

BC Teachers' Federation

Teacher.

Nov | Dec 2019



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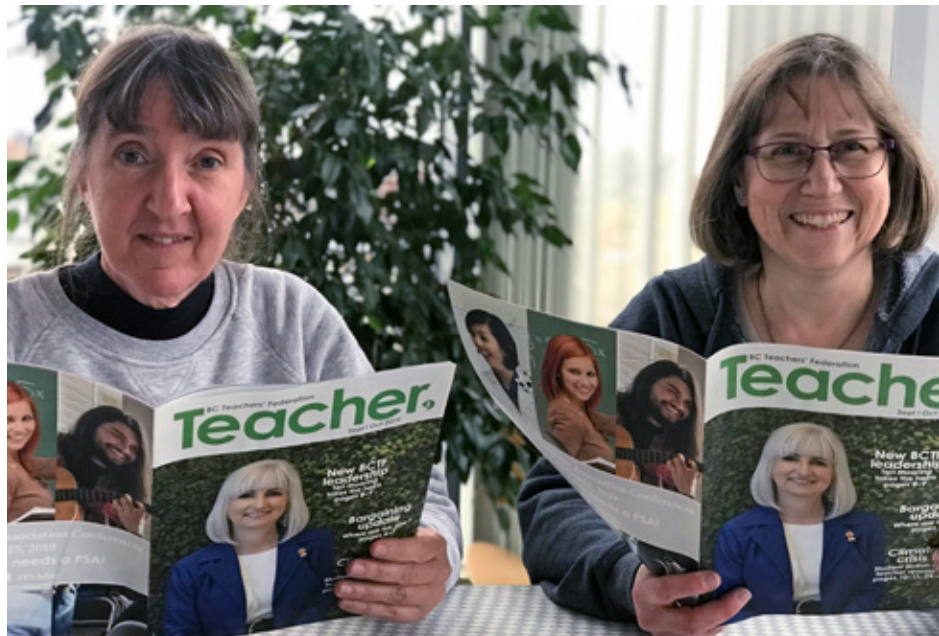
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Teachers Sylvie Afilal, Surrey, and Joanne Gregory, Sooke, enjoy Teacher's Sept/Oct 2019 issue. Jennifer Kimbley photo.

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/publications/TeacherNewsmag.aspx.

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.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Pushing back on the prevalence model

Over the last two years, the BC government has been working on a review of how it funds school districts and public education. When the government's review panel released its initial recommendations last year, one of their key ideas was a big change to the way students with special needs are identified.

It's called the prevalence model. If implemented, this change will have a significantly negative impact on students, teachers, parents, and school trustees.

Instead of funding students who have been specifically identified as having a special need, and therefore entitled to extra support, the prevalence model would use general population statistics to distribute special needs funding.

It's the wrong way to go. The prevalence model will increase teacher workloads, negatively affect children with special needs, and force parents to advocate more for much needed supports for their children. It will be less accountable and transparent, make it easier for governments to cut funding, and disproportionately affect children and families from lower-income areas.

Our colleagues from the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) have a clear warning. In a report written by economist Hugh Mackenzie, ETFO warns:

The breaking of the link between funding and needs has had profound implications for students, parents, teachers, and special education administrators. There is no longer a link between needs and funding that can serve as a guide to available services. For teachers, there is no longer any link between special education needs identified in a classroom setting and additional resources to address those needs. The role of special education administrators has been transformed from one of enabling access to needed services to a gatekeeping role of rationing scarce resources and cost containment.

At the time of publication, there were signs that the Ministry of Education had already made up its mind to move forward with a recommendation to Cabinet on some form of a prevalence model. The BCTF is working hard to reach out to the Minister, the Premier, and MLAs to warn them about the problems this move will have.

For more on the prevalence model, read the article on [pages 24–25](#).



MESSAGE DU PRÉSIDENT

Repousser le modèle de prévalence

Au cours des deux dernières années, le gouvernement de la Colombie-Britannique s'est

penché sur l'évaluation du financement des conseils scolaires et de l'éducation publique. L'an dernier, lorsque le comité d'examen du gouvernement a émis ses recommandations initiales, l'une des principales idées était d'établir un changement significatif sur les façons d'identifier les élèves présentant des besoins spéciaux.

C'est ce qu'on appelle le modèle de prévalence. Si ce modèle était mis en œuvre, il engendrerait un impact négatif important sur les élèves, les enseignant(e)s, les parents et les conseillers scolaires.

Au lieu de financer les élèves ayant été identifié(e)s de façon spécifique comme présentant des besoins spéciaux, donc ayant droit à un soutien supplémentaire, le modèle de prévalence utiliserait les statistiques de la population générale afin de distribuer le financement destiné aux besoins spéciaux.

Ce n'est pas la bonne façon de procéder. Le modèle de prévalence augmentera la charge de travail des enseignant(e)s, affectera négativement les enfants présentant des besoins spéciaux et forcera les parents à réclamer davantage de soutien pour leurs enfants. Ce modèle de financement sera moins responsable et moins transparent, facilitant ainsi la tâche du gouvernement dans la réduction du financement et affectera de façon disproportionnée les enfants et les familles en provenance des régions à faibles revenus.

Nos collègues de la Fédération des enseignant(e)s à l'élémentaire de l'Ontario (ETFO) émettent un avertissement clair. Dans un rapport rédigé par l'économiste Hugh Mackenzie, la ETFO met en garde :

La rupture du lien entre le financement et les besoins a eu de profondes conséquences pour les élèves, les parents, les enseignant(e)s et les administrateurs/administratrices en éducation spécialisée. Il n'y a maintenant plus de lien entre les besoins et le financement qui peut servir de guide vers les services disponibles. Pour les enseignant(e)s, il n'y a plus aucun lien entre les besoins en éducation spécialisés identifiés dans les paramètres d'une salle de classe et les ressources additionnelles afin de répondre ces besoins. Le rôle des administrateurs/administratrices en éducation spécialisée a été transformé d'un rôle permettant l'accès aux services nécessaires à un rôle de contrôle qui rationne les ressources déjà limitées et qui restreint les coûts.

Au moment de la publication, il y avait des signes que le Ministère de l'Éducation avait déjà décidé d'aller de l'avant avec une recommandation au Cabinet concernant une forme ou une autre de modèle de prévalence. La FECB travaille sans relâche pour entrer en contact avec le Ministère, le Premier Ministre et les député(e)s, afin de les mettre en garde à propos des problèmes que ce changement causera.

Nous vous invitons à lire l'article en pages 24–25 de cette édition pour en connaître davantage sur le modèle de prévalence.



Climate crisis resources

The climate crisis resources pages from the September issue look great and teachers have updated teaching material to select from as well as from my book with around 3,200 downloads thus far. This tells me that teachers need climate change material and resources that are absent from the revised curriculum.

In a paper in *Plos One* journal (July 18, 2019) by Seth Wynes from UBC, there is a detailed overview on how climate change is offered in Canadian schools with this brief summary: "We found that most Canadian secondary school curricula did not provide full coverage of six core topics associated with increased concern for the issue of climate change... We have seen that in several regards Canadian climate change education is not consistent with scientific understanding."

That young lady, Greta Thunberg, is a leader with a mission, and we should not disappoint those who would live and endure the climate crisis long into this century.

Thanks again for your good work and hopefully next year I may have an update to publish....

Cheers,
Harold Gopaul

See Harold's list of climate crisis resources in the [Sept/Oct 2019 issue](#) of Teacher and Harold's own resource *Climate Crisis: Physical Science, Natural Variability, Anthropogenic Impacts & Mitigating Emissions* on TeachBC.

Update on a story published in Teacher, May/June, 2019: <https://www.teachernews.ca/story/2019/05/20/2019-05-20-2019-05-20-2019-05-20>

The right to clean air

Two elementary teachers fight a corporate giant

By Lis Stannus, teacher, Kitimat



Photos left: Kitimat teacher Lis Stannus in her classroom.
Below: Kitimat smelter stacks, March 2019.
Photo submitted by author

Sulphur dioxide causes acid rain and breathing problems—especially for vulnerable groups such as the sick, elderly, and young children—and yet, the BC Liberal government gave a pollution permit to a Kitimat aluminum smelter to emit sulphur dioxide into the atmosphere.

STOPS OF THE APT (acid rain) pollution control devices were available to minimize these emissions, however, Rio Tinto, the international corporation that owns the smelter, was not required to install them.

Instead, a five-year sulphur dioxide monitoring plan was put in place to gauge the pollution's impact on air, plants, water, and human health, effectively turning the residents of Kitimat and Terrace into guinea pigs for "wait and see" if the rise in sulphur dioxide emissions would have a negative effect on our health. A study completed by the Northern Health Authority in 2018 shows Kitimat had a 40% higher rate of asthma than the provincial average.

My colleague Emily Tones and I (both elementary school teachers in Kitimat) are worried about how sulphur dioxide is affecting our health. We believe the right to breathe clean air should be guaranteed to everyone, regardless of where they live.

Four years ago, we participated in a month-long hearing to challenge the pollution permit given to Rio Tinto. We lost the 2015 appeal, and we are now on our second phase of legal action.

I am grateful that Chris Tobison and Anthony Ho, lawyers with Pacific Centre for Environmental Law and Litigation, have accepted this case on behalf of Emily and myself as a public interest case. The BC government's approval of the sulphur dioxide monitoring plan could prove to be an infringement of our rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Throughout this lengthy process, Emily and I have united in standing up for clean air for our students to breathe. We, along with other clean air advocates, have developed a non-profit society, Kitimat Terrace Clean Air Coalition (KTCAC), to raise awareness within our communities of the need to protect and advocate for clean air.

Many of the 35 members of the KTCAC are teachers, and they have been invaluable supporters these past four years. Together we have organized garage sales, techhouse fundraisers, folk concerts, and sat in many meetings to organize our next events or decide on letters that need to be written. Our non-profit society gives us an opportunity to reconnect but also to work toward change in the community.

The next Environmental Appeal Board hearing is expected to take place over four weeks starting at the end of July. Emily and I have learned a lot about legal process, air quality data, and the importance of community support since our initial legal challenge.

The right to clean air is a battle we believe is worth fighting for. ■

SO2 appeal settled

Thank you so much for running our SO2 appeal article in the spring version. We did go to mediation in the summer and settled, although the BC government is trying to keep this settlement quiet and they are resisting any kind of news release. Here is an article written by the lawyers who represented us:

www.pacificcell.ca/schoolteachers-air-pollution

Lis Stannus, teacher, Kitimat

Read about Lis's fight for clean air in the [May/June 2019 issue](#) of Teacher.



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The teacher shortage is real: and it's going to get worse

By **Michal Rozworski**, BCTF Senior Researcher

SPECIALIST TEACHERS reassigned into the classroom, unfilled postings, uncertified teachers working on Letters of Permission—these everyday experiences show us that BC has an acute teacher shortage. A close look at the data on labour market projections shows that today's shortage will only get worse unless government acts quickly and boldly.

Without action on recruitment and retention, particularly salary increases, BC will find that there simply are not enough teachers to fill available positions.

A deep look at the details of the government's 10-year BC Labour Market Outlook reveals a persistent long-term teacher shortage will be worse than estimated.

Here's why: government has over-estimated supply and underestimated demand.

Why are supply projections overstated? First, there is a coming shortfall of teachers arriving from other provinces, in particular Ontario, which recently halved its teacher education program seats. Second, the number of teachers being trained in BC is decreasing and will be insufficient to fulfill the projections for BC-trained

"A deep look at the details of the government's 10-year BC Labour Market Outlook reveals a persistent long-term teacher shortage will be worse than estimated."

teachers. And this is on top of already-existing difficulties in recruitment and retention, especially for specialist teachers.

Why, in turn, are demand projections understated? Preparation time provisions came into effect in June 2019, which increased the demand for teachers above what the Labour Market Outlook estimates. Districts will need an increasing ratio of TTOCs to contracted teachers. Uncertified teachers currently employed also skew demand data downward, as these positions should be filled by certified teachers. Finally, teachers themselves view retention as a serious, growing issue. Surveys show that many teachers are considering leaving the profession because of difficult working conditions.

Aside from an impending overall shortage, there are also specific challenges in recruiting and retaining specialist teachers, TTOCs, and teachers to work in rural and remote schools. In the case of specialist teachers, a confluence of factors has produced an existing and persistent

shortage, including difficulty in accessing training and growing needs across the system for specific skills. Job postings offer a glimpse of the challenge: over half of mid-year 2018–19 postings on the Make A Future website were for specialist teachers.

In the case of TTOCs, many are close to retirement age, including an increasing number of retired teachers returning to teach on call. Increasing numbers of TTOCs also want to work part-time only. Alongside challenges in meeting the need for TTOCs, these factors make for a TTOC-specific shortage. The problems of recruiting and retaining teachers in rural and remote locales are well known, and they require significant and ongoing strategies to overcome.

The teacher shortage is one of the key imperatives behind the BCTF's push at the bargaining table to shorten and adjust the salary grid. We need the government to make BC's salaries more competitive with provinces such as Alberta and Ontario. •

A political trick: Education as an essential service

By Kip Wood, BCTF Executive Committee Member-at-Large, Nanaimo



ON THE MORNING of Tuesday, February 28, 2012, I drove from Nanaimo to Victoria. As Member-at-Large on the BCTF

Executive Committee, my job that day was to provide an update to the staff reps of the Greater Victoria Teachers' Association who were taking part in a School Union Rep Training (SURT) session. I recall saying during the lunch break that the day would go down in BCTF history because of these three events:

1. There was a province-wide member vote on whether to start a full withdrawal of services.
2. The Labour Relations Board (LRB) issued, for the first time ever, minimum service levels for teachers. The decision said that teachers could go on a full-scale strike for three days in the first week and one day only in subsequent weeks.
3. The provincial government tabled legislation (Bill 22, the *Education Improvement Act*) that would not only entrench unconstitutional sections of legislation from 2002, but would also legislate "net zero," set up a mediation process with strict limitations, and make illegal the limited job action (including the refusal to complete report cards) that teachers had conducted since September 2011.

Item two in the list above exposed what could only be characterized as a political trick by the BC Liberal

government. Under Gordon Campbell, the BC Liberals brought in legislation (August 2001) to amend the *Labour Relations Code* to make the provision of education programs "essential," along with the life and limb emergency services.

Programs delivered by teachers were deemed to be essential—not because they were of life and limb importance—but because the government wanted the public to believe that education programs would not be interrupted by a teacher strike.

But under the BC Liberals, 41 school days were lost because of four province-wide teacher strikes (2002, 2005, 2012, 2014). Clearly, making education programs essential had little to do with labour peace, and everything to do with shifting power to the employer side of the bargaining table so that terms and conditions of employment could be dictated rather than negotiated.

After making education programs essential, the BC Liberal government had several opportunities to apply to the LRB for minimum service level designations, but they did not. In the fall of 2001, they chose instead, during bargaining, to legislate a contract for teachers (Bill 27, January 2002). In 2005, essential service levels were not determined, and the government

legislated another contract (Bill 12, October 2005). Finally, in February 2012, the LRB was called on to issue minimum service levels for teachers for the first time.

In April 2019, the current provincial government made several amendments to the *Labour Relations Code*, amendments that included making union certification a little easier and contract-flipping a lot more difficult. The political trick—the promise of less disruption that resulted in longer disputes—was finally over because the amendments also included removing education programs from the list of essential services. •



istock.com/GlobaIP

New to teaching?

This conference is for you

By **Lucie Ferrari**, BCTF staff



IMAGINE... a conference centre with hundreds of new teachers from across BC discussing professional

successes and challenges, meeting new colleagues, and exploring the program and material they just received as a gift.

Free resources,
great workshops,
inspiring keynotes!

The BCTF New Teachers' Conferences give teachers in their first five years of teaching an opportunity to develop personal connections with their provincial union, with provincial specialists associations, and with teachers from across the province. They will meet well-known keynote speakers, choose workshops on a wide variety of topics (e.g., classroom management, social justice, Aboriginal education, French education, special education), explore teaching materials in the exhibitors' halls, and enjoy delicious food.

The Richmond conference is January 25, 2020, and the Nelson conference is May 23, 2020. Registration is open now: bctf.ca/NewTeachers.aspx

We are looking forward to meeting you at our New Teachers' Conferences 2020! •

BCTF New Teachers' Conferences

New Teachers, New TTOCs, and Teacher Candidates



Wellness Safety Balance

In life and on the job

January 25
Richmond

SHERATON | Marriott.com/YVRVS
7551 Westminster Hwy,
Richmond, BC V6X 1A3
Richmond, British Columbia

January 24, 2020
Pre-conference Welcoming
Reception from 5pm to 7pm

May 23
Nelson

Prestige Lakeside Resort
and Convention Center
701 Lakeside Drive, Nelson BC V1L 6G3
Nelson, British Columbia

May 22, 2020
Pre-conference Welcoming
Reception from 5pm to 7pm



Students develop entrepreneurial and life skills while building a more equitable community

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By Alisha Parashar, teacher, Vancouver



J&O UPCYCLING, a universally accessible, free thrift shop operated by John Oliver Secondary School in South Vancouver,

is a resource for economically disadvantaged youth and their families to obtain clothing without feeling marginalized or labelled. It also promotes environmental sustainability and helps youth develop a healthy body image while building a stronger school and community culture.

J&O's mission is to bring students stylish, upcycled and repurposed products they can feel good about, through a sustainable business model that diverts waste, provides work experience/volunteer hours, and supports our community in multiple ways.

The program initially started at Sir Charles Tupper Secondary, under the name Charlie's Closet, and was moved to John Oliver in 2018 so more families could take advantage of this program. J&O Upcycling is funded through donations from the Vancouver Sun's Adopt-A-School campaign, Coast Capital Savings, and the Vancouver School Board's sustainability program.

The funding goes toward washing and organizing the clothing, hosting open houses, buying new socks and underwear, and giving honoraria to the volunteers. Clothing is donated by people in the community and then washed by Busy Bee Cleaners on Fraser Street.

"...second to oil, the clothing and textile industry is the largest polluter in the world."

Student volunteers organize the clothing, place them on racks, and style them on mannequins so that it looks like any other store, erasing the perceived stigma around wearing second-hand clothing. The Business Education Department is developing a logo to sew onto the clothing to create a unique brand that represents the diversity of our community.

The store promotes sustainability and financial prudence, and we also use the store and the brand to open conversations around body image, peer pressure, and bullying. J&O Upcycling had a Pink Shirt Day event that included a workshop about homophobia delivered by Out In Schools, a photoshoot, and a Pink Fashion Show. One of the Grade 8 participants in the fashion show described their experience on the catwalk: "I felt so good when everyone was cheering my name. It didn't matter what I was wearing or if it was in fashion, people were just celebrating me. It took a lot of courage for me to do this—I feel like I can do anything!"

J&O Upcycling is providing work experience opportunities to youth. At least 50 students have worked at the store this past year and are developing their customer service, marketing, and organizational skills.

A few senior students landed summer jobs in retail stores because of their experience. "I think it's kind of fun. I like organizing things and meeting the families when we have open houses," says a Grade 10 volunteer.

The youth at John Oliver were astounded to know that second to oil, the clothing and textile industry is the largest polluter in the world. The students suggested repurposing old t-shirts into bags in order to further reduce our ecological footprint. "We spend so much money on bags trying to impress people," says a Grade 8 student. "We don't really think about how making all these bags hurts the environment. We can save that money and use it to help our families while protecting the environment!" •

Check out our [Instagram](#) page [j.and.o.upcycling](#) for more details on J&O Upcycling competitions and community events!

Whose responsibility is wellness?

By **Melanie Sedergreen**, teacher, Maple Ridge



"I BEGAN TEACHING in the middle of a 15-year labour dispute." This is how I introduce my doctoral research because policy continues to affect me in many ways, including how I listen to how teachers are talked to and about.

Lately, my district has been sending monthly wellness emails and challenges. One district wellness challenge was to go to bed an hour earlier. Is it appropriate for employers to direct our physical activities beyond the workplace? The repetitive messaging feels like social conditioning. It eerily recalls George Orwell's 1984 thought police or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World's* hypnopedia: "Everybody is well."

The implication in this wellness discourse is that stress is normal, and we *must* manage it. Appeals to science are often used to legitimate this discourse. The claim is that "fight or flight" is a natural response to stress and we should use calming strategies to regulate it. I question whether our ancestors lived in near constant stress, while caring (mostly alone) for the well-being and learning of 20 to 30+ young people? Teacher stress is not natural; it is the result of poor working conditions.

My research into care work offers another perspective. Care work is a distinctive form of emotional labour because of its relational nature. It involves caring for and about others. Care is essential for human functioning. Without it there would be no market economy, no society, no survival. Most care work is invisible because it is cognitive and affective: it is interior. I think it is particularly

invisible in teaching because our roles were not intended to be caring ones. Education was and is viewed primarily from market and citizenship perspectives.

Joan Tronto, a leading care work researcher, has written about "privileged irresponsibility." She argues that non-care workers (including students) do not experience the demands of care work and this results in blissful ignorance. For example, policy-makers and bureaucrats enjoy a privileged irresponsibility for care work's impacts on teachers.

There are parallels across caring professions. Healthcare workers, social workers, and educators all experience high levels of burnout caused by emotional exhaustion, as well as attrition, which involves exiting the profession. The research on these phenomena finds working conditions are key components in both. Thus, wellness discourses can individualize problems that are actually structural and systemic. This is an extension of privileged irresponsibility.

Teachers have multiple shifts, including curricula and (student) care shifts. Wellness discourses implicate another shift. However, our capacity to care is influenced by class size, composition, changes to the curriculum, and other work demands.

Teacher stress is not natural;
it is the result of poor working conditions.





Lauren Donnelly photos.

By Lauren Donnelly, BCTF staff



STUDENTS AND TEACHERS gather in the Land and Language Based Learning Program classroom at Ladysmith Secondary School in local 68. There are no desks.

In this classroom, students and teachers meet in a circle. There's an atmosphere of reverence as snuneymuxw¹ Elder Mandy Jones, whose traditional name is yutustana:t, opens the class in hul'qumi'num.

snuneymuxw First Nation born and raised, hul'qumi'num is Mandy's traditional language, and now she's teaching it to a classroom of Grade 10–12 students. Each day, one-by-one, students take turns greeting one of their classmates in the circle in hul'qumi'num: "uy'netulh," good morning and "ich 'o' 'uy' 'ul'," how are you?

The class was co-created by Mandy Jones and William Taylor. It's a combination of learning hul'qumi'num, gaining hands-on Coast Salish cultural experiences, and learning to care for the Earth. Mandy shares the traditional knowledge her grandmother taught her, teaching the language within the context of hands-on activities, because that's how she learned growing up. William connects the work in class to BC's new curriculum in the context of each student's learning.

1 The hul'qumi'num language does not use capital letters.

hul'qumi'num is one of 34 Indigenous languages in BC that are endangered because of colonialism. The province of BC has committed \$50 million toward Indigenous language revitalization to be administered by the First Peoples' Cultural Council over three years.

"Our language is sleeping," Mandy says. "But when we start putting the seeds of language inside our students and to hear them—how they know how to acknowledge somebody and show respect—that starts a ripple effect." The effects of Mandy's work earned her a Premier's Award for Excellence in Aboriginal Education in 2018.

William has been teaching for 27 years. He started out teaching English and humanities in Surrey before moving to Ladysmith. He has taught many courses since then, primarily drama and English.

Learning isn't prescriptive in the Land and Language Based Learning program. The program is based on an Indigenous model, which honours students' individual gifts and interests. The class's snuwuyulh (teachings) are assessed with the following four relational accountability measures:

1. Are you present and prepared?
2. Are you listening?
3. Can you tell the story back?
4. Can you identify and share your gifts to contribute to the work of the class?

William remembers when they began the class Mandy asked him if they should start creating lesson plans. "I said,

'Would you do lesson-planning traditionally?' and she said 'No,'" he laughs. "And I was like, why would you do it now?"

Sometimes, he says, they "wing it." Allowing room for the unexpected helps them to listen to students' needs. Of course, there are ontological and epistemological challenges to walking in both the world of the colonial educational structure and the world of Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

"Our First Nations students are taught so many years in the colonial way of learning," says Mandy. "It's hard for them to come back into learning hands-on their own teachings."

It's a challenge that Mandy deals with by taking things one step at a time. She says it takes patience for students and administration to understand new ways of teaching.

Grade 11 student Kayla and Grade 12 student Jennifer knew hul'qumi'num before taking the class. Mandy is their grandma, which makes her a different kind of teacher. "There's more comfort with this class," says Jennifer. "Making sure everyone is included and feels welcome."

t'uxusthumpsh, a hul'qumi'num language sharing event, is an example of the kind of inclusive atmosphere that comes from learning Indigenous languages. This year students from Vancouver Island schools will gather at Ladysmith Secondary to share their knowledge through songs and storytelling. It's an event that Kayla and Jennifer say they look forward to.

"It's cool listening to the non-Aboriginal people speak the language too," says Kayla. "Because they know it so well from this class."

Mandy says it's important for her grandkids to see their grandmother being successful. She has an education in the colonial world, and she practices her culture. She is proof that it's possible to be strong in both worlds as we learn to bring them together into harmony.

William and Mandy encourage students to try new things and to focus on their gifts. One student dreams of becoming a hul'qumi'num teacher. He leads workshops to introduce new vocabulary to the group. Some students have discovered they have a knack for weaving, and others like Josie, a Grade 11 student, are encouraged to develop their artistic abilities.

Today Josie is working with a classmate to make a gift for stz'uminus artist John Marston. They've written a message in hul'qumi'num that they will paint on to cedar.

Thanks are in order for John, whose traditional name is qap'u'luq. Around four years ago he agreed to help bring Coast Salish representation into the schools. Using wood from one old-growth cedar tree, he's created house posts for the foyer, and an eagle sculpture that represents strength, truth, and the transformative nature of education.

Transforming the school's foyer is just one example of how the land-based course has facilitated connection and collaboration in the school. It's a point of pride for Mandy,



Above L to R: Elder Mandy Jones, traditional name yutustana:t and William Taylor. Opposite: Mandy Jones and students.

William, and their students, and a long time coming. William says it took 15 years to bring the idea to fruition.

In the centre of the room there's a loom on display. Mandy needed a loom to teach Coast Salish weaving, but no one at the school had built one before. They took a trip to the Museum of Anthropology and came back with a design that Ladysmith Secondary's woodwork class constructed.

Grade 11 student Isabelle learned to weave in the class and discovered she is gifted at it. "When I'm on the loom I forget about everything that might be troubling me," she says. Before weaving, students learn the entire process of cleaning the wool, combing, carding, and spinning it.

Beyond those hands-on skills, students say the class has taught them a new approach to life. The Coast Salish concept of uy shqalawun—having a good heart and mind—has had a big impact.

"It's a good idea that the product of your work and the quality will reflect how you felt when making it," says Grade 12 student Liam. "In this class you have to find your learning spirit—you have to find what you want to do and apply yourself, and it's a totally different way of learning."

The class moves to the band room to drum and sing. Mandy co-leads the group with a student to her right. Everyone is engaged and respectful. According to William, one of Mandy's teachings is that all of us have culture.

"She tells us that we all have culture in our DNA," he says. "And our learning spirits need to be woken up."

Mandy's goal is that students take what they learn in the classroom and use it outside of the school. There is pride in Isabelle's voice when she says she has taught her mom some words in hul'qumi'num.

The ripple effect is visible. "Now our students are the teachers," says Mandy. "We are learning to work nutsumaat—together as one." •

Spring breakⁱⁿ Tanzania: BC students build hostel for girls

By Chris Harker, retired teacher



WHY WOULD 36 Grade 12 students from Stelly's Secondary School on the Saanich Peninsula forfeit the last holiday of their school career and pay a lot of money to travel to a developing country to do strenuous, unpaid work?

Participants were members of the Global Perspectives class, a two-year locally developed course sponsored by teachers Chris McDonald and Kim Koenig. In their Grade 11 year, students focus on local topics and volunteering; in their final year, international issues are targeted.

During the spring break this year, the class flew to Tanzania and helped construct a hostel for girls in the remote community of Mwahu, 35 kilometres from the town of Katesh. Such hostels are vital as most students live too far from school to be able to walk back and forth daily. And over 30% of girls suffer some form of sexual abuse before their 18th birthday, making the hostel a necessary haven for female students.

Conditions were demanding. The students worked at an altitude of over 2,100 metres in temperatures that, during the day, were seldom below 36°C. The work was very physical as not even a wheelbarrow existed;

everything was done by hand. Rocks, sand, 50-kilogram sacks of cement and 20-litre buckets of water had to be transferred from the delivery site to the construction area about 100 metres away. Cement to cover the 5,000 square foot floor and walls was mixed with a shovel and carried by teams of two students, each holding two corners of an empty cement sack. Seven thousand bricks, each weighing 18 kilograms, had to be carried to where each was needed. One class from the adjacent school was released daily to work alongside the Canadian students.

After the workday, students visited numerous local sites of interest and several nearby schools. They played sports and games with Tanzanian students, and they learned traditional beading and painting skills. They also visited three of Tanzania's iconic wildlife parks.

At Katesh and Mwahu, the days were hot and exhausting, working conditions were arduous, students had to share beds, food was "different," and Swahili-English communication had its challenges.

Was it worth it?

The supervisors—two teachers, a doctor, and a couple of retired

teachers who had long and extensive experience in the Katesh area—asked the students this in a series of survey questions when they got home. The answers reveal what a great group of students we had.

Many were surprised at the lushness of the Tanzanian countryside. They were impressed with the overwhelming friendliness of everyone they met, and how easy it was to meet, mix, and blend. The group particularly enjoyed being able to interact and enjoy games with local students and to be in a place where they were not seen as "rich tourists." Most raved about their safari experiences.

The differences between our "have" world and theirs in Tanzania was a common topic. One student admitted to "crying when I walked into my house and the dishwasher was running. I couldn't help thinking of all that water being wasted."

The hostel will be a very large building for up to 200 students, so it was impossible to complete it during the two weeks we were there. This, to some, was a disappointment; an understandable one, for who begins a project that they would not want to see to completion? At least the group left knowing the local community was committed to completing the project,



and that the materials and most of the funding were in place for this to happen.

We asked what advice they would give to students going abroad next year. "Try everything, be open to all ideas, and push yourself outside your own comfort zone" were common responses. One replied, "It will be one of the best, if not THE best experience ever. It was worth every nickel."

There was a lot of laughter on the trip. One student, mistaking a very spicy sauce for a salad dressing, felt that he might need a mouth transplant. Another had his arms turn green when sunscreen was applied to his skin already coated with cement dust.

For many, it was a trip of personal discovery. "The trip helped me become a more outspoken person," and "I didn't think I'd try so many new things, nor experience as much as we did." More introspective was "I've learned how life can be enjoyed despite not having much, and happiness does not depend on material wealth; what is more important is a mindset and approach to life."

Another common realization was how important Tanzanian students consider education. Every student there is highly motivated and determined to work hard to achieve every iota

of potential. The Canadian students realized this cannot be said of every student at home.

Finding the money to participate was a two-year project for most students. Although the bank of mum and dad no doubt kicked in for some, they all had jobs and forfeited cars, sound systems, new clothes, and other special events in order to earn enough to come. They all had to fundraise for the project too. When in Tanzania, they donated approximately \$17,000 toward the construction of the Mwahu hostel.

Personal growth comes, in part, from exposure to and an understanding of the world beyond our own doors. Experiencing the sights and smells of a different culture firsthand is vastly different from reading or watching a video. The 36 students from Stelly's who spent 17 days in Tanzania last spring now have a much greater insight into the world, and this will affect their lives in a variety of positive ways. •



Top down: Most of the group on the jobsite (Chris McDonald photo); Canadian and Tanzanian students taking a break to socialize; students pose on the jobsite wall; teaming up to carry mixed cement (Chris and Catriona Harker photos).

Let's start talking about menopause!

By Debbie Morran, BCTF staff



IT'S 8:30 A.M. and Jocelyn sits at her desk, waiting for her students to arrive. She feels tired already, and the school day hasn't

even started. She realizes, too late, that she should have worn looser and cooler clothes because she is already sweating. She turns down the heat in the classroom, but because the thermostat is centrally controlled, she is only able to adjust the heat by two degrees. The windows are her next resort, so she manages to open one of them halfway, bringing temporary relief. Her students arrive next, generating plenty of body heat among them. It's now 8:55 a.m. and Jocelyn continues the struggle to maintain her "cool." This struggle is not an isolated experience for Jocelyn, nor is it for the thousands of teachers who deal with the effects of menopause.

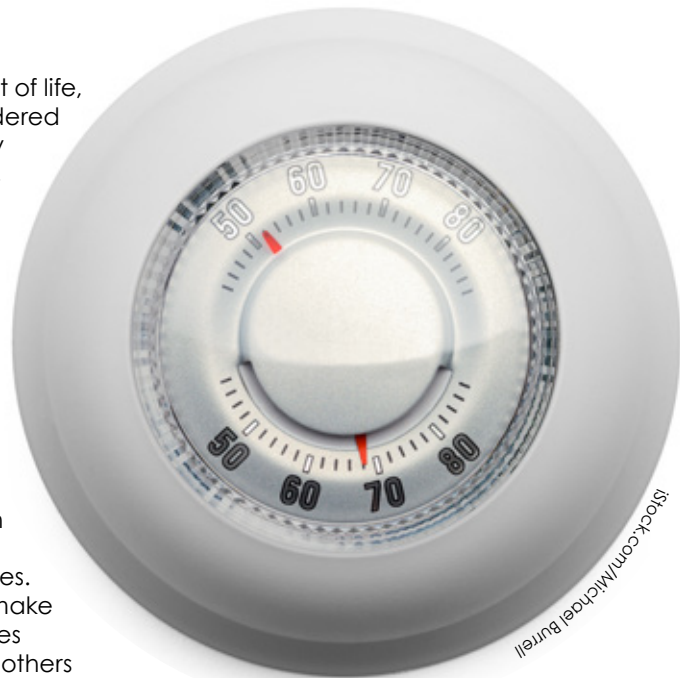
Menopause and perimenopause are reproductive stages, marked by the cessation of menstruation, usually around the age of 51. Perimenopause is the time leading up to menopause (can occur over a span of five years) when an individual may experience the symptoms of menopause. Both stages include symptoms such as irregular and/or heavy periods, hot flashes, night sweats, sleep disturbances, headaches, weight gain, mood swings, irritability, difficulty in concentrating, and memory problems. No one experiences menopause the same, but most experience a negative impact on the quality of their work life. Research shows most people are unwilling to discuss their symptoms with their superiors at work, and they will not ask for the support they need.

Menopause is a natural part of life, but it is a topic that is considered taboo by many and is rarely openly discussed. Currently, there is a push in social media by celebrities such as Emma Thompson and Kim Cattrall to "out" menopause. Across the UK there are "Menopause Cafes" where conversation about hot sweats, fatigue, insomnia, and aphasia (language problems) are common, and where everyone is welcome to join and learn how to support their partners and colleagues. In schools, teachers either make jokes about their experiences during menopause (before others make jokes about them) or they keep silent in the face of potential shame. Seeing as most teachers are women who are either going through perimenopause or menopause, or who will go through it, schools are an obvious place to start talking about menopause.

Several large organizations have created workplace policies to foster an awareness of menopause and to make it a workplace issue. The National Education Union, the largest teaching union in the UK, recently created a campaign to promote understanding in schools. Among other things, they encourage employers to make reproductive issues part of a wider occupational health and safety campaign and suggest that teachers can get support in dealing with symptoms through the occupational health and safety committee at school. In BC, the Federation of Labour has created a training module for occupational

health and safety reps that focuses specifically on these issues in the workplace, including ways to support workers dealing with pregnancy and menopause. The BCTF also provides similar training for local reps who sit on health and safety committees in their schools, and these reps can help teachers access supports they need to ease the impact of menopausal symptoms.

An example of these supports would be as simple as adjusting the temperature in the classroom. This can be accomplished by enabling teachers to have control over the thermostat in their room(s) and by providing adequate ventilation. Ready access to cold drinking water can also help alleviate hot flashes. Frequent breaks to use the washroom are essential during perimenopause and menopause, so a request could be made to have a teacher's class



First time: French chairs join summer conference

By Eva Paré, teacher, Comox



THE FIRST MEETING of the French Education Local Chairs (FELC) was a historic moment at this year's BCTF Summer Leadership

Conference in Kamloops. These leaders from across the province—including second language French teachers, French Immersion teachers, and French program teachers—attended workshops informing them of their rights and responsibilities within their local executives.

Participants shared experiences and challenges encountered in their locals. Lucie Ferrari, our co-ordinator at the

BCTF, explained how our union works and how the FELC position operates within its structure.

Each school district makes different decisions for the operation of their schools and programs. It is important for our FELCs to meet, learn from each other's experiences, and develop strategies that will increase the chance of success for all.

Currently, we have 25 FELC members among our 76 local unions. If your local has not elected a FELC member yet, we encourage you to take the lead and offer your services. Contact your local office for more information. •

covered for a few minutes to allow them to step out. These supports can be requested by the teacher with help from their occupational health and safety rep (or staff rep) at their school as a type of workplace accommodation. But because many feel too embarrassed to share what they are experiencing, the biggest challenge remains in overcoming the stigma surrounding menopause.

Menopause is an important issue that needs to be understood and talked about openly in schools. Teachers need to feel empowered to share what they are experiencing without embarrassment and to feel confident in asking for support. We need to ensure that the days when teachers like Jocelyn suffered in silence are over. Teachers need to start their own Menopause Café and invite their colleagues to join the conversation. •

RESOURCES

The BC Federation of Labour offers a course titled Women's Health & Safety in the Workplace: <http://bit.ly/2BXRcdS>

Menopause Information Pack for Organizations (MIPO), a research-based organization in Australia, offers free resources to help workplaces support menopausal transition: www.menopauseatwork.org



The first delegation of French Education Local Chairs at the 2019 BCTF Summer Leadership Conference, Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops. Laurence Greeff photo.

Greta Thunberg:



Marilou Strait photo

The Swedish climate activist has crystallized the struggle of a new generation of environmentalists.

Teenage superhero

By David Chang, SFU lecturer



ON SEPTEMBER 27, 2019, I marched with multitudes in Vancouver in support of climate action. I was heartened by a sea of faces and placards, uplifted by the solidarity of the masses, the unity of collective resolve. The march was indeed a sight to behold: students crowding downtown streets, spreading over the Cambie Street Bridge, up the hill to City Hall. I've participated in marches before, but I have never witnessed a turn-out of this magnitude—police estimated 100,000 people. If this impressive display indicates a significant shift in pervasive attitudes toward climate change, one might inquire into the causes that precipitated this change. Extreme weather events have certainly become more frequent, and the memory of hazy summer days from raging wildfires remains fresh for many British Columbians. But why has the climate movement become so galvanized at this moment?

The Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg has crystallized the struggle of a new generation of environmentalists. A 16-year-old high school student, Greta began sitting on the steps of the government buildings on Fridays to protest her country's inaction on climate change. Her fiery speeches and steely resolve have inspired millions around the world. Her courageous address at the United Nations conveyed the frustration of a generation whose future has been squandered by a careless elite. Greta is the perfect voice for climate action. Her youth

and innocence are a rebuke to jaded leaders and hidebound power-brokers. Above all, Greta's poignant speeches deliver a sobering message, without the empty embellishments and niceties that characterize political discourse. She speaks truth to power, and she is not intimidated by status. Whether speaking to the United Nations or Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the clarity of her message remains the same.

"Greta's unwavering determination might be due in part to her Asperger's diagnosis, which she describes as a superpower."

Greta's unwavering determination might be due in part to her Asperger's diagnosis, which she describes as a superpower. Indeed, it seems that her intolerance for contradiction is piercing through the pervasive illusions that hold sway. To be neurotypical in the age of the climate crisis is to muster a thousand reasons for inaction, a thousand ways to justify the unjustifiable, to become well-adjusted to an untenable way of life. The endless exhortations to economic growth and material progress belie the environmental consequences of unbridled development. Politicians spout absurd logic without awareness of irony (e.g., "we need to build a pipeline in order to transition to

renewable energy"), and corporations pursue profit at the expense of the environment, all the while touting their social and environmental responsibility. Neurotypicals perform mental gymnastics in order to avoid the obvious.

Next to Greta Thunberg, neurotypicals appear to suffer a serious impairment. In regards to the environmental crisis, neurotypicality can be defined as an inability to consider long-term consequences, an inexhaustible capacity to entertain hypocrisy, a stubborn refusal to recognize settled science, an inability to act in response to peril, a habit of rationalizing the unethical, and a tendency to use others as an excuse for one's failings.

Despite her own reluctance, Greta has become the face of climate activism. We all need to do our part to effect change. For now, I am thankful that she is here to point out what we can no longer see. She is sanity in a society seized by madness. For us neurotypicals who have dithered for far too long, our excuses are futile, and our reluctance must end.

Climate Action Now! •

Opposite: Greta Thunberg, Grand Chief Stewart Phillip (centre), and Joan Phillip (left) join activists at the October 25, 2019, Climate Strike in Vancouver. [See p. 26](#) for a review of *No One is Too Small to Make a Difference*, a collection of Thunberg's speeches and Facebook posts.

Saylesh Wesley: Aboriginal, trans, and still here

By Jennifer Kimbley, Acting Editor, Teacher



IN HER ABORIGINAL

education room, Saylesh Wesley is working with a group of students. The walls are decorated with Aboriginal art and there's a carpet of the Seven Teachings on the floor. It's a calm space.

Saylesh took the Native Indian Teacher Education Program through UBC in the late 1990s, and she began her career as a TTOC for the Vancouver School Board in 1999. Today she is teaching Aboriginal education and learning support in a middle school in Chilliwack.

"I never saw an Aboriginal teacher when I was growing up," she says. "I had no idea it was possible, and, in fact, I was told it was not possible. I began the program, and during my first extended practicum I realized I was a teacher. Now I'm living and teaching on my own territory, and I'm a role model for Aboriginal youth."

She's not only a role model for Aboriginal youth, but for trans kids as well. "I've taught two students who are trans. It's unreal when that moment happens, when they come out to me, and I come out to them. It's a powerful experience—magical," she says. "They realized they aren't alone, and while the experience of each trans person is different, they get it and they know I get it. I think it's life saving. I had no one like that when I was young. I don't know how I did it, and I don't know why I'm still here. I'm grateful that I am, but I don't know how I didn't become a statistic."

"Prejudice and discrimination are not innate.
It's something that people learn."

Saylesh began her transition in 1995, before she began the teaching program. She says, "I was fortunate for being androgynous, as it didn't take much to go from one gender to the next. I put on a bit of make up, and *voilà*, I was ready to go!" It was only in 2016, after over twenty years of misgendered identification documents, that she received legal identification as a female. The following year she had gender-affirming surgery.

She is a founding member of the Chilliwack Trans Support Network. This group has drop-in meetings with as many as 35 participants. "We're in over our heads with numbers, and it's a good problem to have," she says. "The needs are so high and so vast, and a lot of it is beyond our capacity. There are all sorts of mental and emotional health issues and it's all typical—it comes with the trans experience, especially out here in Chilliwack where these folks are transitioning and living so it's amplified. When they find the group, they realize they aren't alone."

Equity and inclusion are close to Saylesh's heart. "Prejudice and discrimination are not innate. It's something that people learn. The kids are so innocent, even in high school,

because when they have me as a teacher, I labour my teaching style with a bit of my 'auntiehood,' and I bring this presence when I teach. I am very equipped to build and develop relationships. The roughest, toughest, smartest, most privileged—it doesn't matter who they are—I've done well in winning over their trust, their respect, their admiration, and even their love." •



Saylesh Wesley. Photo by Calvin Warbus, Lummi Nation.

Bring the museum to your classroom with an education kit



By Nathalie Picard, MA Public History



TEACHERS, are you looking to include more realia into your lessons? If you want to help engage students and you're eager to shake things up in your classroom, you might want to rent an education kit from a Canadian museum.

Education kits are museum-made, travelling mini-exhibitions with educational content developed for use in classrooms. Teachers can order them for a set period (usually two weeks) to be taught as a whole unit or to supplement a unit that you've already developed.



I recently worked with the Nikkei National Museum in Burnaby to develop an education kit about Japanese Canadian Internment during the Second World War. It's called the Journeys Education Kit. Every teacher who rents the kit receives 12 objects, object descriptions for the students with archival images, oral history audio-clips, archival gloves for object handling, and a teacher's guide that includes historical context, further information on each object, and five ready-to-go, adaptable lesson plans for immediate use in the classroom.

Education kits are a great addition to your regular classwork, since they give you a chance to capitalize on a museum's expertise on a topic for your own use. Their tactile nature gives students the opportunity to engage directly with the subject that you're learning about, and the supplementary materials with curriculum tie-ins help you to achieve your learning objectives.

We built this kit to help teachers engage students from Grades 5–12 with a vital part of Canadian human rights history. Like in all education kits, the objects help bridge the gap from the classroom to the world the students are learning about. They help students understand what happened and to empathize with the Japanese Canadians who were forced from their homes and sent to internment

camps generations ago. While the Journeys Education Kit focuses on the injustices that Japanese Canadians faced during the war, museums across Canada offer education kits on a wide variety of topics. On a national level, The War Museum's Supply Line Kit helps teach about the war front in the First World War, while closer to home the Museum of Anthropology has developed a number of kits that help introduce Indigenous content into your classrooms. Check out your local museum, see what their outreach programs have to offer, and take advantage of the education resources in your community! •

The Journeys Education Kit is available to order from the Nikkei National Museum. Please visit centre.nikkeiplace.org/education/journeys-education-kits for more information. Remember to ask your administration or department head for funds to access these materials.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nathalie Picard recently graduated with her Masters in Public History at Carleton University, where she researched how to use object-based learning to introduce difficult knowledge into classrooms. For her final project, she developed the Journeys Education Kit with Burnaby's Nikkei National Museum.

Photos courtesy of the Nikkei National Museum.

Angela Gatt:

Tech-savvy teacher makes Grade 4 fun for all learners

By Lauren Donnelly, BCTF staff



BARTERING, bargain-hunting, and occasionally getting ripped off—learning about the fur trade became real this

year for students at Bert Ambrose Elementary in Fort St. John. The Grade 4 students traded pint-sized containers of gunpowder—poppy seeds in this case—and felted facsimiles of Hudson's Bay blankets. The wares were all carefully assembled by teacher Angela Gatt.

The simulation fur trade is just one example of Angela's knack for creating engaging lessons for her students.

"My own philosophy would be that kids learn best when they are doing and experiencing things in as real a way as possible," she says. "I try to think about everybody in every lesson, and make sure that I am providing different entry points for everyone."

Angela keeps her classroom bright and well-organized. Details like sky-blue curtain toppers and soft fabrics make for a cozy atmosphere, and Angela has other ways of making students feel at home.

Bert Ambrose has a breakfast program, but sometimes students arrive too late to access it. Angela stocks a snack drawer that she tops up when she can. Having items like apple

sauce, crackers, and granola bars easily accessible mean that students' learning isn't impeded by rumbling tummies.

Attention to detail is a strength of Angela's. She's a scrapbooker in her free time, and she's actively involved in her school's science fair as well as the regional science fair.

Experience has shown her that technology can make learning more accessible. For lower-level readers Angela uses an app called Clicker that reads articles to students, highlighting each word along the way. "That way they can be independent," she says. "They can still be part of the room."

She says that independence can work wonders. She remembers a student who was struggling to demonstrate what he knew, so she had him use an iPad app to create a project. "What he showed me through that use of technology was so much more than I had ever seen him do with anything else," she says.

That's when she knew she wanted more of that technology in her classroom.

"The output that they were giving me with that technology was so exciting," says Angela. "They were proud that they were able to show 'this is what I know.'"



Annie M. Photography

Her use of technology extends outside of the classroom too. Angela is a fan of FreshGrade for its ease of use and accessibility. She uses it to share academic progress, highlight important dates, and to send weekly letters to parents.

Parents and students aren't the only ones benefiting from her use of technology. In 2012 Angela started a website as a place to connect with other teachers online and to share her ideas. It's grown into something much bigger. She blogs, and posts lesson ideas and resources. "I feel like I've been able to help support a lot of teachers in BC with the curriculum change," she says. "That's been really meaningful to me to hear their feedback."

Angela is excited about the idea of individualized learning and its implications for students as well as teachers. There's room for all kinds of learners, and there's room for different kinds of teachers too.

"I think teachers can be really hard on themselves, but it's important for people to know that the love for your job matters so much," says Angela. "We all have our different styles and I think it's so amazing even just to walk in my building and see how teachers' love for their job comes out in different ways." •

Life Skills and DAWGs

By Tanya Corstanje, teacher, Terrace



THE EXCITEMENT was palpable as we stood by the front door awaiting visitors. Nathan had been waiting all day for his opportunity to open the door for his four-legged friends. Today was the day he was to show off his mad skills with DAWGs!

For the last seven weeks, our Life Skills Community Lessons were focused on Dogs Assisting With Goals (DAWGs). This diverse group of Grade 1–6 students had weekly lessons at the Ohana K9 Centre in Thornhill, a community close to Terrace in northwestern BC. They learned dog safety, dog etiquette, and even a few tricks!

Hana Niemi, owner of the doggie daycare and obedience centre, explains why she was so interested in creating the program. “One of my close friends has a sister who is wheelchair bound and has many challenges. A few years ago, I offered to take care of my friend’s sister so the rest of the family could go away for a weekend,” she says. Although Hana found the weekend stressful, she also learned to appreciate how valuable different experiences can be to people with life challenges.

In response, Hana created the DAWGs program and she and her dogs worked together to understand children with challenges, many of whom did not speak clearly or have consistent commands. Seven children went to her

shop for an hour each week to learn to ask to pet an unfamiliar dog, how to brush and walk a dog, to get a dog to its “place” and, for some of the children and dogs, how to do a trick and get a treat.

Hana did not do this all on her own. She had friends Emma Oliver and Bill DeLaronde and a few trusted dogs join her to ensure students would have a great experience with unfamiliar dogs. She also had the support of our amazing education assistants who are adventurous and know their charges well. Not all of the lessons went as planned, but Hana continued to develop lessons and then adjusted them to fit with the diversity within the group. For example, one day the lesson for a child was simply that we need to be kind to dogs and NOT step on their tails!

On the day of the school presentation, Nathan was disappointed to learn he was not going to the K9 Centre; however, his frown got turned upside down when he learned the dogs and their humans were having an assembly to demonstrate what the group had learned. Our junior trainers took their job seriously and took excellent care of their four-legged buddies. Nathan showed how to brush a dog properly. Jenna showed how to walk a dog on a leash and get it to lie down. Trinity showed “roll over” with Duke. Abby showed how a dog could catch a treat in the air.

Our Life Skills children were the stars of the assembly—along with the dogs! •



Dog trainer Hana Niemi photobombs student Trinity Green and dog Duke. Gillian Frank photo.

Talking language: Ableism and opportunity

By Leah Kelley, teacher, Chilliwack



I'VE BEEN LEARNING about ableism and the evolution of the language we use to talk about disability and uncovering the way we use this language in other contexts. It seems the language of disability is so commonly used as a pejorative that we have become accustomed to it and do not notice or question its impact.

Biases toward disability are ingrained in our systems and structures, and this is reflected in our language. They are buttressed not only by a myriad of interactions with colleagues, teacher education courses, and even our own experiences as students in school, but by a society that perpetuates stereotypes through books, movies, and popular culture.

It can be uncomfortable when we are asked to question the assumptions and biases that may be at the foundation of our practice, but it is a necessary first step in making change.

So here is a story about me... *getting it wrong*.

I'd been blogging for a few years when some of the autistic people I'd met online said my use of the term ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) was problematic. I had used it in many posts and on the footer of every page of my blog.

ASD is a medical term and commonly used by professionals, schools, and even parents to refer to autistic people in the diagnostic and assessment process. I wasn't sure what the problem was.

What I learned was that calling autism a "disorder" pathologizes autistic people and implies that the non-autistic experience is superior, and it also implies an autistic person is somehow broken or less than.

It took me time to understand this... just like it took me time to understand that identity-first language (IFL) rather than person-first language (PFL) was the preference of many disabled people. This is opposite of what I was taught at university, and in 35 years, not a lot has changed.

Even so, this understanding didn't happen with the flick of a switch. It was a process, and it took time. I read and encountered all sorts of perspectives, and I became immersed in autistic, neurodivergent, and otherwise disabled communities.



Leah Kelley photo

My understanding about the pejorative nature of the term ASD was one of those "stop" moments: a pivotal moment of realization, and an opportunity to move—or not—in another direction.

I was gutted. I thought I'd been working to support and be alongside people in pushing back against negative stigma, but it sent me reeling to find that I was actually adding to stigma: how could I have missed that calling autism a disorder was inherently problematic?

It was the antithesis of my intent. However, intent didn't matter, because *intent* centres *my* experience as the important one—and this wasn't about me or my feelings. Saying it was not my intent would have missed the point and functioned as an excuse to hide behind.

I spent the weekend searching out the term and changing my entire blog. Once you know better, you do better.

I replaced "ASD" and "disorder" with language that spoke of supporting those whose lives were "touched by autism." I thought this statement was beautifully inclusive of both autistic people and those who support them.

However, around 2016, it came to my attention that being "touched by autism" was seen as similar to the idea of "living with autism": considered co-opting of identity as well as being an unhelpful personification.

disability intent centering impact crazy effort bias lame disorder journey identity stigma

Had the language shifted again, or had my understanding deepened?

Rewind... once again, intent didn't matter: know better, do better. This time I checked my replacement words with my autistic friends and didn't feel so gutted. I just hunkered down and fixed it.

Unfortunately, this phrase wasn't only in my blog; it was also inscribed on the beautiful satiny-feel business cards I'd printed for my blog—hundreds of them. I stopped giving them out, embarrassed to share them, but also unable to afford new ones.

And then, I started writing on them: scratching out the old words and handwriting new ones in their place.

These days I share these cards with people, explaining, "We may not get this right the first time. It's a journey, and it's how we respond to what we learn that counts."

The cards are a metaphor: learning is a process and in making that process explicit, we can share it with others for a positive impact. These days I speak to my colleagues about how the prevalence of ableist language means we often don't even know we're using it.

Wow, what a hard day. It was crazy!

Oh—pardon me—I am working hard to shift my language and not use disability slurs like "crazy." Let me try again: Wow, what a hard day. It was ridiculous. It was wild! It was unnerving—I am exhausted.

Or...

I am so tired of that lame photocopier.

Oops—lemme try again. I am trying not to use words like "lame" in a pejorative way. I am so tired of that irritating and unreliable photocopier.

When I offer alternative language and phrases for others, it supports me in becoming increasingly aware of my own language as well. I don't want my colleagues to feel criticized, so I use my learning and my missteps as a way to build understanding. Highlighting and making explicit the effort to change my language creates an opportunity—an invitation, or a calling in—rather than calling out of others. •

Language is **political** in disability communities and I am now deliberate about how I use it. My use of language is a way to demonstrate solidarity. I am willing to be guided by other voices and perspectives to step back and let them take the lead.

Language is **dynamic**: it shifts and changes and takes on meanings that are sometimes unintended. Language comes with history beyond etymology. Words become connected to meanings that require us to view them through a social justice lens, centering the perspectives of those who have been stigmatized and oppressed.

Language has **power**, and through considered use of language, we can work together to use this power to bring about positive change.

AUTHOR'S NOTE ON IDENTITY-FIRST LANGUAGE:

This article deliberately uses identity-first language (IFL) rather than person-first language (PFL) when referring to disability, autism, and neurodivergence. This and other language choices throughout are intentionally aligned with the predominantly preferred language of activists working in disability rights communities, and also in alignment with the field of Disability Studies.

Inclusion and the prevalence model

By Joanna Larson, teacher, Prince Rupert



THE IMPLEMENTATION of inclusion in our public schools began in the 1970s. It was sometimes called integration, or mainstreaming, but the core values behind it remained the same—creating a space for all children in our classrooms. In the early years, local school boards along with the Ministry of Education were committed to working with us.

Specialist teachers were added to the system to provide specific knowledge and improve practices. Smaller class sizes meant teachers could have time to get to know their students as individuals. We were better able to plan, prepare, and set up our classrooms to ensure success for every child.

Once our rights to full, free collective bargaining were achieved in the 1980s, teachers used that process to further enshrine support for inclusion. Provisions were negotiated into collective agreements that guaranteed timely access to school psychologists, placed limits on class sizes, and required consideration of class composition. As always, we were striving for the optimal supports to allow all students to succeed.

During the 1990s, there was a devoted commitment by government and school boards to ensure that numerous structural and financial obligations were met for inclusion to continue to succeed and improve within our classrooms. For example, targeted funding provided school boards with a transparent process to ensure

educational assistant support to students with Ministry designations.

Unfortunately, it was also during this time that the priorities of government started to shift away from providing public services to cutting taxes. Forcing a massive drop in government revenue with tax cuts in 2001, the Gordon Campbell government needed to find the money elsewhere. On January 27, 2002, his government passed legislation to illegally strip the collective agreement of teachers in BC. The tax cuts were funded on the backs of our most vulnerable populations. Provisions that previously linked supports and learning conditions for students were gone.

“Many of our members hoped, against hope, that this legislation wouldn’t be as bad as we had feared, but it’s much, much worse. With the stroke of a pen, this government has eliminated the very provisions that ensure quality education for children,” said David

Chudnovsky, then president of the BCTF.


Teachers struggled to meet the needs of students in an underfunded system. The Supreme Court of Canada decision regarding Jeffrey Moore is one example. He was a dyslexic student who was unable to receive the testing and specialized instruction he needed, and the court found the school district had discriminated against him by not giving him the help he needed. As school districts found themselves less able to provide the programs, services, and supports students with disabilities needed, families like the Moores had to make the difficult decision of leaving public schools for expensive private programs.

When the definitive ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada handed teachers a victory in 2016, optimism returned, albeit briefly. The restored collective agreement language had many mechanisms that ensured flexibility in accommodating all students in classrooms. In good faith,



“Our children are worth more than \$1,800 less than the national average.”

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Teachers across BC want each child in our care to thrive, instead of just survive. We are in favour of inclusion; indeed, we have been the most vocal advocates on the topic for more than 60 years.

the BCTF agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding that further extended that flexibility, for the transitional period.

Much to our chagrin, school boards (supported by the Ministry of Education), did not reciprocate this good will. Instead, learning conditions for students in BC have continued to deteriorate as the language has only been restored to the most minimum measures, if even that. The multiple grievances filed for failure to comply illustrate the lack of commitment to the success of inclusion we saw when it was first implemented.

Simultaneous to this Supreme Court case working its way through the legal system, an aggressive plan for education transformation began in 2012. The leader of the plan for the Ministry of Education, Rod Allen, stated "In a 21st century personalized world, I'll tell you what a special education looks like if you can tell me what a 'normal' education is." He claimed there would be "no labels and no medical model."

Exhausted by the sermonizing of Ministry representatives, in 2018, teachers at the BCTF Annual General Meeting felt it necessary to pass a policy statement on inclusion, Policy 9.W.01, confirming the BCTF's commitment to inclusion of all students in a fully funded, universal public education system.

The BC government launched a funding model review the same year to look at education funding. The

panel included no representation from teachers and was not allowed to consider a need for an increase in educational funding. The parameters were to use the already woefully inadequate education budget to address spending for inclusion. When the recommendations came out in late December 2018, there was one we found to be particularly egregious and cruel.

Recommendation 6 called for a prevalence funding model for students with special needs. This would take away the last of the fragile links and rights of students to access specialized services within BC public schools. There would be no guarantees for specialist positions to exist, let alone for students to have access to specialized services in a timely fashion. Money parents could once follow to advocate for their children would become invisible in general accounts. Where once educational assistant support would have been provided through special education dollars, it now may, or may not.

To support the current drive to implement the prevalence model and regain the power the illegal contract stripping gave government, the current Ministry of Education has invested heavily in a campaign to rebrand the word inclusion as something new. Drawing on the principles of Rhonda Byrne's 2007 book *The Secret*, inclusion is discussed as a mindset that can only be achieved through the power of positive thinking. It is hard to find a teacher in the province who has not

heard the message "all inclusion requires to make it happen, is an attitudinal shift of teachers."

Meanwhile, per pupil funding allocations in BC are now approximately \$1,800 less than the average student in the rest of Canada. Teachers know that inclusion costs money. Ramps cost money, scribing support costs money, physiotherapy costs money, technology costs money, educational assistants cost money, time in education costs money.

Teachers across BC want each child in our care to thrive, instead of just survive. We are in favour of inclusion; indeed, we have been the most vocal advocates on the topic for more than 60 years. Our advocacy is grounded in the real stories of our students and families. For almost 20 years, we have grown hoarse from speaking out about the need to properly fund inclusion. We offer actual concrete solutions about what we collectively need to do to reverse two destructive decades in education.

There is so much at stake for all of us in BC with the current round of negotiations between the BCTF and BCPSEA, and the potential implementation of the recommendations of the funding model review. We all deserve better. Our children are worth more than \$1,800 less than the national average. We can and must reverse this. We must make kids in BC matter again, but we can't do it alone. •

Greta Thunberg:

“What is the point of learning facts within the school system when the most important facts given by the finest science of that same school system clearly mean nothing to our politicians and our society?”

Leader of youth and inspiration for us all

Published by Penguin, 2019

Reviewed by Jennifer Kimbley, Acting Editor, Teacher



AT THE AGE OF 15, Greta Thunberg decided to sit outside the Swedish parliament each Friday and hand out flyers

about the climate crisis instead of going to school. Media took her school strike and her message around the world, and since that day in August 2018 she has continued her crusade to alert politicians, corporations, and average citizens of the urgent need to acknowledge and react to the climate crisis.

Thunberg has Asperger's syndrome, and says this is a gift as it allows her to see the world in black and white, helping her to be clear with her message: We need to stop the emissions of greenhouse gases. It is time to panic. Time is not on our side.

No One is Too Small to Make a Difference is a collection of her speeches and Facebook posts. Her message is clear, concise, and inspiring. At 68 pages it is a quick read, and her words have the power to encourage all of us to make changes in our lives. •

GRETA THUNBERG

**NO ONE
IS TOO SMALL
TO MAKE
A DIFFERENCE**



See [pages 16–17](#) for an article by David Chang titled “Greta Thunberg: Teenage superhero.”

In a vicious racial cycle, white fragility has functioned to keep people of color from challenging racism in order to avoid white wrath. In turn, not challenging white people on racism upholds the racial order and whites' position within that order.

– Robin DiAngelo



Eliminating barriers to achieving equity

Published by Beacon Press, 2018

Reviewed by June James, BCTF staff



IN A RECENT *Teacher* magazine article, “Our shared journey toward equity and inclusion,”

Glen Hansman wrote,

“Equity is not just one of several prerequisites for union renewal. In my view, it is the most important. It is crucial for the BCTF and all unions to reflect the diversity of their membership and strive to eliminate the barriers some members face because of who they are or how they are perceived.”

After reading *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo, I would take Glen’s thought one step further and state that to eliminate the barriers some members face because of who they are and how they are perceived, the dominant white, Euro-centric culture must examine how they have been socialized to identify who they are and how they perceive themselves.

In her book, DiAngelo, a white woman and an antiracist educator, posits that white fragility manifests when white people become defensive about being challenged racially. As she tells readers, “Though white fragility is triggered by discomfort and anxiety, it is born of superiority and entitlement.” She goes on to redefine the idea of white supremacy as not referring to “... individual white people and their individual intentions or actions but to

an overarching political, economic, and social system of domination.” This system has created a culture that makes white people “...the norm or standard for human, and people of color a deviation from the norm.”

Within this culture, socialization into whiteness as the ideal begins in childhood. In her classes, DiAngelo has used the example of a white child naming a black person’s skin colour and being quieted by the mother. Sometimes, her students react to this example by saying that the mother is teaching the child to be polite, thereby assuming it is impolite to mention a person’s blackness. DiAngelo asks, “What is shameful about being black—so shameful that we should pretend we don’t notice?” Through this example we are shown how very young white children are taught to perceive race.

DiAngelo goes on to show that white people pretending they don’t see skin colour carries into adulthood and when white people say that they don’t see race, they are denying and refusing a person of colour’s reality.

Further, white people form a solidarity that is used to try to convince others that they don’t have racist patterns and makes it impossible for people of colour to

point out white advantage because it triggers defensive reactions and righteous indignation on the part of the white person being challenged. As DiAngelo points out, “White fragility is much more than mere defensiveness or whining. It may be conceptualized as the *sociology of dominance*: an outcome of white people’s socialization into white supremacy as a means to protect, maintain, and reproduce white supremacy.”

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that white people interrupt the racist patterns that people of colour recognize in them. As DiAngelo herself admits, “Many people of color have assured me that they will not give up on me despite my racist patterns; they expect that I will have racist behavior given the society that socialized me. What they are looking for is not perfection, but the ability to talk about what happened, the ability to repair.”

Providing the history of white fragility, outlining the feelings, claims, and behaviours of white solidarity, and showing how the white, Euro-centric culture can look inward to begin having positive conversations that will lead to the elimination of the barriers some of our members face, DiAngelo’s book is a must-read as we journey toward equity and inclusion in our organization. •



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- 2. AVOID BUS 'CARAVANNING'**
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- 3. CHANGE THE TIMING OF SCHOOL VENTILATION**
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