Teacher

BC Teachers' Federation

Nov/Dec 2020

In this issue of *Teacher*

Cover photo: Grade 1 student, Emilee, visits Cowichan Bay Beach as part of the Nem'tst'umshasum program. Photo by Catherine Ellis, Cowichan Valley teacher.

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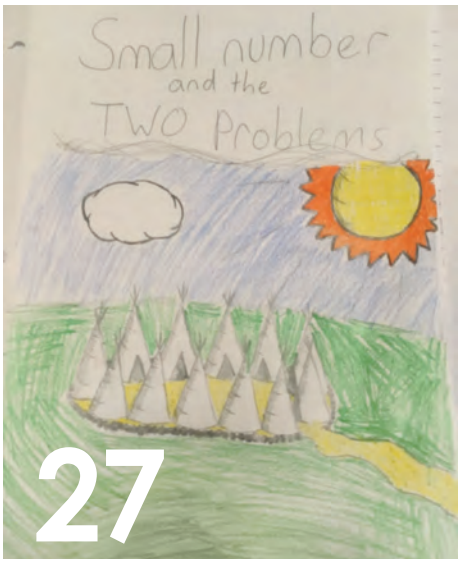
Regular features



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.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BCTF President Teri Mooring

Teachers are frontline COVID-19 workers and deserve better safety protocols

As I sit down to write this message, I have just done two television interviews about the issue of masks in schools. My message to the government and health officials? It's time to start treating teachers and other education staff with the same sense of care and caution as other workers.

Teachers are frontline workers in this pandemic, and we shouldn't be getting mixed messages and confusing orders that give us less protection than others.

I did these media interviews in response to the Provincial Health Officer's announcement on October 27, 2020, that there was a "strong expectation" that masks be worn in public spaces from that day on. Masks weren't mandated, but British Columbians were asked to wear masks in workplaces, community centres, and all other public indoor spaces. However, the standards for schools was not changed.

I know that is confusing. I'm frustrated, and I know you are too. That's why the BCTF has been taking a strong position to encourage teachers to wear masks and to create a culture of mask-wearing in your classes.

Colleagues, we do not have to wait for the Provincial Health Office. You and your co-workers can make changes together. Many schools now have full mask policies because the staff, joint occupational health and safety committee, or administrators are encouraging it to happen. Working together, your school can become safer even if health officials continue with their current position.

We know that physical distancing is not a reality in our classrooms, so we need to do what we can to protect ourselves; this is why we fought so hard to have masks and face shields available to all members.

Teachers, you have a lot of experience creating norms. You know how to take charge of your classrooms. You can't force students to wear masks. However, you can model mask-wearing and normalize it, and I know this is already happening in many classrooms and schools.

Provincially, the BCTF is continuing our efforts to push the government, school districts, and health authorities to do more to protect teachers and students. Read more about our efforts at the Labour Relations Board on page 8.

Please continue to look out for yourselves, your loved ones, and each other.

Teri Mooring,
BCTF President

MESSAGE DE LA PRÉSIDENTE

Les enseignant(e)s sont des travailleurs (-euses) de première ligne durant la pandémie de COVID-19 et méritent de meilleurs protocoles de sécurité

Je rédige ce message juste après avoir répondu à deux entrevues télévisées sur le problème du port du masque dans les écoles. Quel est mon message au gouvernement et aux autorités sanitaires? Commencez à traiter les enseignant(e)s et le personnel en éducation avec le même soin et les mêmes précautions que les autres travailleurs et travailleuses.

Les enseignant(e)s sont des travailleurs(-euses) de première ligne durant cette pandémie et nous ne devrions pas recevoir des messages contradictoires ni des ordres confus qui nous offrent moins de protection que les autres.

J'ai fait ces entrevues suite à l'annonce du 27 octobre 2020 de la médecin hygiéniste en chef de la province, disant qu'il y avait une « attente très forte », à compter de ce jour, que les masques soient portés dans les endroits publics. Les masques ne sont pas obligatoires, mais on demande aux Britanno-Colombien(ne)s de porter un masque sur leurs lieux de travail, dans les centres communautaires et dans tous les espaces publics intérieurs. Toutefois, les normes dans les écoles n'ont pas été modifiées.

Je sais que c'est déconcertant. Je suis frustrée et je sais que vous l'êtes aussi. C'est pourquoi la FECB a adopté une position ferme pour encourager les enseignant(e)s à porter le masque et à créer une culture du port du masque dans leurs classes.

Collègues, nous n'avons pas besoin d'attendre le Bureau provincial de la santé. Vous et vos collègues pouvez engendrer le changement ensemble. Plusieurs écoles ont maintenant des politiques sur le port complet du masque, car les employé(e)s, le comité mixte de santé et de sécurité ou les directions l'ont encouragé. En travaillant ensemble, votre école peut devenir plus sécuritaire et ce, même si les agent(e)s officiel(le)s de la santé maintiennent leur position.

La distanciation physique n'est pas applicable dans nos salles de classes, nous devons donc faire ce que nous pouvons pour nous protéger. C'est pour cela que nous nous sommes battu(e)s si fort pour obtenir des masques et des visières pour tous les membres.

Enseignant(e)s, vous avez beaucoup d'expérience dans la création de normes. Vous savez comment gérer votre classe. Vous ne pouvez pas forcer les élèves à porter un masque. Cependant, vous pouvez servir de modèle en portant le masque et en le normalisant. Je sais que c'est déjà le cas dans plusieurs classes et écoles.

La FECB poursuit ses efforts à l'échelle provinciale afin d'inciter le gouvernement, les conseils scolaires et les autorités de la santé à en faire davantage pour protéger les enseignant(e)s et les élèves. Pour en savoir plus sur nos efforts auprès du Conseil sur les relations de travail, veuillez consulter la page 8.

S'il vous plaît, continuez de veiller sur vous-mêmes, sur vos proches et sur les uns les autres.

Teri Mooring,
Présidente de la FECB

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS, I have had the privilege of listening to teachers from across the province share their stories of success and struggle. You strive to create safe, inclusive, caring spaces for students. You push yourselves to find ways to engage learners and satisfy their curiosities. Your resilience and creativity astound me. However, resilience is not a solution. Systems of education so often rely on teacher resilience to push through struggle when what we really need is large-scale change.

This edition of *Teacher* magazine highlights the remarkable work BC teachers do every day and draws attention to some of the challenges teachers continue to face. *Teacher* magazine prides itself on a long-standing tradition of being written for and by teachers. As the new editor, I have every intention of continuing this tradition. I want to hear your stories and ideas. Send me an email or give me a call to tell me about what's happening in your school and classroom. Tell me about your passion projects, your adventures in teaching, and your thoughts about the world we live and work in. If you're keen on writing, send me an article. If you'd prefer not to write but have an idea for a piece, share your idea with me and we can work together to turn it into an article.

I hope you enjoy the articles prepared by your teacher colleagues and BCTF staff members, and I hope to hear from you for future editions of *Teacher* magazine.

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SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

The submission guidelines for *Teacher* magazine are available at *bctf.ca/newsmag*.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Left: Rosemary Brown, 1993. Dick Loek/Toronto Star via Getty Images.

Should Gladstone Secondary School in Vancouver be renamed Rosemary Brown Secondary?

As a 20-year veteran teacher at Gladstone Secondary, it was with surprise and interest that I read Noel Herron's opinion piece in the September/October 2020 issue of *Teacher*.

There have been several interesting suggestions put forth for renaming Gladstone, one being to rename it after Canada's first Indigenous senator, James Gladstone. Currently, as I understand it, the Vancouver School Board has instituted a policy that schools will not be named after people at all, so it seems unlikely that Rosemary Brown will get her due.

Several weeks ago, I contacted noted Vancouver archivist, John Atkin, and asked if he could get to the bottom of the name controversy. As it turns out, if Gladstone Secondary is actually named after the British Prime Minister, it took a circuitous route to get there.

Gladstone Secondary was so named because it is located on Gladstone Street. Gladstone Street was named for an interurban (streetcar) station that was positioned by the Gladstone Inn, founded in 1871. As to the provenance of the Gladstone Inn, we cannot say.

This is not to say that the school should not undergo a name change, but rather to ensure that all parties are aware of the origin of the name in question before a decision is made. The link to British Prime Minister William Gladstone appears tenuous at best.

This sort of mystery is catnip to social studies teachers everywhere.

Lawrence Jakoy, social studies teacher, Gladstone Secondary

Teaching through a pandemic: What are we learning?

By Anne Hales, BCTF staff

Fearful. Uncertain. Angry. Grieving. Resigned. Grateful. Determined to make the best of it.

THESE ARE SOME of the words BC teachers used to describe their wide-ranging feelings in a BCTF quick poll conducted in mid-September. Remember September? Like everything else in our upturned world, COVID has messed with our sense of the passage of time. Labour Day may seem like both yesterday and a hundred years ago. How can it be both "already" and "only" November?

Just under 9,000 BCTF members provided a collective pulse on health and safety preparations and provisions across BC school districts. Few teachers (7% of 8,952 responses) indicated their local health and safety measures were completely adequate. That means many BC teachers were left feeling "exposed," "disposable," and "unsafe" in their schools. Moreover, many reported concerning levels of anxiety at being unable to keep their students and their own family members safe while doing their jobs.

> "A bit of a rocky start-up with schedules, but that should be expected under the circumstances. The students are well-informed and have been following the guidelines. I feel very safe at my school."

> "... the Health & Safety Committee at my school is absolutely phenomenal ..."

What's working?

While the first quarter of the year felt like a rushed, high-stakes test run for how to do public education in a pandemic, some teachers did report satisfaction and relief with the health and safety measures implemented in their school. What happened in those places to keep teachers informed and safe?

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3Cs: Consultation, communication, co-operation

BCTF members noted different results when teachers were consulted and included in health and safety planning. Informed, constructive, and transparent collaboration with school administration and district officials often translates into practices that better align with the realities of classroom life.

Teachers felt safer when health and safety measures were clearly communicated and implemented; community consensus and co-operation resulted in stronger adherence to protocols. In other words, when a critical majority within the collective school community understands and abides with health and safety protocols, teachers feel less vulnerable to mental and physical risk—and less burdened by the worry that kids, colleagues, or family members might become ill under their watch.

What isn't working? Double standards.

Some teachers felt they have been treated differently than other essential workers when it comes to managing COVID in the workplace. Many expressed frustration that protocols expected in other sectors or jobs, and for the general public, have not been maintained in school settings.

Shifting public health information and recommendations—and ambiguity about how those translate into public school settings—has produced confusion and tensions. To clean or not clean my own classroom? Why did my colleague get a work accommodation when I couldn't?

> "I love my job as an educator ... but am so frustrated by the lack of care or consideration for educators during this pandemic."

> "... the lack of consistency in terms of messages regarding safety plans and policies has been frustrating and disconcerting."

Too much individual troubleshooting

Teachers recognize that even when support staff, custodians, and administrators do their best, their personal efforts are often not enough. Occasional emergency responses and judgment calls are inevitable in an unfolding pandemic situation, but they are not substitutes for collective approaches like physical distancing, reduced classroom density, equitably distributed safety supplies, swift and generous work accommodations, and recognition of teachers' additional workload and health concerns.

Supply chains must not only deliver adequate cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment but also ensure those resources work for a school environment. Teachers reported instances where basic classroom health and safety relied on personal problem-solving and last-minute Costco runs for wipes and hand sanitizer. After much autumn frustration and troubleshooting, a better co-ordinated systems approach will hopefully emerge in the coming months.

> "I believe our school leadership group is doing everything they can. Our CUPE colleagues are working flat out, too. And teachers are doing what we have done throughout our careers: making an underfunded system work for the benefit of the kids."

> "I am new to teaching and I love my job, but I have had serious thoughts about pursuing a different career because of COVID and the way teachers are being treated."

Teacher exhaustion and attrition

Whether teaching at a distance, or in close quarters in overcrowded classrooms with windows that sometimes don't open, COVID is changing BC teachers' teaching practices in ways that are making some question how long they can continue.

Cultivating collective resilience

The September quick poll revealed tremendously varied perspectives and experiences related to COVID responses in schools across BC; however, as teachers we do have some common challenges given the unique public and pedagogical work we do. Albert Camus wrote in *The Plague* (1948) that public crises teach us "there are more things to admire in humans than to despise" and the only way to truly overcome a plague (whatever form it takes) is to carry on as best we can with "common decency." As we move into the winter season, mutual support, empathy, and collective advocacy—along with hand washing and sanitizing—will all be necessary protective measures to practise as we do our best to keep ourselves, our families, our students, and our communities safe and well. As one teacher commented, "We need to learn how to do this together."

Section 88 application to the BC Labour Relations Board

By Teri Mooring, BCTF President

AS THE 2019–20 SCHOOL YEAR drew to a close, the BCTF anticipated there would be consultation and collaboration with the Ministry of Education to develop a restart plan with strong protections for students and staff.

Unfortunately, as the summer progressed it became clear the plan to reopen schools was being rushed and leaving many unanswered questions. Despite the BCTF urging the Ministry to take the time necessary to develop and implement proper measures to minimize the risk of COVID-19 exposure, schools reopened after Labour Day without a common understanding of which safety measures would apply, how they would operate, and whether these measures would be adequate to make schools safe for students and staff.

This gave rise to significant concerns on the part of members and the BCTF as a whole. A consensus quickly developed within the BCTF that individual members need to be supported by collective action to ensure that schools are as safe as they can possibly be and that working conditions remain fair and reasonable.

As part of a comprehensive action plan to support classroom teachers, the BCTF filed an application under section 88 of the *BC Labour Relations Code* on September 17, 2020.

What is section 88?

The *Labour Relations Code* establishes structures for collective bargaining and for the co-operative resolution of workplace issues and disputes. The code protects but also regulates certain forms of collective action. For example, strikes are allowed only during the negotiation of a collective agreement and are prohibited once a collective agreement is in force until the expiry of its term. During the term of a collective agreement, disputes over enforcement generally must be resolved through grievance arbitration procedures.

The code recognizes that differences may arise during the term of a collective agreement, which cannot be resolved through grievance arbitration without undue delay or industrial unrest. Section 88 of the code allows the Labour Relations Board (LRB) to inquire and make recommendations to resolve such differences.

Our submission to the LRB

The BCTF's section 88 application seeks the assistance of the LRB in addressing the serious concerns that teachers have about the working and learning conditions in the public education system during the COVID-19 pandemic. The BCTF has emphasized that these concerns require urgent attention in order for teachers to feel safe while continuing to attend work and avoid industrial unrest.

These concerns include:

- ✗ inadequate consultation
- ✗ lack of clarity with respect to what guidelines apply
- ✗ changing guidelines
- ✗ inadequate "layers of protection" for teachers
- ✗ lack of enforcement of Ministry guidelines
- ✗ pressure on teachers to work in unsafe conditions
- ✗ insufficient resources for preventative measures
- ✗ failure to reduce student density
- ✗ inappropriate use of the cohort model as a substitute for safety measures for physical distancing, a robust mask policy, and sufficient personal protective equipment
- ✗ confusing directions for students and staff with COVID-19 symptoms
- ✗ changes to health screening and safety protocols that increase risk of contagion
- ✗ insufficient additional staff
- ✗ impact on teacher workload and other terms and conditions of work.

What are we asking the LRB to do?

The BCTF has asked the LRB to investigate and make recommendations to resolve the problems. The BCTF suggested the LRB examine the following key elements of the COVID-19 response process:

- ✓ consultation and policy development
- ✓ communication and implementation of measures
- ✓ providing resources to introduce and maintain changes
- ✓ evaluation and enforcement of measures and polices.

Proceedings to date

The LRB responded to the BCTF's application by engaging with the parties informally to facilitate a resolution. Through this process, as well as other avenues for discussion and dispute resolution, the BCTF is continuing to push for a transparent and accountable framework for how the education system responds to COVID-19.

Unmasking logical fallacies:
Analyzing an antimask pamphlet with students

By Marcus Blair, teacher, Summerland

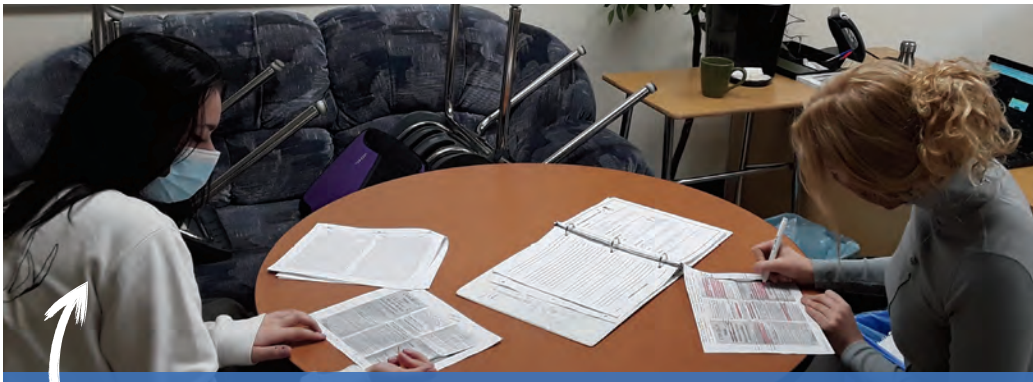
MY PHILOSOPHY 12 COURSE always launches with students developing their reasoning and argumentation skills. Reasoning and argumentation are fundamental to critical thinking and, by extension, BC's revised curriculum. My students kick off my reasoning and argumentation unit by learning the significance and implications of logical fallacies, a crucial component of both.

Logical fallacies are common errors in reasoning and appear in many forms, including ad hominem attacks, black and white reasoning, and straw-men arguments. To the untrained eye, they may appear to bolster an argument; however, they do little more than undermine one's reasoning.

Logical fallacies occur in many contexts: from presidential debates to the memes populating our social media feeds. In Philosophy 12, I hoped my students would learn enough about them to both recognize fallacious reasoning when confronted with it and be able to practise critical thinking where it matters most: the world beyond the brick and mortar classroom.

While in the heart of my reasoning and argumentation unit, a student came to class eager to tell me that she walked by an antimask rally on the weekend. Initially, her excitement caught me off guard. I had never associated antimask sentiments with anything resembling excitement. Regardless, I wearily listened. It turned out, she just wanted to show me a pamphlet from the rally, as it had "like a million logical fallacies." Now I felt excited too!

That student's story inspired our primary activity for the following class. I scrapped what I initially had planned and went with something infinitely more meaningful. I googled "antimask pamphlet" and got to work.



Above: Two students in Marcus Blair's Philosophy 12 class at work analyzing an antimask pamphlet. Photo provided by author.

That Google query proved successful, and I found an authentic antimask group's pamphlet ready to be analyzed. How would my students fare? Would their learning, and my teaching, stand up in real world situations? Only time would tell.

I prefaced our pamphlet analysis by showing my class a news headline about an antimask rally held near two Kelowna schools: Rutland Middle and Rutland Secondary. Students immediately communicated disdain for the demonstrators and questioned their motives: "Why would antimaskers protest at a school? That's messed up."

I responded, "Well some people believe teenagers are impressionable and lack critical thinking. Maybe they thought they would have an easier time convincing students your age ..."

I thrust the gauntlet down. My class readily accepted.

In small groups, students annotated a photocopy of an authentic antimask pamphlet. They highlighted logical fallacies, questionable "facts," and any other problematic elements that caught their eye. I gave them 20 minutes to work through the pamphlet. They proceeded with utter zealousness; a symphony of excited chatter and highlighters meeting paper met my ears.

As a class, we discussed our findings section by section and column by column. Though our discussion focused extensively on the logical fallacies featured in the pamphlet, students identified several other features that defied reason: dubious statistics, suspect claims, etc. Groans of bewilderment broke out each time a student discovered a particularly questionable aspect of the pamphlet.

Students were excited to share their findings aloud, which isn't always the case. It was almost like they were competing against the pamphlet's authors and the stakes were high. By the end of the discussion, students had discovered issues with almost every line. One student exclaimed, "Why can't we do stuff like this every day?"

I began asking myself the same question. How can I bring more real world activities into my classroom?

This was one of my most rewarding experiences as a classroom teacher. First, it was proof my teaching could withstand real world challenges. But more importantly it was proof my students had the tools to make their way in the world. A world where real world activities will cease to be a classroom novelty and will become my students' everyday realities.

Mandart Chan photo

The music plays on: Safe school music classes during COVID-19

By Sunjum Jhaj, Editor, *Teacher* magazine

WE'VE KNOWN for some time that music can reduce stress, promote emotional regulation, and release "feel-good" chemicals in the brain, such as dopamine, endorphins, and oxytocin. Perhaps that's why so many of us turned to music to find connection, comfort, and relief at the height of social isolation. As school restart planning began, teachers around the world highlighted the necessity of music education in helping students cope with stress and regain a sense of normalcy in schools. However, we couldn't help but wonder: is music education safe during a pandemic?

Janet Wade, music teacher at W.J. Mouat Secondary School in Abbotsford, did some research of her own to answer the looming question. "I was advocating for the music program in my own school after reports were circulating about eliminating instruments and singing due to COVID-19," recalled Janet. "When searching for data that backed up these decisions, I saw media stories about choirs being 'super-spreaders' but very little scientific data. So, I started doing some more research: how can music education continue safely? What changes do we need to implement?"

Janet reached out to Mandart Chan, president of the BC Music Educators' Association (BCMEA), and Christin Reardon MacLellan, president of the Coalition for Music Education in British Columbia (CMEBC). "Combining our knowledge of return-to-school in June, our years of experience in music education, and our reading and research, we were able to work together to problem-solve, come up with viable strategies, and continue our research to make the safest and most informed decisions possible," said Janet.

They found it is possible, with a few extra precautions, to have a safe music education program in the midst of a pandemic.

"In many ways, our classes look familiar to students, but there are some differences that are particular to our environment," said Janet. One of the differences is in how instruments will be managed. Puppy-training pads are used to collect condensation that has to be released from instruments. Some instruments also use bell covers, specialty masks designed to cover the large openings and prevent the spread of droplets. Singers now stand physically distanced in straight lines instead of facing toward one another, and elementary music classrooms have individual packages of materials to prevent sharing.

Janet, Christin, and Mandart collaborated with several music teachers across BC to create a guide for safe music classes during the pandemic. The guide aims to offer ideas and support to music

teachers, while also showing families that the decision to continue music education in schools is based on facts and research. The BC Centre for Disease Control reviewed the guide and offered feedback that was incorporated, to ensure all suggestions are in accordance with COVID-19 protocols.

"It's an important advocacy piece," said Christin. "Protecting music programs during the pandemic and helping teachers, students, administrators, and parents see that music classes can be offered safely and that they should continue."

While Christin, Mandart, and Janet have been successful in advocating for the continuation of music programs in BC, they highlight that music teachers are still facing challenges. "We are still countering perceptions that music and singing are not safe because of media coverage early in the pandemic. We have to build confidence that music can be done safely," shared Janet.

In some schools, navigating shared spaces safely has also proven to be challenging. Budgets are another issue. Many of the safety measures that need to be put in place require funding; this is money that many music programs just don't have access to.

Advocacy efforts to protect music programs have been ongoing for many years but are perhaps more important now than ever before. "Music education gives students some normalcy in a time of semichaos. It allows them to turn off the noise of the world, even for part of the day, to engage in something that will spark joy and togetherness," said Mandart.

Music teachers from around the province have worked together to raise awareness about the value of music education and support each other in navigating a new normal for music classes. The BC Music Educators' Association Conference, one of the largest annual provincial specialist association conferences, was held entirely online this year.

"Although the thought of running our BCMEA Conference online this year seemed uncomfortable, it successfully brought together our community of music educators for a day of recharging and reconnecting," said Mandart.

AWARD-WINNING TEACHERS

Janet Wade and Christin Reardon MacLellan were recently awarded the Canadian Music Educators' Association Builders Award for their work in creating guidelines for safe music classes in BC. This national award recognizes those who advance music education through collaboration and community building.

They have also been awarded the Distinguished Service Award from the BC Music Educators' Association in recognition of their unique and lasting impact on music education in BC.

Their guide, Guidance for Music Classes in BC During COVID-19, is available online at the following link: *drive.google.com/file/d/1KG2rE1rU-NENxbQsuYN20xnM9TBlNn3Z/view*

Opposite: Glynis Dawson, music teacher and colleague of Mandart Chan, directs the concert choir of Belmont Secondary School, Langford.
Below: The Senior Jazz Band at W.J. Mouat Secondary School, Abbotsford, where Janet Wade is the music director.

Janet Wade photo

Stories of resistance: Resilience in the face of racism in education

"Teaching is a language … what do we do with the experiences in our classrooms that made us feel too brown?"

By Amrita Kauldher, teacher, Coquitlam

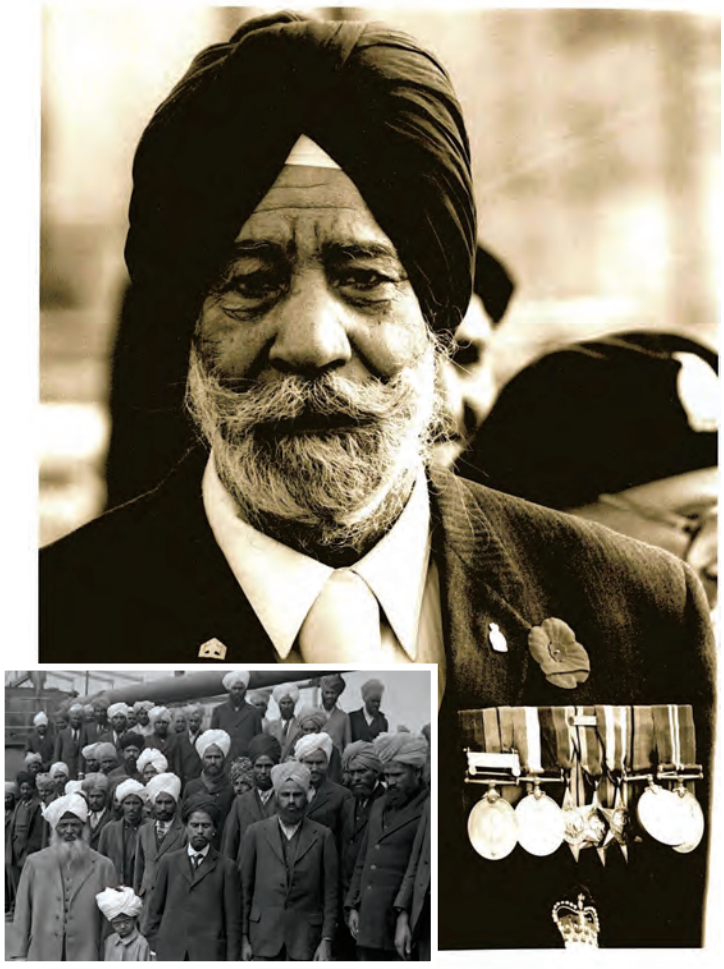
FOUR YEARS AGO, I jotted down the quote above by Indigenous author Tracey Lindberg during a keynote speech. I have held on to it since. It has been incredibly powerful in my reflections as an educator of colour. It resonates with my own brownness, being of Punjabi-Sikh ethnicity and heritage. Although Tracey speaks to the painful journey of being Indigenous in Canada's education system, I am reminded of moments as a student where feeling "too brown" was immense.

I begin this story with a history textbook. It was the only place in the education system, growing up in a small mill town in British Columbia, that I was able to see something close to my likeness. It is a famous photograph in black and white of men packed tightly on a ship, dressed in European tailored suits. You see brown weary faces, long beards, and the stark white of turbans. It is one of many famous photographs taken of passengers on the Komagata Maru.

In that moment, as a 15-year-old, I wanted to disappear under my desk because something felt so wrong in learning about this history in a simple paragraph. Something felt wrong knowing they were not worthy of Canada because of their brownness.

I knew most of the passengers were Sikh men, but seeing them called "Hindus" in the old newspaper clippings made me feel small. It was the same feeling when I heard the word used as a slur in the hallways. I felt this page in history did not whole-heartedly represent myself or my family. I thought of my grandfather, a community leader, with his turban held high. I looked back at the page, at a reflection of Canadian history that made me feel deeply uncomfortable.

The first chapters in some of our widely used history textbooks depict how difficult pioneering was. For people of South Asian, African, Japanese, or Chinese descent, pioneering was not only difficult, it was dangerous. Establishing minority communities was a matter of life and death, because they were targets of racial violence. If they were not dehumanized by racist Victorian values, they were discriminated against with laws or legislation



Above: Amrita's grandfather Ujagar Singh Kauldher. Provided by author. **Inset:** Image of passengers aboard the Komagata Maru. Vancouver Public Library/Public Domain.

promoting a vision of a "white Canada." Therefore, I ask: how do we plan to equip our students of colour with power and resiliency, while presenting them with a history that is racially desolate and grim?

Many educators will continue to teach this history by beginning with such a poorly written chapter, and do not have the scaffolding in antiracist pedagogy in place. This will result in a grave disservice. It is not only in resources and curriculum that teachers need to become aware of racism, but racial microaggressions that take shape in our

language. Referring again to Tracey Lindberg's quote, "teaching is a language …", we are all reminded that how we speak, what we speak, how we say words, and when we say them, matters. In the classroom, students will also notice our silence.

As I reflect on my experiences as a student, I am reminded of a moment I witnessed as an educator. For this student, his racial identity became amplified as he shared a moment when his blackness felt limiting. He spoke of being singled out and told in a library, among other students, that he would be particularly interested in a selection of books about the African American experience, based on his appearance.

The student explained how he spoke up and said he was not Black, but African.[1] However, the person did not hear him. He corrected them again, and in being more explicit, told them he was not Black, but Rwandan. This student was still not heard. Eventually, he just gave up, shaking his head and mumbling, "Never mind."

In speaking with him, I apologized that all of that even occurred. He told me not to worry and that he was used to it. I do not want this student to be used to it. I do not want this student to feel consumed by feelings and projections of blackness in the education system. For what I believe he wanted in that moment, aside from not wanting to be singled out at all, was his identity as an African from Rwanda not to be conflated or stereotyped. He has a history and life experience of his own.

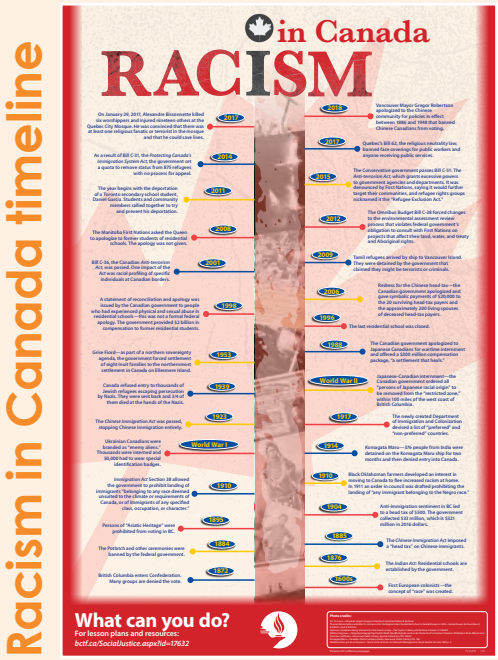
So, where is resiliency in the face of racism in education? It will be found in the stories we share of survival and resistance, while teaching histories of oppression. Resiliency will be found in not only actualizing what racism looked like, but the realities of it today.

There is a heavy load being carried by educators who are Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC). They are consulting and contributing their intellect and background with racial issues. This is additional labour to the existing demands of teaching. Resilience can be found within them, their relationships with students, and their pedagogy.

Racial violence, bias, and discrimination are real and lived. Those incidents from one's past instantly become magnified with current events that remind us that racial violence was not left in the past or in the first chapter of a history textbook.

It is my recommendation that every teacher across BC participate in antiracist training. Districts can further this initiative by identifying educators who have begun this critical work through their own research, curriculum, and self-published books. The truth of the matter is, most BIPOC educators pursued this profession to make a difference. That place of "difference" likely began with them and how their identity through race, ethnicity, and culture was othered in the classroom.

BCTF antiracism resources



This poster notes significant dates in the history of racism in Canada. The reverse side links the content to the Grade 10–12 curriculum and includes a suggested lesson plan.

This and other antiracism posters are available at *bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=21348*.

How to Be an Antiracist workshop

This skills-based workshop is a powerful, practical way to promote awareness and empathy, and to develop skills to effectively respond to incidents of racism.

This workshop is available for online facilitation. For information on this and other workshops, including how to book, visit *bctf.ca/pd/workshops.aspx?id=233053*.

1 Capitalizing the B in "Black" is standard for recognizing culture, community, and ethnicity descended from enslaved Africans.

iStock/Jovanmandic

Equitable learning for Deaf and hard of hearing students

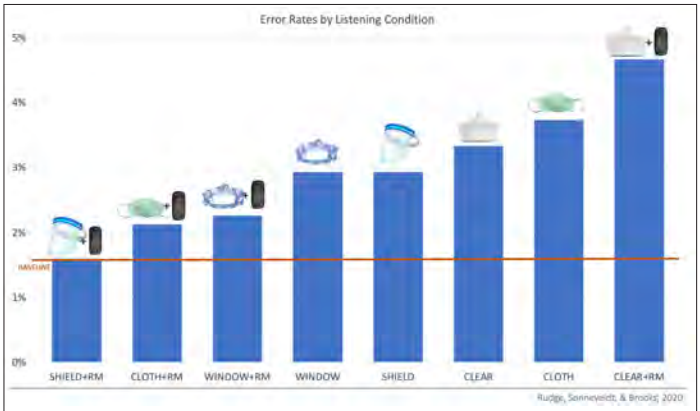


By Rhena Tevendale, teacher of the DHH, North Vancouver
Katelin Miller, teacher of the DHH, Comox Valley
Angela Wallenius, teacher of the DHH, Kootenay Columbia, with shared services in other districts

OVER THE PAST several months, you may have noticed the American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter, Nigel Howard, on the daily news briefings related to COVID-19. Nigel Howard is a Deaf interpreter and is Deaf himself. Individuals with varying degrees of hearing are referred to as Deaf, deaf, or hard of hearing. "Hearing Impaired" is no longer an acceptable term. The capital D in Deaf signifies that the person identifies as culturally Deaf; these individuals use ASL as their first and primary language and are members of the Deaf community. They may use terms such as "Deaf gain" as opposed to "hearing loss." Many Deaf people value their language, community, and culture and would not choose to change their level of hearing. Hard of hearing and deaf (lower case d) individuals may use ASL or auditory/verbal methods of communication and primarily participate within their hearing communities.

Nigel Howard, currently BC's most famous Deaf interpreter, is briefed before each news conference. During the conference he uses a hearing interpreter who relays information to him in ASL. As a Deaf interpreter, he can translate information both linguistically and culturally so that it is more readily understood by Deaf viewers. A Deaf interpreter uses non-manual communication, such as facial expressions, body language, and head movements, to translate the emotion as well as the content of a message.

Having a hearing difference can be an isolating experience; these feelings of isolation have been significantly heightened by the pandemic for many people who are Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH). Mask wearing, while essential for preventing the spread of COVID-19, creates barriers in communication for people who are DHH. Facial cues are an important signal many people who are DHH rely on in order to fully understand what people are saying verbally and in ASL. Wearing a mask removes this visual cue. Some may believe that a clear mask could improve understanding, however, recent studies through the Moog Center for Deaf Education show that wearing a clear mask degrades speech perceptions more than some other personal protective equipment options (see graph below).



Percentage of speech perception error as measured by the CNC test in nine variations of face-covering conditions, including the baseline condition of no face covering and no remote microphone represented by the orange line.

moogcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/The-Effects-of-Face-Coverings-and-Remote-Microphone-Technology-on-Speech-Perception-in-the-Classroom.pdf

Mask wearing, while essential for preventing the spread of COVID-19, creates barriers in communication for people who are DHH.

All students, whether hearing or DHH, benefit from optimal speech signals. A sound-field (amplification) system in the classroom can improve the signal to noise ratio and signal clarity; however, as the graph illustrates, a soundfield system combined with a clear mask can still result in a high percentage of speech perception error. It is important to accommodate DHH students who need to see the speaker's face in order to use visual cues. Scaffolding information, providing a written visual, and checking for understanding are imperative during this tricky time. A qualified teacher of the Deaf and hard of hearing (TDHH) can be a great resource for teachers to consult in ensuring your auditory teaching practice is equitable for all students.

There are approximately 65 qualified teachers of the Deaf and hard of hearing in BC who work with 1,151 designated Category F (Deaf and hard of hearing) students.[1] Qualified TDHHs provide DHH students with equitable learning opportunities and support classroom teachers in creating equitable learning environments.

TDHHs work with students from birth to Grade 12 using a variety of modalities. They work in a variety of settings, including early intervention, itinerantly in K–12 classrooms, in DHH resource programs, and at the Provincial School of the Deaf.

DHH students in British Columbia have the choice of attending their local mainstreamed school or the BC School of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing located in Burnaby (BCSD). BCSD offers students a chance to be immersed in rich language and social opportunities that are unlikely to be available in local communities.

Many DHH students also attend various camps, field trips, and activities that are hosted either regionally or through the Provincial Outreach Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. These opportunities allow DHH students to learn, socialize, and not have to advocate quite as hard as in their everyday lives. Many of the students we work with are the only DHH student in their school.

Teaching self-advocacy is a significant part of the work of a TDHH and aligns within the BC competency-based curriculum. Teaching students how to accept and explain their hearing level, explore their identity (whether it be within the Deaf community, their hearing community, or somewhere in between), and working with students to create equitable and accessible learning opportunities is crucial. TDHHs also provide direct instruction to DHH students in communication, language, academics, and social-emotional development.

Qualified TDHHs work with families and school teams to provide and implement accommodations to minimize barriers in equitable access. Most importantly, TDHHs support students in developing their identity and self-awareness so they can continue to confidently self-advocate after graduation.

TDHHs are in critical shortage. If you are interested in this fascinating field contact the Canadian Association for Educators of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at *caedhhbc@gmail.com*. Or explore the Deaf Education UBC Masters Program: *ecps.educ.ubc.ca/special-education/graduate-concentrations/med-concentrations/deaf-and-hard-of-hearing/*

LEARN AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

American Sign Language is a dynamic and comprehensive language used by individuals who are Deaf. For more information, or if you are interested in learning ASL, please see the options below.

Burnaby Online:
online.burnabyschools.ca/modern-languages/

ASL Connect:
www.gallaudet.edu/asl-connect

Provincial Outreach Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing:
Available only if working directly with a DHH student. Email *office@popdhh.ca*.

University of British Columbia:
extendedlearning.ubc.ca/study-topic/sign-language-american

Douglas College:
www.douglascollege.ca/programs-courses/catalogue/courses/MODL/MODL1161

Vancouver Community College:
www.vcc.ca/programscourses/languages-and-writing/sign-language-studies/

Camosun College:
ce.camosun.ca/search/publicCourseSearchDetails.do?method=load&courseId=23316

1 Information for designated students collected from *catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/student-headcount-by-special-needs-category/resource/ab33bc93-ca6c-4e87-a89b-43b354ec2648?inner_span=True*

Art by Molly Crabapple and available for Green New Deal activism at *350.org*.

From climate crisis to climate opportunity: Why we need a Green New Deal

By Tara Ehrcke, Committee for Action on Social Justice member

THIS SEPTEMBER, students and teachers walked into their classrooms with not one, but two environmental crises dominating the back-to-school season. As if a global pandemic were not enough to navigate, thick clouds of smoke blanketed most of the southwest areas of the province. An impossible health issue just got worse: how do we go outside and breathe fresh air to protect ourselves from viral load when the air quality index is literally off the charts?

COVID-19, along with Ebola, SARS, and MERS, is one of an ever-increasing number of zoonotic viruses that are jumping from animals to humans. This happens as we crowd in on the natural world's space. Forest burn, intensive farming, and urbanization are all contributing to an increase in the frequency of pandemics, as the 21st century is showing us.

At the same time, the relentless increases in the use of fossil fuels has led to "inferno seasons," where hot and dry conditions, such as this year's heat dome, exacerbate wildfires creating toxic clouds of smoke that push us indoors and punish our lungs.

Depressingly, this is not going to be as bad as it gets. We are experiencing now the impact of just one degree of global warming. But scientists warn that time is almost up to prevent two degrees or more, the consequences of which will be devastating. And as we try to respond to overlapping events it will be harder and harder to keep ourselves safe, as this September's twin crises of fires and pandemic demonstrated.

What is to be done?

We need nothing short of a climate revolution. Long gone are the days when individual actions might have made a dent in our use of green house gasses (GHGs). Despite decades of recycling programs, good intentions, and international climate conferences, emissions have moved ever upwards. We need not only a collective response, but one on a scale that fits the size of the crisis we face.

Enter the Green New Deal, a policy platform to match the size of the problem. No longer do we have time to propose baby steps or to work within existing political frameworks. The Green New Deal envisions mass systemic change. For instance, we don't just need to make our cars electric. We need to change how we move around and get around. Mass, free, public transit is the sort of policy solution to eliminate the hundred mega-tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents we use on transportation every year in Canada.

Like the New Deal of the 1930s, the Green New Deal will require enormous investment. We have only nine years left, according to United Nations scientists, to halve our emissions. That means harnessing all our resources to make these changes.

The Green New Deal is not only about renewable energy. It also envisions new social relations. As we rebuild, rethink, and re-create structures and systems, we have the opportunity to do so in a socially just way. The voices and needs of marginalized people can be centred. We have the chance to reconstruct institutions without the systemic racism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia of the past and present. We also have the opportunity to ensure every worker has a decent and well-paid job, and that we eliminate the grotesque inequality in the world today.

What does this mean concretely? Many in civil society have been working through specific policies. Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign included a far-reaching Green New Deal platform. Closer to home, the Council of Canadians propose measures to take at the municipal, provincial, and federal level. And for an internationalist and decolonial perspective, we can look to the Red Deal, an Indigenous proposal for sustainable social transformation.

Any Green New Deal should contain these elements:

- Phase out fossil fuels.
- Invest in renewable energy systems to replace fossil fuels.
- Build public and fossil fuel free alternative (walking/cycling) transit infrastructure.
- Train/retrain workers displaced by transitions and guarantee well-paid jobs.
- Re-wild landscapes and protect and renew our forests.
- Transform our food systems to be regenerative and sustainable.

Despite the many technical details, the biggest challenge we will face to win a Green New Deal will not be articulating what needs to be done. We already have the expertise to solve these problems. Rather, it will be creating the political pressure to make it happen. With a federal government intent on purchasing pipelines, and a provincial government intent on expanding the GHG-producing natural gas industry, we have a lot of political work to do.

To solve the climate crisis, we will need the power of a movement. We will need workers and their unions, environmental organizations, all of civil society. We all have a role to play in that movement, and the movement will need every one of us. This June the BCTF endorsed the Green New Deal and a Just Recovery. The strength of these endorsements will be how we fight for them—at the provincial, and the local, and the school level. We can move from crisis to opportunity, if we seize the moment to do so.

MORE INFORMATION

- *On Fire: The (Burning) Case for a Green New Deal*, by Naomi Klein
- *justrecoveryforall.ca*
- *canadians.org/greennewdeal*
- *berniesanders.com/issues/green-new-deal.*

Hungry to learn: Pandemic worsens food insecurity for BC kids

iStock.com/pepifoto

By Nancy Knickerbocker, BCTF staff

IN NORMAL TIMES, Kamloops teacher Val Shannik always got to school in time to have breakfast ready for students arriving on the 7:45 a.m. bus to Brock Middle School. Normally, about 200 kids relied on that cereal, oatmeal, or toast with peanut butter and jam to start their day. That is, until the pandemic hit.

"It was a vital part of their daily nutrition, but now we can't run the program with the safety measures we need in place for COVID," says Shannik. "It's breaking my heart…. You see some kids with new cell phones, new clothes. And then you see other kids who don't know where their next meal is coming from."

A recent assessment by UNICEF Canada of the pandemic's impact on children states, "More children will face poverty and food insecurity as prolonged job losses and debt take their toll on family finances and some children lose the school meals they relied on. Canada is the only G-8 country without a guaranteed meal at school every day."

In the 2019 federal budget, Ottawa announced its intention to work toward a national school food program, but there was no funding attached to the pledge. Without a co-ordinated strategy, hungry students must depend on a fragile patchwork of initiatives. For example, the Brock breakfast program relied on free bread from a local bakery, help from a nearby church, and donations from school staff and community members who made it work for everyone. "It's open to all because we want to take away the stigma of being identified as struggling," Shannik said.

Universal access is key to ensuring equity and eliminating stigma, says Dr. Claire Tugault-Lafleur, a post-doctoral fellow in the UBC School of Population and Public Health. "Making sure all kids are fed well so they can learn well is one of their basic human rights," she said, pointing to Japan and Sweden as successful models of universally accessible healthy school food programs. In her recent study "Who's missing lunch in Canada?" Tugault-Lafleur investigates a myriad of demographic, socio-economic, and lifestyle factors associated with children's odds of missing lunch on school days.

Of course, missed meals have profound implications for learning. "You can't begin to do academics until you've got the kids there with food in their stomachs, feeling safe," Shannik says. "Often they're unable to process their emotions because of the hunger and things going on at home."

By contrast, shared meals foster connections. "Breaking bread together leads to deeper conversations," says Nicola Cridge, a youth worker at Pinetree Secondary in Coquitlam. "The pandemic has exposed so many needs. Parents have lost their jobs, kids are stressed."

In September, the BC Centre for Disease Control and BC Children's Hospital reported, "When in-person instruction was suspended, the BC Ministry of Education advised school districts to continue providing meal programs; 75,000 meals were delivered to 16,000 families every week. Anecdotal information suggests that the number of families seeking support from school food programming increased considerably during this time."

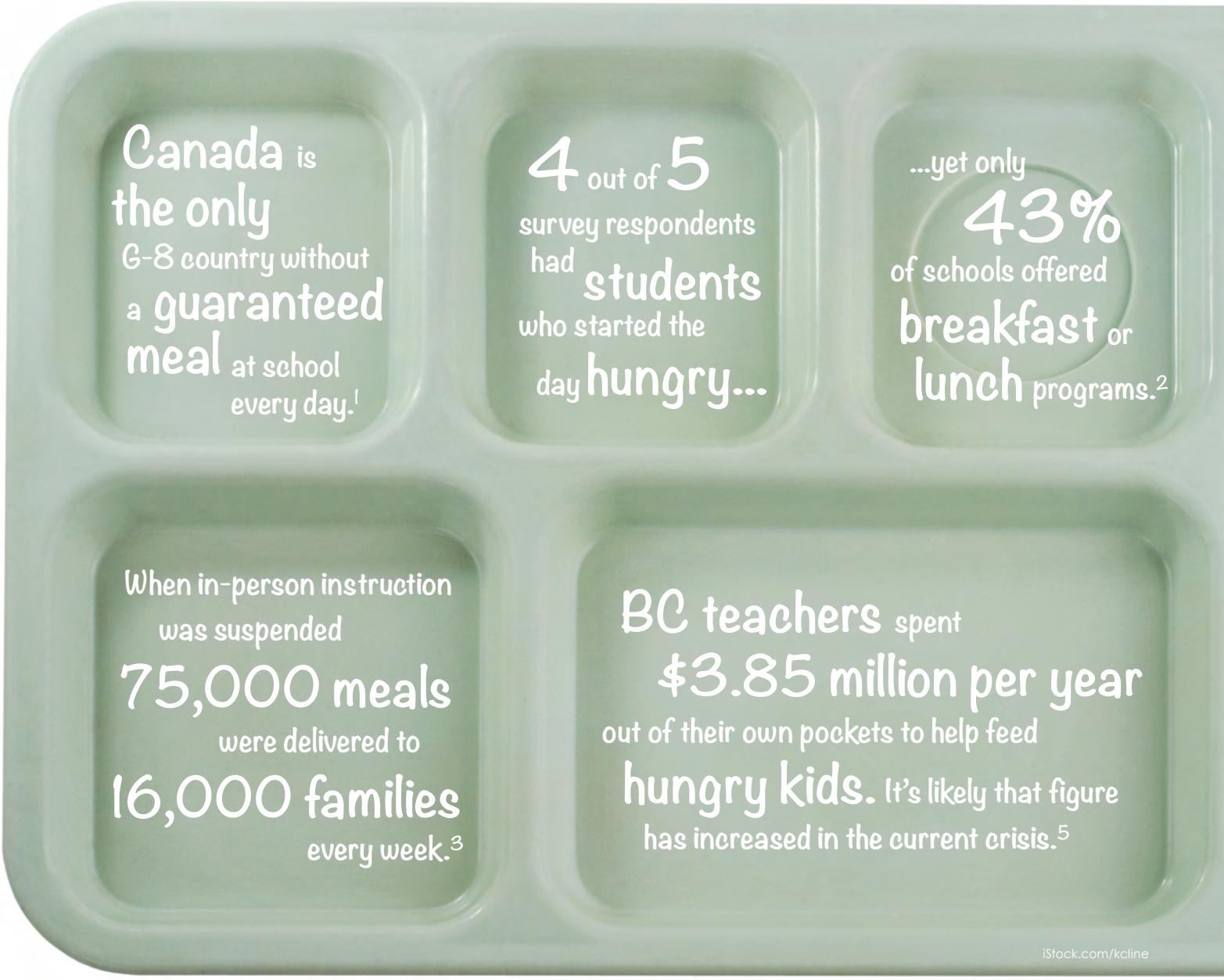
This increase will come as no surprise to BC teachers, who have long been filling the gap between students' needs and provincial funding. In the BCTF's most recent study on poverty in education (2015), four out of five respondents had students who started the school day hungry, yet only 43% of schools offered breakfast or lunch programs. In countless kind gestures, teachers spent $3.85 million per year out of their own pockets to help feed hungry kids. It's likely that figure has also increased in the current crisis.

Clearly, the goodwill of individual teachers cannot provide a sustainable solution to the pervasive food insecurity experienced by BC students. What's needed is a comprehensive poverty reduction plan, including a fully funded, universally accessible school food program.

Do you have thoughts or experiences to share about these issues? Please consider participating in the BCTF "virtual think tank" (see below).

BCTF VIRTUAL THINK TANK

To explore these issues from the perspective of teachers, the BCTF is holding a "virtual think-tank" with members across the province in late fall 2020. Watch your email for the *BCTF News* for your opportunity to participate or contact *researchassistants@bctf.ca* for more information.



1 *Canada's kids in lockdown: impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of children in Canada*. UNICEF, May 2020. 9pp.
2 Poverty and education survey: A teacher's perspective, BCTF: *bctf.ca/povertyresearch.aspx*
3 Dove, N., Wong, J., Gustafson, R., Corneil, T. (September 2020). *Impact of school closures on learning, child and family well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic*. BC Centre for Disease Control & BC Children's Hospital. 40pp.
4 Poverty and education survey: A teacher's perspective, BCTF: *bctf.ca/povertyresearch.aspx*


Naomi Nilsson photo

Louise Thomson photo

LOCAL PROFILE

Cowichan Valley Teachers' Union: Advocating for schools and communities

By Sunjum Jhaj, Editor, *Teacher* magazine

NAOMI NILSSON didn't always envision herself in the role of local president of the Cowichan Valley Teachers' Union (CVTU). She first got involved in her local union when her mother volunteered her for the local professional development committee. Since then, she has dedicated herself to advocating for the rights of teachers and students.

Back to school has been especially challenging this year, but the CVTU has experienced several successes in their advocacy efforts around the school restart plan.

"We were able to build a positive working relationship with our senior administration team at the board office early on," noted Naomi. The CVTU quickly secured pay for some members over the summer as they worked with school administration to plan the re-opening of schools. This ensured teacher voices were included in the restart planning process.

Member support and advocacy has continued through the fall to address the challenges teachers continue to face. These challenges include TTOC shortages, member mental health, and inadequate access to necessary cleaning supplies.

"Our role as advocates for our students, our communities, and ourselves has never been more evident and that passion is strong in Cowichan," said Louise Thomson, CVTU vice-president.

Despite the stress brought on by the pandemic, members in the CVTU continue to work hard to create safe and inclusive spaces for all students. Recently, the CVTU was awarded a BCTF Social Justice grant for a Rainbow Crosswalks Project chaired by local teacher, Nik Richardson. "It's a project that's very near to my heart," said Nik. "I'm so happy that we, as a local union and district, continue to create and grow amazing community-based projects and initiatives that support inclusivity and awareness."

The Rainbow Crosswalks Project was the result of collaborative advocacy from members of CVTU's Social Justice Committee and student representatives from secondary schools across the local. With this grant, every school in this local will have a rainbow crosswalk painted in a visible and accessible location.

A Cowichan Secondary student shared, "Crossing them every day is a reminder that my school and community care about me."

In addition to the Rainbow Crosswalks Project, the CVTU has garnered community support for social justice initiatives through hosting events such as the Cowichan Pride Parade. The pride parade was a collaborative effort between the CVTU Social Justice Committee and Cowichan Valley Youth Services in response to requests from students to host such an event. The CVTU also organized an evening of storytelling performances featuring Ivan Coyote. The event was open to the public and free to attend; over 200 people from all over Vancouver Island took part.

Large-scale community events will not take place in the foreseeable future, but CVTU members have found new, creative ways to support students. Teacher sponsors for school-based rainbow clubs across the local organized weekly Zoom meetings for members of all rainbow clubs to get to know each other. Students who may have otherwise never met have had an opportunity to connect with each other and find belonging despite the social isolation brought on by COVID-19.

"Regardless of the challenges our communities face, teachers will always be looked at to help support our students and their families. Seeing members build digital communities with students, morph their practice to address safety protocols, and teach in formats many had never used before is a testament to their expertise, flexibility, and resourcefulness," said Louise.

Above L to R: A BCTF Social Justice Grant supported the CVTU's Rainbow Crosswalks Project; Louise Thomson has taught portraiture to students in the first week of school for several years, and an installation of their work welcomes you to George Bonner Elementary.

Catherine Ellis photos

Building community in Kindergarten

TRANSITIONS CAN BE DIFFICULT for many students; transitioning into Kindergarten can be especially challenging. For the past three years, Catherine Ellis and Kate Johnston have been easing transitions into Kindergarten by forming positive relationships with families before they ever enter the school. The process starts in January, with surveys to find out which children will be joining the school community in the fall. In February, Catherine and Kate visit each family.

Catherine and Kate show up with a Valentine's gift for the child and a Kindergarten registration form. They support families in completing the registration, meet the children who will be in their classrooms next school year, and get to know the families.

"We try to make a connection and make it feel safe for families to send their kids to school. With our history of colonialism and the trauma of residential schools, many Indigenous families are uncomfortable coming into schools, so it helps to build relationships with parents and kids by visiting their homes where it's comfortable for them," shared Catherine.

"Relationships are everything," said Kate. "When children trust you and you have that bond where they feel safe, their behaviour improves, their ability to learn improves, everything improves."

Since starting the home visit program three years ago, Catherine and Kate have noticed improved attendance in their Kindergarten and Grade 1 classes, and increased parent involvement in the school.

Each month, students at Alexander Elementary school learn about a different Cowichan teaching. For Catherine and Kate's class, a lot of this learning happens outdoors with the support of community members. They started a program called Nem'tst'umshasum, meaning "we're going for a walk" in the Indigenous language Hul'q'umi'num.

Nem'tst'umshasum allows the children to learn about the area they live in, and its traditions and history, in way they can understand. In October, the Kindergarteners visited the Cowichan River and were joined by a Knowledge Keeper who taught the kids about the land, the wildlife, and the plants. In the past, they've walked 5 km to the Cowichan Tribes Elders' building to meet with Elders and hear their stories.

As they walk and explore on each field trip, the school Hul'q'umi'num language teacher shares Hul'q'umi'num vocabulary for the animal and plant life they encounter. The students create scrapbooks to showcase their learning journey and include the new Hul'q'umi'num words.

Despite the pandemic, Catherine and Kate are continuing the Nem'tst'umshasum program. There is a greater focus on outdoor, place-based learning, and younger Knowledge Keepers are invited to join the class instead of Elders, but the level of engagement from students and families remains the same.

The home visits will also continue as planned, but instead of entering, they will visit on porches and front yards as they did over the summer when both teachers volunteered to drop off food hampers to anyone who needed them.

In the entrance and halls of Alexander Elementary you can find many images of the stqeeye' (wolf). The stqeeye' was chosen as a symbol because it represents strength, loyalty, and kinship. A short conversation with the teachers at Alexander Elementary is enough to see how much that kinship means to them. "We're a community," said Catherine. "It's important to respect each other, learn from each other, and build trusting relationships."

Above L to R: Teachers Catherine Ellis and Kate Johnston; a Nem'tst'umshasum program student climbs a tree; Dolly Sylvester, District Elder and Merle Seymour, local Elder.
Below: Going for a walk.

Finding connection: History, culture, community

"KNOW WHO YOU ARE and where you come from," said Trish Ryder. For some, this knowledge is interwoven within stories and experiences from childhood to adulthood. For Trish, it was a journey of self-discovery, guided by a desire to learn and feel connected to a community.

"I didn't give much thought to all the things I didn't know until my dad passed away," recalled Trish. "He was a member of the Musqueam Nation and I didn't know any of the protocols to follow in order to hold his funeral on the reserve. I felt so disconnected."

Since then, each of Trish's siblings has worked to learn more about their Musqueam heritage. It was more challenging for Trish to seek out traditional knowledge and connect with the Musqueam community because she lives farther away, on Vancouver Island. Instead, she pursued a Master's degree in Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies.

"My Master's program gave me an opportunity to learn more about living in First Nations cultures. Bringing Indigenous knowledge into my teaching practice was a way for me to continue to explore my identity after my Master's program ended."

Each year, Trish uses Orange Shirt Day as a starting point for teaching students about residential schools. "My dad was a residential school survivor, as are many other people I know and work with. I bring those stories into my classroom, but it doesn't stop there. We use this as a starting point to talk about how colonization affected First Nations people and how we still feel those effects today."

By sharing her story with students, Trish creates a safe space for students to share their stories. "A lot of my students will share stories from their grandparents or personal stories from their own experiences," said Trish. "Sometimes it feels like we're talking about things that are beyond the understanding of Grade 3 and 4, but the kids bring so much depth to the conversation."

"I want to help students learn about Indigenous cultures and traditions," said Trish. "Being immersed in Indigenous cultures provides me with an outlet to continue my own personal growth. I often get to work with Cowichan Knowledge Keepers and listen to their traditional stories. Even though I'm a member of the Musqueam Nation, this work makes me feel more connected to my history."

Left: A Cowichan Knowledge Keeper shares with students.
Above: Trish Ryder in the field. Photos provided by Trish Ryder.

Working with our hands and our hearts

LIKE MOST woodwork teachers, Tobias Lemay often wears a woodwork apron when he teaches classes at Cowichan Secondary School, but what sets his apron apart from others is the array of buttons that adorn it. Each button represents a social justice topic that Tobias is working to address with his high school students.

"Safety is not just about tool use in the woodshop," said Tobias. "The shop needs to be a safe and inclusive space for all identities. I use my woodwork apron to signal some of my values and priorities to my students. I also support and encourage my students to explore their identities through self-directed work in the woodshop."

One way that Tobias supports identity exploration is by advocating for and teaching an Indigenous Technologies course at Cowichan Secondary. In this course, students learn about the histories and traditions behind the multitude of Coast Salish technologies that are still thriving today. "We are taking on projects such as Coast Salish design, cedar weaving, lacrosse, cedar box making, carving, printmaking, canoe paddle making, and Cowichan knitting," said Tobias.

The Indigenous Technologies course is a collaborative effort between the school's Indigenous Education Department, community members, and local Indigenous craftspeople. "I am much more of a co-learner than a teacher of this class," noted Tobias. "This course could not take place without the support of Lauren Rainone [Indigenous Education teacher], Rita George Greene [Indigenous support worker], and Rosanna Jackson [Indigenous Education curriculum co-ordinator]. We have a fantastic team here."

Whether in the Indigenous Technologies course or in the other woodwork courses he teaches, Tobias is using his leverage as a high school teacher to create a safer, more inclusive world. "Students are often surprised when I start a course with a land acknowledgment and discuss reconciliation," said Tobias. "They hear this in their humanities classes, but they don't expect to talk about this in the shop. I make a commitment to work toward reconciliation and I encourage all my students to share in that."

"Work toward reconciliation and social justice has to happen everywhere in the school. It's especially important to break down the machismo, classism, and sexism that has been a big part of trades culture. We can do better. We can work with our hands and our hearts."

Above L to R: Tobias Lemay in his button-laden apron; Tobias with colleagues Lauren Rainone (left) and Rita George Greene (right). **Left:** A woodworking project. Photos provided by Tobias Lemay.

Holodomor: The genocidal famine in Ukraine

By Caitlin Patricia Johnston, teacher, Nanaimo

IN THE MONTHS leading up to my fall 2020 Genocide Studies 12 course, I joined an organization called Genocide Prevention BC. This non-profit organization in Vancouver challenges racism and hate by supporting genocide prevention education in BC schools and provides a platform for intergenerational trauma advocacy.

Through Genocide Prevention BC I met an intergenerational survivor of the Holodomor. She encourages genocide studies teachers to include the Holodomor in their courses.

It felt good to reassure her that I would be teaching my students about the Holodomor. What didn't feel good, however, was acknowledging that if I hadn't been tasked with teaching a course on genocide studies, I would have been completely ignorant to the existence of the Holodomor and its Canadian memorialization dates. Why had I never learned about this genocide in my own schooling?

The Holodomor, which means "inflicted death by starvation," was a government-sanctioned famine genocide that occurred between 1932 and 1933. The Soviet Union, under the dictatorship of Joseph Stalin, forcibly collectivized 75% of farms in Ukraine and effectively brought Ukrainian villagers and their grain production under Soviet state control. Farmers who refused to comply with Stalin's collectivization plans or grain-quota laws were either robbed and thrown out of their homes, shot dead, or sent to Siberian death camps.

Starvation during the Holodomor was used as a tool to annihilate Ukrainian nationalists who openly resisted the Soviet Union's repressive communist rule. Every edible product from family homes, gardens, and farms was legally appropriated to fulfill impossibly high grain quotas set by the Soviet government. The sale of the stolen grain and foodstuffs was used to fund the mechanization and industrial expansion of the Soviet Union.

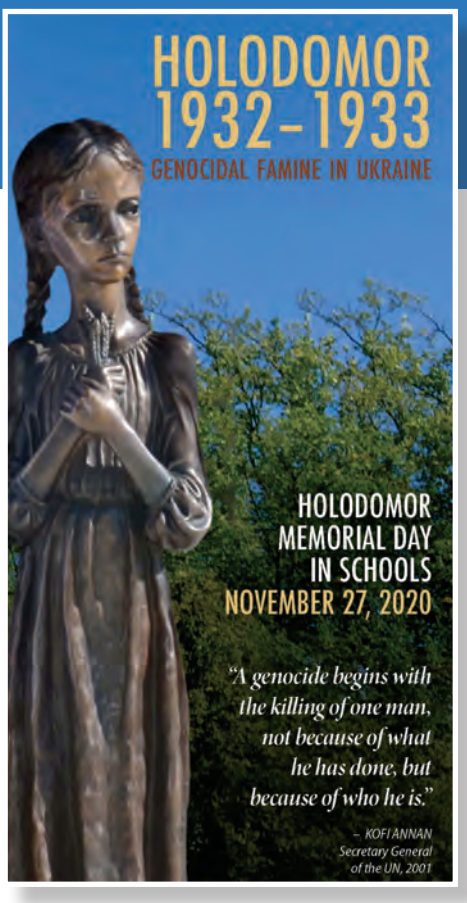
The results were genocidal. As hunger increased, Stalin introduced ever-more draconian policies that trapped Ukrainians inside of their ransacked villages. Soviet blockades purposely prevented humanitarian food-aid from entering Ukraine. Entire villages, including elders and children, were reduced to eating tree bark, grass, rotten roots, rats, frogs, dogs, horses, and birds. In June 1933, at the height of the man-made famine genocide, 28,000 people died per day. The total number of Ukrainians who died of starvation during the Holodomor is estimated to be between four and seven million.

The final insult came in the form of five decades of denial from the world about what happened during the Soviet occupation of Ukraine. In fact, the famine genocide was denied by the world up until the fall of communism in 1991.

The Canadian government has recognized the last Friday and Saturday of November as Holodomor Memorial Day. This year, November 27, 2020, marks the date schools across the nation will commemorate one of the darkest periods in 20th century history.

My students will commemorate the Holodomor with a Genocide Memorial Tree Planting. The idea behind planting fruit trees for the Holodomor was born out of a concept known as "active hope," which views ecological and socio-historical healing and repair as something we do actively together rather than something we hope for in the future.

The Foundation for Genocide Education Canada, a non-profit that creates Canadian-recognized genocide curriculum for teachers and advocates for mandatory genocide education across Canada and the United States, informed me that no provinces in Canada mandate genocide education for students.



Holodomor Research & Education Consortium

This is concerning. Genocide education promotes critical thinking, can prevent the radicalization of youth, teaches citizens how to recognize the signs of state-sanctioned prejudice and human rights violations, increases social connection and empathy toward other cultures, encourages respect for diversity, empowers students to act on and prevent future atrocities, and develops more informed and engaged citizens.

Perhaps you weren't planning to teach or memorialize the Holodomor this November—but don't feel it's too late! Discover the educational resources available at the Holodomor Research & Education Consortium (HREC) online at *education.holodomor.ca*. There you will also find a Memorial Day pamphlet created specifically for schools as well as an application form for the HREC Educator Award for Holodomor Lesson Plan Development.

I also encourage you to visit Genocide Prevention BC and The Foundation for Genocide Education online to learn more about how these non-profits are working to support teachers to ensure we actively end genocide today and into the future.

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Reflections on fostering resilience: Our students are stronger than we know

By Annie Ohana, teacher and settler on the unceded territories of the Kwantlen, Katzie, and Semiahmoo peoples, Surrey

AS TEACHERS, we have the power to build and foster resilience in our students. However, we may sometimes forget that students, especially those deemed as "needing resilience," are already resilient and have found their own creative ways to build resilience within themselves.

Resilience can be a dangerous term when it is understood only as a "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" process. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "It is a cruel jest to say to a bootless man that he ought to lift himself by his own bootstraps."

Resilience work is not a pity party. It is the understanding that for many people, simply existing requires resilience. Transformative justice, in conjunction with resilience, can change the systems that have created the need for resilience.

Transformative justice avoids band-aid solutions and simple charity. It involves taking apart systems that create trauma and privilege. With transformative justice, we can seek change on a larger scale rather than focusing solely on individual decisions and actions. Students are not empty vessels to be filled, but rather flowers growing in concrete. The concrete needs to be cracked open so the soil of culture and identity can foster growth.

Resilience is defined by three concepts: the presence of systemic power as a marginalizing process, the absence of privilege through oppression, and understanding and navigating complex traumas. Only by addressing all three of these concepts can we properly help build resilience.

The presence of systemic power structures

Oppressive factors are built into our current systems of governance and education. Our systems are not broken, they are built to marginalize Indigenous, Black, and people of colour (IBPOC). Our students don't exist in a vacuum. They interact daily with people, content, and experiences. Normalized beliefs force assimilation and result in daily oppression that people with privilege simply do not have to face. Under-representation, microaggressions, and prejudice are all systemic forms of oppression that IBPOC students cope with daily.

Much of the trauma our students face is not attached to a single event; it is the repetitive perpetuation of colonialism. The power imbalances created by the Eurocentric settler state are perpetuated in what we teach, who we centre in our examples, and what we highlight as model behaviour or unacceptable behaviour.

Absence of privilege

Unearned and usually invisible, privilege or the lack thereof must be considered in resilience work. Access to resources within families and communities has huge impacts on how we promote resilience. Resilience cannot simply be a checklist, an assessment, a metric. It needs to be understood within the multidimensional realities of privilege, access, and opportunities that remove barriers. As teachers, it's helpful when we acknowledge privilege or its lack and understand the complexities surrounding traumas.

Complex trauma

The experiences we define as requiring resilience need to be understood as an interconnected web of systemic processes and individual realities that have ongoing impacts on a student's development. Trauma does not exist simply within a singular event. Rather, it continues to have effects well after the fact and can have intergenerational impacts.

Examples of complex trauma can include, but are not limited to abuse (physical, sexual, verbal, emotional), neglect, witnessing community violence, and victimization due to multiple forms of discrimination (racial and cultural) within a settler colonial state structure where policies are openly genocidal. How we choose to understand these complex traumas relies on our understanding of how and why these traumas exist in the first place.

I encourage teachers to look at their own positionality when it comes to lived experience and their multidimensional identities. Tropes, stereotypes, and prejudices have no place in resilience work.

Individual lived experiences are the culmination of so much more than personal decisions. Resilience work that does not scratch the surface of visible trauma does not build up resilience. Instead, it furthers the othering process that entrenches systems of oppression, forcing students to merely survive rather than thrive.

Mindfulness: Practise teacher well-being every day

By Morgen MacDonald, teacher, Salmon Arm

AS TEACHERS, we are faced with the task of creating days that not only support educational needs but also positively contribute to students' emotional needs. This is even more prevalent as we work and learn amidst a pandemic. Teachers who practise mindfulness can foster the capacity in themselves and their students to deal with the many challenges and changes of today's classrooms. A mindful approach to the classroom can help teachers in their day-to-day interactions with students and in their own ability to cope with and function in the increasingly stressful environments of classrooms and schools.

The practice of present moment awareness allows teachers to create spaces that are conducive to students exploring not only the assigned curriculum but also the curriculum of life. As a mindfulness practitioner and middle school teacher, I have found that mindfulness has helped me foster a classroom that is calmer, allows me to feel less sense of urgency, and provides opportunities for my students and I to work at a pace that reflects our needs and desires as a class community.

Through mindfulness practices teachers can develop an awareness of their own biases and emotional reactions. Practices such as meditation and self-reflection allow us to explore our personal emotional states. In doing so, we evaluate our social-emotional regulation in the moment and do our best to react with care, calm, and respect. By being present with ourselves, mindful teachers can be present with students and are less likely to react to outbursts and disruptive behaviour from a place of stress, but rather from a place of self-awareness and compassion.

We all know that not every day goes smoothly. On those days, mindful awareness can help teachers reflect on their practice, adjust as necessary, and regroup. Mindfulness can help us start each day with a fresh mind and clear intentions. These skills become models for our students, as teachers demonstrate how to be present, calm and aware, how to react under stress, and how to think critically or reflectively.

Mindfulness can also help to combat feelings of burnout and emotional exhaustion and can be used in conjunction with other forms of mental health care. All too often, we hear of teachers feeling stressed, exhausted, and dissatisfied. These are all emotional states that lead to teacher dysregulation, which is translated to the students and classroom as a whole. By practising mindfulness and reflective thinking, teachers are better able to look back on their day and celebrate the small victories, breakthroughs, and good things that happened. These celebrations remind us that the work we do is rewarding and worthwhile.

EVERYDAY MINDFULNESS PRACTICES

Set aside time to be present with yourself and you will see the benefits in your classroom as your students follow your lead and help you create the calm, relaxed, engaged learning environment we all desire. Here are some mindfulness practices that don't require drastic changes to your day.

Start your day by taking 20–30 minutes to enjoy a cup of tea or coffee. Get up early and enjoy this time in stillness, really taste and smell the tea, feel the warmth of the cup in your hands and enjoy the sensations of your body waking up.

Throughout the day make a conscious effort to be present. Take a deep breath before you speak or act; this short pause can make all the difference.

Pause and take three to four deep breaths. Breathe in for a count of four, hold for four, and breathe out for a count of four. I find a great time to do this is while my students are transitioning from one job to another or as I transition from one class to another.

At the end of the day, take time to participate in a shower meditation. Take a few minutes to do a body scan, allow the water to be your guide as you end your day with relaxation, clarity of mind, and openness of heart, bringing presence to your personal space.

A more informal mindfulness practice is that of movement: go for a run, to the gym, do yoga, or go for a walk with your dog. Be mindful of your surroundings, of your body, of your mind and let thoughts, feelings, and emotions pass through you without judgment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Morgen MacDonald, B.Ed., M.Ed., is a Grade 6–7 teacher and literacy intervention co-ordinator at Shuswap Middle School. This article is based on her M.Ed. capstone project, for which she received the Outstanding Project Award from the Okanagan School of Education at the University of British Columbia.

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Math Catcher Festival: Learning math through storytelling


By Veselin Jungic, teaching professor, SFU Department of Mathematics, and **Terri Galligos,** mentor support teacher, Indigenous Education, Coquitlam

MATH CAN BE a tricky subject. Many students, when encountering abstract thinking for the first time, struggle to connect mathematical concepts to everyday life. Storytelling, on the other hand, is naturally interwoven with lived experiences and opportunities for connection.

Rina Sinclair, an Elder of the Siksika Nation, showed us just how powerful storytelling can be at the First Nations Math Education Workshop in 2009. Following the workshop, we set out to create an initiative that would apply the Indigenous tradition of storytelling as a vehicle to both communicate and promote mathematical concepts. Thus, began the Math Catcher Outreach Program, which aims to link mathematics to the "real world" through problem-solving, stories, and hands-on activities.

Over the last 10 years, we have worked to create a series of short stories and animated films that teach math skills and problem-solving within cultural contexts. The main character in all stories is a boy called Small Number, who has an impressive aptitude for mathematics—and a proclivity for getting into mischief. Through these stories, we show students that young people, like Small Number, encounter mathematics and require knowledge of it daily. The stories highlight how mathematics can be interesting and applicable in real life problems.

The Small Number stories and films incorporate problem-solving and aim to promote Indigenous culture. Of course, Indigenous culture is not a singular cohesive set of beliefs and practices, but a myriad of traditional and modern values and practices. As a result, Small Number's adventures take place in different situations and in different Indigenous communities. The stories are available in nine First Nation languages, as well as English and French.

The Math Catcher Program is strongly guided by the First Peoples Principles of Learning. For example, the principle stating, "Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)," is the essence of the message we try to communicate through our events and activities.

The program's newest initiative, the Math Catcher Festival, aims to continue our work in the same direction. The festival and associated activities are based on the belief that storytelling, accompanied by pictures and open-ended questions, helps students experience mathematics in action and encourages them to enjoy math.

The initiative, driven by a group of teachers from Coquitlam, is envisioned as a celebration of students' imagination and creativity and their knowledge of mathematics and Indigenous cultures and traditions. We invite Grade 4–5 students to create, over the next couple of months, their own Small Number stories and present them in the format of their choice: a picture book, a comic, a video, a PowerPoint presentation with a voice over, a play, a poster, an animation, a computer game, or any other medium that fits their ideas.

The festival, to be held virtually on December 11, 2020, will showcase student-created Small Number stories and will also include several activities, such as:

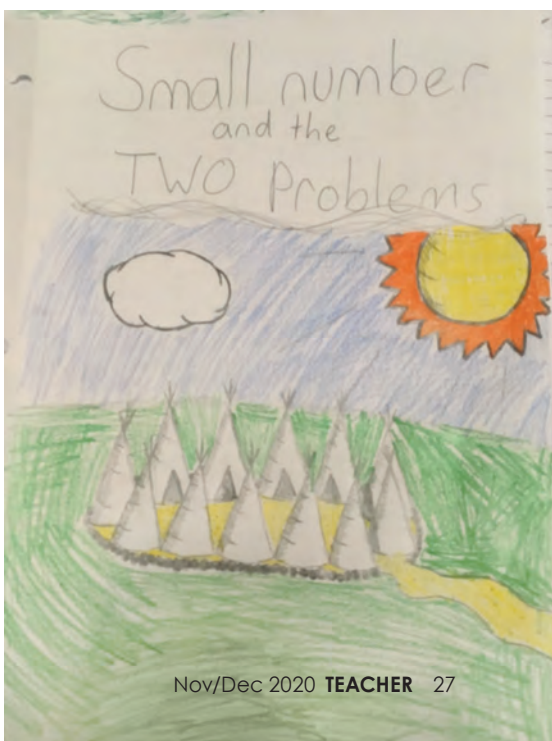
- mathematical demonstrations
- presentations of different Small Number films
- virtual activities with members of the SFU Indigenous community.

All participants will receive a Math Catcher Festival certificate. Additionally, a selection of the admitted stories will be posted on the Math Catcher website and their authors will be recognized.

MATH CATCHER FESTIVAL

For festival guidelines, important dates, and more information please visit the website *www.sfu.ca/mathcatcher/math-catcher-festival.html* or send an email to the Math Catcher Outreach Program at *math_catcher@sfu.ca*.

Below: Work by Math Catcher students in Coquitlam. Provided by Veselin Jungic.



Counselling through circus

By Tiffany Wightman, school counsellor, Gulf Islands

SIX YEARS AGO, an Australian public school circus troupe, Cirkus Surreal, visited Saltspring Island Middle School as part of their North American tour. Our students and staff were awed by their inspiring performances of aerial skills, trapeze, lyra, acrobatics, unicycling, and more. After their performance, Cirkus Surreal left behind anchor points in our gym ceiling—and the idea that such a program was possible in public schools.

Fast forward to 2020, a historic year defined by monumental challenges. Maintaining a circus program has not been easy in the age of physical distancing; however, the program has grown to become an integral part of our school culture. It's more necessary now for our students than ever before.

In our school, circus is a classroom physical activity, an extracurricular team, and a counselling pedagogy. As the school counsellor, I use the circus equipment to work with students who would like an alternative approach to counselling goals.

Somatic mindfulness, which focuses on the mind-body connection in the healing process, works with the theory that traumatic experiences are trapped in the body and can present as anxiety, depression, and even physical ailments. Posture and body language are part of this mind-body connection. Using circus as a non-narrative form of counselling allows students to process internalized emotional pain through movement. Learning to trust themselves, regulate their experiences, and address fears or difficult feelings (both physical and emotional) in a safe and supportive environment are all part of circus practice. It is a natural way to gain strength from the inside out, set goals, and it allows confidence to emerge over time despite the emotional and physical obstacles.

Some students who struggle with post-traumatic stress, attention-deficit/hyperactivity, oppositional defiance, and anxiety conditions, for example, may not respond to narrative processes. Moreover, in a regular class setting, many students enduring these conditions may struggle to stay within set boundaries, and feelings of failure can increase their symptoms. Students who habitually refuse rules tend to respect them when their body is engaged in the process and they need to follow rules to stay safe. Trust, attention to the activity, and a desire to be there become part of the experience. To learn the mechanics of "wrapping a drop," students climb the fabric and wrap it in a sequence around their bodies before falling toward the floor to unwind the wrap. They may feel afraid to let go but, with encouragement, they usually do. When the drop is completed, they feel safe, proud, and thrilled at the experience. It gives a sense of joy and is a relieving contrast to their constant anxiety.

For others, juggling can help develop their attention span or disrupt anxiety conditions, all the while working

About to "wrap a drop"

Learning the stilts

Tiffany Wightman photos

with both brain hemispheres to bring them into the present. There are emerging studies on this activity as a therapeutic modality. Circus also invites conversation about oppression, as it is known to celebrate diversity and invites out-of-the-box thinking. It is a place where critical thinking and unique self-expression are expected, and students are ready for it.

Co-operation and collaboration are the focus at practices, inviting students who don't like team competition to find their inner athlete, even when they may never have enjoyed sports before. We strive to eliminate gendered barriers and create an environment that is inclusive of all gender identities. We also integrate varied ages, chipping away at ageism power dynamics. Moreover, differently abled people can and do participate, finding their inner circus athlete. It comes as no surprise that circus, as a fringe sport with a foundation in celebrating diversity, creates a space where athletes of all different body types, abilities, and cultural groups can truly be valued and given a gateway not only to survive hard times, but also to thrive.

In the current pandemic, we've shifted our scheduling and set up to allow for safe practices. There are nine main points hanging from the gym ceiling, each safely physically distanced at eight feet apart.

Through the fundraising efforts of the extracurricular team, Tsunami Circus, we have collected enough aerial apparatus, mats, props, stilts and unicycles for classes to share. With COVID-19 safety guidelines, only one group can use the circus gear for two weeks at a time. This way all classes have a rotation and get to experience the joy of circus. Our more advanced apparatus are set aside for mentors to train on in the extracurricular Tsunami Circus troupe, so no items are shared across groups. Some teachers who have found their students are particularly keen on circus have ordered their own class sets of juggling balls or spinning plates and work with our school's circus teacher/counsellor for additional circus training.

The survival of such a program depends on making space, and that is what our school has ensured by booking the last block of each day in the gymnasium for "circus exploratory." Dedication and collaboration from school and district leaders laid the foundation for the success of this program.

Education and relationship building were our greatest tools in addressing the challenges associated with introducing a school circus program. For example, circus is not considered a sport, so we cannot apply for sports grants. Programs are funded entirely by fundraising. There are other issues schools must address, including organizing shared gyms to accommodate circus training, how much storage space is needed for circus equipment, and the challenge of equitably accessing space. Brave and thoughtful adult and student leaders have been the supporting voices we've needed to keep this program thriving.

Before COVID-19 disrupted our school year in the spring of 2020, Tsunami Circus was gearing up to do a show called "rEVOLUTION." Students were creating performances through their own activist lenses. Our motto follows the "6 Ps of Circus": practice, positivity, perseverance, patience, pain (the good kind), and pass it on. Collectively, these powerful words influence our culture that consciously works toward resilience, joy, and belonging. Those who graduate will continue to apply these principles, not only giving them greater resilience, but also the increased confidence to work toward social change.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tiffany Wightman is a counsellor and teacher in Local 64 Gulf Islands, an Opt Certified Sexual Health Educator, and the circus director and coach at Saltspring Island Middle School where she has worked for 20 years.

Project-based learning: Not all good news

By Dr. Lorrie Welch, teacher, North Vancouver

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING (PBL) has become more popular in recent years. While there are several advantages to this type of learning, there are a few issues. As a science and math teacher, I have noticed a recent decline in senior students' foundational knowledge. A few years ago, I began to hear phrases like "I've never seen this before" as I referred to concepts from the curriculum for Grades 8–10. This seemed to be a systemic problem, as most of these students were participants in the PBL program.

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To gain a better understanding of PBL, I focused on this type of teaching with one of my Science 8 classes. The first assignment was a partner project on different types of diseases. I found that students knew their disease well but were unable to remember the main points of project presentations from other groups.

Before starting the second project, I attended a seminar to improve my iPad skills as I wanted to follow the criteria set out by the PBL protocol in our school. The second Science 8 project was a summary of the density unit focusing on key concepts and example calculations. Students used scientific equipment to capture pictures and videos that were then incorporated into Keynote presentations (similar to PowerPoint) on the school iPads. The PBL took longer than other methods of teaching and the assessments that followed did not show an increased level of understanding of the scientific concepts. In terms of math-based questions, the results were lower than those who learned the concepts in a more conventional program. The students did, however, learn a lot about iPads and Keynote.

The third project dealt with different types of liquids and solids and was thus named the Slime Project. This was the first project completed on an individual basis, although the students helped each other with videos and photographs. The results varied widely, with some students handing in excellent work and some not finishing the project even with much one-on-one support.

There were positives and negatives with the project work. Some students thrived because they were able to spend time on work that interested them. At the opposite end, some students did not engage with the work, were easily distracted using technology, and had to be helped through each project step-by-step. Project learning worked best when there were no mathematical components, no need to understand the other students' projects, and no assessment afterward.

The gaps in senior students' knowledge reflect these findings. Students know a lot about the material they studied for their projects but very little about concepts outside of their own work. As an example, I watched Science 10 students' group presentations about types of chemical reactions. Each group did an excellent job of presenting the one type of chemical reaction they were responsible for but did not listen to the other presentations; they were either planning their own presentation or congratulating each other after they had spoken. The next year in Chemistry 11 these students were only able to describe one of the six types of chemical reactions—the one they had presented in Science 10.

There are other issues with the PBL program. Most of the younger students need a lot of scaffolding and guidance with PBL before they can work on a project independently. Even in the senior classes, some of these students have a hard time working by themselves and seek affirmation from their PBL classmates before starting an assignment. In some classes, they all look to one individual and copy their work. They have difficulty handing in assignments on time, as the PBL program allows flexibility around due dates. Their extended field trips take them out of the classroom, sometimes for weeks at a time, so they miss learning opportunities in their other high school classes. And in parent-teacher interviews, some parents have expressed concern that their child's increased test-taking anxiety is due to the lack of testing in the PBL program.

In conclusion, project-based learning does have a place in the classroom and can provide important learning opportunities. However, where it is the sole method of learning, students may understand only a small part of the knowledge needed for success in future courses.

Teachers and students volunteer to make Christmas toys

By Jennifer Kimbley, BCTF staff

THE WOODSHOP is filled with the sounds of intermittent drilling, laughter, and conversation as volunteers work together to put smiles on kids' faces come Christmas morning.

Students, teachers, parents, and graduated students are assembling wooden rocking toys at Fraser Heights Secondary in Surrey. Their toys will be donated to the Surrey Christmas Bureau, a non-profit organization that provides low-income families with toys and stocking stuffers at Christmas.

"I volunteered for this project because I think it's interesting and I wanted to try a new skill," says Cindy, a Grade 11 student. "And it will make children happy to have a new toy."

Teachers Martin Lim and Chris Mills are the driving force behind the creative enterprise.

"It all began when we took a group of woodwork students to Tijuana, Mexico to build a house for a family in need," says Martin. "It was just four basic walls, but they were so grateful. And it led to the question, 'What can we do for our local community as well?'"

They returned to Surrey and created the annual toy-building project, and 2020 is their eighteenth year.

On average, the volunteers make 60 rocking toys for donation each year. They gather over a two-week period to cut the wood into pieces, assemble, and paint the rocking toys. All materials and supplies are donated by local businesses. This year they made three designs: dinosaurs, moose, and seaplanes.

In early December, the toys are delivered to the Surrey Christmas Bureau.

"Every year when the toys come in, they're front and centre," says Tony Miles from the Christmas Bureau. "When the parents see the toys, they're just amazed at the amount of work that goes into making them, and how bright and colourful they are. I'm sure these items become heirlooms for many families."

The connection with community is what keeps the teachers and volunteers coming back.

"I was in woodworking for the five years I was in high school, and I got very close to everyone here. They call me 'kiddo'," says past student Vy Pham, 20. "This is my sixth year volunteering, and I come back every year to help out."

"A couple years ago we were very short on volunteers," she says. "I spent most of my day here working by myself and people would come help after school. I always come back."

This year, with COVID-19, things will look slightly different, but the team at Fraser Heights is committed to again making toys for the Surrey Christmas Bureau.

Above: Wooden rocking seaplanes, moose, and dinosaurs at Fraser Heights Secondary ready to be gifted. Rob Sabo photo. **Left:** Surrey teachers Chris Mills (left) and Martin Lim (right). Jennifer Kimbley photo.

Negotiating Belonging: Teachers as allies for refugee students

By Helia Jafari, pediatric psychological clinician, BC Children's Hospital and
Anusha Kassan, associate professor, UBC Faculty of Education

TWO YEARS AGO, we started a project to learn more about the processes responsible for refugee student resilience. Inspired by our own migration histories, we conducted in-depth, one-on-one interviews with refugee high school students across Canada. The results yielded a thorough model that explains the process whereby refugee youth develop resilience. The central concept in this model, Negotiating Belonging, highlights how important it is for this group to cultivate a sense of belonging in the new country.

Generally, during war, displacement, and resettlement, young refugees suffer significant losses that may include their loved ones, language, culture, former identities, school, and community. These losses can strongly undermine their sense of belonging after resettlement, which leads them to prioritize the development of new ties and relationships as well as putting down roots and making Canada their permanent home. In this context, negotiating disrupted lives, loss of sense of self, and culture shock—in other words negotiating belonging—becomes vital.

However, within pluralistic Canadian society, despite its multiculturalism and equity policies, Eurocentric worldviews and culture represent the mainstream. This reality complicates the negotiation of belonging for refugee students after the resettlement process. The refugee students we spoke with shared how they often felt like "the other" in Canada. Moreover, they faced a strong pressure to assimilate (i.e., become like others around them, at the cost of their own culture), especially in high school.

Many refugee students expressed a fear of standing out and a wish to "just be normal." For example, some participants disclosed experiences of being placed in lower grades and receiving additional educational assistance, which negatively affected their self-confidence (despite appreciating its necessity). As such, they tried to boost their confidence through academic success, which concurred with their cultural value of academic accomplishment as a means to enhance personal worth. To succeed academically, they reported choosing peer role models who could provide positive examples, structures, and guidance. Also, they closely followed the rules by attending all classes and doing their homework diligently.

Overall, negotiating belonging involves a continuous process in which refugee students successfully navigate their way to find necessary resources, like tapping into their own personal qualities and turning to culturally relevant and meaningful services in Canada. Such personal and contextual resources have a bidirectional relationship: for example, a supportive school climate positively influences young refugees' attitudes toward school and hence their willingness to do well, and vice versa. Their positive attitudes and enthusiasm encourage higher social acceptance.

A positive adaptation in the school context facilitates the positive adaptation of refugee youth into Canadian society, further highlighting schools' and teachers' instrumental role in the adaptive process of refugee students. Specifically, school connectedness, which has been defined as a sense of belonging, acceptance, care, and support from the school environment, protects refugee students from mental health challenges and boosts their self-esteem and efficacy. The following teacher- and school-related themes were addressed by refugee students as promoting positive connections.

Teacher-related factors

Culturally responsive support and teaching. Teachers play an influential role in the lives of refugee students and as such can make a difference by promoting positive social contexts in schools. Training about the needs and experiences of this population can better prepare teachers to address refugee students' specific needs in culturally sensitive ways. This includes knowledge of processes such as interrupted schooling, language barriers, and socio-political trauma.

Culturally responsive pedagogical approaches can be critical assets in the classroom. Teachers who adopt culturally responsive teaching approaches and offer multicultural education allow refugee students to connect with their cultural heritage and learn from others in the classroom. Teachers can also play an important role in fostering refugee students' sense of belonging by recognizing their strengths—and not simply focusing on improving their deficits. Some refugee students shared that teachers' recognition of their strengths fostered confidence and enthusiasm, especially in language-dependent subjects. Adopting a strength-based approach to teaching helps educators recognize that refugee students with diverse life experiences have a lot to contribute.

Building connections. To foster a sense of belonging and facilitate positive adaptation among refugee students, teachers are encouraged to develop positive relationships by getting to know them on a personal level. This could mean asking about their journeys, previous educational experiences, cultural background, academic goals, to name but a few examples. Essentially, it is much easier for refugee students to open up and form meaningful connections with their teachers when they are invited to do so. It is often too intimidating for them to initiate such contacts and/or ask for help.

School-related factors

School climate. A culturally sensitive school climate is critical for facilitating refugee students' sense of connectedness. Such a climate refers to the overall quality of various aspects of school life (i.e., emotional, social, structural, and academic), which are influenced by norms, values, social relationships, teaching and learning approaches, as well as organizational structures. A positive school climate translates into a diverse and inclusive educational environment—one that is free of discrimination and promotes equality and positive intercultural relations. In a pluralistic society like Canada, a school climate that is characterized by both cultural diversity and equity represents an ideal integrative approach to help refugee youth with acculturation and cultural identity negotiation.

School programming. Beyond the classroom, there are many initiatives that can foster refugee students' sense of belonging within the school. For example, schools might consider offering bridge or transition programs that address the adjustment and resettlement needs of refugee students. Enlisting the help of cultural brokers, individuals who are well-versed with language, local knowledge, cultural beliefs, and practices of refugee students' specific cultural groups, in such programs can play a role in facilitating the academic and psychosocial adaptation of refugee students in school settings.

School programs can also target resilience directly by (a) implementing policies related to equity, diversity, and inclusion, (b) addressing these concepts with all students, (c) tailoring existing curricula to make them more responsive to racialized refugee students, (d) pairing refugee students with non-newcomer peers, and (e) promoting antistigma initiatives that address the systemic barriers faced by refugee students (e.g., discrimination, exclusion, racism).

System barriers. While not new to the literature of refugee student resilience, it might be timely for schools to address system barriers and racism more intentionally. Participants in our study reported being othered in many areas of their lives, especially in high school. Such experiences call for prioritizing anti-oppression initiatives and training that target discrimination in schools. These efforts can promote positive teacher-peer relationships, characterized by respect for diversity and equity. Another way to address systemic barriers is by encouraging and preparing refugee students to take on leadership roles in their schools. This opportunity can be empowering and facilitate applied and actionable knowledge, which, in turn, can inform future culturally responsive programming.

Transitioning to post-secondary. Participants in our study recognized that their strong aspirations for higher education represent a way to overcome their marginalized histories and build a better future for themselves and their families in Canada. Valuing education has been linked to refugee students' resilience and warrants transformative resettlement policies that provide them with necessary and equitable support. Also, refugee students spoke about their need for support in terms of navigating admission to post-secondary education and identified teachers' assistance with university applications as instrumental in pursuing advanced education. As such, additional support may involve offering refugee students opportunities to obtain information about Canadian colleges and universities in high schools, either through free workshops or proactive mentorship from educators and/or guidance counsellors.

It is clear that teachers shoulder enormous responsibilities, particularly during these unprecedented, COVID-19 times. At the same time, teachers are often the first familiar face that refugee students encounter on a regular basis upon arrival in Canada. Through the development of meaningful, collaborative relationships, teachers can ease refugee students' multiple transitions into the school system. At the same time, the educational setting as a whole has a responsibility to provide culturally and socially just supports for its students and staff to thrive.

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Q&A with author and teacher Harman Pandher

Interview by Sunjum Jhaj, Editor, *Teacher* magazine

Tell us a little about your book *Gurpreet Goes to Gurdwara* and why you decided to write it?

Growing up, I knew I wasn't exactly like the other kids in my class. I had a turban and long hair in accordance with my Sikh faith. My family had traditions, beliefs, and a home language (Punjabi) that were different than those of my classmates.

But what really stuck with me throughout my elementary and high school years, which was largely a wonderful time thanks to so many amazing teachers and supportive friends of all cultures, was the lack of books, especially picture books and novels, that reflected my experience, my face, my voice, my life. So, I thought, no more waiting for someone else to write that story. I'm going to represent and do it myself!

What aspects of your own life helped inspire the book?

Gurpreet Goes to Gurdwara: Understanding the Sikh Place of Worship is a very personal story. There was no research required for me to write it because I lived it. I drew on my childhood experiences of going to gurdwara and not finding answers to questions I had about why we were going and why we were doing the things we did when we were there.

One of my favourite scenes in the book is when Gurpreet awaits his turn at his mom's knee to get his hair combed: "His hair was longer and wavier than Amanjit's. Gurpreet's mom wasted no time in untangling his hair and tying it into a neat little bun." Amanjit is Gurpreet's younger sister. It's also the name of my older sister. It was important for me to not just show what it means to go to gurdwara, but also show in an authentic, straightforward way what it means to grow up in a Sikh household. Family routines, family traditions, family bonds, and intergenerational family learning involving parents, grandparents, and children are at the heart of the book. For Sikh students, these scenes will be mirrors to their identity; and for non-Sikh students, they'll be windows to a world they otherwise may not have had the opportunity to witness.

What do you hope students and readers learn from this book?

The start of this school year was my first opportunity to read the story to my own Grade 5 class at Beaver Creek Elementary in Surrey. They loved it! It generated a lot of questions and connections. My Sikh students proudly connected at one level with the familiar situations in the story, while my non-Sikh students eagerly connected at another level. Muslim students talked about going to mosque, Christian students talked about going to church, and Buddhist students talked about going to temple. They shared similar stories about learning their mother languages, connecting with community, and celebrating at their various places of worship. Most importantly, Gurpreet's story of discovery proved to be a great vehicle for students to arrive at a very important discovery of their own: they all had much more in common with each other than they thought!

It was crucial to me that the book not only reflect my Sikh identity, but also our collective Canadian identity as a multicultural nation. I've received a lot of responses from non-Sikh parents and educators expressing their support for a book they see as part of the larger, concerted effort to combat racism, hate, and ignorance in society. They want to be part of the solution so they're actively seeking out diverse reading materials to broaden and inform their children's world views. Sikh readers have also been reaching out to say they're thankful that a book like this has come along. Some get quite emotional thinking back on their own childhood and how they never saw books like this growing up.

Above: Harman reads his book to students. **Below:** A proudly displayed copy of *Gurpreet Goes to Gurdwara*. Photos provided by Harman Pandher.

BOOK REVIEWS

We're wired to do hard things

Review by Jessica Bonin, teacher-librarian, Prince George
***Kids These Days* published by FriesenPress,** 2019

I OFTEN ASK myself if teaching is the right profession for me; reading Dr. Carrington's book reminds me why I started teaching in the first place and inspires me to continue. *Kids These Days: A Game Plan for (Re) Connecting with Those We Teach, Lead, & Love* is full of personal anecdotes that show us how crucial it is to make connections with our students and take care of ourselves as we do so.

Kids These Days offers clear advice teachers can use to build meaningful connections with students. This school year, more than ever, our focus is on making those connections with kids and ensuring that they feel safe and welcome in our spaces.

Dr. Carrington states, "From this day forward, every time you hear yourself say that kid is 'attention seeking or lying,' try to replace that phrase with, that kid is 'connection seeking' and see what happens." In doing so, we can focus on the child and remove the negative connotation. The book further describes strategies teachers can use to help students identify and navigate their feelings during a time of dysregulation or when the student is "flipping their lid," as Dr. Carrington calls it.

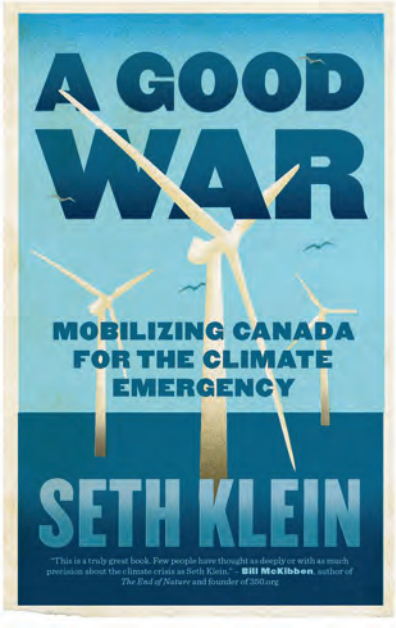
During this global pandemic, Dr. Carrington has been going live on Instagram and Facebook to talk us through the waves of emotions brought on by everything going on in the world. The live feed always has a disclaimer that Jody "uses colourful language," and I believe that is what connects us to her: passionate swearing. Through her social media or book, her words of encouragement, swearing, and laughter have helped many educators with the reminder that "we are wired to do hard things."

A path forward in the climate crisis

Review by Ken Novakowski, BC Labour Heritage Centre board member and retired teacher
***A Good War* published by ECW Press,** 2020

FINALLY, a book on the climate crisis that doesn't just focus on the foreboding doom. Seth Klein, for 21 years the director of the BC office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and a frequent presenter at various BCTF assemblies, provides us with a clear roadmap of how Canada can tackle the huge challenges before us in *A Good War: Mobilizing Canada for the Climate Emergency*.

To do so, he effectively invokes Canada's role in the war against Nazi Germany. Through the establishment of new Crown corporations and the broad mobilization of all sectors of society, we proved capable of remaking our economy and providing a contribution to the Allied war effort that far exceeded what anyone might have expected from a country our size. He argues convincingly that if we could do it then, we can do it again, this time taking on the climate crisis.



The book also effectively analyses some of the mistakes we made during the Second World War, like our racist treatment of Japanese Canadians and others and the suspension of basic human rights by invocation of the *War Measures Act*. Klein makes the case for not making those mistakes again. And he lays out a strategy that involves Indigenous Peoples, civil society, and all levels of government in what is truly the fight of and for our lives. Teachers collectively could be an influential cadre to help lead in this battle to come.

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.
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Joyful Literacy Interventions is proud to announce that our founder Dr. Janet N. Mort was awarded the Order of British Columbia on August 3rd, 2020 for her work over the past ten years on behalf of Vulnerable Children (over 30% of BC's students entering Kindergarten).

For the past seven years, in collaboration with four BC school districts and an independent Indigenous School, Janet and over 200 teachers have been implementing the Joyful Literacy Framework with exceptional results.

Our Evidence-based Conclusion: Over 85% of all children (vulnerable or not) can achieve at grade level in literacy by grade three when the Joyful Literacy Framework is applied by school staffs consistently K through 3.

An Invitation from Dr. Janet Mort to Twenty BC School Staff Teams (K to 3)

I am inviting twenty primary school staff teams to join me and my BC Joyful Literacy Teacher Team **BY ZOOM** on February 12th 2021 (BC Pro D Day) to explore and begin implementation of the Joyful Literacy Framework in your school.

You will leave the day with a step-by-step understanding of how to begin and proceed with Joyful Literacy implementation as well as:

- **18 Narrated PowerPoint Videos**
  11 hours of Professional Development that will guide you through complete Joyful Literacy implementation over the next three years.
- **A Set of Janet's Published Books**
  Joyful Literacy Interventions, *Putting on the Blitz*, and *Understanding and Assessing Foundational Literacy Skills*
- **Janet's New Unpublished Book**
  Joyful Literacy (K - 3) Guiding Principles Summary
- **Twenty-six Circle Charts**
  (Assessing and Tracking Foundational Skills K to 5)
- An ongoing connection with Janet and her Team by Zoom and social media.

The cost of the entire package: $2800.00 (plus GST) per school.

For more information about this invitation, and for a free preview of our video series package, visit: **JoyfulLiteracyOnline.com**

Please contact Dr. Janet Mort directly at **jnmort@shaw.ca** to discuss possibilities.

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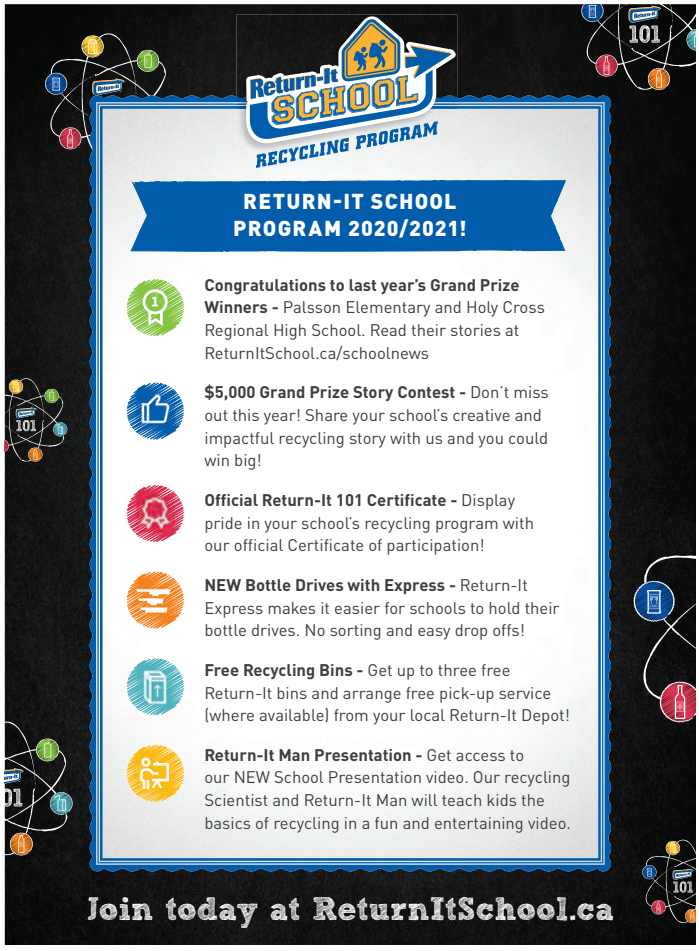

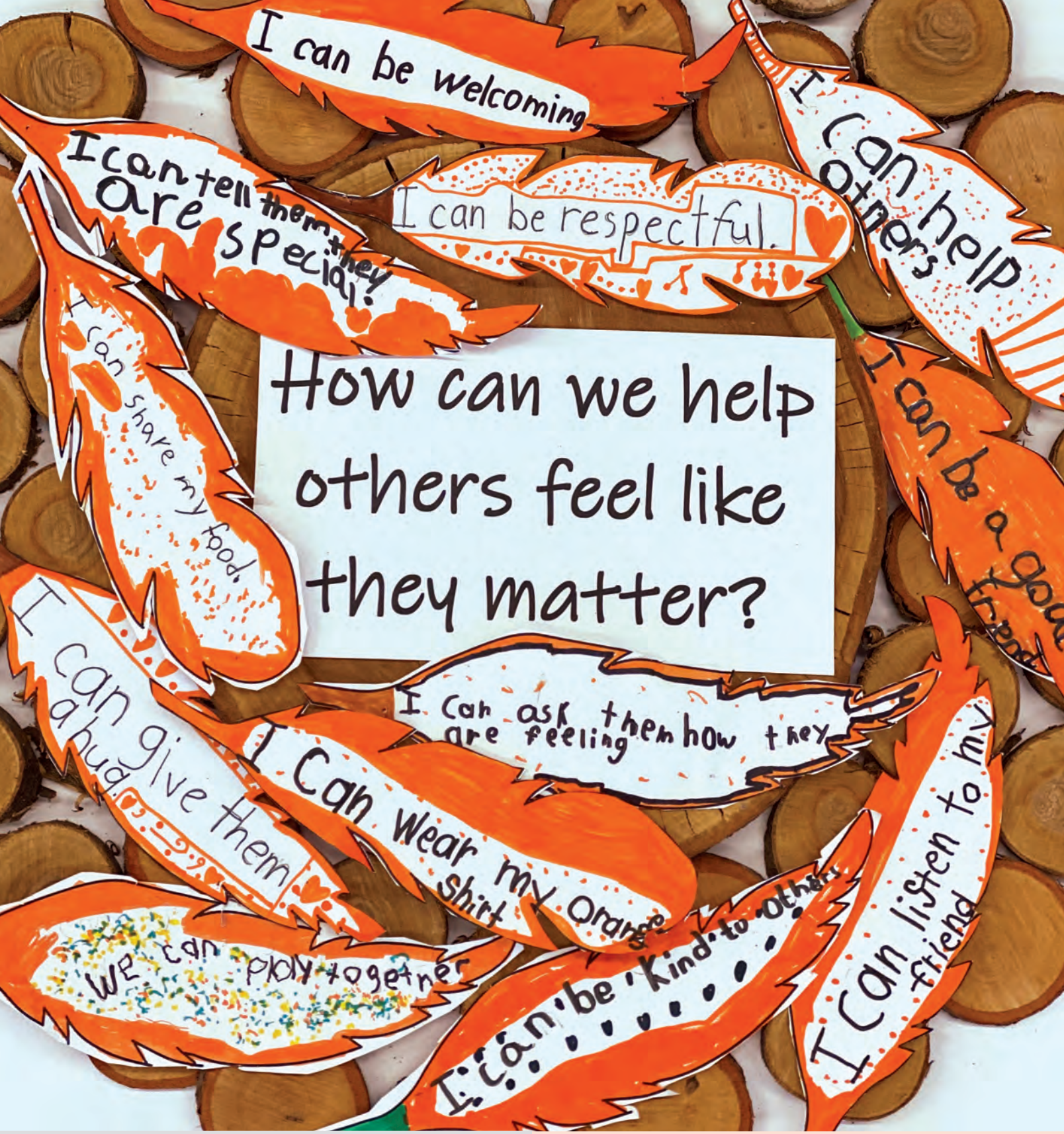

Above: Andrea Morissey's Grade 2 students, from École Marlborough Elementary in Burnaby, explore how they can apply lessons from Orange Shirt Day to their everyday lives.

Send photos of your students' work to *teachermag@bctf.ca* for a chance to be featured in an upcoming issue.

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