fetuses, yet data suggests that most of us are sleep deprived. People of all ages need healthy sleep, and people of all ages have poor sleep. Sleep quantity, quality, and daytime sleepiness are shown to be far worse for school-aged children with access to portable electronic devices in the bedroom.[3] The same study found that 96% of teenagers aged 15–17 took electronic devices to bed with them and averaged 9 hours of screen time a day. A simple pole in my classroom suggests similar findings.

1 *www.fraserhealth.ca/health-topics-a-to-z/children-and-youth/physical-activity-for-children/screen-time-for-children#.YkoBWC0ZNBw*
2 *www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx*
3 *www.pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27802500/*

iStock.com/Kerkez

The Canadian Paediatric Society recommends school-aged children **5 years and over** should have less than **2 hrs of screen time a day**...

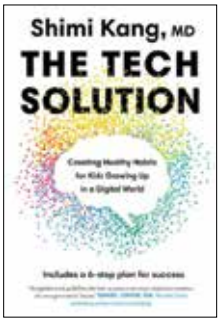
... Compare this to a 2019 survey that found, on average, **children aged 8–12 spend over 4 hrs** on screens for entertainment purposes, while those **aged 13–18 spend over 7 hrs.**

What about links between depression and social media? There are multiple studies that show a correlation between social media use and stress, depression, and anxiety. Some studies demonstrate a dramatic difference between high social media users and low social media users and their correlated negative effects.[4] There are also exceptions.[5] Where high social media users get large amounts of face-to-face contact, much of the negative associations are absent. Is it a matter of social media causing stress, depression, and anxiety? Or is it that spending hours on social media is reducing the time spent having real face-to-face contact? In time, the data will likely become more clear.

What we can understand is that screen time is having an effect on children. When children are connecting with technology there are short-term benefits and long-term costs. If a teacher uses videos to capture the children's attention, are the children building skills to attend and focus without a screen? If a student is engaging with flashing screens to learn math, does a book seem boring? If a student is scrolling through an app, are they engaging in social-emotional awareness or mindfulness? Or are they avoiding certain feelings and lack awareness of their surroundings? If a student eats their lunch while looking at a screen, my suspicion is they aren't building important face-to-face social skills. Emotional regulation, boredom, mindfulness, physical activity, and social connection are all recurring themes for long-term health and happiness. So, do we forego these for short-term benefits? This is not an all or nothing situation; much in the same way you can be healthy while your diet also includes candy and chips. A healthy dose of screen time in a modern society is also healthy. There can be plenty of beneficial outcomes that result from a healthy use of screen time. Not all screen time is the same. There are some computer applications that teach mindfulness exercises. There are a host of devices, like Fitbit, that can promote physical activity.

As educators we need to educate ourselves as new data is published to teach ourselves, students, and parents about healthy screen time. I believe there should be a greater value put on learning during screen-free time, because this can support healthy brain development and skill building. We should recognize the type and frequency of screen time we are showing our students. Lastly, if studies demonstrate that poor mental, cognitive, or physical health outcomes are associated with certain uses of screens, we should advocate that teachers reduce such usage in the classroom and students not use screens for these purposes on school grounds. Schools model other healthy behaviours, such as limiting the sale of sugary drinks and snacks, why not do the same for unhealthy screen-time habits? •

Recommended reading



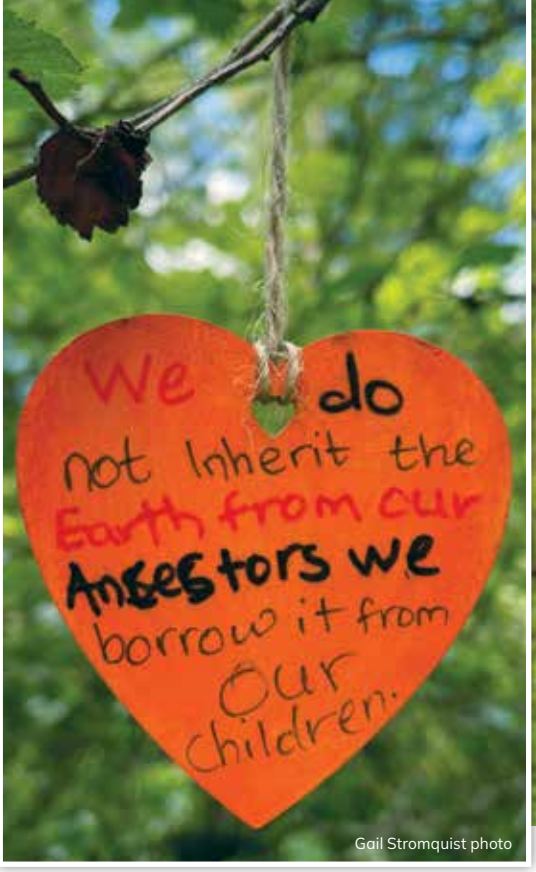
The Tech Solution by Dr. Shimi Kang provides parents and educators the tech habits children need to achieve their full potential.

Links to resources from Fraser Health, the Canadian Paediatric Society, and the World Health Organization are also available at *linktr.ee/ScreenTimeHealth.*

4 *www.nature.com/articles/s41467-022-29296-3?fbclid=IwAR3WpV6IvIvZkpbFMM8mdXHltKEs3EHaYY60hj1qn4Om1715xGr-up2yjLc*
5 *www.childmind.org/article/is-social-media-use-causing-depression/*

Students as teachers for truth and reconciliation

By Cheryl Carlson (she/her), teacher, Fraser Cascade



Gail Stromquist photo

Students from Cheryl's class hang hearts as a gesture of reconciliation.

Sunjum Jhaj photos unless noted.

EVERY YEAR, my Grade 2/3 class spends several months learning about the lasting legacy of colonization and residential schools in Canada. Many of the conversations we have as a class can be difficult and emotional. As students learn about the atrocities of residential schools, and the experiences of students who attended these schools, they often express empathy for survivors and sadness for the children who were lost. They also express a desire to do something about it.

Truth and reconciliation is about action alongside learning. As settlers, we must actively participate in learning the truth, and then leverage our learning for reconciliation. For my Grade 2/3 students, leveraging their learning means sharing it with their families, friends, and community.

Each year for the past few years, I conclude my unit on truth and reconciliation with a field trip. My students and I load up for a bus ride to Spuzzum, the traditional territory of Gladys Chapman, a young girl who was taken from her home and sent to the Kamloops Indian Residential School, where she died at the age of 12. We visit Gladys's grave to clean up the area and place orange hearts as symbols of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and remembrance.

For the past few years, the students have also used the orange hearts to create an art installation in Spuzzum, as a way to educate and inform members of the community about the link between this part of the province and the residential school in Kamloops.

This year, as I talked to parents on the bus ride to Spuzzum, I realized that students take their responsibility to share what they learn very seriously. The learning is like a drop in the water, it has a ripple effect into the community. Learning trickles out into the community, not only through classroom projects like our orange hearts display, but also through conversations at dinner tables in students' homes.

Many parents of school-aged children were denied the opportunity to learn about the residential school system as part of their own school experience. In this regard, our education system has made good progress. The curriculum and content taught in schools is evolving to reflect calls for decolonization and the integration of Aboriginal Ways of Knowing and Being. In many of my students' homes, the children are teaching their parents about the truth they were denied around the history of residential schools.

To facilitate conversations about truth and reconciliation in students' homes, I invite parents to join in their children's learning. For example, parents join for field trips or larger school events and projects. I also invite students to take some of their work from our class, or books and other resources we use in the school, home so they can share it with their families and use these materials as conversation starters.

One parent shared the following: *I came out [on this field trip] because my daughter asked me to, but more importantly, we are Métis as well, and I like to get some more info from the actual true story. It's quite an eye-opener. Oakley does bring a lot of it home and informs me of the residential schools and what happened and what she's learning. I feel like this is the real story of Canada, and it was nice to experience it.*

Parents and community members participated in hanging the hearts alongside students and were invited to join us as we listened and learned from members of the Spuzzum Nation on our field trip.

→

Chief Jim Hobart hangs a heart on the UBC campus during the BCTF's Summer Leadership Conference. RIGHT: Attendees listen to Indigenous colleagues and guests and make hearts to express their learning.

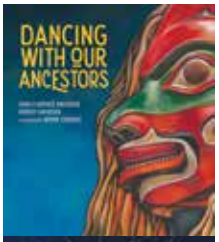
At the BCTF's Summer Leadership Conference this year, several other colleagues and I collaborated to transform the orange hearts lesson idea into a professional development opportunity. In my classroom, the act of designing and creating an orange heart can be therapeutic for students and provide an outlet to process the difficult emotions that may come up as we learn about residential schools. When we head outside to hang the hearts for our art installation, the students have an opportunity to connect with the land and reflect on their learning.

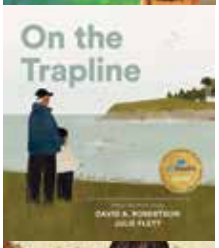
Workshop participants at the conference were given an opportunity to engage in something similar. As we listened to the stories and learned from the experiences of Indigenous colleagues and invited guests, including Chief Jim Hobart (pictured left) from Spô'zêm, Chief Rosanne Casimir from Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, and survivors Diane Stewart and Mercy Thomas, we were invited to create orange hearts to express our learning. Not only did we engage our emotions, but we also took time to consider our commitments to truth *before* reconciliation. Later, we hung the hearts around the UBC campus.

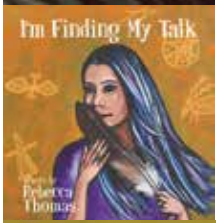
Throughout the day, I was wrapped up witnessing UBC students and other BCTF conference attendees pausing to look at the hearts, inspect what was written on them, and ponder the messages. I hope this moment of pause was an opportunity to reflect on what they know about truth and how that relates to their positionality and responsibility. At the very least, it is a moment for them to acknowledge, remember, and honour the thousands of children who died at residential schools across Canada.

As you prepare for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation this year, I encourage you to reflect on the many ways your students will use what they learn in your classroom to educate and create change in their communities. When my students first told me they wanted to take action and do something about truth and reconciliation, I had no idea their motivation would inspire an activity that continues to bring truth to light a year later. In my many years of teaching, I have seen that children intuitively understand injustice. They have the empathy, passion, and drive to use their learning for positive change. We just need to empower them with the knowledge, and ways of being, to do so. •

BOOKS BY INDIGENOUS AUTHORS FOR USE IN THE CLASSROOM







***Sk'ad'a Stories* series**
by Sara Florence Davidson and Robert Davidson
These four books are based on the experiences and memories of the Haida authors. The books focus on the cultural significance of ceremonies and traditions.

Aggie and Mudgy: The Journey of Two Kaska Dena Children
by Wendy Proverbs
This book focuses on the 1,600 km journey two sisters are forced to take to a residential school in central BC from their home in the North.

The Orange Shirt Story
by Phyllis Webstad
This book tells the true story of Phyllis Webstad's experiences that inspired Orange Shirt Day. Visit *www.orangeshirtday.org* for more teacher resources.

***On the Trapline* by David Robertson**
A story of intergenerational connection, *On the Trapline* shares the questions and connections between a boy and his grandpa as they visit a trapline.

***Shin-chi's Canoe* by Nicola Campbell**
This follow-up book to Shi-shi-etko tells the story of Shi-shi-etko's return to residential school for her second year, and her brother, Shin-chi's, first experience at residential school.

I'm Finding My Talk
by Rebecca Thomas
In this response to Rita Joe's poem, "I lost my talk," Rebecca Thomas reflects on reclaiming her language as a second-generation residential school survivor

When We Were Alone
by David Robertson
In this story, a Cree grandmother answers her granddaughter's questions about her culture and experiences at residential school.

Speaking Our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation
by Monique Gray Smith
Monique Gray Smith draws on the experiences of survivors to explore the legacy of residential schools, and highlight necessary actions based on the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

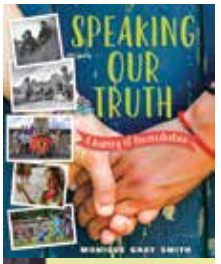
Spíləx̌m: A Weaving of Recovery, Resilience, and Resurgence
by Nicola Campbell
This memoir uses poetry and prose to explore what it means to be an intergenerational survivor of residential schools.

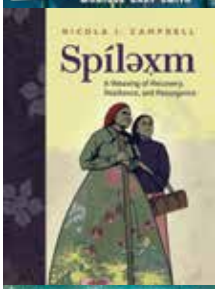
When I Was Eight
by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton
This picture book version of the memoir *Fatty Legs* makes Margaret Pokiak-Fenton's story accessible for young readers.

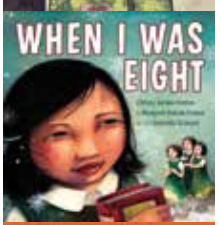
A Stranger at Home
by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton
This sequel to *Fatty Legs* follows Margaret's return home after two years away at residential school. The story deals with the disconnect and struggle for belonging residential school survivors faced when they returned years later to a culture and language they were forced to leave behind.

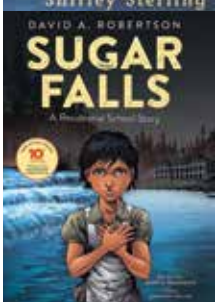
My Name is Seepeetza
by Shirley Sterling
In this novel, Shirley Sterling draws on her experiences at the Kamloops Indian Residential School to give readers a thorough understanding of what residential school survivors endured.

***Sugar Falls* by David Robertson**
This story centres on an interview between a child and a residential school survivor. It is based on the true story of Betty Ross, an Elder from Cross Lake First Nation.









What the research says: Guest speakers in the classroom

By Lauren Hudson (she/her), TTOC and K–12 Education Co-ordinator with Ocean Networks Canada, Comox and **Monika Pelz** (she/her), TTOC and K–12 Education Co-ordinator with Ocean Networks Canada, Victoria

A FAMILIAR EMAIL appears in your inbox: it's an invitation to have a guest speaker join your class. You see a few of these opportunities each year and wonder if it's worth it. Maybe the students will learn something new, or maybe it will just be more work to prepare them to have a guest. Logistically, will the guest speaker be able to fit their presentation into your class time? Does the topic align with what you're currently working on? Does that matter? Will the guest speaker be able to connect with your students and share their expertise in an age-appropriate manner? With the extra effort required to bring guest speakers into the classroom, you wonder if there is any value in inviting a guest speaker into yours.

With over 20 years of combined experience interacting with students as classroom teachers and as guest speakers, we decided to investigate these questions for our master's program. Our research review of academic literature, and our own personal experiences, overwhelmingly point to guest speakers as being a benefit to student learning. Based on our experience and learning, we suggest the following four practical benefits when considering inviting a guest speaker into your classroom. In addition, consider the eight before/during/after suggestions (under "Making it meaningful") to help you make your next guest speaker experience a success.

PRACTICAL BENEFITS

1. Expertise shared with students and teachers

It is undeniable that guest speakers share their content expertise with students during classroom presentations. Although teachers are dedicated to being informed and knowledgeable, it's not realistic to know it all. Guests are often sought out because they can share in-depth knowledge on specific topics, taking considerable pressure off of teachers. Indeed, guest speakers may introduce students and teachers to important topics that would otherwise be omitted from the classroom experience. Sharing topic-specific knowledge is the top reason in the academic literature explaining why guest speakers are invited into the classroom. This expertise is not just a benefit to students, but teachers also have the opportunity to learn from guest speakers.

2. Career exposure

Guest speakers may share their background education, career path, and personal stories of how they got to where they are today. In the words of Cheska Robinson, "Teachers can motivate students to start thinking about and planning for their future by bringing in real-life experts and pairing these presentations with hands-on learning."[1] Guests with diverse backgrounds and careers may be a source of inspiration and help students envision their futures.

3. An experience to remember

Although it may sound simplistic that guests provide students with experiences, this statement holds an incredibly rich and multifaceted array of meanings. On the surface, guest speakers are an opportunity to change the daily routine and give students a chance to interact with a new educator. Some guests may even tell stories, share a demonstration, or facilitate a hands-on activity. A recent study highlights that even videoed guest presentations elicit empathy and connection.[2] Guest speakers often have access to unique tools or manipulatives that enhance student learning and stimulate interest in new subjects and experiences.

4. Authentic

Guest speakers often explicitly share or implicitly represent their lived experience. The unique personal, emotional, and cultural acumen held by guest speakers often cannot be replicated by classroom teachers. In this regard particularly, Indigenous guests offer unique and authentic experiences for students. Inviting Indigenous guest speakers can be an important step in addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's call to include Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in our education system.[3]

1 Cheska Robinson, "Guest speakers and mentors for career exploration in the science classroom," *Science Scope, Vol. 41*, No. 8, 2018, p. 18-21.
2 Justine Grogan et al., "Using videoed stories to convey Indigenous 'Voices' in Indigenous Studies," *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, Vol. 50*, 2019, p. 38–46: *www.doi.org/10.1017/jie.2019.15*
3 "Calls to Action," Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015: *www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf*

MAKING IT MEANINGFUL

Before

Sourcing: Guest speakers are everywhere, and sometimes the simplest and best connections are to go where you think experts might be. Ask parents and friends, or expand out to post-secondary institutions, museums, special interest groups, and outreach organizations. Experts often don’t call themselves as such—instead, just think about who might be able to share knowledge with students.

Relevance: Seek opportunities that are connected to the curriculum and the core competencies. Be sure to communicate with the guest speaker what your students are working on and invite them to share their expertise on that subject. For example, the ocean is a huge topic, but sharing that your class is learning about biodiversity can focus an expert’s discussion on the unique adaptations of marine life.

Inclusion: Ensure that your guest speaker is aware of your students’ interests and needs. If your potential guest does not have a background in teaching, share with them your students’ developmental milestones. Sharing what grade you teach may not be sufficient in preparing the guest to use age-appropriate language. For example, instead of saying that your students are in Grade 2, let your guest know that the students are still working on formulating questions and that sometimes they need reminders to ask questions and not share stories.

Inquiry: Let your students know who you are inviting in and share some background information about the guest speaker and/or the organization they represent. Help students generate questions they want to ask your guest, and let the guest know that you are doing this.

During

Set the stage: Ensure the guest speaker knows how much time they have, and ask them how and when they would like to take questions from the class. Doing this right at the beginning with the students present will help set expectations.

Connection: Don’t be afraid to ask your speaker leading questions to help guide the discussion or focus on a particular area. For example, “We are studying ocean ecosystems, what ecosystems have you observed? Can you tell us more about that?”

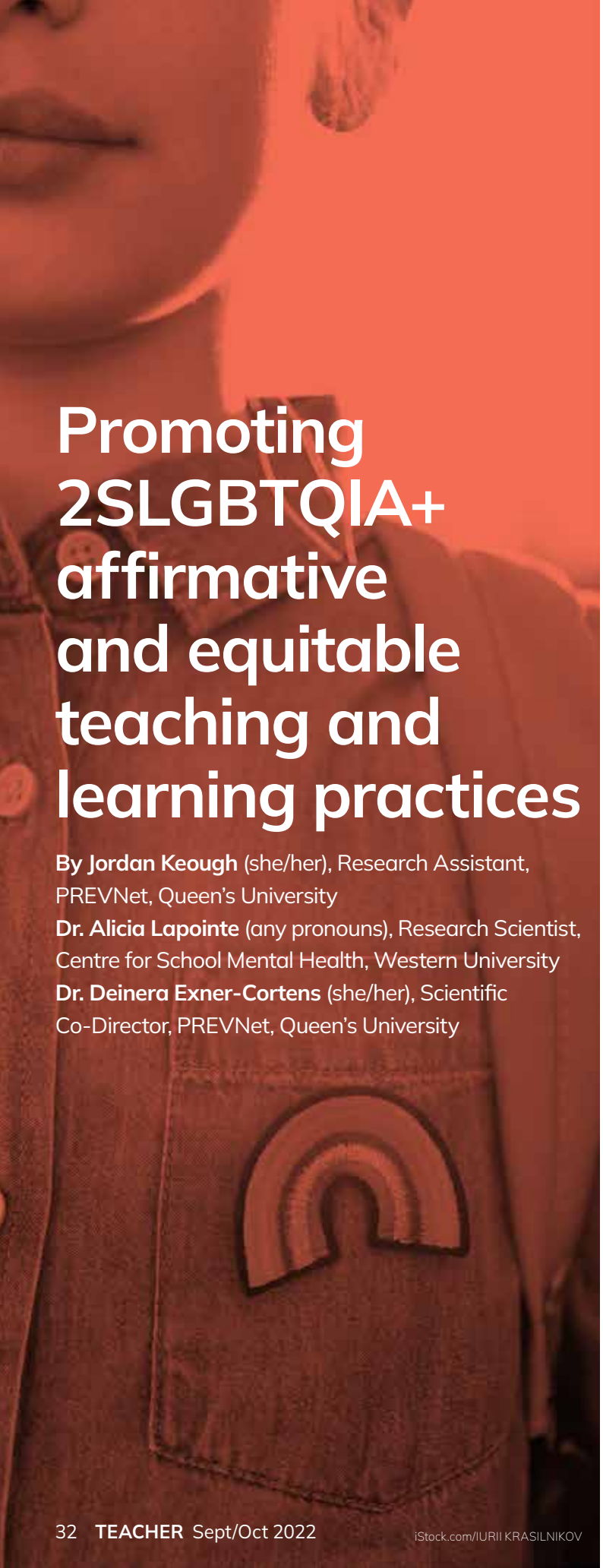
After

Impact: After the guest speaker concludes, ask your students to demonstrate their learning. For example, students could include fun facts that they learned in a thank you letter to the guest speaker, or they could comment on aspects of the guest speaker’s presentation that shifted their thinking.

Extension: Students may have additional questions after the experience, so ask the guest speaker if they would be willing to be emailed or contacted with follow-up questions.

Guest speakers do more than fill content knowledge gaps for students; they open the school to the community and the world beyond the classroom. When you expose your students to individuals from the community, you share with them expertise, experience, and examples of what the future could hold for them. •

iStock.com/LightFieldStudios



Promoting 2SLGBTQIA+ affirmative and equitable teaching and learning practices

By Jordan Keough (she/her), Research Assistant, PREVNet, Queen's University
Dr. Alicia Lapointe (any pronouns), Research Scientist, Centre for School Mental Health, Western University
Dr. Deinera Exner-Cortens (she/her), Scientific Co-Director, PREVNet, Queen's University

A TROUBLING DISCREPANCY:

An Egale Canada survey found that 62% of 2SLGBTQIA+ student respondents reported feeling unsafe at school, while the Every Teacher Project found 97% of educators surveyed across the nation believed their school was safe.

IN 2021, Egale Canada, a national advocacy organization supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual/aromantic, etc.) individuals, conducted their second school climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia across Turtle Island (colonially referred to as Canada). On this survey, 62% of 2SLGBTQIA+ student respondents, compared to 11% of cisgender heterosexual student respondents, reported feeling unsafe in their school, with many experiencing discriminatory harassment.[1] By contrast, the Every Teacher Project revealed that 97% of educators across the nation believed that their school was safe, revealing a huge discrepancy between school staff's beliefs and students' realities.[2] And, although 73% of educators in the Every Teacher Project survey approved of 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive curriculum, far fewer school staff were comfortable discussing queer and trans topics with students. Less than half (47%) of survey respondents used inclusive language and examples; only 18% challenged transphobia; and only 16% critiqued heterosexual privilege (i.e., unearned and taken-for-granted benefits associated with positioning heterosexuality as natural and normal).

Drawing on a landscape metaphor, we outline teaching and learning practices for anti-heteronormative/cisnormative education. To begin, what does anti-heteronormative/cisnormative mean? These terms describe beliefs and actions that challenge assumptions that being heterosexual and cisgender is normal, moral, or natural. For example, we may ask someone for their pronouns rather than assuming their gender identity based on their appearance. To learn more about 2SLGBTQIA+ terms and concepts, scan the QR code (below) for Eagle Canada's glossary.

So how do we put anti-heteronormativity/cisnormativity into practice within education? Using a landscape metaphor, we can understand such practices in terms of land, atmosphere, water, and sun.

RESOURCES

For links to resources mentioned in this article scan the can the QR code or visit *linktr.ee/2SLGBTQIAResources.*

1 *www.egale.ca/awareness/still-in-every-class/*
2 *www.uwinnipeg.ca/rise/research/the-every-teacher-project.html*

LAND: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

It is important that we first build understanding within ourselves and our students that gender and sexuality are spectrums that can (and do) change across time. Rather than seeing gender as a binary of man/woman (a colonial way of thinking), this perspective acknowledges that people embrace a diverse range of identities and expressions that do not fit into these exclusive categories. Given its roots in colonialism, rejecting the gender binary is also an important piece of decolonizing curriculum. Similarly, queer and trans theories understand sexuality as more than just heterosexual attraction. Sexual identity is very diverse, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, straight, and asexual identities (and many more!).

One important step is using equitable language in the classroom. Equitable language honours the diversity of student identities and experiences, and challenges oppressive ideas that have dominated learning environments. This foundation should also be trauma-informed, by acknowledging that some students have or are currently experiencing trauma.

Lastly, this foundation is intersectional, meaning that educators realize that students' lived experiences are shaped by multiple, intersecting systems of oppression (e.g., homophobia, transphobia, racism, colonialism, ableism, etc.). It is important that we recognize these differences within and between youth, and do not apply a universal "experience" or narrative to students. Scan the QR code (opposite page) to watch a panel discussion on supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ students of colour.

ATMOSPHERE: CREATING AN AFFIRMATIVE LEARNING CLIMATE

Beyond foundational knowledge and practice, it is crucial that 2SLGBTQIA+ students feel safe, affirmed, and understood in their school environment. This involves identifying and addressing the disparities 2SLGBQTIA+ students face in education, such as harassment, discrimination, ineffective intervention, and teaching and learning practices that exclude queer and trans identities.

Similarly, understanding and applying education policy within your school can aid in building supportive learning environments. In BC, school codes of conduct must acknowledge prohibited forms of discrimination under the Human Rights Code, which includes discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Finally, respecting student privacy and confidentiality is necessary to protect the safety of 2SLGBTQIA+ students. For example, students may not feel safe or comfortable disclosing their identity to their family, but may feel safer doing so at school, especially in spaces that are affirmative (e.g., Gender and Sexuality Alliance clubs). Therefore, asking students what pronouns/names they use in specific school spaces (e.g., basketball team, drama class, chess club, etc.) versus at home, and taking care to reflect this in all documentation leaving the school, is crucial for supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ students.

WATER: RIDING THE WAVE OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND CHANGE

Building an affirming classroom and curriculum requires ongoing work. Often, inclusivity strategies can look like checking boxes off a finite list of steps. However, promising practices continue to evolve, and embracing the ongoing and shifting nature of the journey ensures our equity strategies continue to improve. Collaborating with leaders in anti-heteronormative/cisnormative education helps to facilitate continued action. For example, networking with 2SLGBTQIA+ champions, such as the BC SOGI Educator Network, and seeking support from decolonization, equity, diversity, and inclusion leaders in school communities supports ongoing communal change.

Reflecting on potential gaps and connections in current curriculum can also aid in identifying areas for continued improvement. It is important to consider not only the presence of 2SLGBTQIA+ content in curriculum, but also *how* this content portrays 2SLGBTQIA+ identities and experiences. Integrating positive and varied representations of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, rather than privileging tropes, stereotypes, and a universal "2SLGBTQIA+ experience," can ensure representations are not causing harm. For example, question whether the representations offered only discuss risk factors faced by 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals and communities, rather than honouring their strengths and triumphs. Furthermore, consider whether the content reflects the diversity within 2SLGBTQIA+ communities in terms of ethnicity, class, disability, newcomer status, religion, body size, etc.

SUN: SHINING A LIGHT ON STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING

Equitable and affirmative education must centre the experiences and perspectives of students to best address their needs. By focusing on youth voice, educators can empower students to explore their interlocking identities and ways of understanding. Student-centred learning can look like encouraging discussion-based, case study, and role-playing practices where students can learn with and from each other. These practices challenge teacher-student power dynamics by positioning students as invaluable participants in their learning. Similarly, fostering opportunities for self-reflection and exploration can support student creativity and celebrate non-conformity. For example, see GLSEN's Empowerment and Self-Identification Activity and Challenging Assumptions Activity that address the negative impact of stereotypes and labels. You can take a look at both activities by scanning the QR code (opposite page).

CONCLUSION

The Every Teacher Project urges schools to implement anti-heteronormative/cisnormative education to promote student safety and well-being, and challenge harmful assumptions surrounding gender and sexuality. By embracing the ongoing and evolving journey of building equitable and affirmative learning environments, we can support *all* students' well-being—not just straight and cisgender pupils. •

The power of playlists to transform professional development

By Jessica Liew (she/her) and
Blair Miller (he/him), teachers, Vancouver

WE'VE ALL BEEN THERE: you leave your professional development (PD) workshop feeling totally inspired and ready to transform your teaching. Then the practical realities of your job take over again, those great ideas fall to the wayside, and you never find time to integrate them into your practice. When we decided to organize a conference, we wanted to end this cycle.

We hosted the Perfect Blend Conference in February 2022 to help teachers explore the ways that effective blended learning can combine online and offline learning experiences to help increase meaningful human-to-human interactions in the classroom. It seemed only natural that our conference would have a blended format. We hosted the keynote and workshops live online, but we encouraged participants to sign-up in groups and tune in together, so they could also enjoy the collegiality of an in-person conference.

To create space within the day for teachers to integrate their new learning with their current practice, we made some key changes to the typical PD format:

WE OFFERED FEWER WORKSHOPS.

Many conferences consist of three to four workshop sessions, but we only offered two learning sessions, so teachers had time to dig deeper into their learning.

WE SWITCHED UP THE FORMAT.

Instead of moving from workshop to workshop with no time to process all the new information in between, we created learning sessions that began with a one-hour workshop, followed by a break, then 45 minutes of exploration time.

WE CREATED PLAYLISTS FOR SELF-DIRECTED EXPLORATION.

During the exploration time participants used the conference website to access a digital playlist of activities related to the workshop topic. The list consisted of four self-paced, differentiated options designed to help participants deepen their understanding, practise new skills, or apply their learning directly to their teaching practice. These activities ranged from group discussions with colleagues, to listening to a podcast, to planning a lesson.

The teachers who attended the conference really enjoyed this approach. On the feedback survey all the questions related to the format received an overwhelmingly positive response. We had worried that offering fewer workshops might leave some people feeling short-changed, but, as one respondent pointed out, "too much choice is paralyzing." Someone else reminded us that it can be "too much info and too busy if there are four sessions in one day." Participants also valued the time that we created for applying what they learned to their teaching, saying, "I loved the playlist for exploration afterwards," and, "I like that there was dedicated time during the day for exploring the material." Reading these responses, we knew we had discovered a PD model that met teachers' needs.

While our conference took a full-day, blended approach, we believe this model is flexible enough to be used for single workshops and half-day events that are offered wholly online or in person as well. If offered online, participants could access a digital playlist for deeper exploration. If everything is taking place in person, attendees could choose from different stations as a follow-up activity, or they could return to their own classrooms to put their learning into practice.

If you will be organizing PD for your colleagues this year, and you think this format might be a good fit with what you are offering, we also want to share some of the pitfalls we encountered, so you can avoid them:

CONSIDER YOUR AUDIENCE.

For some of the beginners in attendance, the workshops felt rushed, and some weren't ready to move on to independent exploration when the session ended. This format may not be appropriate for introductory sessions or more complex topics.

MAKE TIME TO CURATE GOOD PLAYLISTS.

The exploration sessions will only be as good as the playlists that support them. Keep playlist creation manageable by limiting the options to three to five choices. Not sure what to include? Ask the presenter for suggestions or take a closer look at the resources you will share with participants. Could you leverage these into exploration activities?

PREPARE TO HELP THOSE WHO ARE UNFAMILIAR WITH THE FORMAT.

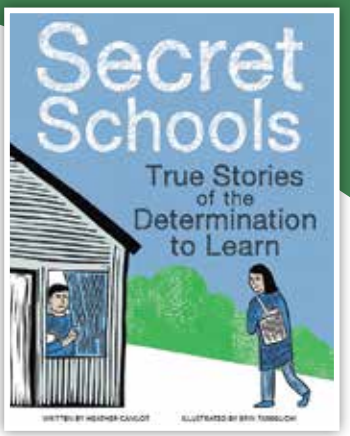
Even if you provide links and instructions ahead of time, many attendees will be unsure how to access or use the playlists. Remind participants about how the exploration sessions will work at the end of each workshop, and prepare to field questions from confused attendees during the transition time.

Once you have navigated these bumps in the road, we're confident that participants will appreciate this new approach to professional learning, and we encourage you to try it the next time you organize a PD session for your school or district. •

iStock.com/arinahabich

History of secret schools reveals value of education

Review by Janet Nicol, retired teacher, Vancouver
Secret Schools: True Stories of the Determination to Learn
published by Owlkids Books, 2022



WHAT IF the secret you are keeping is that you go to school? This is the question Toronto-based author Heather Camlot poses in her inspiring non-fiction book aimed at middle grade readers. Fifteen well-researched accounts depict "underground" classrooms around the world at various times in history. Linocut prints by Vancouver artist Erin Taniguchi illustrate each true story with empathy and imagination.

The first of five thematic chapters looks at the "subversive" teaching of government-banned languages experienced by Japanese migrant workers in Brazil from 1930 to 1945, Indigenous Peoples in Ecuador in the mid-1940s to 1963, and Lithuanians living under Russian rule from 1863 to 1904. According to the author, "all refused to let authorities stamp out their language." Heroes emerged, including book smugglers, teachers, and community activists. Because these secret schools persisted, the government in all three countries eventually abolished the language ban.

"Hope and Dignity," is a compelling chapter and begins with an account rooted in the 1600s, when hundreds of thousands of people from African countries were kidnapped, brought to the United States, and sold as forced, unpaid labour. Imparting literacy and knowledge to enslaved Black people over the ensuing generations was discouraged and even outlawed. However, learning frequently took place in secret, some schools run from the homes of freed Black people.

Under the Nazi regime in Germany (1933–1945) more than 1,000 segregated ghettos were imposed on Jewish people across occupied Eastern Europe. Educating Jewish children was forbidden, but hidden classrooms were established in defiance, some in soup kitchens, stables, and attics. Even within the horrific concentration camps, there were instances of Jewish prisoners conducting secret classes.

Between 1961 and 1991, more than 3,000 political prisoners, including freedom-fighter Nelson Mandela, were sent to Robben Island in South Africa. The common bond among prisoners in the maximum security prison was their fight to end a racist apartheid regime imposed by white rulers. Teaching and learning went on covertly.

The chapter on "Girls' Rights" highlights a few different periods through history when women and girls banded together to resist oppressive and sexist policies. Education for girls was banned when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. Secret schools for girls sprung up during those five oppressive years, as the author describes, including under the guise of sewing circles. When Poland lost its independence in 1795, girls were forbidden to attend school but in 1882, an underground organization called Flying University was organized in Warsaw. And in 1907 when the Iranian government wouldn't finance schooling for girls, a secret society in Tehran raised the necessary funds.

A rogue chapter devoted to "Spy Schools," describes top-secret, government-approved learning institutions, created for the purpose of serving the interests of the state. Here's a critical question for readers to consider: *Do spy schools control and subvert students rather than educate and uplift them?*

Also stretching the definition of secret schools is the final chapter titled "Radical Learning." The first account describes university students in South Korea who set up illegal "study circles" in the 1980s, leading to organized protests and a push for democracy from military rule.

A second account, better depicted as "under the public radar" rather than "top secret" describes American billionaire Elon Musk's non-profit, experimental school, established in California in 2014 and focused on math and the sciences. As with the chapter on spy schools, it lends itself to critical discussion, especially about commercialization and privatization of schooling, and the value of also teaching the humanities along with math and the sciences.

Most dramatic in this chapter on radical learning, is the secret school in Indonesia's capital of Jakarta where children of suicide bombers "unlearn" the teaching of their parents, giving them a chance at a normal life.

Secret Schools offers many opportunities for instruction in the social studies classroom. Before students are exposed to the book's content, the teacher could ask the class the following: *Why would a secret school exist? List as many reasons as possible.* Next, students in groups could be assigned a single chapter to read, summarize, and report-out to the class. A class discussion follows, based on two questions: *What surprised you about these secret schools? What do you want to learn more about?*

In conclusion, students respond to the following question through a group discussion or written report: *Have these stories changed your viewpoint about education? Explain.*

However educators choose to introduce this book into the classroom, it is certain readers will gain a new perspective about the world around them and their own role as students attending an "open" school. •

CLASSIFIED

Centre Paris, privately owned, 1 bedroom, everything included, $1,875/week: *irene.roland@gmail.com*

Sylvia King writes about the many benefits of connecting with nature in her article "Nurturing with nature" on pages 12–13.

Sylvia King photo

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