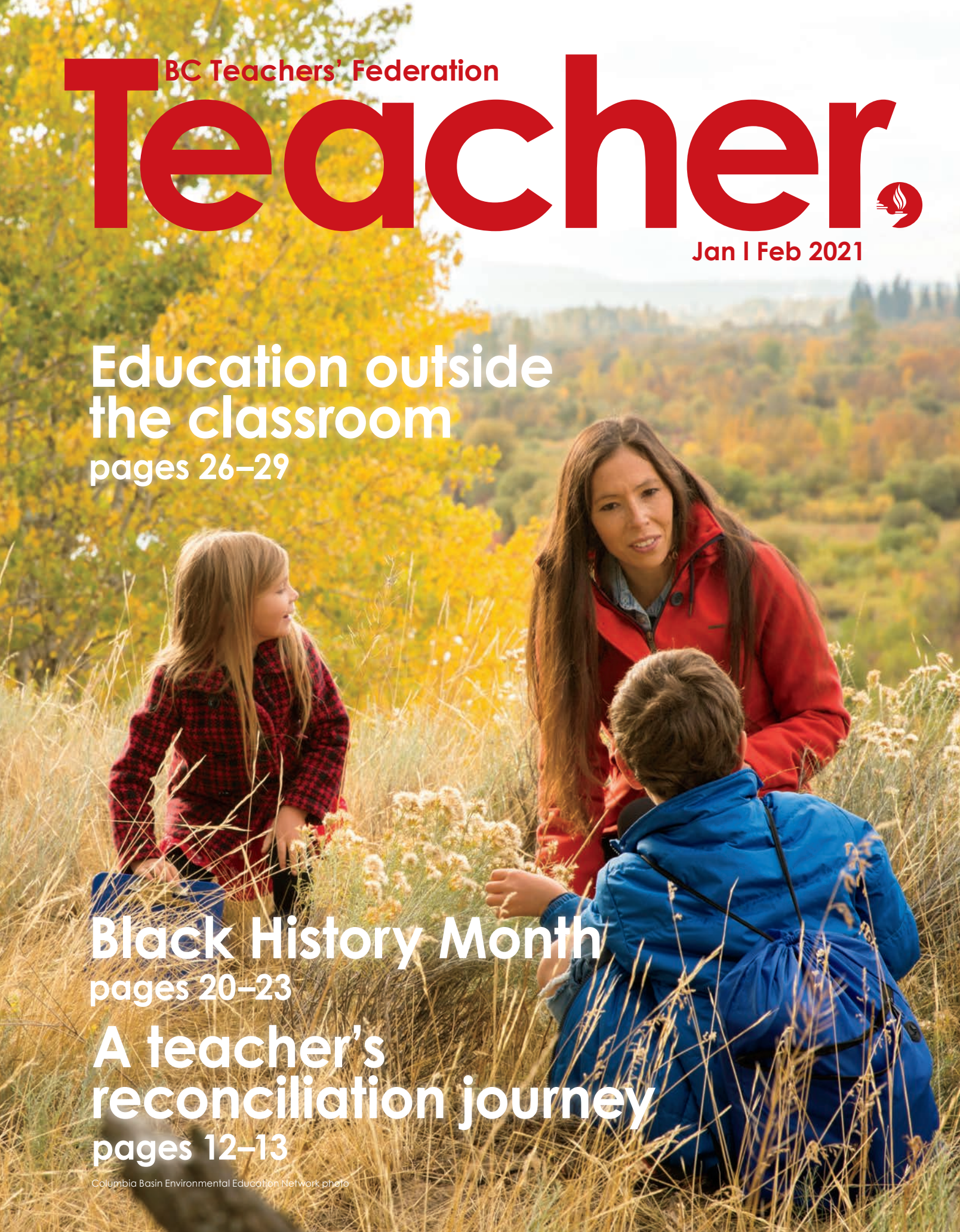
BC Teachers' Federation

Teacher

Jan | Feb 2021



Education outside the classroom

pages 26–29

Black History Month

pages 20–23

A teacher's reconciliation journey

pages 12–13

Columbia Basin Environmental Education Network photo

IN THIS ISSUE

Volume 33, Number 3—Jan/Feb 2021

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/newsmag*.

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

May/June 2021	March 26, 2021

EDITOR'S NOTE

The BCTF supports the use of masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Outdoor learning photos in this edition show students without masks. This is because of the significantly lower risk of COVID-19 transmission in outdoor environments.

Contact us

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

FSC www.fsc.org MIX Paper from responsible sources FSC® C011267
CALM Canadian Association of Labour Media
CEPA Canadian Educational Press Association
TFEU
PRINTED IN BC

Notice of the BCTF 2021 AGM

As required by the *Societies Act*, the following formal notice of the 2021 Annual General Meeting is made to all BCTF members pursuant to by-law 8.1 by publication in this edition of *Teacher*.

The 105th AGM of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation will be held virtually beginning on Saturday, March 20, 2021, and continuing to Tuesday, March 23, 2021.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Grateful for Gurpreet

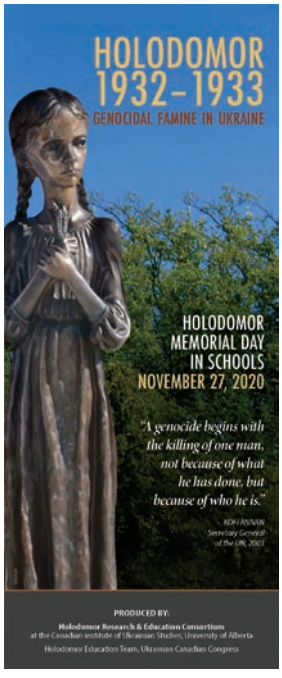
When I immigrated to Canada in 1983, my family took up residence in Vancouver. We had never known discrimination when we lived in Mauritius, but from the moment I started school in Canada, I could see just how ingrained it was in our culture.

For my own children, I would specifically look for books that included characters that looked like them and shared their ancestry. They were very hard to find. This is why I am so proud that one of our own BCTF members, who identifies as a member of colour, has authored a book on Sikhism.

How wonderful it would be if my children were young again and could see a person of colour as a protagonist in a children's book. This book makes it okay for kids to be who they are, no matter the colour of their skin. This is a must in our libraries, and in our lives.

Benula Bunjun, Member-at-Large, BCTF Executive Committee

Read the Q&A a with Harman Pandher, teacher and author of Gurpreet Goes to Gurdwara*, in the Nov/Dec 2020 issue of* Teacher.



Holodomor remembered

My attention was drawn to Caitlin Johnston's description of her Holodomor unit, as part of her Genocide Studies 12 course. As a first-generation Ukrainian-Canadian, I am pleased that she is teaching her students about that wretchedly inhumane event in the history of our humanity.

I visited my father's village in 2011 and spoke with an elderly "baba" who recounted to me the time when the Russians came and took all their food. When her mother protested, they were beaten and thrown into their home that was set afire. They escaped through the back and hid until the "Moscalee" were gone. She survived the Holodomor. Millions of Ukrainians did not. I encourage Caitlin Johnston to submit a follow-up article on her program, accompanied perhaps by testimonials from some of her students.

Best wishes. And to all BC teachers, keep safe.

Gord Yakimow, retired teacher, Chilliwack

Read Caitlin Johnston's article "Holodomor: The genocidal famine in Ukraine" in the Nov/Dec 2020 issue of Teacher.

BC Student Sick Out

My name is Emma Sullivan-Collins, I am in Grade 7 from Fraser River Middle School in New Westminster and I participated in the December 1, 2020, BC Student Sick Out campaign.

The reason for this protest is that us students do not agree with the decisions the schools, the Ministry of Health, and the Government of Canada have been making.

These are some examples of the precautions that all schools have not been taking:

- Students do not have to wear masks inside the classroom. To achieve this goal, we could make them mandatory.
- Having the exploratory teacher/music teacher see everyone in the school. If they get sick, then the whole school is at risk of being sick.
- Desks should be six feet away from each other so that the students can social distance, because not all the students are wearing masks. To achieve this goal, we could lower class sizes.

We want to be and feel safe in school. Some students and teachers may not appreciate these rules because some people do not like having to wear masks inside and outside all the time. Who can blame them? I don't like wearing my mask, but it's for the safety of me, my friends, my parents, my teachers, and other people in my community.

If the school could help solve these problems, or adjust some of these measures, that would help and comfort the rest of the students who agree with me.

If these changes are made, parents will feel a lot more comfortable with their child going to school, and teachers will feel a lot safer in their workspace.

Emma Sullivan-Collins, student, New Westminster
This letter first appeared in the New West Record.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Teri Mooring, BCTF President

A safe and inclusive new year

The reality of a vaccine for COVID-19 has brought a glimmer of hope to the new year. The BCTF and the Canadian Teachers' Federation are strenuously advocating for teachers, as frontline workers, to be in the priority order for vaccination, but a return to normalcy is still many months away.

In the meantime, teachers continue to work under inadequate health and safety measures with increased workloads. We have shared our concerns and recommendations with the new Education Minister Jennifer Whiteside and continue to press for improved safety measures.

The troubleshooting process that came from our successful application to the Labour Relations Board (LRB) has proven to be effective in finding quick solutions to some of the issues teachers are facing. We are continuing our advocacy at the Ministry of Education steering committee and anticipate positive changes to the communication structures because of the implementation of the recommendations from the LRB.

Despite the ongoing challenges, teachers have continued to support students both academically and emotionally. Your care, creativity, and dedication to students and their families speak to the commitment and resolve of BC teachers.

Teachers deserve to be thanked and applauded for all the work you do. We've seen parents and students from across the province voice their support and gratitude for teachers, standing in solidarity as we fight for safe working conditions while continuing to be pillars of support for our communities.

I have hope that 2021 will be a safer and more inclusive year. As the new year progresses, the BCTF will continue to focus on our commitment to equity and inclusion through a new task force on the Representative Assembly. This task force will identify and seek to address barriers, with the aim of creating more equitable and inclusive opportunities for members to engage with the Federation's key decision-making body.

Along with our commitment to equity, we must also commit to our own well-being. I encourage you to focus on your well-being and take time to care for yourselves, as well as your families and colleagues.

Thank you and take care,

Teri Mooring
BCTF President

MESSAGE DE LA PRÉSIDENTE

Une nouvelle année sécuritaire et inclusive

La réalité d'un vaccin contre la COVID-19 a apporté une lueur d'espoir pour la nouvelle année. La FECB et la Fédération canadienne des enseignant(e)s militent énergiquement pour que les enseignant(e)s, en tant que travailleurs(-euses) de première ligne, soient placé(e)s en priorité pour la vaccination, bien qu'un retour à la normal n'aura pas lieu avant encore de nombreux mois.

Entre-temps, les enseignant(e)s continuent de travailler sous des mesures de santé et de sécurité inadéquates, en plus d'une charge de travail accrue. Nous avons fait part de nos préoccupations et de nos recommandations à la nouvelle ministre de l'Éducation, Jennifer Whiteside, et nous continuons de faire pression pour améliorer ces mesures.

Le processus de dépannage découlant de notre demande auprès de la Commission des relations de travail (LRB) s'est révélé efficace pour résoudre rapidement certains problèmes auxquels les enseignant(e)s font face. Nous poursuivons notre action auprès du comité directeur du ministère de l'Éducation et prévoyons des changements positifs dans les structures de communication suite à la mise en œuvre des recommandations de la LRB.

Malgré les difficultés actuelles, les enseignant(e)s continuent de soutenir les élèves, à la fois académiquement et émotionnellement. Vos soins, votre créativité et votre dévouement envers les élèves et leur famille témoignent de l'engagement et de la détermination des enseignant(e)s de la C.-B.

Les enseignant(e)s méritent d'être remercié(e)s et applaudi(e)s pour tout le travail qu'ils/qu'elles font. Nous avons vu des parents et des élèves à travers la province exprimer leur soutien et leur gratitude envers les enseignant(e)s, solidairement, alors que nous luttons pour des conditions de travail sécuritaires tout en continuant d'être des piliers de soutien pour nos communautés.

J'ai espoir que 2021 sera une année plus sécuritaire et plus inclusive. À mesure que la nouvelle année progresse, la FECB continuera de mettre l'accent sur notre engagement envers l'équité et l'inclusion par l'entremise d'un nouveau groupe de travail sur l'Assemblée des représentant(e)s. Ce groupe de travail identifiera et cherchera à éliminer les obstacles dans le but de créer, pour les membres, des possibilités plus équitables et inclusives de s'engager avec l'organisme décisionnel de la Fédération.

En plus de notre engagement envers l'équité, nous devons aussi nous engager à assurer notre propre bien-être. Je vous encourage à vous concentrer sur votre bien-être et que vous preniez le temps de prendre soin de vous, de vos familles et de vos collègues.

Merci et prenez soin de vous,

Teri Mooring
Présidente de la FECB

Luis Isidoro photo

Journalist. Communications Expert. Advocate.

By Teri Mooring, BCTF President

IN 1997, Nancy Knickerbocker joined the staff at the BCTF as our Media Relations Officer after a successful first career as a reporter and freelance journalist. In December 2020, Nancy retired after 23 amazing years in our Communications and Campaigns Division, where she wrapped up her career as Director.

I can speak from experience that every president over the last 23 years, and all BCTF members, have been incredibly well served by Nancy's keen eye and journalistic instincts. She has been a champion for teachers in BC and around the world. Over her career, she has helped the BCTF make huge strides in equity and inclusion. Her deep personal commitment to social justice is perhaps best shown through her work with teachers on resources, stories, and articles to support Truth and Reconciliation.

Nancy's heart is also evident in her writing. She has contributed many memorable pieces over her years at the Federation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she penned a heartfelt and memorable op. ed., "Schools may be closed but teachers' hearts are open."

Congratulations on your retirement Nancy, and thank you for your immense contributions to our Federation.

Congratulations Nancy Knickerbocker on your retirement from the BCTF!

A steady hand

Immediately after I was elected president of the BCTF, literally the moment I stepped down from the microphone, I was searching for Nancy at the AGM and saying, "I need you." And I did need her! That day and for every day after that, I needed her calm and steady hand to help guide me through our work with the media. For more than 20 years, every president and every Executive Committee has needed Nancy to help us face every struggle and every challenge. Her skills, her professionalism, and her commitment served us all incredibly well. Nancy has always been there: writing, crafting messages, teaching us to communicate, leading us, and helping to promote our values. They are also her values: the values of public education.

– David Chudnovsky, BCTF president 1999–2002

A strong union sister

Nancy has a heart of gold, a deep sense of social justice, and she is a fabulous writer. She brought her energy, enthusiasm, sense of humour, and very considerable talents to the BCTF to support teachers and public education, but she didn't stop there. Nancy also embraced the BCTF's commitment to international solidarity. Nancy is loved by teachers and activists around the world, particularly in Latin America and Africa. She will be remembered everywhere for her fierce advocacy, her dedication to equality, her sense of fun, her amazing writing talent, and her excellent Spanish. Enjoy the summer that never ends, Nancy!

– Irene Lanzinger, BCTF president 2007–2010

A supportive and caring friend

Nancy is not only a powerful social justice advocate; she is also a caring friend and ally. She was always there for me as a kind and supportive friend as well as a colleague. Whether it was translating or keeping me on track during trips to Latin America among mass protests, she was there to help me. Her skills helped me to communicate and connect with people as well as understand their struggle for rights and justice. In the BCTF building, local offices, and around the world, her colleagues and friends could always count on her. She has a huge heart and she pours it into her work and relationships. She also knows how to have fun and brighten up your day with a great laugh. Congrats Nancy! And, thank you.

– Jim Iker, BCTF president 2013–2016

A dedicated advocate

Nancy is always someone you can depend upon for both high-quality work and sage advice. I appreciated all the times that Nancy would draw upon her experience as a journalist, parent, and active community member to better equip those of us in BCTF spokesperson roles in our efforts connecting with the broader public and inspiring action on K–12 and labour issues. Thank you, Nancy, for your amazing contributions and years of dedication to public education, students' well-being, and teachers.

– Glen Hansman, BCTF president 2016–2019

New Westminster teachers make BCTF history—100 years ago

By Ken Novakowski, Labour Heritage Centre board member and retired teacher, and **Sarah Wethered,** New Westminster Teachers' Association President

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO on February 14, 1921, 84 New Westminster teachers, most of whom were women, went on strike. The seven primary and two secondary schools were closed, affecting 3,000 students. This was remarkable because BC teachers did not obtain the legal right to strike until 1988, and it was quite uncommon to see women taking strike action during the early part of the last century.

New Westminster teachers had significant reasons to go on strike when they did. They were paid based on a salary schedule established unilaterally by the school board. Years of experience and education were not considered in determining what each teacher was paid: it was an unfair and inequitable system. The New Westminster Teachers' Association (NWTA) proposed a new salary grid with significant increases so New Westminster teacher salaries would be more in line with those in surrounding school districts. The school board ignored the teachers' submission, so teachers made a very reasonable request that the matter be referred to arbitration. The board refused to agree to arbitration and the strike was on.

Despite board threats to fire teachers who continued to strike, teachers remained out and united. Teachers also had strong community support that eventually resulted in the board agreeing to arbitration. The strike lasted five school days, and the subsequent arbitration award favoured the teachers' proposal.

The board had not budgeted for a salary increase, so a supplemental estimate had to be approved by city council. Teachers carried on teaching until the end of the year when it became clear that the board did not intend to include any provision for back pay. In response, the teachers' association delivered the signed resignations of all the teachers in the district to take effect if the board failed to provide the arbitration award.

Teachers at Lord Lister School, New Westminster (192-). New Westminster Museum and Archives, IHP9860-278.

At the civic election in January 1922, the recalcitrant members of the board were swept out of office. The new school board quickly agreed with the teachers' association and finally paid their arbitrated salaries.

The New Westminster teacher strike was an important event in BCTF history. New Westminster teachers demonstrated that unity and strength helped obtain their collective goals. They achieved a fairer form of salary allocation, and their salaries were more in keeping with those in surrounding districts. The New Westminster Teachers' Association was now recognized by their employer as the official bargaining agent for teachers in the district. Further, two NWTA teachers, Ernest Lock and George Ford, went on to become BCTF presidents and winners of the BCTF's G.A. Ferguson Memorial Award, which recognizes outstanding contributions to public education.

The New Westminster teacher strike took place only four years after the BC Teachers' Federation was founded; the NWTA was one of seven teacher organizations that came together to create the provincial body. But the strike exposed a major weakness of the BCTF as it was then structured. The BCTF did not have a membership structure independent of local teachers' associations and proved ineffective in being able to provide the New Westminster local any substantive support. This experience would eventually result in changes to the BCTF that would allow it to become the effective body it is today in assisting locals.

Supportive messages came from teacher organizations across Canada, and teacher associations in BC sent funds to the New Westminster local to help them in their struggle. As it turned out, these funds were not needed and the local turned them over to the BCTF, which used them to establish the BCTF Reserve Fund. This fund became an important emergency fund for the BCTF over the next 65 years when it then morphed into the Collective Bargaining Defence Fund. One of the main uses of the fund was to provide strike pay to teachers.

In 2017, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the BCTF, a plaque was installed by the BC Labour Heritage Centre across from New Westminster City Hall, on 6th Street and Royal Avenue. This is the approximate location where the 1921 school board offices stood. This plaque commemorates the 1921 New Westminster teacher strike and acknowledges its important role in the ongoing struggle for fairness and full bargaining rights. It is one of five local events recognized around the province as contributing to the eventual gaining of full bargaining rights in 1987–88.

Mentoring:
Working together, learning forward

"Watch carefully, the magic that occurs,
when you give a person just enough comfort to be themselves."
– Harper Lee

By Barb Wilson, Jennifer MacDonald, and Tamara Sengotta, co-chairs of Teacher Mentors of BC

THIS PROFESSION IS HARD; we are charged with the intellectual and emotional well-being of our students while also balancing parent involvement, administrator's expectations, professional relationships, and district initiatives. We do most of our learning on the job, but it can be a lot less overwhelming with someone by your side. It takes a community to support and encourage new colleagues.

Teachers are natural helpers. Classroom teachers often share resources and unit plans, and support teachers may share sage words of advice after a long day. These moments of kindness play an important role in creating communities of support for new- to-role and early career teachers. Mentoring is an extension of this support network and offers long-term, personalized, learning-focused opportunities.

Most often, teachers who become mentors were mentored themselves. Mentors are colleagues wanting to give back. They are collaborative partners who do not create evaluations or report back to anyone. In fact, it would be against our Code of Ethics to do so. Mentors are great listeners, colleagues to debrief with after a rough day or celebrate with after a great day.

Everyone has their own passions, values, and strengths that they bring to teaching. In mentoring, time is initially spent getting to know one another, finding ways to trust and be vulnerable together so that learning and growth can happen. The relationship facilitates listening, questioning, and talking through problems that arise. Mentors attend specialized professional learning opportunities to establish the skills needed to facilitate learning forward conversations. These conversations can be reflective and involve planning or problem-solving depending on the needs of the new teacher in the moment. Mentoring skills ensure a new-to-role teacher is feeling supported, challenged, and connected to their professional vision.

Engaging in mentoring can be a lifelong pursuit. Mentors are helpful when you engage in something new, whether that be taking on a new grade, leaning into teacher leadership, or learning the art of facilitation. Connecting with a mentor who has lived experiences and strong communication skills can help a new-to-role teacher build confidence and contribute to improved student learning. Mentoring is synonymous with lifelong learning.

Left: Teresa O'Sullivan and Corinna Fair work together on a mentee needs assessment and mentoring plan at the Whistler Mentorship Retreat.
Opposite: Jeremy Wiebe and Tawnie Hildebrandt collaborate on strategies to actively engage students in their learning during the Whistler Mentorship Retreat. Photos provided by Barb Wilson.

A NEW TEACHER'S JOURNEY

My journey as a teacher started when I was a child. I would line up my stuffed animals and teach them for hours at a time. My mom was my biggest supporter, helping me set up my makeshift classroom and praising my lessons. As I worked toward my goal of being a teacher, the stuffies came to life as students, and my mom's presence was replaced by an extraordinary school associate who allowed me to learn in his classroom. His support and tutelage helped me navigate curriculum, classroom behaviour, and many other aspects of being a student teacher.

The journey suddenly reached warp speed as I received my first classroom assignment. All at once the "stuffies" weren't co-operating, the curriculum was a blur, and I wasn't sure the principal would appreciate me phoning my mom during class time.

After some deep breaths and tears of joy and trepidation, I contacted the district mentorship program. I was paired with an amazing mentor who guided me through my wonderings, listened to my ideas, collaborated with me on lessons, extended my thinking, and helped me formulate who I wanted to be as a teacher. Her thoughtful questioning enabled me to be more intentional about my instruction. She was supportive, even when asking me hard questions. She allowed me to fail forward and encouraged reflection rather than giving correction. She didn't just share resources—she supported my growth in understanding the why behind the how.

This year I have made a significant change in grade levels and have asked to work with someone else who can help me navigate the different curriculum, but my first mentor will always be in my life. I call my mentors during the work week; I call my mom on the weekend.

A MENTOR'S JOURNEY

When I was first approached to be a mentor to an early career teacher, I was hesitant. I'd been teaching for a number of years and felt reasonably comfortable with what I was doing in my classroom, but was I comfortable enough to mentor someone who was new to the profession? I took a leap of faith and decided to give it a try. Mentoring turned out to be an amazing experience. Through working together, my mentee and I developed a close relationship. We engaged in deep and provocative conversations, we planned units and co-taught lessons together, we watched each other teach, we laughed, we cried, and we had fun. We learned so much from each other. Mentoring afforded me so many benefits, and I think one of the biggest was that it forced me to closely examine my own practice. While working with a mentee, I had to reflect on why I did what I did, and that has made me a better teacher. I learned a lot from my mentoring interactions. Being exposed to their new ideas has enriched my practice too.

CONNECT WITH A MENTOR IF YOU WANT TO:

- ✓ increase your confidence.
- ✓ improve student learning.
- ✓ become an empowered decision-maker.
- ✓ develop better ways of communicating with students, families, and colleagues.
- ✓ learn from the experiences of others.
- ✓ develop strategies for problem-solving.

BECOME A MENTOR IF YOU HAVE A:

- ✓ compassionate lens and a joyful heart.
- ✓ desire to help others and give back.
- ✓ willingness to be open to other perspectives and engage in new learning.
- ✓ desire to learn deeper communication skills (listening, questioning, pausing, paraphrasing).
- ✓ capacity to invest your time in helping others.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT MENTOR LEARNING

- ✓ *Mentoring Matters*, by Laura Lipton, Bruce Wellman, and Carrlette Humbard
- ✓ *The Art of Coaching*, by Elena Aguilar
- ✓ *Cognitive Coaching*, by Arthur Costa and Robert Garmston
- ✓ *Better Conversations*, by Ted Knight
- ✓ *The Coaching Habit*, by Michael Bungay Stanier
- ✓ Mentoring Minutes, a video series that takes you through the skill set of effective mentoring. Each video is two to four minutes long. Follow the Mentoring Minutes YouTube channel: *www.youtube.com/channel/UCmao_iDJ5FMKKbXA8OSq8hQ*

MORE INFORMATION

Are you interested in or are you currently running a mentoring program in your district? Then you are invited to contact the Teacher Mentors of BC (TMBC). We are a group of educators who meet regularly to share our journeys of mentorship and collaborate on plans for supporting early career teachers. Email *teachermentorsbc@gmail.com* for more information.

Diversity audits in library learning commons: Equity in action

"Libraries need to speak the truth so hard it hurts."
– Chief Stacey Laforme, Ontario Library Association Super Conference, Toronto, January 2020

iStock.com/clu

By Rebeca Rubio, co-ordinator for libraries and information services, and **Leanne McColl,** teacher consultant, Richmond

WE ARE IN A TIME of social revolution. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in addition to the Pride, Black Lives Matter, and Me Too movements, have demanded that we collectively examine our understandings of equity and discrimination. The demands by these movements are necessary, and responses to these demands are long overdue.

Schools, like other institutions, are complicit in systemic discrimination and are part of a system that needs examination. Equally, school library learning commons (LLCs) are structures within this system. They can be fierce allies who commit to equity and inclusion in their practice, collections, and programming. So, as teacher-librarians, it is time for us to ask ourselves some hard questions: Which aspects of our practice have we failed to examine lately? Which voices, histories, stories and perspectives have we amplified in our collections, and which ones have been silenced or excluded?

One way to actively answer these questions is to launch an LLC diversity audit. LLCs have a duty to ensure that all patrons have access to high-interest, high-quality books that are representative of their lives and the lives of those who make up their communities. A diversity audit is a thorough review or inventory of items in the LLC, with the goal of determining exactly how diverse the collection is.

A diversity audit can be summarized as four key steps: taking a random sampling of the collection, tracking it against diversity markers, generating data, and then using the data to inform future acquisitions and directions. However, it is much more complex than these simple steps. It is a rich journey of professional development that addresses our implied biases. It also tackles a critical question: to what extent is the LLC collection representative of the school, the community, and even the world?

Secondary teacher-librarians in Richmond are currently immersed in a diversity audit. Our journey began in September as we unpacked concepts of identity, positionality, privilege, racism, systemic discrimination, diversity, equity, and intersectionality.

Considering our desire to expose underrepresented voices, we set out to establish categories of self-identification, also called "diversity markers." In setting those, we grappled with big ideas: How do we define race? What is decolonization? What is gender? What are our understandings of sexual orientation and gender identity? How do we define "ability" and "disability," "visible" or "invisible"? How do we decide which groups are underrepresented or marginalized?

We settled on markers of race, gender, ability, and sexual orientation and gender identity. We also included Muslim voices, as a response to increasing Islamophobia in Canada. Finally, we included "Own Voices" as a marker, in a deliberate attempt to honour authors authentically writing about their own experiences, as opposed to having others appropriate their voices. We then pulled a random sampling of our young adult fiction and started tracking it against these selected markers.

Our next step will be to analyze our data and then use it to inform our practice and update our collections. Whose voices, histories, worldviews, and perspectives have we neglected? The diversity audit will be followed by advocacy, applying pressure on publishing companies to invest more in diverse literature. We will continue to amplify the voices that have not had equitable space on our shelves, in our buildings, or in our classroom conversations.

Rabia Khokhar, a teacher-librarian from Toronto, noted, "Equity is not something we do every once in a while, but rather the lens through which we intentionally plan and carry out our vision for the school library."

Equity is something we can champion all the time: refusing silence, committing to learning and unlearning, and understanding that this important work begins with an examination of the self. An LLC diversity audit is important work—it is equity in action.

MORE INFORMATION

The BC Teacher-Librarians' Association hosted a webinar on LLC diversity audits in January 2021; it is available at *bctla.ca*.

Outrageous homework assignment sparks anger, then reflection

By Sunjum Jhaj, Editor, *Teacher* magazine

This has been a humbling experience for all of us. As a school district, we will redouble our efforts to interrupt and disrupt racism and all forms of discrimination and remain committed to revealing and correcting miseducation related to Indigenous Peoples. We will work with Indigenous community Elders to move forward together in a manner that honours each of our children and our common humanity. – Dr. Kevin Godden, Superintendent of Schools, Abbotsford

IN LATE NOVEMBER, an Indigenous mother from Abbotsford shared a TikTok video documenting her heartbreak and outrage at a school assignment her daughter brought home. The Grade 6 student was asked to list five or more positive stories about residential schools. This assignment, like so much conventional history, drew on colonial narratives that intentionally omit Indigenous perspectives. It is a denial of the central role residential schools played in Canada's cultural genocide against Indigenous Peoples. Unfortunately, this assignment was not an isolated incident.

Our schools mirror the racism that exists in society. We've repeatedly called for Lynn Beyak's expulsion from Senate following her inappropriate comments about positive residential school experiences. This Abbotsford incident occurred just as law professor Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond released In Plain Sight, her searing report on the prevalence of anti-Indigenous racism in our healthcare system. We've also recently seen widespread police violence against the BIPOC community and learned of our government's failure to provide Indigenous people with the most basic of necessities: clean drinking water.

Several teachers and district leaders responded to the incident quickly and thoughtfully. They acknowledged the harm caused by this assignment, apologized, and, more importantly, discussed actions to prevent future incidents.

Jessica Richardson, a teacher with Abbotsford's Indigenous Education Department, noted, "My fear is that this incident will have teachers stepping back from the content to avoid falling into a similar circumstance. Instead, I hope to see teachers reaching out more and building capacity in this area."

There are several resources and professional development opportunities available for teachers to learn and commit to reconciliation. One of the most valuable resources for settler-teachers are colleagues in district Indigenous education departments.

"I value my relationships with my colleagues, and make sure they know the door in the Indigenous Room is always open should they ever have questions or apprehensions in confronting the topic of residential schools. My hope is that through these professional relationships our staff feel supported and well-informed to deliver content that will correct misinformation on the history of residential schools in Canada," said Taryn MacDonald, a teacher for Indigenous success in Abbotsford.

Janelle Dick, a teacher from Abbotsford's Indigenous Education Department, also highlighted the importance of collaborating with Indigenous people. In this way, "Indigenous education is being led by Indigenous people."

While collaboration is an important first step, it's essential to recognize that true reconciliation requires deep personal and professional learning, deconstructing stereotypes, and acknowledging privilege. For reconciliation to be meaningful, we must commit to understanding the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples and confronting our complicities in anti-Indigenous racism.

The BCTF offers several workshops to help teachers learn how they can participate in reconciliation and work toward antiracism. Some examples include the Gladys We Never Knew workshop and accompanying resource, and other workshops covering the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the Sixties Scoop, and antiracism. These and other professional learning modules are available on the BCTF website, under the Social Justice Programs and Workshops tab.

Schools have the power to create societal change by educating future generations. Through the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives across all grades and subject levels, we can work toward creating positive change. "We need to take every opportunity to learn, talk, and share. We need to be open to different perspectives that bring us closer to equity. We need to move forward in a restorative, healing way," shared Jessica.

Photo: The General Synod Archives, Anglican Church of Canada: Old Sun Indian Residential School, Gleichen, AB, 1945. P75-103 S7-184.

Reconciliation: A slow journey

By Shelley Balfour, Cranbrook District Teachers' Association president and *Teacher* Magazine Advisory Board member

AS A SETTLER in British Columbia, identifying the part I play in reconciliation has been a circuitous journey. I have known for a long time that things were unequal and dreadfully unfair, but I couldn't find my part in the work that needed to be done. Now, at 58 years old, I can say that I am working on acknowledging the past, making changes to be a better ally, and starting to help others see their part in the journey to reconciliation.

I lived most of my childhood in Kamloops. My family owned a trucking company that leased property "on the reserve." That was my first connection to those words.

Every day we drove past the beautiful setting of the Kamloops Indian Residential School. At the time, I didn't think it had anything to do with me. However, in 1977, the year the Kamloops Indian Residential School closed, a group of Indigenous students joined our junior high. Prior to this unexpected arrival, my school was a sea of white faces with very few people of colour, including the staff. We had an opportunity to welcome the survivors of the residential school into our classroom, school, and community, but my recollection is that we did not. As settler teenagers, we watched, we judged, but mostly, we ignored the new students. I don't recall the teachers making an effort to discuss the residential school system, although they must have known where the students had arrived from.

Several summers ago, while visiting the Human Rights Museum in Winnipeg, where an entire floor is dedicated to the history of the residential schools in Canada, I learned that the Kamloops residential school was one of the worst schools for abuse and neglect of students. In 2019, when I was home to attend the BCTF Summer Leadership Conference, I took a tour of the school for the first time. The main part of the building remains untouched. Even today, the sadness is palpable—I couldn't hear the tour guide's voice, I could only hear the tiny voices in the night. Those little voices I didn't hear as we drove past every day in my youth.

At age 20, I packed up my belongings to head north, with a "quick stop" in Lethbridge to visit relatives. I ended up staying. I found a job in a law firm and met my husband. I immediately noticed Lethbridge had a much more visible presence of Indigenous people and a more overtly racist tone to it. From my legal secretary's chair, I became very aware of the racist comments, the mistreatment of Indigenous people, and the inequity of the justice system. Thoughts were starting to percolate about what I could do to make a difference.

My husband graduated from the teaching program the summer we got married. His first teaching job was at Upper Hay River Day School (now Upper Hay River School) in Meander River, a tiny Dene Thá community in northern Alberta. I worked as the school secretary while he taught a class of eight students. For us this was a grand adventure, but for the folks who lived there it was a sad reality. The only buildings with electricity and running water were the school, the Catholic church, the Hudson's Bay trading post, and the teacherages we lived in. The rest of the village lived in darkness. The settlers received the luxuries, while the community members lived without. In winter, I often had a lineup at my door to fill water jugs or to do laundry. I had

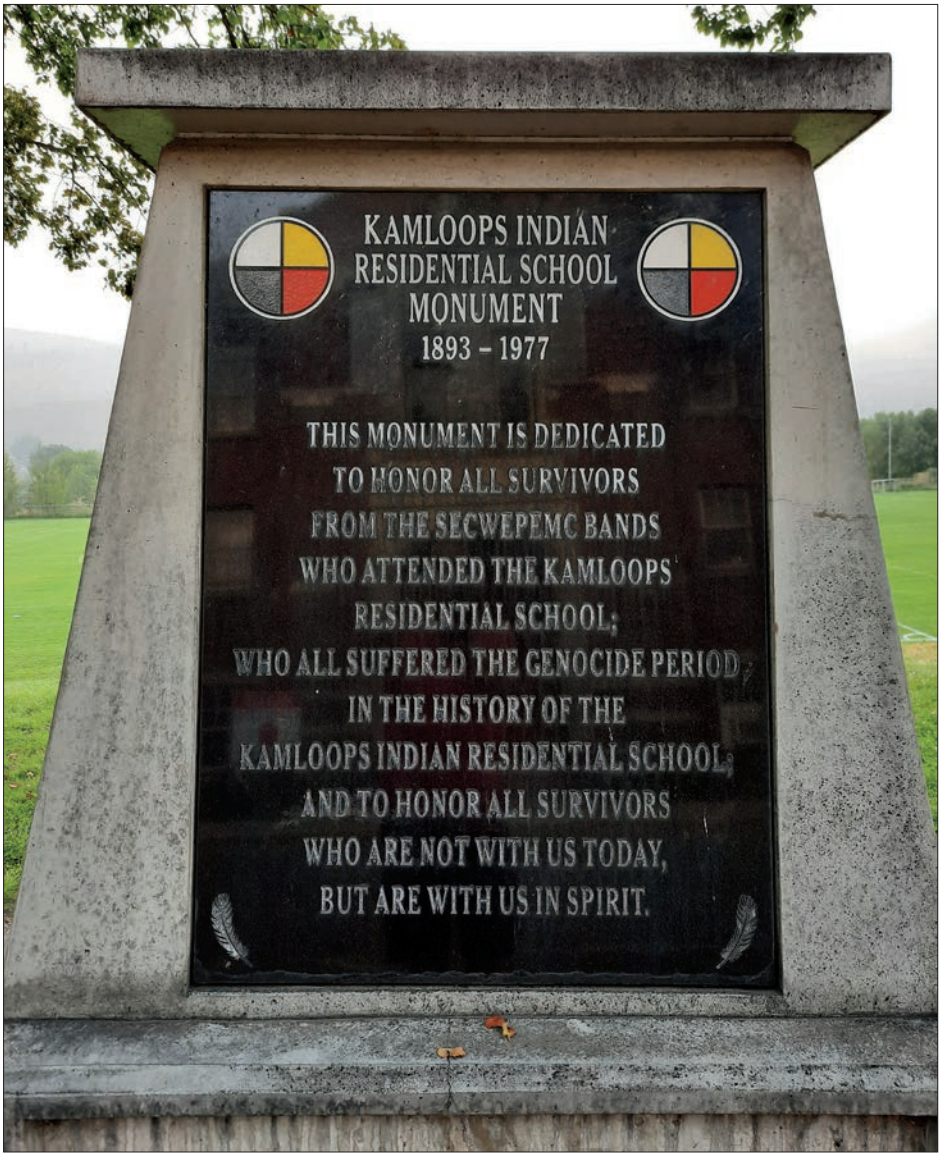
many cups of tea with friends while the washer did its work. It was during these laundry dates I learned that these women sitting in my living room were among the first to return from the residential school in Hay River after its closure in 1969. Their children were the first in generations to start at the "day" school in their own community. They told me stories of the heartbreak, the violence, and the difficult return to their homes, where they were strangers to their own families.

During our second year in Meander River, I went so far as to foster a young girl named Roberta. We took Roberta with us when we moved south to Dawson Creek at the end of that year with no formal agreement in place—we just took her. As we prepared to drive out of Meander River, Roberta stood in the back seat with silent tears and not uttering a word. Roberta stayed with us for almost two years. Her mom checked in periodically. I believed that I had a responsibility to change Roberta's life for the better. I had no experience as a parent and couldn't manage the behaviours. It took me two years to realize what she actually needed was her family, not another white settler here to save her. The village already had their share of that with the Hudson's Bay trading post, the Catholic church, and the school filled with white teachers. I reached out to Roberta's mom and she arrived a month later by Greyhound bus to pick her up. I will never forget Roberta staring out the window of the bus, tears rolling down her face again as the bus pulled away, my husband and I crying on the dock. A regret I still live with.

A further move south, brought us to Cranbrook in 1995. I discovered the St. Eugene Mission Residential School during a drive to explore our new surroundings. It was a heartbreaking scene of broken windows, neglect, and sadness nestled amongst the beautiful Rockies. In 1970 it closed and sat empty until Chief Sophie Pierre and her council had to make a decision. They could tear the building down to rid the community of the sorrow, or they could heed the words of Elder Mary Paul: "Since it was within the St. Eugene Mission school that the culture of the Kootenay Indian was taken away, it should be within that building that it is returned." Mary Paul knew that to destroy the building would not destroy the memories. The year 2020 marked the 20th anniversary of the opening of the very successful and beautiful St. Eugene Mission and Golf Course.

For my Masters' degree, I did an appreciative inquiry on the transformation of St. Eugene Mission Residential School. I was struck by the words I remembered of Mary Paul and used them as the basis of the paper. Sifting through the many documents on Canada's residential schools, the stories of survivors, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and reading the words of Chief Sophie Pierre, I realized my place as a settler on this land is a privilege, and I began to understand that the only way for the healing to begin, for settlers and Indigenous Peoples, is for people like me to commit to acknowledging past crimes and to work tirelessly to make sure we don't assimilate, but celebrate what we all bring to the world. I have some reconciliation of my own to do.

Opposite: ǂkamnin'tik (The Children) sculpture by Cameron Douglas honours all students of St. Eugene Mission Residential School.
Below: Monument outside the Kamloops Indian Residential School. Photo courtesy of Ken Favrholdt.



A journey with the Project of Heart Canoe

By Rick Joe, teacher, Chilliwack

THE FIRST TIME I saw the Project of Heart Canoe was at a Truth and Reconciliation Commission event in September 2013. I am a canoe puller and have a high regard for canoes. I knew immediately that I wanted to participate in this initiative. At that time, I didn't know much about the canoe. It wasn't until I joined the BCTF Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee that I learned of the canoe's history and travels across the province.

The canoe was carved by Derrick George, a Tsleil-Waututh carver, and his three sons. Una Ann Moyer, a Tahltan artist, took on the task of embellishing the canoe. She used tiles created by students from across the province. Each tile is a witness piece, representing something meaningful from one person's journey of learning about residential schools.

In June, I travelled to Port Alberni to pick up the canoe and bring it to Chilliwack, where I teach. In Port Alberni, Ahousaht Elder Tim Sutherland blessed the canoe and sang a travelling song for a safe journey.

Currently, the canoe, along with the Speaking to Memory exhibit, is housed by Stó:lō Nation Research and Resource Development in Chilliwack. The Speaking to Memory exhibit is a collection of documents that share stories of residential school survivors who attended St. Michael's Indian Residential School in Alert Bay.

When the canoe first arrived, we hosted a traditional Stó:lō brushing off ceremony. The canoe does important work by providing space and time for us to learn about residential schools. As people pass through and participate in this project, they share their emotions and energy with the canoe. By brushing off the canoe, we cleanse the energy and start fresh.

I am St'at'mic from the Lil'wat Nation and was honoured to be involved in the brushing off ceremony, but knew it was only appropriate for a Stó:lō person to perform the ceremony. Previous Lieutenant Governor Steven Point completed the ceremony.

The Stó:lō Nation Research and Resource Development has an education longhouse with enough space for a class to sit with and learn from the canoe together. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has limited opportunities for classes to interact

with the canoe. A group of Chilliwack teachers, including myself, were accepted into the BCTF Teacher Inquiry Project and will investigate how to create virtual learning opportunities involving the canoe as part of our inquiry.

Chilliwack is also hosting the Light Box as part of our Project of Heart exhibit. The Light Box is housed in the Chilliwack Museum. The Light Box was created by the Comox Valley School District's Aboriginal Education Department. It has a stained-glass top with the image of the canoe. When you plug it in, the box lights up and the canoe glows.

The Light Box is a legacy project. Each local that hosts the canoe creates a legacy project, so that the learning can continue even after the canoe moves on to another local. Port Alberni created a resource bank filled with units and lesson plans as their legacy project. They have offered to share this legacy project with anyone who wants to host the canoe.

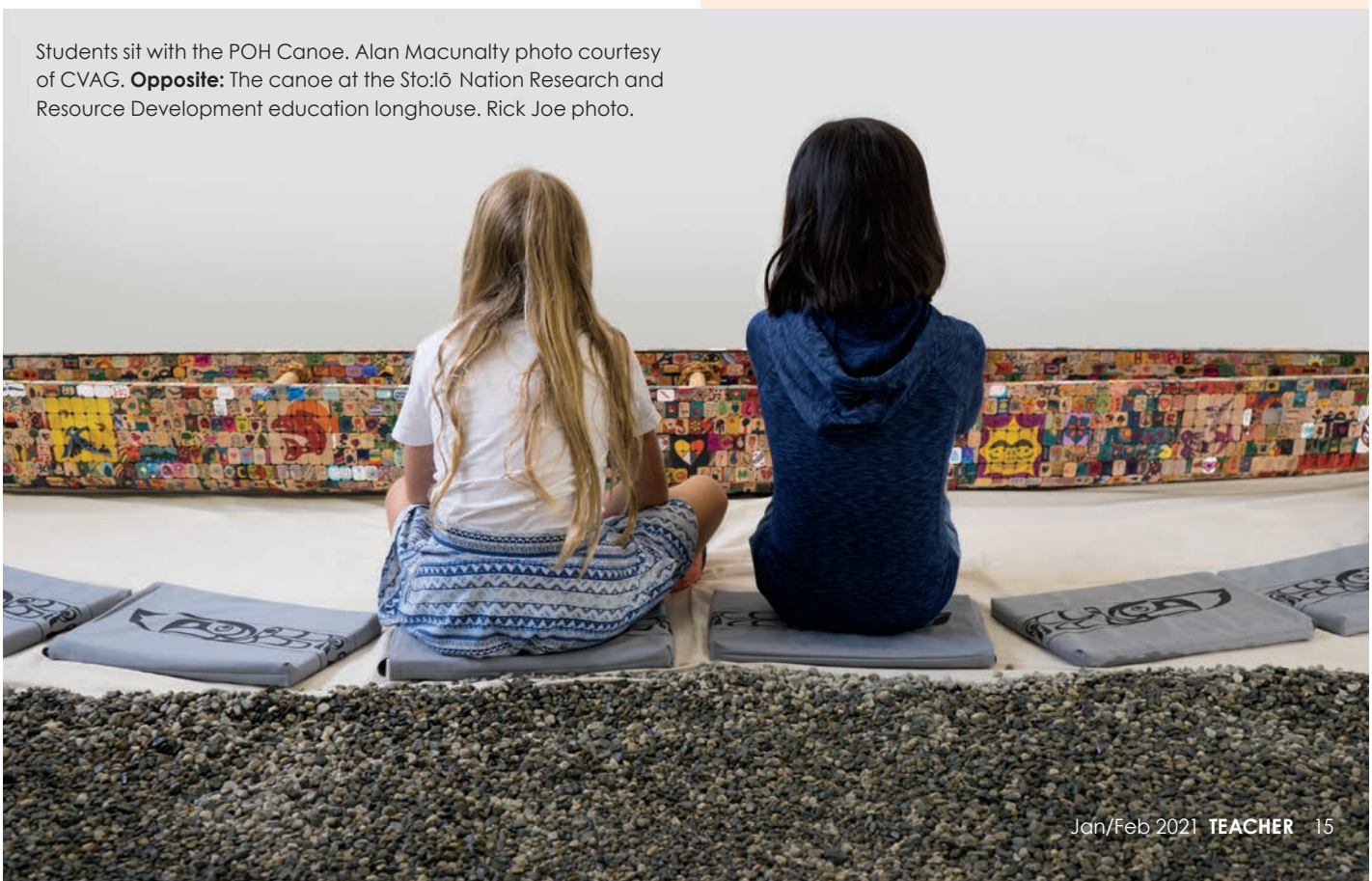
The Project of Heart Canoe has toured the province, visiting different locals and creating lasting and dynamic relationships. The canoe gives us an opportunity to take time to learn about residential schools. It brings history into the present and helps us understand that residential schools are not simply something from the past. Together, Chilliwack teachers and students will be working on a legacy project from our time with the canoe. It is my hope that we will use this opportunity to honour the students who attended residential schools and create a lasting legacy in our local before the canoe continues its journey to spread its teachings in another local.

The Light Box, created by the Comox Valley Aboriginal Education Department as a Project of Heart Canoe legacy project. Alan Macunalty photo courtesy of Comox Valley Art Gallery (CVAG).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my wife, Peggy Janicki, and our friend, Lillian Morton, for their help getting the canoe to Chilliwack. The work of the Aboriginal Education Departments from Comox Valley and Port Alberni is very much appreciated. Each local, and each person involved in this project, has taken care of the canoe in a good way. My hope is that every local will have a chance to host and learn from the Project of Heart Canoe.

Students sit with the POH Canoe. Alan Macunalty photo courtesy of CVAG. **Opposite:** The canoe at the Sto:lō Nation Research and Resource Development education longhouse. Rick Joe photo.



Re-envisioning classroom management: There is no room for rewards in the 21st century classroom

iStock.com/Daisy-Daisy

By Ryleigh Jacobs, teacher on educational leave, Chilliwack

PICTURE A BEAUTIFUL, bright middle school classroom, one that screams Pinterest on every bulletin board. Suddenly, a 12-year-old boy stands up mid-lesson and starts twerking while obnoxiously singing "Earthworm Sally." His classmates aren't sure how to react. Some laugh, some roll their eyes, while others look to the mortified first-year teacher frozen at the front of the classroom.

The naïve and overwhelmed first-year teacher in this scenario (yours truly) decided she was well past punitive solutions like detention. While diffusing the situation as best I could, I made a mental note to implement a positive behaviour rewards system as soon as possible. My guess is, we have all struggled with management issues and find ourselves somewhere on the continuum between punishment and rewards. Unfortunately, these two staples of classroom management are two sides of the same coin. While we have long touted that punishment is dismayingly ineffective at promoting the skills required of 21st century citizens, I believe it is time we realize the same about rewards.

When it comes to classroom management, it may seem like rewards do the trick by incentivizing students to effectively conform to expectations. Unfortunately, this is akin to slapping a Band-Aid on a wart: a short-term fix. Rewards erroneously shortcut the essential process of cultivating values in our students that can only be done from the inside out.

Research initiated by Alfie Kohn[1] reveals that rewards are ineffective: people tend to revert to their default behaviour once reward systems are removed. Even worse, rewards tend to undermine the very thing we strive to promote as educators: instead of motivating students to learn, rewards motivate students to get more rewards. If the goal in our classrooms is to create effective communicators, critical-thinkers, and problem-solvers who care about the well-being of others, then a prerequisite is the removal of rewards.

I am not advocating for anarchy, nor am I intending to leave you in the dark, stifled by classroom management hopelessness. I am, however, advocating for something that might seem messy in the interim but is nevertheless holistic and emblematic of 21st century learning. One such avenue to achieve this is restorative practices.

Restorative practices is a relational approach to learning that aims to establish an inclusive, safe, respectful, and responsible classroom environment. As an alternative to traditional discipline, restorative practices invite students to consider their role within a community, encourage self-regulation, and teach healthy conflict resolution through structured time and activities. Simply put, it is a way of being and learning with others that closely reflects the First Nations principles in our reformed BC curriculum.

When we ditch the rewards and adopt restorative practices, we are forced to examine the social dynamics of our classroom and grow together. Living in a community is messy, and our students deserve to not only know this, but be equipped to deal with it too. In leveraging the mechanisms for social engagement rather than social control, we can offer the space and time for students to develop their potential and recognize their role in a dynamic community where belonging is not contingent on conformity.

Rewards demand that our students quantify each experience as they ask the question, "What will I get if I do this?" Restorative practices, on the other hand, invite our students to wrestle with the important question, "Who do I want to be?" in a way that celebrates, values, and challenges them within a safe community.

One leader in actualizing communities of trust, compassion and awareness in BC classrooms is the North Shore Restorative Justice Project (*www.nsrj.ca/programs/schools-initiative*). In providing a framework to build community and restore broken relationships, they effectively help all students to grow in a way that beautifully aligns with our BC core competencies of personal awareness, social responsibility, and communication.

Now picture a young girl stepping off the bus, angry and desiring destruction. During morning circle time, she shares about hardships no Grade 6 student should ever face. It took five months to get to that point of sharing: five months of vulgar language and mild violence toward myself and peers. Instead of shoving her peers in the halls, her go-to coping mechanism, she learned to regulate her emotions in the presence of her peers who had grown to respect her through restorative practices.

As forward-thinking educators, we are obliged to ask ourselves the following: how can we cultivate autonomous, critical-thinking learners if we continually insist that students act in prescribed ways based on reward systems? As such, I invite you to abandon the status-quo of rewards, and recognize that your true power lies not in student compliance but in empowerment of all students through restorative practices.

1 Kohn, A. (1993). Punished by rewards: The trouble with gold stars, incentive plans, A's, praise, and other bribes. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Self-directed professional development

By Robyn Ladner, teacher and BCTF Professional Issues Advisory Committee chairperson, Vernon

TEACHERS, like students, have different learning styles and needs. Our professional development (PD) activities should reflect this. Research tells us that the most effective PD occurs when teachers are in control of their own learning. The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted how teachers engage in PD opportunities. Time together in-person at conferences or in collaboration isn't possible. Webinars and online conferences are often our only choices on PD days. Many teachers, weary of this format, are turning to self-directed PD as an option of supporting their growth. But where do you start and how can you move forward?

Choices for self-directed PD should be made carefully. A starting point is reflecting on your practice and teaching needs. What are you interested in improving or knowing more about? What additions and improvements to your professional repertoire would best support the needs of your students? What parts of your teaching practice do you want to strengthen?

You can use such guiding questions to create a set of goals or ideas that can be referred to when looking for PD opportunities. Themes and areas of interest begin to reveal themselves and can guide you as you search for and browse learning experiences that may fit your needs.

Self-directed PD can be transformational. It is a method in which teachers are truly in control of their learning experiences, in their own time, and under their own conditions.

THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LENS

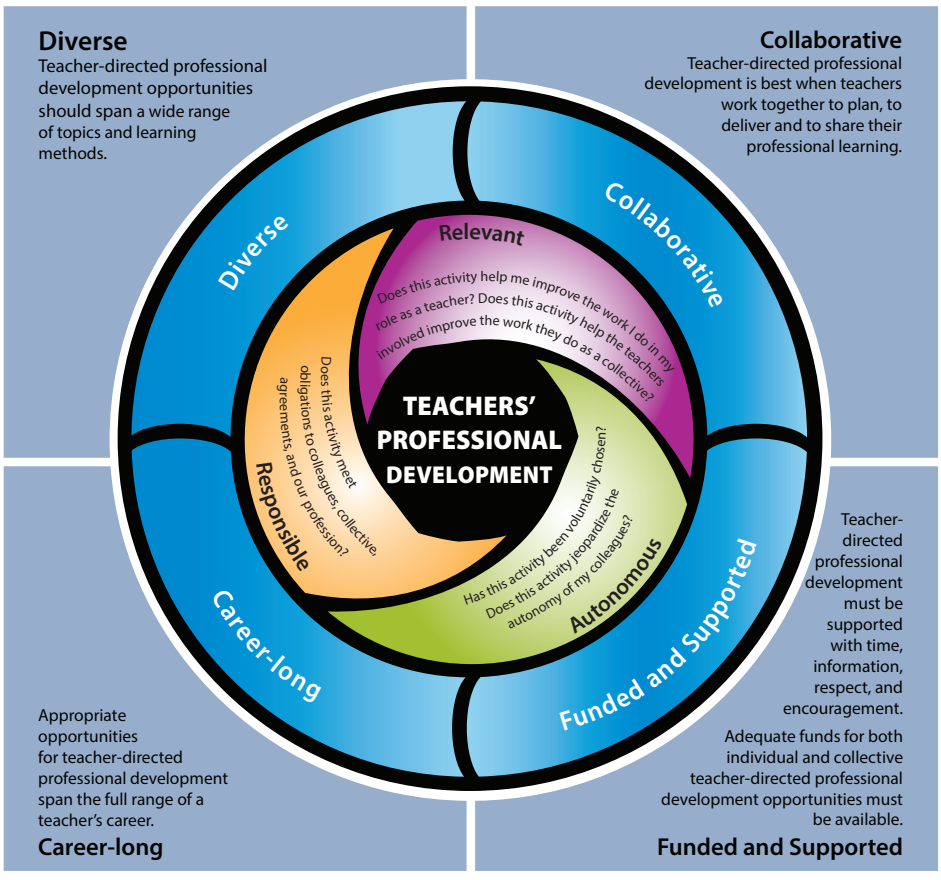
At the centre of the lens are teachers and their learning, both as a collective and as individuals. The term "teachers' professional development" is used to highlight its use both in thinking about individual PD and PD as a collective endeavor.

The Inner Ring: Key criteria

The inner ring consists of three factors that are necessary for an activity to be considered professional development. If any of the three are not present, then the activity should not be seen as professional development.

The Outer Ring: Necessary factors

The factors in the outer ring are critical to the success of teacher-directed professional development as a collective endeavor. In turn, this collective work provides the necessary conditions for all teachers to be able to create their own rich tapestries of appropriate professional learning.



Some options to consider when creating your self-directed PD plan:

- Read educational journals, books, or articles.
- Engage in a teacher inquiry project or form a teacher research group.
- Conduct online research of a professional topic of interest.
- Watch professional videos online.
- Develop and/or facilitate a workshop for colleagues.
- Develop and/or publish a professional resource/article.
- Research, plan, and pilot a new or innovative program for your classroom.
- Pilot or develop new materials for a specific subject area.
- Apply for grant programs that could benefit your class or school.
- Enrol in an online course or webinar.
- Observe another teacher.
- Go for a walk on the land to prepare for place-based learning opportunities.

Visit *bctf.ca/Self-directedPD.aspx* for additional information to help you plan your self-directed PD.

The Professional Development Lens

The PD Lens (left) is a tool for members to consider when making informed and autonomous professional development choices: *bctf.ca/PD-Lens*

Pandemic increases inequity for special education students and teachers

By Yuri Watanabe, learning services teacher, Richmond

iStock.com/fpm

"I USED TO LOVE MY JOB!" I hear that echoed more and more among my colleagues, as well as across social media. The past several months have been extremely taxing for many of us. For some non-enrolling teachers, our jobs have changed ominously. We do the best we can as an uneasy, disquieting anxiety swells beneath the surface.

The pandemic has exposed cracks in our social structures. In a diverse, pluralistic country, both the health and education systems are critical junctures where government policies and lived realities converge. Many of these cracks in our systems existed prior to the pandemic but were exacerbated by the crisis. The effects have been particularly significant for some of our must vulnerable children in special education, learning services, and English language learning (ELL) services.

When I first started teaching many years ago, there were three distinct roles within learning services, each with their area of expertise. Special education teachers worked with children with specific specialized needs; learning assistance teachers worked with children who required additional reinforcements or a different way of learning; and ELL teachers worked with students who, for the most part, may not have any learning difficulties, but were learning an additional language.

Through the years, these three roles were amalgamated into one position in some school districts. Now, we have a blended model of learning services where each resource/ELL teacher is responsible for the learning needs of children with special needs, learning differences, and ELL. While there may be benefits of incorporating these roles, there are also substantial drawbacks for some students and the educators working with them.

One area of concern is the issue of workload. Resource/ELL teachers often juggle cases, managing students with a very wide range of special needs who require specific supports, while trying to keep up with the latest strategies and research on how best to educate students with learning differences. At the same time, we try to stay on top of the newest methodologies on second and/or third language acquisition. We juggle these three areas while we strive to keep abreast of the changing and increasing amount of paperwork required.

Balancing the needs of all students I work with is not easy. To give an example, I remember a reading session with a student being interrupted because I needed to meet with specialists who supported a different student. In the midst of this meeting, one of my young students became overwhelmed and needed my attention. I wished I could have split into three different people so all my students could receive the care and attention they needed.

With the onset of the pandemic, ensuring all students have access to learning support has become increasingly difficult. In September, my large urban elementary school was divided into cohorts of three classes. As a resource/ELL teacher, I provide direct services to two classes while case managing the remaining class in my cohort. As a result, it is difficult to provide the same level of support to all three classes.

In addition, many resource/ELL teachers have had to reduce regular services to provide transitional learning opportunities, as well as being required to provide prep release time for classroom teachers in our cohort. The decrease of resource services is particularly concerning for students with learning differences. Being familiar with research concerning the importance of reaching particular literacy proficiency levels by the end of the primary years, I am concerned about the consequences for long-term learning that will result from taking time away from students. As in times prior to COVID-19, these students seem to go unseen.

I often feel guilty when I leave my students to struggle unsupported in the classroom while I go Zoom with my students who are learning from home. But when I see the warm faces of my online students, I know my support and encouragement are important in helping them get through what might be an otherwise lonely time.

In closing, I would like to focus on another fractured aspect of education that has come to light during these interesting times. Over the years, one important voice has been missing and/or overlooked when it comes to matters of policy and practice. That is the voice of teachers. Our stories of experiences with students hold important multifaceted glimpses of authentic contextualized possibilities. We need our stories heard. Your story as an educator is important and deserves to be heard. Our voices as a collective body of educators matter and need to be heard at every level where policies that affect our students' lives are made.

Improvisation and communication: Facilitating language skills

iStock.com/Daisy-Daisy

By Nicole Kornelson, speech language therapist, Port Alberni

IT'S NOT A COINCIDENCE that "no"and "uh-oh!" are some of the first words a child learns. As adults, we have many rules and ideas about what's right and wrong. We're also used to guiding children through this type of language and corrective learning. It's easy to get trapped in habits without realizing what those patterns create.

Often, when adults ask questions to younger learners, we don't provide the language we expect them to use in their responses. As a speech language therapist, I've learned that children will tell us far more about their strengths and abilities when we use statements to have a conversation, rather than focusing on an expected reply to a question. People are surprised when I don't ask about what's right in front of a student or use a standardized assessment, but instead head straight into something less tangible like, "Oh I love cats too, my cat's name is…". In giving statements, students aren't limited to one correct response. The focus is shared conversation, rather than providing answers for one-way communication.

Students often start our first session together with, "I can't say that sound" or, "It's too hard." I teach them it isn't about saying the sound, it's about playing with the idea of it. It's not about getting something right but about trying to see it, hear it, and think about it. We all need safe spaces where we can explore and try things, and this is why saying yes to someone's efforts matters more than their answer. We need to ensure students efforts will be met with a yes, regardless of their ability to be right.

In improv, wrong doesn't exist. The most important rule in improv is you can't say no to the ideas given by others. You say, "Yes, and... ". You build on ideas shared by peers, and there are no correct or incorrect ways to do so. Improv also avoids questions. The more questions you ask in improv scenes, the trickier and stickier it is to hold a conversation and build a world where characters can safely interact. No one wants an interrogation—it's stressful. Fewer questions allow for rich vocabulary to be spoken and learned. This safe, positive, turn-taking pattern creates an opportunity for students to speak up without worrying that their contribution won't come out as intended, will be incorrect, or will not be received well. Improv is a recipe for positive communication experiences.

Students giggle and sit up a little bit taller when they realize our conversation doesn't involve a correct answer; instead, it's about sharing ideas and exploring them together. We don't stop and start over when something goes wrong in improv. We dive in and embrace the imperfect surprises; it's healthier and more entertaining this way.

Here are two improv activities that can be used to teach language and communication skills in the classroom:

One-word story, suitable for Grades 3 and up

For this activity, you need a Word document projected on a screen so students can follow along. Feel free to use any familiar story structure symbols too. Each student takes a turn saying one word at a time. Their word must build off the word spoken by the previous student. The teacher types each word on the document as the class builds the story. You can't delete what is said. Type as quickly as students speak, errors included. You can encourage quicker turn-taking by setting a timer. The funny will come out under pressure. Afterward, discuss what was funny or difficult and why, rather than what went "wrong."

"Yes, let's!", suitable for Kindergarten and up

This game is great for students who need movement during transitions. Everyone gets their own space to stand and act out what is said. Students practise listening, taking turns, agreeing with one another, and following along with new action verbs or sequences. Anyone can start. All that's said is "Let's _____!" Everyone else then says, "Yes, lets!". That activity is then mimed out by everyone until a different suggestion is randomly shouted out. Students aren't typically picked or called on, which gives space to play and act out what's said, while building confidence to offer ideas when students feel ready. "Let's brush our teeth!" might lead to a classroom of wishy-washy noises or squeaks. "Let's bake a cake!" might involve seeing students stir invisible bowls or crack non-existent eggs. Coach as needed when new language and concepts come up.

Photo of Harry and Valerie Jerome courtesy of North Vancouver Museum & Archives 14861. Photo by the Vancouver Sun.

Is change in our future?

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."
– James Baldwin

By Valerie Jerome, retired teacher, Vancouver

ON MAY 31, 2020, millions of people around the world watched on their television screens as George Floyd was murdered by the people who were supposed to be protecting the lives of all citizens. The murder of a Black man at the hands of law enforcement was not unique. Nor was it the only such incident that month. Many people here in Canada took up the rallying cry, "Black Lives Matter," and poured into the streets to protest the experiences of Black and Indigenous people. Black and Indigenous people are 20 times more likely to be shot by police in Canada than are white people. If you are not a person of colour, you are privileged.

The protests bestirred a lot of hope in some people: hope that Canadians might actually address racism. But I have seen hope before. I was 19 when Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his "I Have A Dream" speech to millions who marched or watched on television, and I was filled with hope beyond imagining.

I felt great hope when Barack Obama was elected President of the United States in 2008. I still have the remnants of the campaign decal, HOPE, on my rear windshield. Within months of putting it on my car, it was defaced with black felt pen and half of it was ripped off. This vandalism happened right here in Vancouver.

Looking at what the last four years in America has wrought, you understand that my hope has been vanquished. We have been returned to the 1950s.

Every November since I retired from my 34 years of teaching in the Vancouver public school system, requests for Black History Month presentations appear in my inbox. Some come from community organizations, but most are from schools. I welcome these invitations because people of colour in Canada have been left out of history books, have been absent until recently in advertising, and for a very long time have played only servants and other diminished roles in film and television.

I have gone into countless classrooms with an array of photos and memorabilia to share my family's story. My maternal grandfather, John Armstrong Howard, was Canada's first Black Olympian in 1912 and suffered horrific racism. Known as Army Howard, he was Canada's 100m and 200m champion. He worked as a railway porter, as did my father.

From 1909 until the late 1950s, despite Canada's worldwide appeal for immigrants, only 100 people of African descent (no matter their country of origin) were allowed to immigrate to Canada. They were mostly men and accepted only into the field of portering on our national railways. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the Prime Minister who enacted this law, was determined to adhere to the policy to keep Canada white.

In these Black history talks, I share the story of my family's move to North Vancouver in 1951 and of my siblings' and my first day of school there. On that Tuesday morning after Labour Day, our feet never touched the school grounds, because we were turned back by pelting rocks hurled by children. These kids, with every racist slur imaginable, attempted to achieve what their parents' petition failed to do: keep the neighbourhood white.

All things about our schooling were white. In music classes we were made to sing racist Stephen Foster songs.

We lived for three years amongst hostile neighbours before we moved from that first home in North Vancouver. Most of them never uttered a word to us. The nine children of the family next door attacked us both verbally and physically on sight.

When a house fire from our sawdust furnace brought sirens on to our street at 2:00 a.m., the neighbours could be seen raising the blinds on their windows. They peered out at us, but none came out to offer a bed, or a place on a sofa, or even on the floor. Our pregnant mother and the four of us under the age of 12 went by cab to the Salvation Army Hall on Lonsdale and slept on chairs. Just as it had been on that first day of school, our advocate was away portering for the Canadian National Railway.

However, my story takes a happier turn when I continue my presentation about my late brother's mercurial rise in the world of athletics. Obviously bearing the genes of the grandfather we never met, my brother, Harry Jerome, set seven world sprint records. He was named BC's Athlete of the Century.

Harry and I joined a new track club in 1958 under the tutelage of our much beloved coach, John Minichiello. In our second year, we moved our practices to Brockton Oval in Stanley Park, and it was here that we experienced our greatest joy. We were judged not by the colour of our skin, but by the stopwatch and the measuring tape. Regardless of the weather, we were most happy in that place. The camaraderie, respect, and love easily overcame the fatigue, pain, and challenges of the workouts.

That July, following my 15th birthday and Harry's graduation from North Van High, we went to the Canadian Senior Championships. I won the 60m, 100m, the long jump, and came third in the high jump, while Harry won the 100m and 200m. We were selected to Canada's Pan American Games team, the first of three International Games for me and the first of eight for Harry.

Both Harry and I became teachers following the model of our coach. Although Harry later went on to work on behalf of youth at the government level, he fully enjoyed teaching at Richmond High and at Templeton High in Vancouver between 1964 and 1968. We wanted to make a difference in the lives of children. When we were students, there were only a few teachers and community leaders who confronted racist situations, and in so doing validated our worth.

Experiences of racism throughout my first year of teaching showed me nothing had changed since my own elementary school days. In 1964, I worked with a principal who entered my classroom before a field trip and said, "Give me that little darkie over there." He proceeded to strap the child as an example for kids who might misbehave while on the trip. In the closing days of the 20th century a principal, when informed at a staff meeting that a new little girl from Haiti was being called the N-word, responded, "Well, if she is being called the N-word, she probably deserved it."

Throughout my teaching career, I experienced and witnessed ongoing, deeply distressing racist incidents that were either ignored or blamed on the victim.

People liked to say, "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me," but they could not be more wrong. The ubiquitous decision-making mechanism used by adults as well as children, "eenie meenie minee moe," offended us constantly.

In 2020, I was heartsick to hear of the continued presence of racism in our schools. Recently, a distressed father of a Grade 1 girl told me she was being called the N-word. When he went to speak to the principal, the only comment he received was, "We didn't have any problems with racism at this school until you came."

Special events during Black History Month can bring awareness to classrooms and foster empathy, but it is immoral for educators to ignore the racism in our schools.

In the words of James Baldwin, "Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

WATCH Valerie Jerome's February 2020 presentation at the Vancouver Historical Society at *www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3nF1xqzho0*.

▲ Entrepreneur and civil rights activist Viola Desmond, 1945. Wanda and Joe Robson Collection. 16-84-30224. Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University.

◀ Barbara Howard, the first Black female sprinter to represent Canada, competed at the 1938 British Empire Games in Sydney, Australia (she holds a stuffed toy koala bear from a fan). She was also the first teacher of colour to be hired by the Vancouver School Board. City of Vancouver Archives, CVA 371-1643.

Black History Month and beyond: Sharing the untold stories of African descent history in Canada

By Raman Gill, teacher, Vancouver

AS BLACK HISTORY MONTH is approaching in February, I, like many teachers, am reflecting on how to celebrate the vast culture and contributions of people of African descent with my students. Preceded by Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday on January 20, Black History Month is a time to honour such brilliant leaders whose message of peace, equality, and solidarity still resonates in light of the present-day Black Lives Matter movement. The brutal murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor are tragic reminders that the present is a reflection of the past; colonial perceptions of people of African descent linger to this day, resulting in disproportionate arrests, harassment, and police violence toward Black individuals. Celebrating Black History Month and including African descent Canadian history within our social studies curriculum would enhance cross-cultural understanding as well as Black students' sense of identity and belonging in our schools.

I must admit that I was minimally aware of Black history in BC and Canada until I met Yasin Kiraga of the African Descent Society of BC. Two teacher colleagues and I had arranged a meeting with him in the fall of 2019 to discuss potential ideas for celebrating Black History Month in our schools. Born and raised in Uganda, Yasin arrived in Canada in 2009 and pursued a degree in political science and international relations at UBC. He currently leads walking tours through Strathcona and Hogan's Alley and organizes the yearly African Descent Festival. An urban historian, he is a storyteller who firmly believes that racial divides can be bridged through teaching history and sharing culture. In Yasin's words, "African descent history is Canadian history."

The arrival of the first Africans in Canada can be traced back to the 1600s. They were among millions of Africans brought to America via the transatlantic slave trade. Many had been sold to Canadians by American slave owners, while some, like Harriet Tubman, had escaped to Canada on their own. Their stories of strength, courage, and perseverance in the struggle for freedom are an integral part of Canadian heritage.

Although Canada played a significant role in providing freedom to many African Americans via the Underground Railroad, it is necessary to acknowledge our own history of race-based discrimination and human rights violations. It is a history that must be explored further and a story that must be told in our classrooms.

African Canadians' social, political, scientific, and cultural contributions have greatly helped to shape the country. Among prominent Black Canadians was Governor James Douglas who helped approximately 800 African Americans escape to Fort Victoria in 1858. Some of these pioneers settled in Salt Spring Island and downtown Vancouver by the late 1800s. Mifflin Gibbs was one of the individuals assisted by Sir James Douglas. He was a judge, banker, and activist for his community who became the first Black politician in BC in 1866. As an elected official, Mifflin Gibbs helped lead British Columbia into Confederation.

Barbara Howard, a prominent African Canadian woman, made history as the first Black female sprinter to represent Canada and competed at the 1938 British Empire Games in Sydney, Australia. She was also the first teacher of colour to be hired by the Vancouver School Board, and she went on to teach at Hastings, Henry Hudson, Strathcona, and Trafalgar elementary schools over a 40-year period. A more well-known African Canadian was Viola Desmond, a successful businesswoman and civil rights activist from Nova Scotia. Forcibly removed from the whites-only section of a movie theatre in 1946, Desmond fought against segregation, inspiring the Canadian civil rights movement.

iStock.com/bulentgultek

As we continued to collaborate during the school year, Yasin shared his archive of black and white photographs of Hogan's Alley: the once vibrant, predominantly Black neighborhood bordering Strathcona. Dating back to the early 1900s, Hogan's Alley was located between Main Street and Jackson Avenue, extending to Union St. to the north and Prior St. to the south. The area has a special connection to the legendary Jimi Hendrix, who would visit his grandmother, Nora Hendrix, a resident of Hogan's Alley. The neighborhood was also the scene of many restaurants and businesses, not to mention bustling jazz clubs where Jimi Hendrix performed alongside the Crump Twins. Home to African Canadians who had their roots in California and Oklahoma, Hogan's Alley was the heart of Vancouver's Black community until the mid-1970s when, sadly, it was displaced by the construction of the Georgia viaduct.

These largely untold stories of people of African descent are embedded within both our local and national history. The struggles of African Canadians have resulted from the massive displacement and centuries of institutional racism that still persists, as evidenced by Yasin's recent eviction from his Hogan's Alley office. But like his predecessors, he is incredibly resilient—determined to advocate for his community, especially for Black youth, who frequently face racism and micro-aggressions, both at school and online.

During the past year, Yasin has shared his knowledge of African descent history with students and teachers in many Vancouver schools. With the direction and guidance of the Vancouver School Board, Yasin and I, in collaboration with Professor Larry Davis, compiled this valuable knowledge into an African Descent History in BC course. Designed for Grade 12 students, it will be offered in Vancouver secondary schools as of September 2021. The course curriculum and resources will also be available to other school districts in the province. The intent of this year-long course is to provide an opportunity for students and teachers to explore African descent history beyond Black History Month. According to Yasin, "This course will highlight the missing pages of Black history in BC," and empower Black students, while instilling a sense of pride in their heritage. It can also facilitate cross-cultural understanding and allyship within our diverse student community. As educators, we are central in changing the present by teaching about the past.

El Salvadoran teachers work to help students and families cope with the pandemic

By Wendy Santizo, Education Program Director, CoDev Canada, and **Steve Stewart,** Executive Director, CoDev Canada

FOR OVER 20 YEARS NOW, the BCTF has supported Central American teachers' organizations to develop resources that promote equality, women's rights, and an inclusive and democratic society.

The program Non-Sexist and Inclusive Pedagogy (NSIP) was first developed by the women's secretary of the Costa Rican teachers' union. NSIP encourages the analysis of gender inequity, exclusion, and issues of justice through teacher training and classroom resources.

CoDevelopment Canada, a Vancouver-based NGO that manages many BCTF-supported projects with Latin American teachers, saw the potential in NSIP and assisted Costa Rican teachers to train their colleagues in neighbouring countries to promote the approach. The BCTF has contributed to this effort, sending facilitators to support training. Over time, NSIP expanded its reach to include several Central American countries.

When the pandemic hit, it was clear that existing social and economic inequalities would only be exacerbated. El Salvadoran teachers participating in the NSIP program quickly changed the focus of their work to help students and families cope with the pandemic.

The NSIP program co-ordinators in El Salvador organized focus group discussions with teachers to learn how communities had been affected by the pandemic and what supports were needed. Teachers shared that food insecurity had increased, families were struggling to access clean water for drinking and washing hands, many parents experienced job loss because their work could not be done remotely, and limited access to internet made distance education inaccessible to most teachers and students.

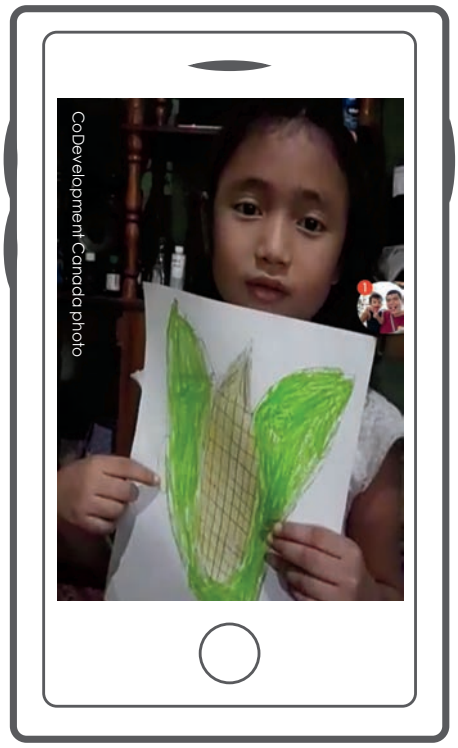
Internet and technology have become integral to adapting teaching, learning, and working for pandemic protocols. In El Salvador, where less than 30% of the population has access to internet and only 18% of people have subscriptions to mobile broadband, the transition to remote learning was not easy.

Teachers used their creativity to work around the barriers they faced. Whatsapp has become a key vehicle for instruction and communication between teachers and students. Parents share their smart phones with their children so teachers can send assignments, lessons, and resources for learning from home.

Despite the creative efforts of teachers, many students still struggle to access remote learning opportunities. One teacher received a message from a student's father saying, "Please be patient with my daughter. I don't want her to fail the grade, but between buying data and buying food, I'd rather use the little money I have to put food on the table."

For families that do not have access to smart phones, teachers drop off learning materials. Schools and the teachers' association in El Salvador also deliver food hampers, information on COVID-19 and steps to reduce the risk of infection, and local victim services contact information for women and girls experiencing gender-based violence.

With the support of the BCTF, the Women's Secretariat of the National Association of Salvadoran Educators (ANDES) developed short stories and poems, with accompanying lesson and unit plans, to reflect the experiences of the education community during COVID-19. They created six characters representing different values and strengths: Marta represents self-confidence; Filipe represents empathy;



Jose is happiness; Sara for freedom; Ana for peace; and Fernando represents love. The stories, along with follow-up activities, are shared with families over Whatsapp.

This unit contributes to a sense of community and connection amongst students, their families, and teachers, enabling children to better understand the pandemic, overcome their fear, and take concrete measures to stay safe. The unit extends beyond academic learning to include opportunities for play and to build communities of care and support networks.

The pandemic and subsequent lock-down have exacerbated inequality and the vulnerability of Salvadoran public school children. With the support of the BCTF and their own teachers' association, ANDES 21 de Junio, Salvadoran teachers have extended a lifeline that breaks the isolation and connects students to their schools and to a sense of hope that they will come through these difficult times stronger and safer.

The end of snow days?

By Sunjum Jhaj, Editor, *Teacher* magazine

I HAVE FOND CHILDHOOD MEMORIES of waking up to see my neighbourhood blanketed with snow. On those frigid winter mornings, I would watch the local news with eager anticipation to see if my school was one of those closed for the day. These fortuitous breaks from daily routine were opportunities for play, sledding, and movie marathons.

With the rise of online learning, future generations may never experience the joy of a snow day. Districts across Canada and the United States are considering virtual learning as a means to continue classroom learning on inclement weather days, when students and teachers are not able to safely access school buildings.

Several provinces and states have been discussing the topic of virtual learning on snow days for quite some time. The pandemic, and the shift to online learning it required, caused district officials to revisit these discussions with new insights. Many districts have already made decisions to either transition to online learning or stand by the tradition of a snow day at home.

In BC, comparatively, there has been very little stir on the topic of snow days. This may be due in part to the fact that many areas in our province have significantly milder winters than other parts of the country. In the Lower Mainland, school closures are more often caused by ill-equipped responses to scant snow fall rather than significant snow accumulation. Nonetheless, when it's unsafe for students and staff to travel to school, should we give everyone a break for the day and cancel school, or transition to virtual learning from home?

Currently, inclement weather language in collective agreements and district policies varies widely across the province. In many districts, snow days don't always equate to closed schools. District-wide school closures for inclement weather do occasionally occur; however, the more common response in BC is to take an optional attendance approach for students. In inclement weather, buses may be cancelled, but schools remain open for students who can safely access the building. In such cases, teachers are expected to report to work. In some areas, such as Cariboo Chilcotin, teachers can report to alternate school sites if they cannot safely travel to their own school.

Virtual learning on inclement weather days could alleviate some of the stress and danger associated with commuting through snowy weather, but it is not an equitable solution for all. Murray Helmer, local president of the Cariboo Chilcotin Teachers' Association, noted, "The opportunity for members to remain safe in the confines of their homes and teach remotely on snow days would address safety concerns, but doesn't necessarily ensure contact with students who don't have access to the necessary technology or reliable internet."

Internet access can be a particularly severe problem in rural locals. Equity concerns such as these became evident early in the pandemic, when students and teachers suddenly shifted their classrooms online.

Many students may not be able to successfully access and complete virtual learning opportunities without support from adults. In this way, parent support may be an additional component that is necessary for many students. Teachers also know first-hand how difficult it can be to transition lessons designed for in-person learning to suddenly fit online instruction. The expectation to prepare a full day of virtual learning with little or no notice prior to a snow day raises additional workload concerns for teachers.

While virtual learning on snow days raises several concerns, an unplanned day of idleness at home is also not a perfect solution. I recognize the privilege I grew up with, where a cancelled day of school was an opportunity for fun, rather than a potentially dangerous situation. For children who rely on schools for meals, safety, and other supports, a missed day of school could mean hunger and significant stress. For many working parents, kids at home also means a missed day of work.

Even with the optional attendance model, where schools stay open but buses are cancelled, students who need to access supports provided by schools may miss out because they cannot safely access the building.

So, what is the best solution to solve our inclement weather woes? Each approach, whether school closure, virtual learning, or optional attendance, has its drawbacks. Although it appears there is no perfect solution, the conversations happening around the world about new approaches to snow days do make one thing clear: the adaptive responses to the pandemic will shape multiple aspects of our lives for years to come.

iStock.com/calvindexter

Education outside the classroom

By Ryan Barfoot, outdoor and ecological educator and EEPSA member-at-large, Powell River

EVERY DAY, teachers across BC are seeking ways to keep themselves and their students safe and healthy. This responsibility has become even more paramount during the pandemic. Our understanding of COVID-19 has evolved since the beginning of the pandemic, but the fact that transmission rates are significantly lower in outdoor environments continues to stand true. This, along with an emphasis on place-responsive education and the First People's Principles of Learning in the updated curriculum, detail some of the reasons why teachers are increasingly engaging students in education outside the classroom (EOTC).

While the increasing interest in EOTC is certainly a reason to celebrate, it's also a reason to exercise caution and have supports in place. The Environmental Educators' Provincial Specialist Association (EEPSA), in collaboration with the Outdoor Council of Canada and Classrooms to Communities BC, recently developed a Position Statement on Education Outside the Classroom. The position statement seeks to summarize our perspective on EOTC, while helping to legitimize it as an effective learning environment.

It may be helpful to review what we understand about education outside the classroom:

- Spending time outside is a part of our heritage and cultural identity.
- Being outside is beneficial to the social, emotional, and physical health of both teachers and students.
- Outdoor learning correlates with equitable and improved academic success.
- The outdoors can be an inspirational and transformative learning environment.
- Teaching is complex, and EOTC requires dynamic decision-making skills specific to each region.
- Teaching outdoors requires risk management that is appropriate, evidence-based, and reasonable.
- Place-based learning is best experienced outdoors.
- Misconceptions about perceived and actual risks create barriers for EOTC.
- Professional learning and mentorship build confidence and capacity at school, district, and provincial levels.

The position statement also includes clear recommendations the BC education system can use to support teachers in taking their classroom learning outside. This is particularly important in these times of COVID-19 when the outdoors may be our safest venue for learning. EEPSA developed the following recommendations for teachers, administrators, and the Ministry of Education:

- Consider a 60-minute minimum for daily instructional time outdoors as a provincial mandate. This time could be aligned with curricular content areas. Multiple K–12 resources exist to support EOTC for teachers across the curriculum.
- Maintain daily access to outdoor play and learning, despite inclement weather, including rain and snow.
- Designate and prioritize funding to develop outdoor learning spaces on school grounds.
- Include the experienced voices of practising teachers in EOTC policy decisions at both district and provincial levels.
- Provide professional learning, leadership, certification, and mentorship opportunities for both teachers and students to enhance access to outdoor play and learning during school hours.
- Follow appropriate risk management practices for outdoor learning within school yards and local communities.
- Support communities of practice that encourage time for reflective and emergent learning outdoors.
- Build partnerships with local First Nations and community organizations to inform practice, build capacity, and support change on a systems-based level.

> "Now I see the secret of making the best person: it is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth."
> – Walt Whitman

EEPSA is a key support for BC teachers who are looking to connect their students to outdoor, environmental, and place-based learning. In this pandemic, teachers are challenged to provide an educationally rich experience and to keep our schools and communities safe. Now is an opportune time to consider EOTC as a way to meet both objectives. The educational community would benefit from reduced barriers and strategic funding.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ryan Barfoot is a member-at-large with EEPSA and an outdoor and ecological educator in SD47 Powell River. He chairs the Position Statement on EOTC Committee and honours the work of Frances McCoubrey, Nick Townley, and Megan Zeni, along with the EEPSA Executive.

Columbia Basin Environmental Education Network photos

AN OUTDOOR LEARNING ALBUM...

Columbia Basin Environmental Education Network photo

Columbia Basin Environmental Education Network photo

"In the beginning, I would take my students out for one hour, once a week, but I committed to doing it for the entire year, regardless of the weather. The benefits I saw were immediate and measurable."

– Laura Jackman, Rossland

Laura Jackman photo

Ryan Barfoot photo

"EEPSA (eepsa.org) has local chapters of inspiring outdoor educators across the province that provide resources, offer professional development, and host those conferences that are so integral to changing practice." – Selina Metcalfe, Surrey

Also visit the Columbia Basin Environmental Education Network (cbeen.ca), the Kootenay-Boundary Environmental Education Initiative (kbee.ca/outside-learning-ideas and kbee.ca/tips-tricks), and the non-profit Outdoor Learning Store (outdoorlearning.store) for resources.

Opposite above and left; this page below and right: Jenna Jasek takes students into their outdoor classroom in SD 6 Rocky Mountain. **Opposite below right:** Laura Jackman's Grade 2 students love to get their hands dirty in the outdoor classroom at Rossland Summit School. **Above:** Leadership Ecology Adventure Program students heading back to the bus after a day rock climbing beside the Salish Sea. **Below right:** Kindergarten and Grade 1 students in the forest near Cultus Lake; an Aboriginal education assistant shares sxwoxwiy´ am: stories about making the world right through the power of transformation.

Columbia Basin Environmental Education Network photo

Columbia Basin Environmental Education Network photo

Donna Boucher photo


iStock.com/sources

Detours: Connecting classrooms and universities

By Dale Martelli, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Education, SFU; BCSSTA president; teacher; Vancouver

TEACHING IS NOT STAGNANT. It evolves and changes over time based on our collective understanding of how students learn. As a teacher, I often turn to my colleagues for ideas and opportunities to collaborate. I rarely looked to the world of academia for information on my professional practice. That is, until I started my graduate program in social studies education.

The research that comes from academia is often relevant for teachers but is difficult for teachers to access. Consequently, there is a gap between academia and classroom practice. Teachers do not regularly have the opportunity to read about new research, and researchers miss out on the valuable insight teachers can provide. Throughout my doctoral program, I have been working with teacher colleagues and the Faculty of Education at SFU to create connections between universities and school classrooms.

To facilitate conversations between teachers and academics, the BC Social Studies Teachers' Association (BCSSTA) created a peer-reviewed journal called *Detours: Social Science Education Research Journal*. The title came from my own research into the pedagogy of historical thinking in the classroom. Sometimes inquiry into practice or philosophy takes us down unexpected paths, thus *Detours*.

We are partnered with SFU's Department of Philosophy, SFU's Education Faculty, and the British Columbia Library Association. Our editorial board is composed of teachers and professors.

The journal is a space where academic researchers and teachers can share their knowledge and have conversations around theory and application in the field of education. Any social studies teacher or any social science researcher can submit articles. In our first issue we had three articles from teachers and two from academic researchers. A modest beginning but something I hope will grow. This issue will be followed by a conference in February. The conference will be a roundtable paper presentation by all five authors to promote discourse around the papers.

My hope for the journal is that it evolves as a peer-reviewed journal and as a space for connecting social sciences academia with teachers. I hope it also gives teachers who are pursuing graduate studies a space to publish their work and share ideas with colleagues and universities.

FROM THE CONTRIBUTORS

The stereotype of academics in their ivory tower isn't entirely without foundations, but the fact is that most researchers would like their work to be beneficial to society in a very concrete sense. Interacting more with K–12 teachers is a natural way to do so, but often it's hard to find access points. I think Detours *is a great initiative that will facilitate the sort of interaction we can benefit from.*
– Nicolas Fillion, professor, SFU Department of Philosophy

www.detoursjournal.org/index.php/detours

Detours *provided me the opportunity to reflect and share my thoughts about the Holocaust's historic and contemporary relevancy for high school classrooms. I strive to continuously grow as an educator, and Detours has provided an avenue in this pursuit. Detours most certainly challenged my thinking.*
– Graeme Stacey, teacher, Kelowna

Detours *gave me an opportunity to write about my passions. Since publishing my article, I have had scholars email me to have further discussions about my topic and how it connects to my students. It was a valuable professional development experience.*
– Tina Clarke, teacher, Kelowna


iStock.com/Mladen_Kostic

Online learning: An obstacle for many in adult education

By Kim Henneberry Glover and **Dale Hardy,** adult education teachers, Maple Ridge

THERE IS A PREVAILING MYTH that people today are tech savvy. However, being able to scroll Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter does not always translate to successful learning online. Adult education teachers are all too familiar with this: we have been using online learning to reach students long before the start of COVID-19. Some of our students can only access public education through online formats because of their work or family commitments; but, as we have always known, online learning is not for everyone.

This school year, because of COVID-19, our small school lost eight face-to-face classes and gained fifteen online classes. This proved to be a very difficult time for teachers in our school. Many have had their teaching time reduced, and, for others, the only way to maintain a full-time position was to move into online teaching. First-time online teachers are scrambling to navigate virtual instruction. It is not as simple as putting your course materials online.

We are also struggling to keep track of all students enrolled in online classes. Unfortunately, there is no class-size limit in digital learning adult education classes, so there are some teachers with a class load of 500-plus students. There are only so many hours in a day and finding a way to connect with each student to build a relationship and monitor progress has proven to be extremely difficult. Establishing rapport, which is so vital for students who have been out of school for some time, is often lost.

As difficult as this has been for teachers, their biggest concern is the impact on students. For students, the self-discipline required to go online and do assignments can be daunting. Students also miss the rich connections with their teachers and classmates and often find online learning isolating and discouraging. Online instructions can be difficult to decipher, and often students need personal support.

One of our students, who is representative of many, graduated in 2010 with Communications 12 as his Language Arts 12 requirement. This was not his choice, but at the age of 16 he deferred to an adult who felt English 12 would be too difficult for him. Seven years later, as an adult working full-time, he found himself in need of English 12 to enter a post-secondary program that will help him move out of a dead-end job. He registered for English 12 online feeling it offered more flexibility. Round one: he was not successful in completing more than 15% of the course. A year later he tried again. Sadly, round two was no better, and his frustration mounted as he missed another post-secondary enrollment deadline. Discouraged, he reached out to our counsellors who strongly suggested he try the face-to-face class. The additional support from teacher interaction was the missing piece. He is now in his second year of post-secondary studies. For adult education counsellors, this is an all too frequent scenario.

Besides grappling with the written online instructions, some students face a more difficult challenge: they lack the devices required to complete online learning courses. We have students who are only able to access and complete course work using their phones. Can you imagine writing a 500-word analytical essay or solving quadratic equations on your phone? We simply don't have the resources needed to provide devices for our students.

We hope for a return to normalcy in a post-COVID-19 world, but we are definitely worried. Our primary concern is that districts will be satisfied in maintaining the online-only model for adult education. Our lived experience over 20 years shows us that adult education teachers leaving or retiring are not being replaced, and their classes are moved online; districts appears to prefer this model. In-class adult students are funded significantly less than both under-19 students and online adult students. Hence, when budgets are tight, adult education face-to-face classes are an easy line item to cut. However, learning online can be the obstacle that keeps adults from improving their lives, which, in consequence, adversely affects them, their families, and our communities.

Unlearning biases: The work of generations

By Pinder Jhaj, teacher teaching on call, Burnaby

I DON'T REMEMBER what she said or what exactly it was that she did, but I do remember the way she made me feel. That's the thing with being left out or discriminated against, you can't always pinpoint the exact words or any particular moment, but you know it's there. You feel it.

Thirty-five years ago, I felt it from my Kindergarten teacher. She was a beautiful blond-haired lady, well dressed and soft-spoken. I'm pretty sure she was kind and loving too, because I saw the way she interacted with my peers, but she left me with a feeling of longing. A longing to be wanted. A longing to be accepted. In her presence, I never felt as though I was enough. She made me feel like I didn't belong. At five years old, I had no idea why I was treated differently. I didn't understand that the colour of my skin would leave me feeling isolated.

Needless to say, it was a lonely start to my education. At the end of the school year, my teacher told my mom I was too shy and wasn't ready for Grade 1. I failed Kindergarten. I was shy, and I was scared. Being the eldest child of young immigrant parents, English was still new and foreign to me, so perhaps there was some justification for failing me.

But, as I reflect on this experience as a teacher and a parent, I recognize the important role acceptance and kindness play in fostering learning. I think I could have thrived if given the chance, if given a bit of kindness and encouragement, if welcomed with acceptance, if, perhaps, my teacher could have reflected on her own biases. My elementary educational experience was shaped by my Kindergarten interactions. I carried those feelings of fear and isolation with me for many years. I was not a confident student and rarely participated in class, even when I was sure I had the right answer.

Sunjum Jhaj photo

▲ Pinder Jhaj with her sons. **Right:** Pinder's Kindergarten photo.

Fast forward to the fall of 2020 when I was naïve enough to believe that my boys, only five and seven years old, have yet to experience what it feels like to be left out because they look different. Surely things should be different now than in my time, when I was the only non-white child in my class. My eldest son's teacher stopped me at drop-off one morning and told me his peers were questioning why he wears "that" on his head. She invited me to come into his class and talk about the significance of his pugh (a Sikh turban). I happily agreed, but as I walked off racking my brain with all the ways I could present and all the things I could say, my heart also hurt a little at the realization that my boys, too, will experience discrimination and likely already have.

During our presentation, the students listened intently, and respectfully asked questions. My son and I demonstrated how we tie his pugh every morning. He allowed the class to see his long hair and watch as we gathered it in a bun on the top of his head before tying his pugh.

My hope is that this presentation has helped reduce the discrimination that might come at my son. Differences can make us feel uncomfortable. Unknowns and uncertainty can lead to assumptions; often these assumptions are formed by a lack of knowledge. But if we open our hearts and worlds, we give each other a chance to learn about one another. Or maybe a chance to unlearn: unlearn biases and previously held beliefs. At the very least, the experience gave my son a chance to be brave and, hopefully, wear his pugh with pride.

Today we may celebrate significant days from different cultures, our libraries may finally be carrying books that represent children of different backgrounds, and we have guest speakers and resources at our fingertips to help our students learn about each other's differences. We are proud of our multicultural schools. But all these things mean little if we haven't first reflected on what's going on inside. All of this means little unless we do the inner work, reflect on our own biases, and challenge our own beliefs. We all have personal biases, but it's important, especially as teachers and parents, that we recognize them and be willing to work through them because our children can feel them, just as I did 35 years ago.

Should you talk to your BIPOC colleague about racism?

Quiz concept and text by Mahima Lamba, Teacher Magazine Advisory Board member and teacher, Delta

1 If you do not have a strong relationship, your questions and comments may come across as rude or even threatening. The continued experience of racism is traumatic for many individuals. How would you feel if someone you didn't really know started asking you personal questions about something difficult in your life?

2 If BIPOC individuals were to encourage and comfort every potential ally, they would have no time or emotional energy to decolonize themselves!

3 Certain news cycles are particularly difficult for BIPOC individuals. Continued imagery of dehumanization, struggle, and trauma can have serious impacts on mental health. While your intention may be to convey sympathy, you may risk making assumptions or possibly bringing up something sensitive.

4 Are you trying to control when is an appropriate time to talk about racism? When your colleague brings up the topic, do you welcome it as graciously as you are expecting them to?

5 If you are unwilling or have been unwilling to listen to your colleague when they have tried to talk about racism, you need to do more learning independently before you can have a productive conversation.

BC teachers review BC authors

Coming-of-age on the pitch

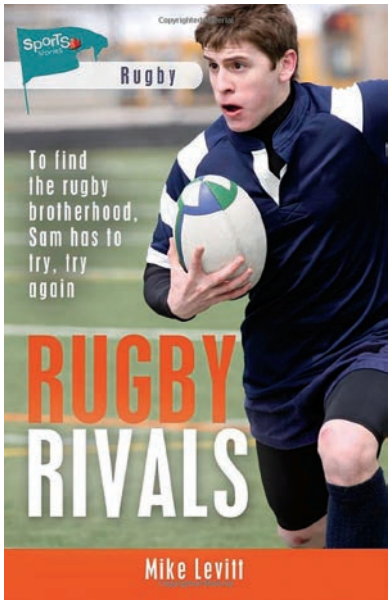
Review by David Julius, counsellor, Cariboo Chilcotin
***Rugby Rivals* published by Lorimer,** 2020

RUGBY RIVALS is a new young adult novel by retired BC teacher, counsellor, and rugby coach, Mike Levitt. The book focuses on the experiences of Sam Brewer, a teenage boy who moves to a new school and navigates differences in socio-economic status, new friendships, bullying, and romance.

Sam is raised by a single mom and his grandfather, who goes by Pops, has always been a father figure for him. Pops is suffering from dementia, but rugby stories and reminiscing about rugby culture often bring Pops to a more lucid state. In this way, rugby brings Sam and Pops together. Sam and Pops' relationship highlights the challenges and frustrations many teenagers experience with their aging grandparents.

Rugby Rivals is appropriate for Grades 7–9. It is suited to reluctant readers because it is an exciting and well-told story with lots of action. The novel is written using easy-to-understand language and includes a glossary of specialized rugby words. It is not necessary to be a rugby fan to enjoy this book. It is an engaging coming-of-age story that happens to centre around the sport of rugby.

Mike Levitt's second rugby novel, *Rugby Rookies*, will come out in February, this time with a teenage girl protagonist.



Tools for connecting: Social-emotional learning and mental well-being

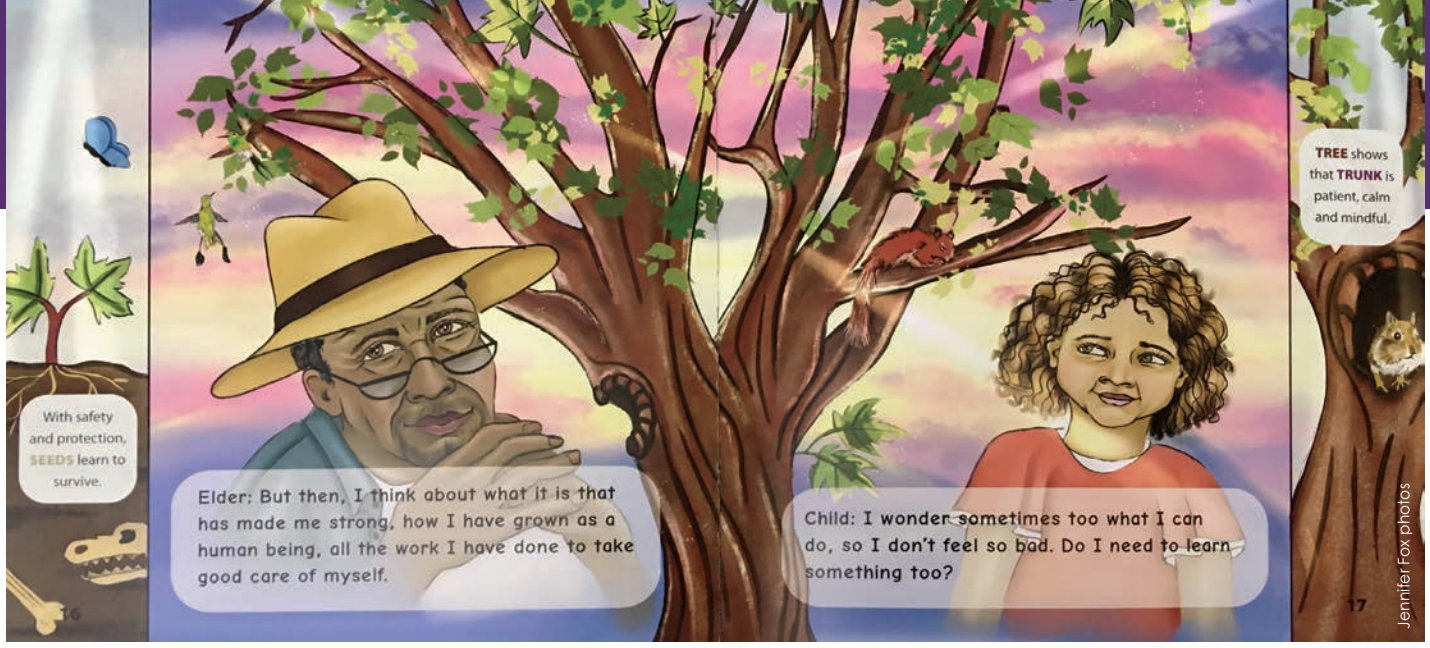
Review by June Iwagami, teacher, Surrey
***Brian Fit Tool Kit* and *Brain Fit Super Powers*, self-published,** 2018 and 2020

THE INCREASE in our national rates of depression, anxiety, and mental illness are staggering. In my 20-plus years of teaching I have seen, first-hand, this increase among students who have entered my classroom. As an educator, I strongly believe that children need to learn about feelings and self-regulation to become emotionally resilient, caring, and empathetic citizens in our global community.

Natalie Hunniford-Sandve's *Brain Fit* series is a useful resource that combines ideas and languages from several social-emotional resources such as Goldie Hawn's MindUP program and Michele Kambolis's *Generations Stressed* handbook. Natalie is a school counsellor in Surrey who created this resource based on her experience teaching students to develop an awareness of their brain-body connection.

The *Brain Fit Tool Kit* consists of six essential tools, such as the brain barometer that links the zones of regulation, a gratitude journal to foster a growth mindset, and deep belly breathing techniques. The accompanying program, called the *Brain Fit Super Powers*, highlights ten character virtues that are celebrated monthly and build attachments between adults and peers using common social-emotional goals and language. The final resource in the series, the *Brain Fit Super Powers* workbook, includes hands-on activities and check-ins to increase mental health awareness and attachments at home.

My school has been using the *Brain Fit* resources for the past four years as part of a school-wide social-emotional learning program. We have seen growth in our school community as students, parents, and teachers connect and share this social-emotional language. It is my sincere belief that, with the support of the *Brain Fit Tool Kit*, we are, as Natalie says, "building connections that are inspiring kids to grow into strong, resilient, and happy individuals."



Jennifer Fox photos

Cultivating emotional intelligence through metaphor

By Jennifer Fox, teacher-librarian and *Teacher* Magazine Advisory Board member, Dawson Creek

THE *I AM LIKE A TREE* SERIES, written by Nanaimo authors Kerry Armstrong and Terri Mack, caught my attention immediately. It is deceptively simple at first, but is filled with complex ideas about emotional states, connecting, expressing, and belonging. The series uses a tree as a metaphor for understanding emotions and yourself. Each of the four books focuses on a different emotion represented by a specific tree part.

The illustrations, by Lisa Shim, are clear and easy to understand. There are three important visual aspects to the page layout: the foreground, background, and side panels. The side panels show the present emotional state of each character using the parts of the tree and the text (see photo above). This strengthens the metaphor of the tree and helps students identify what is happening internally for each character using visual cues and language. Most characters have no obvious gender labels so all students can see themselves reflected in the story.

I was given the opportunity to have a conversation with the authors to discuss their conception, purpose, and structure of the series. They emphasized conversation as a way of connecting; this is reflected in the series. The stories focus on dialogue between characters on specific emotional states, including how mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional experiences affect one another.

During our conversation, Terri talked about the series taking much of its style from her knowledge of First Nations storytelling. For example, meaningful words and phrases are repeated for emphasis. Belonging is a key word that occurs throughout the book as it shows that everyone needs a metaphorical forest. Kerry shared, "It is essential for us to belong no matter how different we may appear."

The final page of each book includes suggested talking points, inquiry ideas and activities to guide teachers as they share the books with their classes. Both authors encourage using the readers' theatre format to engage students. Teachers can also have students write progressive responses to character experiences, invite an Elder to talk about storytelling's purpose, or build a tree with their class that can reflect different emotions.

Can you use just one of the books? Certainly! However, the four books in the series connect all the parts of the metaphorical tree and are more powerful when used together.

This series is useful and engaging for students of all ages. So, how am I, a high school teacher-librarian, going to use this series? I am in the process of designing a tree in a high-traffic space with a description of each emotional part. I will make these books available and accessible for students because I believe they have the potential to support students' emotional growth.

Terri noted, "Every tree has its own incredible lived experience, its own story, just like we do." When students learn about empathy and understand their emotions and sense of belonging, they will, hopefully, learn to connect with themselves and others.

MORE INFORMATION

Listen to Terri Mack and Kerry Armstrong discuss the *I Am Like a Tree* series on YouTube: *www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmoGQSLXYPs*

CLASSIFIEDS

NEW SOCIAL STUDIES 11 & 12 planning made easier, more cohesive with "Potlatch Blanket for a China Man" and free teaching plans - as presented at 2019 BCSSTA Conference. Suitable for classroom, online and/or hybrid teaching. Written by a teacher for teachers. Adaptable for Literary Studies. Reviewed in "Ormsby Review." For specifics and free sample lessons, email *AzimuthBooks@shaw.ca*.

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

SINCE 1995 LONG LAKE WATERFRONT B&B has welcomed guests to enjoy complimentary canoe and kayaks off our floating dock, delicious hot breakfasts and a lakeside hot tub. All of our newly remodeled and meticulously clean suites have full lake views, some with fireplaces and jacuzzi tubs. This multiple award winning and highly reviewed B&B is located in Nanaimo on beautiful Vancouver Island.
Call, text, or email Rebecca to enquire about Winter/ Spring rates. Please book direct for best rates.
250-217-6711 - *lodgingnanaimo.com* - *longlakewaterfrontbandb@gmail.com*

Queen's University

COURSES FOR TEACHERS
Continuing Teacher Education

YOU TEACH TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE. SO DO WE.

Fully online TQS-approved post-graduate certificates

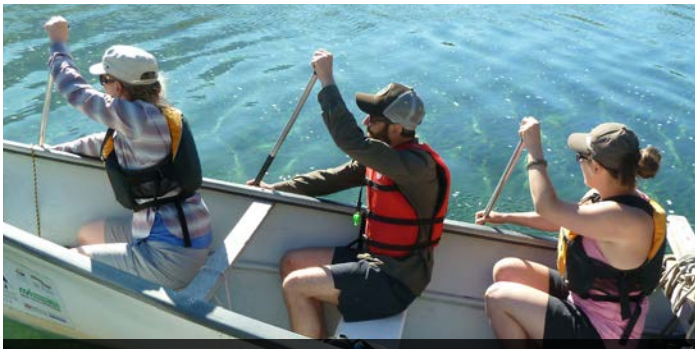
Subjects Include:

- Early Childhood Education
- English Language Learners
- Mathematics Education
- Special Education
- Teacher Librarian
- Teaching Science Grades 11 & 12

We now offer courses for educational support staff.

coursesforteachers.ca/bc

▶ Would you like to teach for us? To apply, visit our website.



ADVENTURE EDUCATION

POST-DEGREE DIPLOMA

Develop your knowledge and understanding of educational possibilities using outdoor, experiential and adventure-based learning.

- 13-month program: online and face-to-face learning
- Work and study at the same time
- Program start: **July**

Acceptable Integrated Program for BC TQS category upgrading.
PRE-APPROVAL RECOMMENDED

CAMOSUN
Centre for Sport & Exercise Education

camosun.ca/adventure

CTRI
CRISIS & TRAUMA RESOURCE INSTITUTE

Inspiring Learning. Improving Lives.

LIVE VIRTUAL WORKSHOPS WINTER 2021

EATING DISORDERS
–From Image to Illness
January 27: 9 am - 4 pm CT

CRITICAL INCIDENT GROUP DEBRIEFING
January 28: 9 am - 4 pm CT

MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS IN CHILDREN & YOUTH
February 6: 9 am - 4 pm CT

PLAY THERAPY–Tools for Helping Children and Youth
February 17: 9 am - 4 pm CT

ANXIETY
–Practical Intervention Strategies
February 18: 9 am - 4 pm CT

Visit our website for info on more workshops coming in Winter/Spring 2021

ONCE A WIZARD New Book
A Story About Finding a Way Through Loss

This wordless children's book has beautiful imagery and the potential to create many imaginative storylines. It empowers children to tell their own stories and explore the meaning of their own experiences of loss. The book includes helpful tips, questions, and activities to support parents and caregivers as they help children navigate their way through loss.

877.353.3205 www.ctrinstitute.com info@ctrinstitute.com

BCTF Virtual New Teachers' Conference 2021
February 26, 2021

Community and connections for early career teachers

This year, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation will be hosting a Virtual New Teachers' Conference. The conference is a professional development opportunity designed specifically for teachers and teachers teaching on call in their first five years of teaching, as well as teacher candidates. Keynote speakers will be John Lagimodiere, founder of Aboriginal Consulting Services, and Dr. Shauneen Pete, Indigenous Resurgence Co-ordinator, Indigenous Education Department, University of Victoria.

For more information, email *ntc@bctf.ca*.

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*