

# TEACHER

Newsmagazine of the BC Teachers' Federation

## Where to with class size and composition?

By David Denyer

As of this moment, it is not clear what to make of Arbitrator James Dorsey's decision on the Grades 4 to 12 class-size and composition grievances. BCTF President Irene Lanzinger gives her perspective and the legal department has provided some comment based on their preliminary analysis.

The arbitrator's 354-page decision documents in fine detail the evidence given by both parties (the employer and teachers) in the course of the hearings. He draws attention to a number of instances where there was no proper consultation and little, if any, attention given to class composition as required under Bill 33. Yet, out of 546 classes, which were cited (a representative sample drawn from over 1,600 documented) he chose to examine 81, which were agreed to by both parties, and out of those recognized only 21 as successful grievances. In these particular cases, the grievance is allowed (upheld) and in many other instances, despite what we viewed as compelling evidence of violations of the act, grievances were dismissed. The arbitrator confined himself almost exclusively to issues of process and did not pass judgment on the rationales as being either acceptable or not in regard to the concept of "appropriate for student

learning." In itself this points to the limited legal scope within which arbitrators are inclined to work; they are not—as we may be tempted to assume—the answer to our problems. They cannot rewrite or overturn legislation.

The arbitrator has retained jurisdiction over the "allowed" grievances should the union and employer not be able to agree on a remedy. The intention here is that the BCTF and/or the local and the BCPSEA and/or the district sit down and hammer out a solution. If not, the grievance remedy will be settled most likely through a further arbitration bringing with it all the attendant costs, time, effort, and energy that involves. This would put the prospect of a settlement even further into the future on top of the two years it has taken to bring these grievances forward.

However, will it take the imposition of a sufficiently daunting remedy, to bring those who choose to treat the matter lightly into compliance? Or will the evidence and decisions of the arbitrator prove to be the necessary incentive in ensuring that proper process is followed in the future? Or does the decision with its deference to principals and their judgment, allow for even greater latitude in how the legislation is observed? Should the union continue on this course of recording and data-gathering in the future when it appears to yield such limited return? What other strategies can we use to achieve the urgently needed changes to manage class size and composition? These and many other questions will be debated and pondered over the coming months as we watch the reaction to this significant decision.

What is abundantly clear from this arbitration, is the inadequacy of government legislation and fruitless exercises, such as the Learning Round Table. The union has struggled to make this wishy-washy legislation work only to be stalled and stymied at every turn.

*David Denyer is assistant director, BCTF Communications and Campaigns Division and Teacher editor.*

### Professional development in France

By Moh Chelali

What do you think of when you hear *Vichy*? Perhaps you think of mineral water, or even healing hot springs, for which the town of Vichy (France) has been famous since Roman times. If you are a history buff you think of the Vichy French government during the German occupation, but for 87 BC teachers, Vichy, France evokes a myriad of memories, of colleagues newly discovered, new teaching strategies,

*See FRANCE page 4*



### President's message

This summer one of the biggest arbitration hearings in the history of the Federation was concluded. The arbitration dealt with all of the violations of the class-size and composition legislation. The legislation was introduced by the Liberal government in May of 2006. In both the 2006-07 and 2007-08 years there were thousands of classes that exceeded the limit of 30 students and the 3 students with special needs per class limit. The issues in the arbitration were complex and included: what constitutes legitimate, meaningful consultation with a teacher and what "appropriate for student learning" (the wording of the legislation) means.

The hearing took place in seven locations across the province and took 55 days. I was fortunate enough to attend part or all of one of the days in almost every location. The teachers who testified were remarkable. Without exception they were caring, dedicated, professionals whose concern for their students was obvious and inspiring. Over and over again, they testified that because of size and composition issues their classes were not "appropriate for student learning." Principals and superintendents testified that all the classes were "appropriate for student learning." One of the rationales given by administrators was that teachers

are so talented we can handle any circumstances we face!

On August 21, 2009, Arbitrator Jim Dorsey issued a 354-page ruling. Needless to say, it is long and complex. The first section of the award is a comprehensive description of the background to the class-size and composition dispute. It is clear that this has been an issue of major importance to teachers for many, many years. The ruling also contains a very thorough description of the testimony of teachers and administrators. It gives a detailed picture of the kinds of difficult situations many teachers face.

In many cases, teachers said their class was not educationally sound or appropriate for student learning. In a significant number of these cases, Dorsey found that the principal's and superintendent's judgment that the class was

"appropriate for student learning" was reasonably held. In the words of our lawyers, the arbitrator gave considerable deference to the opinion of the principal. While this was disappointing there are a number of partial victories in the award.

Dorsey did uphold some of the grievances and overturn the opinions of the administrators. He also made it clear that genuine, meaningful, individual consultation with teachers is required. In all cases where this did not occur, he upheld the grievance.

On the issue of "onus of proof," Dorsey sets a "class size and composition standard" based on the sum of the total number of students in a class and the number of students with special needs in a class. Dorsey says that when this number exceeds 33 (for example a class of 29 with 5 students with

*See PRESIDENT page 2*

### On the inside

Despite what would seem an ever-more restrictive working climate for teachers and education, an amazing variety of projects and creative endeavours is happening in schools. Gardens, dance, photography, the care of animals, and the value of play all feature in this edition as an inspiring start to the new school year.

Other articles remind us of the considerable work that still needs to be done in the areas of Aboriginal education, inclusion, homophobia, poverty, and the plight of those disadvantaged by government

policies and economic turmoil.

These are early days for the new minister of education and the present government, but talk of ballooning deficits and announcements of cutbacks do not bode well for the future. We hope to have interviews with the new minister and education critic in the October edition of the newsmagazine.

Please take some time to study the new consultation form reproduced on page 8 and the accompanying notes and advice on documenting your class size and composition.

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Goodbye BCEsis in Vancouver elementary schools    | 3  |
| Alberta's Bill 44 restricts professional autonomy | 5  |
| Outdoor/play education                            | 7  |
| Class-size and consultation form                  | 8  |
| BCTF Internal Mediation Service                   | 9  |
| Peace art from toys of violence                   | 12 |

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PRESIDENT from page 1

special needs = 29+5=34) there is a significant additional burden of proof on the part of administrators that the class is "appropriate for student learning." Furthermore, the principal has to justify why he disagrees with the teacher's judgment that the class is not appropriate for student learning.

We certainly would argue that the number 33 is much too large and that these classes should automatically be considered educationally unsound unless there is compelling evidence to the contrary. However, the Dorsey award is the first official recognition since 2002 when the Liberal government stripped our collective agreement that it is the combination of size and numbers of students with special needs that must be

recognized in discussions of the appropriateness of certain class organizations.

It is too early to analyze completely the impact of this class-size and composition standard but it is clear the Dorsey award puts a disincentive in place for exceeding this standard that must be considered by principals and superintendents. It is also clear that it is important for teachers to articulate their concerns, make it clear to principals when they disagree with the organization of their class, and for the union to file grievances in a timely fashion.

When the class-size and composition limits were introduced in May 2006, we knew they weren't good enough to guarantee real improvements in learning conditions for our students. In some respects, the Dorsey award

confirms this. To achieve real improvements in classrooms, it will take lower and firmer limits on both the size and composition of classes, as well as guaranteed ratios and case limits for non-enrolling teachers. The Liberal government has never committed to the increases in funding needed to bring about a genuine improvement in our ability to meet the needs of all the children in our classes.

The Dorsey award provides us with some disappointments and some small victories. However, the real message for teachers from this arbitration ruling is that we need to continue to use every legal and political avenue to continue to advocate for the resources we need to ensure that our students get all the help and support they need to thrive in our public schools.

Irene Lanzinger is BCTF president.

## Dorsey award: Legal department observations

Given the high degree of deference to the principal's opinions on appropriateness recognized by the arbitrator, it is evident that if a teacher does not voice disagreement with her [or his] class or request additional resources during the consultation process then challenging the reasonableness of the principal's opinion will be very difficult.

The arbitrator ruled that the phrase "appropriate for student learning" is deliberately imprecise and meant to "encompass a broad range of situations and leave others to administer the language as best they can." In this case, the "others"

are principals and superintendents; and the effect is to insulate their decisions and opinions from searching arbitral review. Arbitrators "must be restrained in questioning the merits of the dual principal and superintendent opinions and accord them a broad deference." (paragraph 441)

In organizing classes, principals are free to consider "factors beyond the class size and composition, including the organization of the school and school districts and the supports available to the class within and beyond the school." This includes a teacher's experience (paragraph 431). Issues of workload are not captured by the phrase, and the goal of successfully providing an education program is not a guarantee and is balanced by the availability of resources. (paragraph 432 and 433).

## Readers write

### I reminisce

I reminisce about high school a lot. The memory of the time I spent there, the friends I met there, the teachers with whom I studied there still vividly reflects the overall positive life I had there. Despite the popular belief that queer people would describe their secondary education as being a nightmare, where they were often emotionally and physically tormented, I sauntered through school safely most of the time with less opposition than most others. A lot of this protection came from the efforts of the teachers, staff, and administrator at school.

The locker room at high school is notoriously known as the common ground for homophobic harassment. It is a place teachers frequently overlook when it comes to oppressive behaviours. I tried to avoid physical education classes because of the bullies' chastisements of my performance in sports due to a heavier set build, my more feminine comportment by assuming a queer identity, and my physical attributes for being Chinese.

I would not have survived if it had not been for my PE teacher. He recognized my special need and gave me as much accommodation within his power and within reason. What I recall the most was when I finally decided to report the bullies to him because I trusted him a lot, he made sure that it was dealt with appropriately and efficiently. Teachers like him allow people of different backgrounds to study free of worry and they encourage students to excel at their own pace, in their own unique way, without being judged.

Moreover, the endeavour of many of the staff members to create a safe environment at school was evident

in their participation in the gay-straight alliance events. One year, the gay-straight alliance organized a drag queen bingo on the International Day Against Homophobia to raise awareness. It was a great success because of the staff members' willingness to cross-dress for the students' sake.

However, there are opportunities for changes and improvement. Discriminatory slurs such as the hackneyed phrase "that's so gay" is still quite often employed in the everyday language of a teenager. Unfortunately, perhaps it is because they are desensitized, or that addressing it would open a can of worms, teachers often avoid reprimanding students who solicit these inherently prejudicial comments. It is vital that these students be educated on the repercussions of their homophobic statements.

Likewise, issues of queerness are not readily discussed in classrooms. The responsibility is stereotyped to be that of the humanities teachers. Yet if these teachers do not feel comfortable, supported, or resourceful, they may choose not to engage in such risky conversation. Without education, students and even teachers themselves, become victims of homophobia, as they would not be equipped to handle the consequent actions motivated by fear or hatred of queerness.

I dream about school life sometimes. I only wish that during my time in high school there were more queer teachers. I am sure they are behind the scenes, and if there are positive queer role models among the teachers, students are more likely to feel happy and proud of themselves, seeing that there have been others who survived.

Jack Cheng  
Vancouver

### Thanks for sharing

I want to thank David Butler ("Coming out in elementary school," *Teacher*, May/June 2009) for sharing his story not only with *Teacher* readers, but most importantly, with his students and school community.

That it was a difficult and anxiety-provoking step for Butler tells me we still have much work to do to make all students, staff, and families feel welcomed, safe, and appreciated in our schools for who they are.

By taking the courageous steps he did to tell his students and colleagues about who he is, Butler has contributed significantly to that work.

I am pleased to read that he found support among his school administrators and colleagues—as he absolutely should.

It is my hope that no one feels they need to check their identity at the door when they attend or work in a Vancouver school. We should all be able to feel proud of who we are and we must send the same clear message to our students, so they too can take pride in themselves and their families.

Butler has given his students a valuable gift and I believe he will continue to do so through his teaching career and it is my sincere hope that he is wrong in predicting that some students "will still grow up to be homophobic." It's our responsibility to make sure that isn't the case. Thank you David Butler.

Patti Bacchus  
Vancouver Board of Education  
BCeSIS

I couldn't agree more with the Langley Teachers' Association's judgment that BCeSIS is a lemon for classroom teachers. However, I am a bit worried that almost half the

article focused on the "lack of training" as the major complaint. As a teacher who has been using it for a year, I am convinced that the problem goes much deeper than that. I have noted five major flaws with this program:

1. It is of major importance that the names of students who have left the class cannot be deleted from the marks list. This leaves a growing number of "ghost" students on each class roll, names that must be jumped each time a list of marks is posted. It is impossible to simply go down a list and type in the results by touch—you have to look at the screen repeatedly to affirm that the marks are not assigned to long-gone students, and therefore not given to the student who actually earned them.

2. BCeSIS will not allow us to print the class list in order of ascending or descending rank. It is possible to obtain such a ranking on a screen, but not on a printout. Having such a list is extremely helpful in making sure no student falls between the cracks when communicating with the Special Ed department—it is also great when communicating with the counselors about placement for the following year.

3. The program literally bullies the teacher into using dates that it considers acceptable when entering marks, and it does not deem week-end days as suitable. As a typical over-worked teacher, I find that the only time I can comfortably enter my marks is on the weekend. However, the program demands that I go through an intricate dance to change the date for each and every new quiz that I want to enter. Life is just too short.

4. A problem that is getting worse by the week is the slowness of the program. I have spent countless minutes simply waiting for the program to boot up. I have wasted even more time waiting for it to register a simple byte of information and to display it on the screen before I am allowed to enter a second. It seems to be a ludicrous waste of Internet time to have the petty test results of each teacher in the province be relayed all the way to a satellite and back to simply be registered on a screen! Why can the basic work not be done locally, and then the summaries be sent to the school board at the end of the semester? Does the minister really need to know that Sally X got 82% on her February 2 vocab quiz? If this province-wide broadcasting of trivia were cut out, I am sure that the processes for the essential parts would be speeded up. As it now stands, the program wastes far too much teacher time.

5. A true insult directed at every teacher in the province occurs each time we log in. The first thing up is a sanctimonious admonition that this program must only be used in

compliance with.....and there is never a clarification of with what. This is a particularly glaring example of the ministry "covering its ass" with hollow legalese. It puts us—its subordinates—in the wrong before we can even do anything; if we persist in trying to perform our job, we have to say yes to a regulation that we cannot even know! Shades of Kafka!

As a result of all these problems, and many more that I will not detail here, I have asked the administration of my school to retain the "Integrate" program on our system so that I can use it next year. Although it is far from perfect, it is at least a bit more teacher-friendly.

In fact, I urge the Langley Teachers' Association to distinctly tone down its attribution of "lack of training" for the failure of BCeSIS. I can just see the ministry using this statement to justify its mandating all 60,000 teachers in the province spending at least three hours each learning how to accommodate the program—that would be 180,000 people-hours wasted on trying to force a shabby program to work. BCeSIS cannot be redeemed; it should simply be scrapped.

Anton de Bakker  
Pemberton

## Your pension: The future is worth thinking about

This fall, members of the BCTF Executive Committee and the Pensions Committee will be visiting your local to provide information and seek input into possible changes to your pension.

Watch for local meetings to be held in your area between September 28 and November 30 this year.

## Teacher eco-audit

The newsmagazine is being printed using recycled paper made with 100% post-consumer waste and bleached without the use of Chlorine or Chlorine compounds, which results in measurable environmental benefits.

We are pleased to report the following savings on this issue of the newsmagazine:

- 69 trees
- 6,255 pounds of solid waste
- 6,882 gallons of water
- 8,976 kilowatt hours of electricity
- 11,370 pounds of greenhouse gases
- 49 pounds of HAPs, VOCs, and AOX combined
- 17 cubic yards of landfill space.

Source: Paper task force and office of the Federal Environmental Executive

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# Science 10 provincial exam survey

By Grahame Rainey

Ever since the introduction of the Science 10 Provincial Exam, in 2004, science teachers across the province have expressed concerns about the provincial exam and the effect it has on the teaching of science in BC.

A new BC Science 10 Curriculum was implemented, in September 2008, without any resources or financial support from the ministry. Teachers have had to rely on the resources produced by publishers, industry, and not-for-profit organizations. With declining budgets, many districts have not been able to provide sufficient resources for proper implementation.

The BC Science Teachers' Association (BCScTA) surveyed science teachers, during the winter of 2008-09, to validate the concerns

that have been expressed over the last few years. There were 202 responses to our web-based survey. The respondents represented a broad spectrum of science teachers, both by location and teaching experience.

Respondents were asked a variety of questions including: What are the effects (both positive and negative) of the Science 10 provincial exam on you, the classroom teacher (or on your colleagues)? and What are the effects (both positive and negative) of the Science 10 provincial exam on your students?

Good science teaching practice involves students participating in many labs, research projects, science fairs, and other experiential learning opportunities. The vast majority of survey respondents indicated that the Science 10

provincial exam has caused a significant decrease or entire deletion of lab activities in Science 10 classrooms, coupled with a preponderance of direct instruction through lectures.

Teachers are struggling to make it through the approximately 100 Prescribed Learning Outcomes and hundreds of scientific terms that students have to memorize for this exam. Respondents repeatedly stated that the science teachers in their schools no longer wish to teach Science 10.

Many responses indicated that those students with IEPs or lower literacy levels and ESL students struggled with both the large amount of vocabulary and the language level of the exam. Classroom experience has shown that many of these students simply give up. Teachers expressed frustration

that they are being forced to leave slower students behind in order to complete the course and have time to prepare students for the exam.

Concern was expressed about the multiple choice nature of the exam, as often students may have partial knowledge of the topic, but unless they select the correct answer, they do not gain any marks.

Eighty percent of respondents would like to see the ministry return to Provincial Learning Assessment Program (PLAP) testing, which was used successfully prior to the introduction of the provincial exam to randomly assess students' knowledge of science.

After discussing the results of the survey, the BCScTA executive made three recommendations, which were included in the report sent to the Minister of Education. The BCScTA recommends:

1. The Science 10 Provincial Final Exam be deleted from the provincial graduation requirements.

2. That teachers participate in school-based decision-making regarding the development and use of a course final exam in Science 10, as is currently in effect in other Science courses in Grades 8, 9, and 11.

3. That the ministry consider re-developing and implementing the former Provincial Learning Assessment Program (PLAP) that randomly tested students on a wide range of process skills and laboratory skills and provided feedback to individual schools and teachers for the improvement of teaching and learning.

The full report is available, to download, on our website: [www.bsccta.ca](http://www.bsccta.ca), where you will also find a link to the *Globe and Mail* article, published August 20, 2009, that featured some of the survey results.

Grahame Rainey is president of the BC Science Teachers' Association.

## Goodbye to BCeSIS in Vancouver elementary classrooms

By Glen Hansman

In the spring of 2008, elementary schools that were designated as "lead schools" in Vancouver for BCeSIS brought their concerns to Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association (VESTA) staff rep assemblies and general meetings—two of our governing bodies where school staffs or individual members, respectfully, can bring their concerns.

Concerns fell under several themes:

1. The expansion of duties of teachers to include data-entry work and the long-term implications of that expansion; and, as a corollary, the shifting of data-entry duties away from CUPE 15 (the union representing school secretaries in Vancouver).
2. The mandated nature of the roll-out in elementary schools, classroom-by-classroom.
3. The cost of BCeSIS vs class-size/class-composition needs.
4. No clear educational benefit for students.
5. Security and privacy.

Additionally, concerns came forward about the "user agreement" that individual teachers were being asked to agree to, sight unseen—and without such agreements having been bargained between the board and the union. The current

**Ultimately, the BCeSIS boycott in Vancouver worked. No teacher was investigated, no teacher was disciplined...**

collective agreement does not expire until 2011, and a user agreement has not been proposed at any bargaining table to date. Therefore, at our October 2008 general meeting, the VESTA membership decided that VESTA members will not participate in any data entry for BCeSIS, and that no user agreement should be imposed on the users of BCeSIS.

In other words—Vancouver elementary teachers initiated a full-on boycott of BCeSIS.

At around the same time, CUPE 15 filed a contracting-out/job-security grievance associated with BCeSIS and the unilateral transfer of data-entry work from the CUPE 15 bargaining unit to the teachers' bargaining unit.

VESTA raised its concerns with management, and also communicated with other BCTF locals about BCeSIS implementation in their school districts. Surprise, surprise—it became apparent that there is a wide variance in how BCeSIS has

been implemented from district to district: Is the attendance feature mandatory or optional for elementary teachers? Is the grade book feature optional or not for elementary teachers? What has been the role of office staff in BCeSIS implementation? and What in-service support has been available? etc.

Ultimately, the BCeSIS boycott in Vancouver worked. No teacher was investigated, no teacher was disciplined, and we brought enough attention to the concerns that we had raised around privacy, workload, the user agreement, and the lack of educational benefit to students that the current set of trustees axed the funding that would have enabled the classroom-by-classroom roll-out of BCeSIS. And so, goodbye to BCeSIS in Vancouver elementary classrooms!

There are still concerns that need to be addressed though. BCeSIS was touted to be a timesaver for users, but office staff in Vancouver (who are still using the BCeSIS for attendance and student records) are reporting the interface is highly frustrating to deal with and that it is adding to their work, not simplifying it! To be clear, though, it's the employer's responsibility to address these problems, not for teachers to help out by adding more work to their already overflowing plates. The employer introduced the new tool, therefore it is the employer's responsibility that it works and that it works efficiently.

Also outstanding are the privacy and security concerns that need to be dealt with—not just those relating to the mountains of information about students and their families stored (permanently, more or less) on BCeSIS, but the information on individual teachers that is derived from BCeSIS.

On the Ministry of Education's web page for its new Student Achievement Data Exchange (SADE), which draws data from BCeSIS, it is stated that SADE will be used to "...share in the design and development of the new Data Exchange platform, to be used for the Employment Data and Analysis System with BCPSEA". (See [www.bced.gov.bc.ca/datacollections/sade/](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/datacollections/sade/).) Read the quote carefully. That has nothing to do with students but with teachers as employees. Remote evaluation? This is something we need to be paying attention to!

BCeSIS might be gone from Vancouver elementary classrooms, but it isn't far away.

Glen Hansman is past president, Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association and a BCTF Executive member-at-large.



## Supreme Court confirms teachers' right to advertise

On July 10, 2009, BC Teachers' Federation President Irene Lanzinger said the Supreme Court of Canada decision upholding the right to advertise on public transit vehicles is a victory for the right of teachers to speak out.

"This is a victory for the right of teachers to speak out about conditions in the classrooms. As teachers we will continue to inform the public about our concerns about class size, composition, and the learning conditions of students. Speaking out is part of our commitment to defend and protect public education," said Lanzinger.

The Supreme Court upheld a 2006 BC Court of Appeal decision that the restrictive advertising policies of BC Transit and Translink were unconstitutional. Translink and BC Transit had appealed that

decision.

The issue arose when the BC Teachers' Federation, in 2004, tried to buy ad space on buses to inform the public about conditions in BC's public schools. The BCTF's ads containing factual information about the numbers of schools closed and the number of teacher positions eliminated were deemed "too political" by Translink and BC Transit policies. (Ad is pictured above.) Consequently they refused to allow the ads on the outside of public buses.

All eight Supreme Court of Canada Justices held that the policies prohibiting political advertisements are unconstitutional since political speech is at the core of the freedom of expression guarantee in the Charter. The justices ruled that the blanket

exclusion of such highly valued expression cannot be justified in a free and democratic society. They declared that the policies are of no force or effect to the extent that they violate the Charter.

The BCTF was joined in the transit ad case by the Canadian Federation of Students who had also been refused ad space. CFS's ad to encourage youth voting stated: "Register now. Learn the issues. Vote May 17, 2005. RocktheVote BC.com."

The BCTF, along with several other unions, recently won another court case rejecting Bill 42—the Gag Law—which restricted public advocacy advertising in the two months before a provincial election campaign.

## Looking back

### 70 years ago

War! With sick hearts we see eclipsed in the shadow of a world's folly the most sacred hopes and dreams of humanity; hopes and dreams to which we as teachers have given our faith. What are we to do about it? First of all let us remind ourselves and our pupils that when the sun is eclipsed it does not cease to exist. The fate of humanity does not depend upon us alone but ours is nevertheless an awful responsibility. Upon the teacher rests a duty to remain sane and to promulgate sanity in a world gone mad. It is for us to resist the irrational hatred and pharisaism and self-deception that always beset a country at war.

– September 1939, *The BC Teacher*

### 50 years ago

After the Second World War, changing social and economic conditions have fortunately brought about a change of ideas with regard to the employment of married women. The idea is now accepted that women continue to teach after marriage. However, some school boards who have adopted the

practice of employing married women teachers still consider that the woman who becomes pregnant should automatically resign. If marriage is no longer to be considered a bar to continued service in teaching, logically a reasonable system of maternity leave should be introduced.

– Sept./Oct. 1959, *The BC Teacher*

### 30 years ago

For one of the most prosperous countries in the world to claim that five percent of the national income is too much to spend on the education of children is inadmissible. For a country that professes to be dedicated to freedom and social justice, a return to a restrictive school system, in which the teacher is expected to be the obedient enforcer of existing inequalities, is surely inappropriate. In common with most of the industrialized nations, Canada faces the prospect of serious deterioration in the working conditions of teachers and therefore in the learning environment of students.

– Sept./Oct. 1979, *The BC Teacher*

### 10 years ago

Female teachers in the early days of the BCTF laid the foundation for the eventual resolution of "equal pay for equal work" for teachers. It was a long struggle and did not actually end until the mid-1960s when the last BC school district abolished gender designated pay scales. It was also their social activism and leadership that led the BCTF into a history of working on women's equity issues through provincial and local Status of Women committees. In 1934, the Vancouver Secondary School Teachers' Association carried a motion calling for banks to be nationalized. At the time this was a radical position but it was a reflection of how teachers, faced with the daily reality of social injustice, poverty, and disadvantage were convinced of the need to advocate for social change.

– Sept. 1999, *Teacher* newsmagazine

Chris Bocking, *Keating Elementary School, Saanich*



Eighty-seven BC Core French and French Immersion teachers from all grade levels spent two weeks learning, speaking French, and becoming trained on DELF (Diplôme d'études de la langue française) diploma exams.

FRANCE from page 1

and a new evaluation tool for French language skills—thanks to federal funding received through the Ministry of Education, the collaborative work between different French language co-ordinators, the Vancouver School Board, the active participation of the Canadian Association of French Immersion Teachers, and the BCTF.

This large group of Core French and French Immersion teachers from all grade levels were able to spend two weeks learning, speaking French, and becoming trained on DELF (Diplôme d'études de la langue française) diploma exams. This was the biggest cohort of BC teachers doing a professional development overseas. This was certainly a professional development "par excellence," including home stays with French families, tours of local cultural and historical sites, and of course much tasting of local food and drink, but most importantly, the opportunity to exchange with colleagues and gain new skills. The excellent instructors and the varied programs offered at CAVILAM (Centre d'approches vivantes des langues et des médias) in Vichy.

The original concept of the DELF training session in France began with an initial training session in Vancouver in December 2008 organized in collaboration between the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers, the French Embassy, and the BCTF. At that time 11 participants became certified DELF trainers and 4 became marker/examiners. The vision established by the language co-ordinators was that the DELF diplomas would enhance the teaching and learning of French in BC as well as improve student retention in French programs (particularly French Immersion). The frameworks of the DELF exams are based on the Common European Framework (CEF), which is becoming implemented throughout Canada in language curriculum as well as assessment of French as an official language.



As a result of this training session, BC is poised to create a DELF exam centre. Important discussions are planned between the BC Ministry of Education, some designated BC universities, the BCTF, and other school district representatives to implement a plan for the centre and a process for implementation. The centre may hold the possibility of continuing professional development for French teachers. Promotion of the DELF to the stakeholders in French language education is also a priority. Participants were united in their positive response to the DELF and the Common Framework as a tool for improving teaching and learning.

**The best professional development leaves lasting effects on the teaching and learning of those who participated. The participants at Vichy, from almost every district in the province, have forged new professional relationships, connected with colleagues who share the same passion for French instruction, deepened their knowledge of French, French culture, and pedagogical strategies, and made friends on both sides of the Atlantic who they will never forget.**

Besides the BCTF, French language co-ordinators played a key role in the success of the DELF training. Many thanks to Daniel Belanger, French Language consultant with the VSB and member of the BCTF French Advisory Committee and Alicia Logie, French language co-ordinator with Surrey School District and president of the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers, for supervising teachers recruitment and working closely with the BCTF to co-ordinate the project.

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Moh Chelali is the BCTF's French Programs co-ordinator.

## What are participants bringing back from Vichy?

The program was extremely well organized and thoughtfully put together. From the very first day of our arrival to the very last day of our stay, I was continuously impressed by the heartfelt welcome of the staff at *Cavilam*. It was wonderful being able to learn and share ideas with other French teachers from all around the world. I am extremely grateful for my time in France this summer and I would like to thank the team at the BCTF for your hard work in organizing this trip and for all those involved in making this invaluable learning experience possible. — Lesley Chung, Coquitlam

The time was très chargé. It was great to be in a different and wonderful place, meeting so many teachers from around the globe, and learning so much as well as deliberately taking time to consider teaching strategies and approaches (things we do all the time but not necessarily on purpose) not just toward French—the language—but all aspects of life in French and French culture. There are implications for British Columbia in the way we teach French as a second language and Second Languages in general. — Yvette Cassidy, Vancouver

Oral language, before everything, before reading and writing, children need to know the rhythm of the language and the sounds of the language. — Nathalie Sanft, Surrey

We are opening the door to the francophonie," not just those who speak French in Canada and France, but the thousand students from 50 countries in the world who joined us in Vichy to learn French or to learn how to teach French. — Elizabeth Woo-Simard, Surrey

It is important to have students use the language, enjoy the language—we have to resist having them write everything at the beginning, let them learn the rhythm of the language, play with the language before they learn the grammatical rules. We have to teach them the sounds, how to name things, then the verbs for describing actions, then help them put it together. We have to teach them like babies learn their first language. — Danuta Kinnear, Surrey

The full-day classes were intense but in the end, we were left with a strong sense of accomplishment and confidence with our level of training. — Nicole Weghsteen, Burnaby

We feel honoured to have been part of this unique opportunity to extend our professional growth. — Sandra Pritchard, Williams Lake

# No means no in Nelson

By Melanie Perez

June 2009, marked a milestone for youth empowerment in the small community of Nelson, BC. Every Grade 8 student in Nelson successfully completed *No Means No*, a peer-education program developed by the West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF).

Stacey Lock, one of the program co-ordinators, says, "This program is an empowering one that educates young people about their rights and responsibilities regarding consent and assault."

In three one-hour sessions, students were encouraged by their youth mentors to explore topics of violence and power in various situations, with the ultimate goal of educating students on their rights and responsibilities regarding consent and assault.

Through creative and interactive activities like brainstorming and role-plays, facilitators kept students interested and engaged while explaining how various forms of "bad power" and gender stereotypes can lead to violence (for example, bullying or assault) in relationships. During the sessions, participants were taught to recognize forms of "good" and "bad" power in various relationships and worked together to come up with effective ways of handling each scenario. Through discussions of consent, students learned about their legal right to say *no*. Upon completing the sessions, both students and mentors noted that the program "is a great way to learn things that will not only help in life, but can also be passed on to others."

The use of youth mentors aged 18 to 24 is a unique feature of West Coast LEAF's programs. It allows for a "youth-to-youth" interaction that can be beneficial for both student and facilitator. Participants are able to learn from young adults who may have experienced these situations firsthand, and mentors are empowered by providing young people with the tools necessary to make good choices. "Students respond to the youth facilitators because they feel that they are easier to relate to and they appear to be more at ease," says Lock. In fact, one Nelson student commented, "The trainers made whatever they were talking about easier to understand by using words or slang that we all know."

The *No Means No* program has its roots in *R. v. Ewanchuk*, a case involving the issues of consent and sexual assault. This case highlights the stereotypes about gender that still prevail and which continue to

undermine equality rights and perpetuate the cycle of violence. In 1999, young people at a conference responded to this case by initiating a workshop to teach other youth about stereotypes and rights. Ten years later, this education has been brought not only to every Grade 8 student in Nelson, but also to students throughout the Lower Mainland at schools including Simon Fraser Elementary, Kerrisdale Elementary, and Mount Pleasant Elementary.

*No Means No* and *Youth in the Workplace*, another education program offered by West Coast LEAF which teaches students about their legal rights and responsibilities in the workplace, are effective in that they are both designed to target age groups that are likely to enter into intimate or workplace relationships. In addition, both programs compliment provincially prescribed learning outcomes set in the Health and Career Education K to 7 (2006) and Grades 8 to 9 (2005) curricula.

With *No Means No*'s successful completion in Nelson, West Coast LEAF is expanding the program in BC by training mentors in Nanaimo this fall. In addition to the original *No Means No* curriculum, West Coast LEAF also offers a curriculum designed specifically for Aboriginal youth.

Through *No Means No*, students in Nelson were given the opportunity to become engaged by thinking about real issues that they may have been dealing with or will likely experience in the near future. The fact that students were all able to ask questions and exchange information helped to raise awareness on topics of violence, bullying, and sexual harassment, making students more conscious about the world around them.

It is this consciousness that West Coast LEAF hopes to spread throughout BC, empowering youth by teaching them about their rights, enabling them to understand the meaning of sexual consent, and thus affirming their legal right to say "no."

"I really love this job because I believe that it is giving young people the tools to be able to make good choices," says Lock, "It is powerful stuff!"

If you would like to volunteer as a youth mentor or need more information on *No Means No* or *Youth in the Workplace*, contact Deanna Ogle, education manager, at [education@westcoastleaf.org](mailto:education@westcoastleaf.org).



# Professional autonomy

By George Popp

Almost from the outset of our rights to bargain collectively, the status of teachers as autonomous professionals has been an issue. The words *professional autonomy* are often invoked by teachers as a cornerstone of their professional status and their professional practice. What does professional autonomy mean? What is the history of professional autonomy in teachers' contracts and what have courts and arbitrators said about teachers' professional autonomy?

Basically, the principle of professional autonomy holds that teachers have the right and judgment to develop and deliver instruction in a manner they think proper. Among the first things bargained in BC teachers' collective agreements were articles protecting teachers' professional autonomy. Here is an example from the Vancouver Teachers' Collective Agreement:

## 7.Q. Professional Autonomy

*Employees shall, consistent with effective educational practice, prescribed, authorized curricula and locally developed programs, have individual professional autonomy in determining the methods of instruction, and the planning and presentation of materials in their professional assignments.*

These clauses were crafted to recognize that educated and professionally trained teachers were best suited to determine the materials and methods of instruction that they would use to teach the students in their care.

Shockingly, others in the education system have differing

perspectives. Management and governments (both trustees and provincial governments) have often intruded into the issue attempting to impose their own ideological vision or exert some sort of management right to control teachers' discretion in practicing our craft.

In the early 1990s, some boards attempted to ban certain materials they found objectionable, such as books about Hallowe'en and books dealing with family structures involving same sex parents.

At about the same time in 1991, the BC Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association issued a position paper that criticized the rights of teachers to bargain their working and learning conditions and described professional autonomy for teachers as the most dangerous and insidious aspect of the new (at the time) unionized status of teachers.

*One further example and perhaps the most insidious of all is the so-called "professional autonomy" clause. This clause is being interpreted and used to hamper school administrators in the effective performance of their duties. It is a clear example of an apparent "no cost" item given away by employers, usually in the later stages of bargaining, to obtain a settlement. We suggest there is the potential for serious long-term costs associated with this clause.*

Many teachers remember the days of Madeleine Hunter and ITIP where administration in many (not all) districts tried to impose rigid structures of methods of instruction designed for other jurisdictions with less well-prepared teachers. Today, in many districts in the United States, teachers are required to use "scripts

for instruction" that require everyone to follow a uniform methodology and timeline to the point that every class in a particular subject must be in the same place at the same time using the same materials everywhere in the district or state.

**Management and governments (both trustees and provincial governments) have often intruded into the issue attempting to impose their own ideological vision or exert some sort of management right to control teachers' discretion in practicing our craft.**

Unique in Canada at the time, the BC Government in 2001 declared K-12 public education an essential service and attempted to define which practices of teachers were mandatory to perform. The employer attempted to say that all activities ever contemplated by teachers had to be continued in any dispute. However, in dealing with that issue, the Labour Board recognized that teacher autonomy exists and that the issue of essential services has never been fully settled to this day, as the government has pre-empted the process by imposing legislation or bargaining regimes.

In British Columbia, the initial imposition of Professional Standards by the appointed College of Teachers in 2004, also attempted to impose political control over teachers' rights to professional discretion in their classrooms. Subsequent to the

takeover of the BC College of Teachers by the government, teachers refused to pay their dues until elected members were returned to the board of the college. Those standards were modified by the elected college and, while still controversial, have included teachers in the process in an attempt to display more respect for teacher practice.

That is not to say that teachers are completely unfettered in their profession. In two famous cases, one in Alberta and another in New Brunswick, teachers were found by the Supreme Court to be promoting hatred by denial of the Holocaust and other equally repugnant positions. Teachers are in a position of trust and are subject to scrutiny when our practices clearly deviate from the values held by society at large.

However, the Supreme Court in the Morin case in Prince Edward Island, affirmed teacher autonomy as a matter of personal freedom of expression, in ruling on his appeal after being disciplined for showing a film to his students:

*Morin was attempting to convey a meaning when he showed the film. It was expressive of his beliefs in what was an appropriate topic for his teaching activities. He was dealing with religion as an important element of society, and was teaching in a manner consistent with the approved curriculum. This was expression as defined by the Charter. The students also had a right to hear this expression and benefit from it. The Board's later decision allowing the project subject to the approval of the principal and the superintendent was also a limitation on Morin's expression. These limits clearly breached section 2(b) of the Charter and were not saved under section 1.*

What other avenues are available to BC teachers to protect our

professional autonomy besides the courts? The first line of defense is the individual classroom where teachers, with very few exceptions, demonstrate good judgment and care in the performance of their professional duties. Where outside forces attempt to interfere inappropriately, teachers can turn to the protections available to them in the collective agreement, most commonly the grievance process.

The vast majority of these disputes are dealt with within the school and local union. Some, however, have had to go through the entire process and to arbitration to be decided.

In Victoria, a teacher was denied the autonomy to conduct her own professional development activity on a PD day and went to arbitration to affirm that right.

Recently, the Labour Board ruled that administering the FSA test is within the scope of teachers work, in part because we did not grieve the imposition of that duty for the first few years of its existence.

Presently in Sooke, an arbitration is in progress, which focuses on the rights of a teacher to refuse to administer a district test that she believes is purposeless and potentially detrimental to the education of the children in her class.

Teaching is by nature a complex enterprise. Misguided attempts to control how teachers teach have no benefit to education. The BCTF Code of Ethics requires that teachers are always prepared to discuss their methods of instruction with parents and the employer. However, we should also be prepared to defend our right to professional discretion in the performance of our duties or be prepared to watch our craft reduced to technique and scripts.

George Popp, grievance co-ordinator, BCTF Field Services Division.

## Alberta's Bill 44 severely restricts professional autonomy

By Kristopher Wells and James Chamberlain

Imagine a classroom, in the 21st Century, where topics like evolution, religion, different family structures, and sexuality are considered topics too taboo for discussion. Does it sound like an alternative reality? Welcome to Alberta!

In May 2009, in what was supposed to be a "good news" bill, Alberta's Progressive Conservative Party finally agreed to abide by the Supreme Court's ruling in *Vriend vs. Alberta* (1998), which ordered the Alberta government to write sexual orientation, as a protected ground against discrimination, into its human rights legislation. Alberta was the last jurisdiction in Canada to provide these basic human rights protections. Eleven years after the Supreme Court's decision, the Alberta government finally introduced Bill 44, which included the explicit "writing in" of sexual orientation, but not without considerable compromise demanded by fundamentalist forces.

On the surface, the name of the bill sounded good (*Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act*), but the content left educational stakeholders, like the Alberta Teachers' Association in a dilemma. In addition to including sexual orientation, Section 9 of the bill also sought to enshrine "parental rights," which would allow parents the right to opt their children out of any explicitly planned discussions of religion, human sexuality, or sexual orientation. Citing the recent *Corren vs. BC Ministry of Education* human rights complaint, conservative forces in Alberta wanted to ensure that gay and lesbian activists would not be able to mandate the forced inclusion of sexual orientation into the Alberta curriculum. As a result, a Faustian bargain was struck.

In addition to the sinister message that Bill 44 sends, the passage of this bill meant that teacher's professional autonomy was severely impacted. The bill will now:

1. require teachers to remove students from classroom discussions that may be sensitive in nature with respect to their religious beliefs (i.e., sexual orientation, religion, evolution, and any social justice issues that may involve these topics).
2. inhibit or curtail a teacher's ability to provide accurate, age-appropriate information to students on a variety of current and emerging social topics.
3. create a learning atmosphere for students where some topics are taboo or censored.
4. restrict student access to non-judgmental information regarding issues that impact their lives.
5. threaten teachers' professional autonomy to teach in a pluralistic manner for the benefit of all students.
6. stigmatize children who ask legitimate questions in classrooms whereby teachers are unable to respond to them in a genuine and honest manner by engaging the teachable moment.

### Impact of Bill 44

Dozens of letters to the editor in the *Edmonton Journal*, objected to the government's backhanded approach to including sexual orientation in the province's human rights legislation. It was clear that through these actions the government was demonstrating a lack of respect and inclusion of its lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) citizens and a profound disrespect for the role and value of public education in the 21st Century.

Not one key educational stakeholder, such as the Alberta Teachers'

Association, College of Alberta School Superintendents, Alberta School Councils' Association, or the Alberta School Boards Association supported the inclusion of Section 9. These stakeholders realized that Section 9 was virtually unenforceable and flew in the face of the very tenets of public education. Accordingly, there was no justifiable educational reason to include parental rights into the human rights legislation.

The impact of this regressive legislation will close down, rather than open up, critical dialogues on contemporary societal issues and serve to further stigmatize LGBT citizens and prevent students from learning about the importance of diversity in Canada's increasingly

**The impact of this regressive legislation will close down, rather than open up, critical dialogues on contemporary societal issues and serve to further stigmatize LGBT citizens...**

multicultural and pluralistic society. The legislation will also put children of same-gender families at risk, as discussions about their realities will become taboo topics for school teachers. Rather than fostering understanding, this legislation perpetuates ignorance about LGBT people. Mandated silence and curricular invisibility send the sinister message that the lives, experiences, and contributions of LGBT people are unfit for public discussion.

Ultimately, Bill 44 legally interferes with teachers' abilities to do their jobs and severely inhibits the abilities of students to learn about their similarities and differences as global citizens. In effect, it will

narrow the role and value of public education, rather than expand its scope to include all peoples, regardless of their differences.

### The context for BC

Here in BC, our Ministry of Education has not allowed parents to opt their children out (for faith-based reasons) of subject areas like social studies, language arts, English, law, humanities, or science where LGBT issues may be discussed. In the past, some parents had removed their children from classes regarding any mention of LGBT issues to simply avoid the conversations altogether. When parents opt their children out, they are required to teach to prescribed learning outcomes in an alternate manner and meet with the classroom teacher to demonstrate how their child has learned the curricular concept in another age-appropriate way. This typically wasn't happening as parents were opting their children out of classes to avoid learning about concepts they objected to. Therefore, the Ministry of Education recently changed the Alternate Delivery Model to prohibit this abuse of the system by right-wing parents. Parents may still legally opt their children out of health and career education (sex education), but not other subject areas that may deal with LGBT issues.

In Alberta and BC, parents have always had the right to opt their children out of some aspects of the curriculum. However, there is significant concern that legislation such as Bill 44 entrenches certain topics as "off limits" for students and teachers. There is also serious concern that teachers may be hauled before the Human Rights Commission should discussions related to sexuality, sexual orientation, and religion enter the

classroom conversation as planned or topical discussions. The pall of censorship, the restriction of professional autonomy, and the role and value of public education loom as large questions facing teachers, concerned parents, and school boards. What allowances will be made for parents who remove their students from classrooms? Will the parents or the school district be required to provide alternative learning opportunities? How will this legislation be enforced and regulated?

### Could this happen here?

While you may think this type of backwards legislation would never happen in BC, think again. The new education minister belongs to a church that opposes same-sex marriage. The new minister for children and families was the former chair of the Surrey School Board during the era when they unsuccessfully tried to ban books about same-gender parented families from their schools. Will personal beliefs trump public ethics, such as was the case in Alberta? Our Liberal government has closer ideological ties to Alberta Conservatives than we might like to think.

There is only a provincial border dividing us from our neighbours to the east, but the future reality of our classrooms could not look more different. This is a time to be vigilant and vocal advocates for education that puts the "public good," back into public education.

Kristopher Wells, researcher, Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta and chair of the ATA's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Educational Subcommittee.

James Chamberlain is assistant director, BCTF's Professional and Social Issues Division.

# Inner-city children in crisis

We'll pay a high price for neglect of early childhood programs

By Noel Herron

Heartfelt pleas from inner-city parents for assistance; repeated cuts over the years to basic programs; crushing operating costs in maintaining a key local early-childhood facility; dramatic increases in vulnerable kids' waiting lists for services; a revolving door of ministers in the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD); provincial failure to meet the unique and urgent needs of preschoolers in Canada's poorest postal code—all these factors have now created a perfect storm—a crisis in the lives of preschool children and parents in Strathcona.

A colourful scroll, prepared by the children, accompanied by a carefully documented brief from the Board of Directors of the Ray Cam Community Co-operative Association was sent to Premier Gordon Campbell. It was endorsed by broadly based local community groups.

This issue was placed on the desk of a man who has publicly stated that all of his political life he regarded kids' needs as his top priority. He referred the issue to Mary Pollock, the new MCFD minister.

The ongoing crisis will test the credibility of the premier's statement.

It is abundantly clear to those of us who have worked in the inner city over the years, that government's highly centralized programs with their one-size-fits-all funding approach, are badly outdated. In fact, they have broken down completely, leaving the most vulnerable kids in this province at risk.

Fresh thinking and a new approach are absolutely essential to address this crisis in early childhood development in Strathcona. The Ray Cam board's recent brief to the premier outlines an innovative approach to the crisis based on past experience and best practices.

Here are the troubling facts as delineated in the board's brief:

- Ray Cam and Phil Bouvier Early Education Centres in the

Downtown Eastside alone have a waiting list of over 300 vulnerable children needing early childhood and preschool programs.

- Other centres in the community maintain their own long lists of children needing support to meet their developmental milestones without receiving any services whatsoever.

- UBC's Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP), funded by the province, conducts regular assessments of children's school readiness. This research shows that preschoolers in Strathcona have the highest vulnerability in Vancouver in five criteria: physical health and well-being, language (communication), cognitive skills, social and emotional development, and are not ready for school. An astounding 75% of children in Strathcona are deemed to be at risk.

- Many of these children (estimated at over 50%) have developmental, health, and support needs that are unmet and result in failure to thrive, failure to achieve developmental milestones, and by the time they reach Grade 3, they have fallen far behind their peers.

**It is abundantly clear to those of us who have worked in the inner-city environment over the years, that government's highly centralized programs with their one-size-fits-all funding approach, are badly outdated. In fact, they have broken down completely, leaving the most vulnerable kids in this province at risk.**

- Many of these children face environmental and economic challenges that threaten their safety, physical and emotional health, and development;

- Ray Cam faces a crushing burden of \$65,800 a year for rent and maintenance in the new Phil Bouvier Centre where 90% of parents request financial assistance.

This crisis is the culmination of a decade-long struggle for equity for these children and their families who face the harsh day-to-day existence of poverty, deprivation, violence, crime, addiction, inadequate housing, and often discrimination.

Because of recent cuts to existing services and the refusal to alleviate the current crisis, the

crucial preschool window of opportunity for meaningful and sustained early intervention will now be inaccessible to inner-city children and thus be irrevocably lost.

To date, the hypocrisy of the BC Liberals on the early childhood file knows no bounds.

Their so-called initiatives over the past several years have consisted of gimmickry (book hands and car seats for parents of preschoolers) and sloganeering (Ready, Set, Learn—a weak curriculum outline and Strong Start—a feeble, part-time, drop-in program for preschoolers).

All-day Kindergarten—one of the most promising and meaningful changes in our K to 12 system—has suffered a drawn-out delay with the re-election in May of the BC Liberals.

With the current budget shortfall of over \$7 million in the K to 12 Vancouver public school system, (VSB is now charged with early childhood responsibility) this situation will deteriorate even further.

Highlighting this worsening situation, one Vancouver inner-city school, faced with an untenable Kindergarten situation this month with 13 identified special needs students (profound speech and language difficulties, fetal alcohol syndrome, and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder) in a class of 20 children, was forced to set up two combined Kindergarten/Grade 1 classes in an effort to spread

the teaching load. This does not include unidentified students on waiting lists for assessment by VSB staff.

Even more troubling is the recent, much-touted, and patently phony, provincial Neighbourhoods of Learning program of which Strathcona school is a part. This is strictly a long overdue seismic

**In the 2007 Speech from the Throne, the provincial government forcefully pointed to the lack of school readiness of one in four preschoolers across BC and set up a much ballyhooed task force in the Ministry of Education whose report was quietly released in April. Promises about possible imminent action were made again and again prior to the provincial election.**

upgrading of the oldest school in BC, and does absolutely nothing for early childhood education.

In the 2007 Speech from the Throne, the provincial government forcefully pointed to the lack of school readiness of one in four preschoolers across BC and set up a much-ballyhooed task force in the Ministry of Education whose long-delayed report was quietly released in April. Promises about possible imminent action were made again

and again prior to the provincial election.

The impact of this studied delay and lack of a meaningful, comprehensive early childhood program will be very costly. It is not lost on inner-city workers, that while BC continues to feed its inexhaustible Olympic budget (the latest being the estimated \$30 million plus "donation" of hundreds of fully paid civil servants as Olympic "volunteers") that emergency funding for the poorest of our poor preschoolers is being denied.

Mary Ellen Tuppel-Lafond, BC's representative for children and youth, recently stated that vulnerable children "will pay a painfully high price" for the on-going lack of a "co-ordinated and comprehensive plan" to deal with BC's children living in poverty. If you doubt Tuppel-Lafond's statement, read the excellent and comprehensive, 2006 Kids 'n Crime report by the Vancouver Board of Trade.

Sadly, nowhere will the price be higher than is currently being played out in the many compromised lives of preschool children and their families in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver.

We should bow our heads in shame.

Noel Herron is former principal of Strathcona Elementary School and the author of "Every Kid Counts," a history of Vancouver's inner-city schools.



## BC is failing our children

By Dawn Steele

BC has by far the highest ratio of students per educator of any province or territory in Canada—17:1 (students per educator) for BC compared to a Canadian average of 14.5:1 and as low as 11:1 for Newfoundland and Yukon. And which students suffer most when they can't get individual attention? It is the vulnerable students and those with learning challenges, who depend on individualized attention and individualized educational planning in order to keep up.

Statistics Canada tracks this key student/educator indicator as reflective of the average level of individual attention that students in each province receive in public schools, the term "educator" encompassing all staff [teachers, counsellors, administrators, librarians, aides] who are engaged

directly in education. It is more useful than simply looking at class size, because it considers the full range of supports available, (i.e., it gives a more accurate picture of situations like BC's, where anecdotal reports suggest that legislation to reduce class sizes has in large measure just forced a shift between non-enrolling and enrolling educators—a shift that would hit hardest the vulnerable students who depend on those non-enrolling supports.)

BC would have to invest an additional \$250-\$300 million annually to hire thousands more educators just to get out of last place and match New Brunswick, which at 15.5 students per educator has the second worst ratio in Canada.

BC's ratio was closer to the Canadian average when the BC Liberals took over in 2001, but the gap has widened significantly. The

most recent stats available from Statistics Canada showed that BC would have had to hire almost 6,000 more educators (an increase of 17%) at an annual cost of some \$400 million more just to match the average level of individual attention that K-12 public school students receive in the rest of Canada.

**How can anyone claim that BC is the best place on earth while insisting that we can't "afford" anything better than providing a fraction of the individual attention that Newfoundland provides to its K-12 students?**

That gap may have declined marginally in the last few years (latest Stats Can data is for 2006-07 I think) but it's a huge gap to close and one that has been largely

ignored in public debate (unlike, for example, the attention now mounting over our even more shameful child poverty gap vs. the rest of Canada).

This new poll, along with the StatsCan numbers and the declining share of the provincial budget going to education, illustrate BC's lagging commitment to public education, and affirm just how incredibly lean our public education system has become under the BC Liberals compared to the rest of Canada.

The particularly high rates of dissatisfaction with special education services also affirm the concerns raised by Victoria trustee John Young last week about a growing two-tiered public education system, whereby school districts are increasingly coping with under-resourcing by neglecting vulnerable students or sidelining them in educational ghettos in order to keep mainstream classes

manageable and functioning.

How can anyone claim that BC is the best place on earth while insisting that we can't "afford" anything better than providing a fraction of the individual attention that Newfoundland provides to its K-12 students? How can we claim to be committed to public education while lagging so far behind the rest of the country in terms of the services that we're actually delivering to students? How can a government claim credit for sound fiscal management when it keeps boasting about spending more tax dollars than ever and yet our students are getting less attention than anywhere else in Canada? How can they claim to care about investing in the future to build a strong BC when they are failing so many of our children?

Dawn Steele is co-ordinator, Vancouver Parents for Successful Inclusion.



## Outdoor play/education more important than ever

By Jean Gelwicks

"They need more of this!" Today, our attitude about unstructured play outdoors is remarkably different than it was a few decades ago. Rather than venturing outside, like most of us did, exploring creeks, seashores, fields and forests, many of our children are spending an increasing amount of time indoors plugged into various technologies, including television, personal computers, and video games. As more studies become available, it is becoming evident these changes are resulting in some alarming health trends. More children are being diagnosed with ADD and ADHD, as well as being prescribed antidepressants, and childhood obesity and related health problems are at an all-time high.

Research shows contact with nature is as important to children as good nutrition and adequate sleep. Time spent outdoors correlates with increased physical activity and fitness and increases children's feeling of well-being and ability to focus on tasks. Children have shown a significant reduction in the symptoms of ADD when they are engaged in outdoor activities in natural settings. We are learning early, repeated experiences in the outdoors also develop in children a kinship with nature that can evolve into an informed, proactive, and lifelong stewardship and love of the natural environment. Richard Louv writes more about these ideas in his best selling book, *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. Louv believes the current generation of children are missing out on this critical form of play needed for healthy human development.

We have built a civilization on fossil fuels and we are fast approaching the end of this era. This is a tremendous opportunity for the next generation; as we will need to reinvent ourselves and develop new forms of sustainable agriculture, power generation, community plans, and transportation systems. The students of today will have this

**Research shows contact with nature is as important to children as good nutrition and adequate sleep. Time spent outdoors correlates with increased physical activity and fitness and increases children's feeling of well-being and ability to focus on tasks.**

responsibility. Many will have jobs we have not even heard of. But how will our children be able to take on this huge and exciting task without a deep connection to the place where they live and the understanding of the ecosystems that sustain them and all life?

Teachers, parents, and students know learning is more meaningful and effective when students can draw connections between their studies and the world around them. Those of us who were free to wade in creeks and ponds, build forts in the woods, climb as high as we could in a favourite tree, and seek solace in a quiet place in nature, know, at a deep level, why we must care for our environment. In fact, when most environmental educators are asked why they do the work they do, they refer to those fond

memories of a childhood spent outdoors. Place-based education involves going outside to learn about nature. This helps students connect to their communities and establishes a stronger commitment to being active and engaged citizens who are concerned for their environment.

The Salt Spring Island (SSI) Conservancy Stewards in Training school program is based on this philosophy. Our program is organized by conservancy school co-ordinators but delivered and taught by over 50 conservancy volunteers each year. The conservancy believes having nature-loving adults as role models is key in every student's life. Rachel Carson wrote: "If a child is to keep alive [her or his] inborn sense of wonder, [she or he] needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with [her or him] the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in." Each volunteer brings her or his speciality of being a naturalist, a retired or substitute teacher, a grandmother, an archeologist, an artist, a gardener, a biologist, or a geologist to the program, which makes it rich indeed.

The conservancy's Stewards in Training school program takes every student (approx. 700 Grade 1 through Grade 8) on Salt Spring Island, one class at a time, every year, on all-day nature field experiences into a variety of special places and ecosystems on Salt Spring Island and teaches them about how to be good stewards of the land. We do this free of charge. Students are involved in outdoor, field experience, where they are exposed to a variety of fun, hands-on, and curriculum-based learning experiences. For more information, see [www.saltspringconservancy.ca](http://www.saltspringconservancy.ca).



Our new Stewards in Training manual will be available online soon, or contact 250-537-4859 for a CD.

The SSI Conservancy hopes that by the time our students get to secondary school they will know their island, want to preserve all its ecosystems, and will themselves be able to act as mentors to younger students. We hope to develop in students a sense of wonder and curiosity about their natural environment that will last them a lifetime and that they will be healthier in both mind and body. "They need more of this!"

exclaimed one enthusiastic teacher at the end of a field trip, and we could not agree more.

Jean Gelwicks is a retired teacher and chair of the Salt Spring Island Conservancy School Committee.

### Resources

- *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*, Richard Louv 2005, published in Canada by Thomas Allen and Son Ltd.
- *Reconnecting children through outdoor education: A research summary*, Andrea Foster and Grant Linney, 2007, The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario

## Education and politics for a better world

By Patrik Parkes

On April 15 at Langara College, BC Peace and Global Educators (PAGE) presented *Education and Politics for a Better World*, a panel discussion moderated by the CBC's Mark Kelly. After an opening presentation by PAGE Past President Pummy Kaur, Kelly introduced each of the five speakers, who gave brief presentations. This was followed by a question and answer session. Aside from moderating the discussion, Kelly also presented his own views on the role of the media in educating for a better world.

The first panelist to speak, California longshoreman Clarence Thomas, gave some background on May Day 2008, when his union bravely shut down 29 US ports as part of an antiwar protest. Thomas spoke also of his union's actions against South African apartheid, and reminded us that "Solidarity is not just a slogan, but means that someone makes a sacrifice to help someone else." In conclusion, he asked the audience to repeat with him: "An injury to one is an injury to all."

The theme of interconnectedness was echoed by other speakers on

the panel. First Nations ethno-consultant Dr. Patricia Vickers used the metaphor of weaving, and spoke of the need for Canadians from all backgrounds to see how they are woven together in order to take ownership of their country's history. Simon Child, a secondary school student and recipient of the 2009 Gandhi Award, spoke of the need for mass media to be a reflection of community interests. Adriane Carr, deputy leader of the Canadian Green Party, spoke of the need for politicians to understand the interconnectedness of economies and the environment.

Dr. Manuel Rozenal, a human rights activist from Colombia, outlined the three crises we face today: economic, ecological, and the "entrapment of mother earth, which needs to be free and collectively owned."

A sense of incredulity also ran through statements made by the panelists. Child wondered aloud why fifth and sixth graders can understand human rights, but certain politicians cannot. Rozenal quipped, "We live in times of mediocrity and some of us are fed up with it. Greed and mediocrity are woven together." All agreed on the

need for education to combat this mediocrity by encouraging engagement in community as a means to solve the problems we face.

On October 23, 2009, PAGE has organized another panel discussion—The Green Challenge—on the topic of environmental sustainability. The event, to be held in Victoria, will include professional development workshops related to global education. Elizabeth May, leader of the federal Green Party, will be the keynote speaker. See [www.pagebc.ca](http://www.pagebc.ca) for details.

Patrik Parkes teaches at Moscrop Secondary School, Burnaby.

# Class Size and Composition Consultation

## Instructions for completing this form

- Please fill out one form for each class that is overloaded either by exceeding more than 3 IEP students (consultation required) or the following class-size limits:
  - 22—Kindergarten
  - 24—Grades 1–3
  - 30—Grades 4–7 (consent required)
  - 30—Grades 8–12 (consultation required).
- Fill out as much of the form as you can. The most common responses on last year's forms have been included in checklists to save writing time and help us organize your information.
- When asked, administrators have generally been helpful in supplying codes and explaining IEP

types. Try to get the exact numbers for each type. There should also be a full discussion of the individual student's IEP and how it should be implemented.

- To help us identify what type of class you have, we have asked for the course title, which is usually the plain language name for the class. This is very helpful in elective areas, *especially for someone who may not be familiar with your school.*
- You have the right to ask a staff rep to come with you to the meeting, and to ask the administrator to schedule the meeting accordingly.
- It's your consultation, so don't be shy about asking direct questions

and trying to get a commitment from your administrator to supply solutions for your concerns. You should indicate clearly (by choosing the appropriate response) whether you agree or disagree with the class organization. This need not be decided in the meeting itself but you should not delay in making that decision as the principal has two days to make a final organization.

- When you have finished the form, please give it to your staff rep.
- Staff reps should collect the forms, make a set of copies to keep, and send the originals to the local union office.

| Ministry special needs categories |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Category                          | Description  |
| A                                 | Physically Dependent                                     |
| B                                 | Deaf/Blind   |
| C                                 | Moderate to Severe/ Profound Intellectual Disability     |
| D                                 | Physical Disability/ Chronic Health Impairment           |
| E                                 | Visual Impairment  |
| F                                 | Deaf or Hard of Hearing                                  |
| G                                 | Autism   |
| H                                 | Intensive Behaviour Interventions/Serious Mental Illness |
| K                                 | Mild Intellectual Disability                             |
| Q                                 | Learning Disabilities                                    |
| R                                 | Moderate Behaviour Support/Mental Illness                |



Your information will help teachers make our case for better learning and working conditions

### Class Size and/or Composition Consultation Form Report to Local Union Office

- School \_\_\_\_\_ Administrator \_\_\_\_\_
- Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Did you request a meeting? Yes  No
- Proposed class size and composition** Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Total number of students \_\_\_\_\_
- Course (secondary)/class title: \_\_\_\_\_ Total number of IEP students \_\_\_\_\_
- IEP student type and number:** A \_\_\_\_\_ B \_\_\_\_\_ C \_\_\_\_\_ D \_\_\_\_\_ E \_\_\_\_\_ F \_\_\_\_\_  
G \_\_\_\_\_ H \_\_\_\_\_ K \_\_\_\_\_ Q \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_
- Does the organization of this class allow you to meet the requirements of each student's IEP?** Yes  No
- Has the principal provided you with the relevant information you requested?** Yes  No
- Was there a consultation meeting?** Yes  No
- Was a staff rep at the meeting? Yes  No  Staff rep \_\_\_\_\_
- Approximate duration of consultation:** Started at \_\_\_\_\_ Ended at \_\_\_\_\_
- The organization of this class will likely adversely affect the normal learning expectations for a class because:**  
*Check any that apply:*
  - unable to meet the prescribed learning outcomes
  - too many students for effective instruction
  - too many high-needs students for effective instruction
  - lack of resources to meet student needs
  - classroom management impacted adversely
  - lack of support personnel
  - safety
  - lack of space
  - workload
  - other \_\_\_\_\_
- How did the principal justify this class organization as being appropriate for student learning?**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Solutions requested by teacher and the response from administrator:**
  - reduce class size will do  no
  - reduce number of IEP students will do  no
  - provide additional teaching staff will do  no
  - provide additional preparation time will do  no
  - provide additional SEA time will do  no
  - other \_\_\_\_\_ will do  no
- Final class organization:** Number of students \_\_\_\_\_ Number of IEP students \_\_\_\_\_
- Comment** \_\_\_\_\_
- \*I agree  disagree  with the organization of this class.**
- Is the principal aware of your opinion regarding the organization of this class? Yes  No
- Teacher's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Staff rep signature \_\_\_\_\_
- Date \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Tips and advice

4. (Course/class title) Use plain language. Local school codes often don't mean much to someone outside the school.

6. The IEP is a legal document with recommendations to be implemented for each student, (e.g., required adaptations for instruction, testing).

11. (classroom management impacted adversely) Remember it is not just students with IEPs who might affect the normal learning expectations for the class. You should discuss students who require additional time/support such as grey-area students, ESL students, and students waiting for designation and testing.

12. Under the arbitration ruling the administrators are required to explain why they consider a class exceeding the legislation limits is appropriate for student learning.

13. The employer in arbitration relied on the lack of specific requests for solutions to say teachers were satisfied and the classes were appropriate.

14. (Number of students and Number of IEP students) Please include both numbers as the combined total could be important to a decision on the propriety of the class.

16. (disagree (choose one) with the organization of this class) This is not intended to be a personal challenge to the authority of the administration, but a thoughtful assessment by a professional teacher.

17. The arbitrator ruled that if teachers feel that a class is inappropriate they must articulate that to the principal and the principal must then take that opinion into account in forming her or his opinion.

# BCTF Internal Mediation Service

By Dean Chatterton  
and Kelly Shields

Experiencing conflict at work? Are you having a difficult time working with a colleague? Are you having trouble communicating in your professional life? Are you feeling frustrated, vulnerable, or attacked? Is a working relationship breaking down?

As terrible as these situations sound, if you answered yes, you are probably not alone. Sometimes intelligent, articulate, sensitive, and caring professionals find themselves in circumstances that are both surprising and desperate. They feel devastated when they are unable to find a way out of the difficulties.

The BCTF Internal Mediation Service may be able to help. Here is a series of answers to FAQs about the service and information about how you can request help.

**1. What is mediation?** Mediation is a carefully designed process that brings people together in conversations, with mediators present, to help them reach a resolution to a dispute.

**2. What is the IMS?** The IMS is a team of volunteer BCTF members, trained and experienced as mediators, who work with teachers and others to help resolve workplace conflicts.

**3. What is the IMS mandate?** The mandate can be found in the *Members' Guide to the BCTF*, section 32.02—(a) “to mediate disputes that threaten good relationships among active members and others as appropriate.”

**4. Who is it for?** Any active BCTF member is eligible to make a request for assistance.

**5. What type of situation does the IMS deal with?** The service can help to resolve a variety of conflict situations including disputes about:

- ethical conduct, including speaking about colleagues or students.
- communication about or with students, parents, administrators, support staff, and/or the public.
- respectful professional relations.
- social interactions.
- resources and/or funding.
- duties, roles, and responsibilities.
- professional responsibilities, including student discipline, teaching style or methods, or assessment techniques.
- professional practice.
- decision making, policies, and procedures.
- school culture and climate.
- local association or other BCTF committee issues, executive roles

and/or constitutional issues.

**6. How do we access the service?**

a. Members may obtain the services of the IMS by communicating with Kelly Shields, assistant director, BCTF Professional and Social Issues Division. For further information, contact Kelly Shields, [kshields@bctf.ca](mailto:kshields@bctf.ca).

b. You may also contact your local president.

**7. How do I initiate the process?**

a. You will be asked to complete a “Pre-Mediation Assessment Form” to make a formal request to initiate the service. (Available from Pat Balango at the BCTF, [pbalango@bctf.ca](mailto:pbalango@bctf.ca), 604-871-1800, or toll free 1-800-663-9163.

b. Both parties must complete a form before the process can be initiated.

**8. What happens next?** As soon as both parties agree to participate, here is what occurs:

- Two mediators are assigned.
- The mediators contact the parties to establish a schedule. (Usually two days of meetings.)
- On the first day, the mediators interview each individual so that each can give a complete account of the situation from their perspective.
- On the second day, the mediators meet with both parties together for a conversation carefully structured to ensure a respectful and safe atmosphere in which mutually acceptable resolutions can be explored.
- The mediators follow up with the parties to help ensure agreements are sustained.

**9. Who pays?**

- TTOC costs and meeting expenses are covered by either the local, the BCTF or, in some cases, shared by both.
- Mediator expenses, including travel, meals, accommodation, and release time are generally at BCTF expense.

**Sometimes intelligent, articulate, sensitive, and caring professionals find themselves in circumstances that are both surprising and desperate. They feel devastated when they are unable to find a way out of the difficulties.**

**10. What about confidentiality?**

All proceedings and information shared during the process are strictly confidential between the participants and the mediators.

a. Any notes taken by the media-

tors during the discussions are shredded upon completion of the process.

- The mediators report to no one.
- The participants are also expected to respect the confidentiality of the proceedings.

**11. What about the Code of Ethics? Can I name names?**

For the purposes of the individual interviews, the provisions of the Code of Ethics are set aside so that each person's perspective can be clearly presented to the mediators. Names can be used during the confidential individual interviews.

**12. I'm nervous; will I be safe?**

- Mediators are trained to ensure that conversations are conducted respectfully and safely for all parties.
- Most mediations involve people who are feeling hurt and vulnerable. In order for the sessions to proceed successfully, mediators are trained to ensure that both parties feel secure as they meet with neutral mediators present.
- Participation in mediation is voluntary, each person and/or the mediators, have the right to withdraw from the process at any time.

**13. Can I be sure that I won't be blamed or attacked?** Yes.

- Mediators are trained to ensure that situations are not made worse.
- The mediation process often helps to reveal balanced and/or shared perspectives that may not have been previously evident.

**14. Will it work to make our situation better?** There are no guarantees, however:

- In the majority of cases, satisfactory and sustainable resolutions are achieved.
- Even in cases where the substantive issues remain unresolved, participants are often able to work together more respectfully and comfortably.
- Mediation often provides a more satisfying and sustainable resolution than alternatives like formal complaints, grievances, or litigation.
- The mediators do their very best to help participants ease the difficult situations in which they find themselves. Mediators are good listeners.

**15. What is my next step?** Call Kelly Shields or Pat Balango at the BCTF (1-800-663-9163 or 604-871-1803) for more information and guidance about whether the service may be of help.

*Dean Chatterton, co-chair of the Internal Mediation Service and Kelly Shields, assistant director, Professional and Social Issues Division.*

# Grandmothers to Grandmothers

Stephen Lewis Foundation

By Ariel Eastman

African grandmothers have become the heart of the response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As the guardians of children who represent the future and hope of Africa, it is clear that special intervention is needed on their behalf.

The Stephen Lewis Foundation's Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign does just that by supporting grandmothers in sub-Saharan Africa who are raising millions of children orphaned by AIDS. As recent studies show in Africa and in British Columbia, children living with their grandparents fare better in school than those living with other relatives or foster parents.

I became involved with the Grandmothers Campaign because I, too, am raising my three-year-old grandson and I am well aware of the day-to-day care of a little child along with a full-time teaching career. I think how easy it is to cook food at the touch of a button. When I had to take him to a hospital at 11:30 one night last summer, I thought how accessible help is to me and what it must be like for African grandmothers to watch helplessly as their children and grandchildren suffer before their eyes.

Here, a growing number of grandparents are raising their grandchildren. According to the Canada Census 2001, of the 8,780 children in British Columbia being raised by grandparents, two-thirds were women and 46% were retired. My husband and I have joined a local Grandparents Raising Grandparents support group and are amazed at the personal stories that speak of courage, commitment, and love. As a group, we are finding our collective voice and are advocating for increased awareness of our challenges and the resources available, including financial support. The orphans in Africa will lead the continent out of the AIDS pandemic. Support for the grandmothers caring for them is a responsibility I cannot ignore.

When Stephen Lewis, humanitarian and former United Nations Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS, spoke at the University of the Fraser Valley on International Women's Day (March 8, 2008), my grandmothers' group, the Abbotsford Area Gogos, was born. We belong to a regional network of grandmother and grand“other” groups in Southwestern BC who operate under an umbrella called Greater Van Gogos (gogo is the Zulu word for grandmother). BC boasts 52 grandmother groups and many of us are teachers or retired teachers and principals who have a wealth of experience to add to our commitment to our African sisters.

Stephen Lewis established the foundation that bears his name in 2003. In 2006, on the eve of International Women's Day, he challenged Canadian grandmothers to bond with their African sisters. Later that year, the SLF brought together 100 African grandmothers and 200 Canadian grandmothers in Toronto. At the end of their three-day gathering, the African grandmothers promised, “We will not raise our children for the grave,” and the Canadian grandmothers promised, “We will not rest until they rest.” In just over three years, we have more than 200 grandmother groups across Canada representing well over 5,000 individuals. Our mission is threefold: fundraising, awareness (education), and advocacy. The Grandmothers Campaign has raised more than \$6

million and has become an important component of the SLF's fundraising efforts.

What's different about this campaign is that the SLF singles out grandmothers in Africa as having special needs. I am impressed by the way the African projects build community at a grassroots level. The projects provide grandmothers with counseling, school fees, and uniforms for their grandchildren, and support for income-generating programs such as sewing and other crafts community gardens.

Our advocacy efforts resulted in a 32,000-signature petition, presented to Parliament in March of this year, asking the government to keep its promises on foreign aid, contributing our fair share of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria, and to speed the delivery of generic drugs to Africa. This fall, we will turn our advocacy efforts to the Millennium Development Goal No. 2—free, universal primary (up to Grade 8) education for boys and girls throughout the world.

Many BC grandmother groups are already working closely with teachers and school administrators providing speakers and fundraising ideas to staff, parents, and students. Several retired educators, within Greater Van Gogos, have formed a Schools Working Group and are developing programs appropriate for all grade levels that will engage teachers and students in supporting the inspiring work of the Stephen Lewis Foundation. While the gogos prefer to present at school assemblies, they will tailor programs for interested classroom teachers, if time permits. In the Vancouver area, contact Ann Marrs at [welsagogos@gmail.com](mailto:welsagogos@gmail.com). For more information go to [stephenlewisfoundation.org](http://stephenlewisfoundation.org) and if you'd like to hold a fundraiser in your school, e-mail [community@stephenlewisfoundation.org](mailto:community@stephenlewisfoundation.org). To find a grandmothers group in your area, go to [www.grandmotherscampaign.org](http://www.grandmotherscampaign.org) and click on “group profiles.”

*Ariel Eastman teaches at Sardis Secondary School, Chilliwack. [ariel\\_eastman@sd33.net](mailto:ariel_eastman@sd33.net).*



“Dare to Dine”

In October, Stephen Lewis is challenging Canadians to participate in *A Dare to Remember: Ordinary people doing extraordinary things*.

The idea for this nation-wide fundraising week was inspired by African communities where every single day, ordinary people—grandmothers, children, women—are forced by the AIDS pandemic to go above and beyond what they thought was humanly possible.

During the week of October 17-25, 2009, thousands of Canadians will choose a memorable dare—something funny, healthy, kind, sporty, anything at all—set a personal fundraising goal, and ask their friends, family, and colleagues to sponsor them. All proceeds will go to the Stephen Lewis Foundation to support community-based organizations that are turning the tide of AIDS in Africa.

As part of the SLF's Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign, Canadian grandmothers are taking on *A Dare to Remember* by holding 1,000 dinners during this week. Called “Dare to Dine” dinner hosts will collect donations from their guests and the money raised will be allocated to the courageous and resilient grandmothers of Africa.

For more information on this initiative, go to [www.stephenlewisfoundation.org](http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org).



# Taking action on Aboriginal issues within the BCTF

By Christine Stewart

The education of Aboriginal children in BC and Canada has been and continues to be a topic of great concern and debate for Aboriginal people and, in fact, all involved with Aboriginal education. This is Part 1 of a paper addressing some of the work of the BCTF Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee in dealing with the education of Aboriginal children and bringing their concerns into the policy process of the BCTF. Part 1 will focus on the committee's response to the troubling issues of accountability for specially allocated Aboriginal Education targeted funds and the use of standardized assessments to measure the growth of our children and to rank schools according to success on these assessments. Part 2, which will be printed in the October 2009 issue of *Teacher*, will turn to the broader question of how committees like this one work on Aboriginal Education within the greater context of *Social Justice Unionism*.

## Targeted funds and standardized tests

For a couple of years now, the Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee (AEAC) has been working on the issue of program assessment. In 2007, the committee, made up of teacher members of the BCTF, adopted a professional statement on monetary assessment, one that was later endorsed by the BCTF at its 2008 Annual General Meeting. We'll look at this statement at the end of this section, but it needs a bit of an introduction to understand it within its political context.

Despite the fact that there is so much to be explored in the area of Aboriginal education, we find that the issue of accountability is front and centre. One reason for this myopic exploration, strangely enough, is the way in which Aboriginal funding is used (or not used as the case may be) to enhance the education of Aboriginal children.

In British Columbia, the provincial Ministry of Education provides school districts with designated Aboriginal education funds to be spent on self-identified Aboriginal students. Since 1984, there has been and continues to be an annual ongoing challenge to the way these funds have been allocated combined with demands to ensure the funds are spent appropriately. In many school districts this work has meant getting the message through to district staff, administrators, and school trustees that this money is meant to enhance Aboriginal education of Aboriginal students and not meant to be extra funding on top of the same per capita funding a district receives for all students. With continuing provincial cutbacks in school funding, this is not easy task.

According to the BCTF AEAC minutes and various unpublished reports, it was left up to each district to be use the money for Aboriginal students on what they felt was needed. And often these funds paid for items that would not be used by Aboriginal students—to carpet floors, for example, or to buy computers for schools.

The funds don't always go this

way. In Vancouver for example, Aboriginal education money was used to hire First Nation School support workers and staff to work in Aboriginal alternate programs. It was also used to provide district Aboriginal youth and family workers and it was used to pay for training all Vancouver School Board (VSB) staff in Feuerstein Instrumental Enrichment (FIE)—a program designed to meet the needs of students who have experienced trauma in their communities. The legacy of residential schools has caused great intergenerational trauma in the lives of Aboriginal people and FIE is one useful course of action to help Aboriginal children be successful in the Vancouver public education system. The idea was that all teachers in the VSB would be trained in FIE and this training in turn would facilitate change in how teachers teach Aboriginal children. While many teachers in the VSB received training in FIE, unfortunately only a few use FIE in their classes.

While under the leadership of Lorna Williams in the VSB, the targeted money was spent well, but this is mostly an exception. Few BC school districts used the funding with a similar ethical brush. In fact, there are many narratives of how Aboriginal money was misallocated not only for things like carpets or regular texts, but even to supplement the salary of administrative staff.

Aboriginal leaders and their community, of course, wanted some kind of accounting for the money specifically allocated for Aboriginal students. After a great deal of struggle, a system of audits had been set up by the Ministry to check on whether the funds were actually being spent on an enhanced programs for Aboriginal students. We have yet to see how successful this accounting will be. But now that *accountability* is the new watchword for Aboriginal funding, we find that it is being applied much more aggressively to Aboriginal education as a whole—and with much more destructive impact.

Accountability is important, of course, both for funding and for the quality of education. Public educa-

tion is responsible for our children five days a week, 10 months of the year and we need to know how the schools are doing. However, the question arises about what are valid ways that the ministry can know whether the schools are succeeding?

Since the late 1990s, the Ministry of Education has used census-level standardized testing as a major aspect of accountability for public education as a whole. Previously, it had used sample testing, along with a number of other forms of inquiry, to assess how curriculum was being implemented and what changes need to take place.

The ministry-defined accountability process adopted the Foundation Skills Assessments (FSA)—a test given annually to all Grade 4 and 7 students at the same time across BC. The Aboriginal community is not united in its response to FSA testing. During the debate on the FSA, for example, a spokesperson for Aboriginal band-operated schools stated Aboriginal people need to know how their children are

**Aboriginal people in Canada have been socially marginalized historically, have often lived in poverty, and have had their cultures denigrated and denied as well, particularly through the residential school experience. It is hardly a surprise, then, that Aboriginal students as a whole have not succeeded in school. It does not require a standardized test to figure that out.**

doing in BC schools and claimed that the FSA would show that. The FSA is also not opposed by most of the education partner organizations in the Aboriginal community, though these organizations also argue that, at most, the FSA is a single snap shot and not the full story on how our children are doing in BC public schools. The BCTF, however, has opposed the FSA from its beginnings and has often been

demonized in the media where there is little trust in what the BCTF has been saying about the FSA.

During the early days of the FSA, Aboriginal students were often exempt from taking the test. As is often the case, when high stakes are placed on test results, schools tend to excuse those who will bring down school scores from taking the tests.

If there is any consistent finding in education research, it is that performance in school and success in tests is closely tied to the socio-economic status of the families of students, with school programs providing only a small contribution. Aboriginal people in Canada have been socially marginalized historically, have often lived in poverty, and had their cultures denigrated and denied as well, particularly through the residential school experience. It is hardly a surprise, then, that Aboriginal students as a whole have not succeeded in school. It does not require a standardized test to figure that out. Nor can the school alone be expected to make significant improvements for Aboriginal students. That requires many parts of the society, business and government, along with the schools create the social changes necessary.

The FSA tests have become a flashpoint, at least partially, by the way they are used by the Fraser Institute, a right-wing think tank situated in British Columbia. The Fraser Institute each year produces a report card on schools, ranking them according to test results primarily. This produces a situation where schools with large Aboriginal populations end up on the bottom in the report, even if there are positive programs to support and encourage Aboriginal students. This was demonstrated in a CBC documentary that went to the school the Fraser Institute named as the worst school in BC. The report showed the extensive work that was being done in the school to support the success of the Aboriginal students.

The FSA tests have some significant defenders in the First Nations communities. The First Nations Education Steering Committee, a provincial organization of representatives from many First Nations groups, has supported the tests from the beginning. They said that Aboriginal children were not succeeding in school and they wanted the test to show this in order to get action to improve the school experience for their children.

The BC Representative for Children and Youth, Mary Ellen Turpal-Lafond has also spoken out in support of the tests. When challenged, she has said that she supports the test since it is the only

concrete measure that we have, not because she thinks it is the best way of identifying the problems and getting them addressed. Mary Ellen Turpal-Lafond has met with the Federation in-house officers and the BCTF AEAC and discussed the issue of FSA testing and has agreed to work on some joint assessment research projects.

The BCTF AEAC has taken quite a different approach. This is clear in its statement of professional concern, which was endorsed by the BCTF 2008 Annual General Meeting

## Professional statement

- That the AEAC of the BCTF strongly opposes the overuse of standardized testing.
- We believe the misuse and overuse of standardized testing further discriminates against Aboriginal children and reinforces negative stereotypes.
- We believe paper and pen testing does not acknowledge the gifts of our children.
- We believe this is a colonial tool that perpetuates negative feelings and undermines our children's ability to learn.
- We believe there is a problem and more testing will not address our children's needs.
- We believe our children are entitled to equity of outcomes.
- We believe that we need to focus on the strategies and solutions to help Aboriginal children.

## Supporting statement

- It has become increasingly essential for the Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee to take this professional stand.
- The professional statement is an attempt to address supposedly benign assessment to identify the need for a quality education for Aboriginal children in BC.
- The mythology of testing is that tests are at the root of, and reinforce, the unequal status of Aboriginal people and their children.
- These tests were developed by men dedicated to proving the presumed inferiority of Aboriginal people, women, and a host of other people deemed inferior.
- The form of testing used on all children, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, identifies the lower class or underprivileged.
- Hidden in testing is the link to capitalism and the erosion of higher education and the public school system.

*Christine Stewart teaches at Britannia Secondary School, Vancouver, and is a member-at-large, BCTF Executive Committee.*



Thanks to the BCTF, the Arrow Lakes Teacher's Association, and Darryl Smolik, ALTA social justice rep, Heather Jenkins's Grade 6/7 class, at Nakusp Elementary School, was able to buy wool to knit woolen blankets to send off to children in Afghanistan. This is the second year for this project in conjunction with Afghans for Afghans. Last year, the class sent off 89 vests with the help of many women in the community of Nakusp.

# H1N1 causes Burnaby school closure

By Marianne Neill

Marlborough Elementary School in Burnaby was closed on June 17, 2009, in response to a number of cases of H1N1. While students were asked to stay home, teachers in the school were required to report to work. Although, the Burnaby board should be commended for making the decision to take the precaution of closing the school to students, would it not make sense to treat teachers with the same protocols as students when it comes to concerns about a communicable disease?

The questions are significant for any workers who may find themselves in similar situations. Imagine an office closed to customers, because many customers had been diagnosed with a communicable disease in a global pandemic. Imagine that the illness can incubate for two to seven days, and that any of the workers could be carriers. Then imagine that the workers are nevertheless required to report to work after the business is closed. This is essentially what happened to the teachers at Marlborough.

The Fraser Health Authority advised that there is no danger to the teachers. How does the health authority measure danger? Is there no danger to teachers with students removed, or is there just less danger? Is the level of danger considered less because the illness is considered mild? Are students removed, not because they are in danger, since the illness appears to be mild, but because they are more likely to spread the illness more quickly? They can't be relied on to wash their hands and are more likely not to cover their mouth when coughing.

At this time there have been 349 hospitalizations and 13 deaths reported among laboratory-confirmed cases of H1N1 in Canada. In any flu season, different strains of flu result in about 4,000 Canadian deaths a year. If H1N1 is not serious, why has the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic? According to the Public Health Agency of Canada website, the concern is that this is a new strain, and people will likely have no natural immunity to protect against the virus. Therefore, it could spread quickly. The more cases there are, the more deaths there will be.

At this time, there have been 209 laboratory confirmed cases in BC. About 2.4% of those were at Marlborough. However, the data takes on a different meaning when you know that adults are not being routinely tested if they have a mild flu; so there could be many more cases than are reported. Some teachers at Marlborough elementary are sick, but may never know whether they have H1N1, unless it becomes serious.

**How does the health authority measure danger? Is there no danger to teachers with students removed, or is there just less danger?**

The level of danger to health is one factor in assessing the reasonableness of the decision to require workers to report to the quarantined site. Whatever the seriousness of the illness, logic suggests that the teachers at Marlborough elementary are at greater risk of taking ill with H1N1 than other members of the community.

Here are some of the facts:

- While parents were told to enter the site at their own risk, teachers inside were being told to close windows and blinds.
- Teachers in the school had not been informed if students in their class were diagnosed with H1N1. They had been informed each time a new case was discovered, but not whether it was one of their students. Student confidentiality had to take priority. So they had no idea whom among them was most likely to have been exposed.
- Since the incubation period is two to seven days, and people can carry the virus while asymptomatic, there is a chance, no matter how slim, that the teachers could relay the virus to one another, and some could be in the incubation stage after students return.
- The argument that they can just as easily be exposed in the community is illogical. The school milieu is a known H1N1 site, with a larger proportion of cases than the community at large.

Whatever the risk to teachers—even though perhaps no greater than that presented by any flu—the closure of the school to students created a circumstance in which the directive to report to work pre-

sented a snapshot of implicit values and attitudes toward workers. With the risk to health assessed as , but not significant, and the core work they do rendered impossible, they were nevertheless required to be on site. They spent their days doing preparation for next year, and wondering whether they would take ill, or whether they or their colleagues were carrying the illness that had emptied the classrooms of students. Much of the work they were doing could have been done at home. This raises a question as to why, when it seemed to make no sense, the teachers were asked to report to work.

Perhaps the answer is that attitudes to workers have, in many contemporary work places, not changed since the industrial revolution. When factories replaced artisans, paternalism began to characterize the relationship of employer and employee. Some of the features of this relationship included worker anonymity in relation to the employer, management rights to discipline employees, and loss of control by the worker over the work place.

While these attitudes have been changing in many businesses, public schools still value control and surveillance, for both students and teachers. This has been a growing culture in the last decade. Education reformers of the 1960s and 1970s made advances in personalizing teaching methods, making public education more child-centred, and raising professional standards for teachers. However, in recent years many of these advances have been undermined.

Unions grew to protect and expand the rights of workers in the industrial environment. The health and safety of workers has always been a prominent issue. It is remarkable to think that the legacy of the industrial revolution still plays a role in the way workers are treated in 21st century Burnaby, when facing a communicable disease during a global pandemic.

Workers and unions might do well to pre-emptively negotiate agreements about H1N1 protocols, or, in general, protocols for closure of the worksite due to the presence of a communicable disease.

Marianne Neill is president, Burnaby Teachers' Association.

# Health and safety

By Karen Langenmaier

As the animated character cries at the end of the CBC Comedy Show, "Mommy, it's over!"—so too is the summer. I hope you rested, relaxed, recharged, and are ready for the health and safety issues that teachers will be facing when they return to work this fall.



## H1N1 Virus (Swine Flu)

This spring, in response to the H1N1 pandemic, the Ministry of Education issued an order (M138) on how to deal with outbreaks of H1N1 in schools in May, 2009. It essentially says that if any student or staff member tests positive for the H1N1 virus and was present at the school while in the infectious stage, the school board must close the school for at least seven days.

This fall however, the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the provincial health officer have revised their position as per the following quote: "It has since become apparent that the disease caused by this virus is generally mild and does not warrant such severe measures."

While the ministries may be taking this conservative position, our advice remains to be vigilant and to use universal precautions of washing your hands often and well with soap and water and avoid touching your mouth, nose, and eyes.

The other cautionary note is to pregnant women who should see their doctors as soon as there is a suspected case of any infectious disease that is potentially harmful to themselves or their babies and to get a note to say that they should not work at that worksite.

The ministry will be releasing a pandemic response framework as each school district must have a plan to mitigate an influenza pandemic.

The following are some links that will provide more information on H1N1:

- Ministry of Education: [www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1](http://www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1)
- BC Centre for Disease Control: [www.bccdc.ca](http://www.bccdc.ca)
- European Centre for Disease Control: [www.ecdc.europa.eu](http://www.ecdc.europa.eu)

## Violence prevention

Teachers and staff have the right to know if students in their class have a history of any violent behaviour. The employer is obligated to provide this information to teachers and staff and a risk assessment followed by a safety plan for the workers must be developed before a student is enrolled in a class.

## New and young workers

The definition of a "new" worker is one who is new to a workplace, is returning, has relocated, or is affected by a change in the hazards of a workplace. This could mean a new or changed physical plant or new students to your classroom. A "young" worker is anyone under 25 years of age.

According to the WCB, all new and young workers must receive orientation and training relative to their work environment. This could include:

- employer's responsibilities and rights under *Workers Compensation Act*.
- worker's responsibilities and rights under the *Workers Compensation Act*.
- how to report unsafe conditions.
- the right to refuse unsafe work.
- workplace health and safety rules.
- hazards including risks from robbery, assault, or confrontation.
- working alone policy and procedures.
- violence in the workplace policy and procedures.
- location of first-aid facilities and how to summon first aid.
- how to report incidences or injuries.
- contact information of health and safety committee and worker representative(s).

## Indoor air quality

As school districts move into the fall and winter, they will attempt to minimize their heating costs, often at the expense of providing fresh air. The threat of mould increases with the rainy and wet season, which is further compromised by diminished fresh air supplies as we close our windows reducing even passive air flow. The fall is a good time to request indoor air quality testing. The testing techniques and results are varied and in my experience often invalid and unreliable sometimes to the point of misleading. Please contact this office if you have any questions regarding indoor air quality testing.

## Electromagnetic radiation and the dangers of wireless technology

There are a growing number of people who are aware of the health impacts of exposure to wireless technology, particularly in young children. This group of teachers, parents, and scientists are organizing informational meetings and publishing documents in an effort to stem the tide of ever-increasing wi-fi. As so many of us use cell phones, wireless internet, and other forms of wireless appliances, most of us are unaware of the dangers of their continued use. Please take the time to read some of the information from the links below. If you would like further information, please contact this office.

- [globaltv.com/globaltv/globalshows/16x9/2009.01.04.segment01.html](http://globaltv.com/globaltv/globalshows/16x9/2009.01.04.segment01.html)
- [mastsanity.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=132&Itemid=113](http://mastsanity.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=132&Itemid=113)
- [gelighting.com/na](http://gelighting.com/na)

## Training modules

Each member of a joint-health-and-safety-committee has the right to eight hours of annual training. Please ensure that our members request and receive this training either through the BCTF Health and Safety Program or SURT.

## Remember your four basic rights under the *Workers Compensation Act*

1. The right to know the dangers in the workplace.
  2. The right to participate in workplace health and safety activities.
  3. The right (obligation) to refuse unsafe work.
  4. The right to no discrimination. You cannot be fired or disciplined for participating in health and safety activities. Maintaining a healthy and safe work environment does wonders in preserving your mental and physical health.
- Karen Langenmaier, BCTF Health and Safety officer.

# The law of unintended consequences

By Lucinda Tooker

According to the "law of unintended consequences," any purposeful action will invariably include at least one unforeseen side effect. The unintended side effect can potentially be more significant than any of the intended effects. (*Wikipedia*, 2009)

We have all heard the joke about the student who brings an elaborate project to school. When his friends ask what he is carrying, he replies, "It's a B+."

We laugh, with a shake of our heads, knowing that this is not far from the reality in our schools today. I think this is a result of the so-called standards movement, manifested in BC with standardized tests of achievement and a proliferation of provincial final exams, as well as district achievement contracts. It's not about learning, it's about "achievement".

A certain amount of tension exists in our education system, where "standards," which harken

back to the efficiency movement of the 1920s, are laid upon an education system that struggles to value the individual learner. The tension between educating the child and proving the education system is meeting externally set standards is visible in several arenas.

Despite the influence of the standards movement, the development of each IRP is still guided by the following principles of learning:

- Learning requires the active participation of the student.
- People learn in a variety of ways and at different rates.
- Learning is both an individual and a group process.

Yet students are still expected to demonstrate their learning at predetermined intervals, provincial exams, or FSA tests, irrespective of where they are in their learning.

Furthermore, there exist many lofty vision statements in schools and school districts across the province that value individual learners. Yet these principles are undermined by evaluation practices

imposed by the ministry, school boards, and even by school departments.

By emphasizing measured outcomes rather than learning experiences, the unintended consequences are a narrowing of curricula, an appreciation of only extrinsic reward, and a lack of deep engagement with subject matter. Hence, the pride of the student in the joke with the mark he anticipates, rather than the project and his learning.

According to Elliot Eisner, this situation will not change until the education system itself undertakes a "program of education" for the public, including "... a deep understanding of the meanings of education and the issues that need to be considered in defining outcomes and assessing the quality of educational practice." It's time to change the conversation about "what counts" in our schools.

Lucinda Tooker is a teacher-librarian, Kanaka Creek Elementary School, Maple Ridge.

## BCTF Advantage

By Laurence Greeff

Still in its infancy, BCTF Advantage celebrates the second anniversary of the voluntary program, which is based on the model developed by the National Union of Teachers in the UK and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, both of whom have mature programs. BCTF Advantage is designed to develop a voluntary opportunity for members and their immediate household to get travel options on vacations and cruises at advantageous rates, to have a range of insurance options from household to travel/medical insurance at a special rate, and for members to have the option of designing a customized mortgage through the mortgage broker, Ellis Mortgage Brokers. In addition, the Advantage program has begun working with Royal LePage, the only Canadian real estate company to offer 25% off the real estate fee for BCTF members and their household members.

**One of the most important aspects of the BCTF Advantage program is to build a network of partners who respect our commitment to socially and ethically responsible corporate values and who meet the criteria set by our union.**

The exciting part of initiating a program like Advantage is that we are building on the long history of the union supporting members. In 1938, the Vancouver Teachers' Federation signed an agreement with Cunningham Drug Store to provide teachers with lower-cost pharmaceuticals. The program has learned some important lessons from OSSTF when they set up their program; build strong partnerships, make sure that the program is voluntary, and build the involvement by listening to those who choose to join the program. Of course, this is no different from the early days of the depression when co-ops were set up across the prairies for working people to help each other.

To date, over 5,000 teacher households have joined BCTF Advantage. No small feat for a program in its infancy and still developing options to support members.

Our latest venture is to set up the *Community Local Market*. We have asked local associations around the province to tell us about companies that support teachers and their families so that we can contact them to find out whether the program can work with those companies to offer the better deal to members around the province. A small example of such an offer is Café Etico, a local company that sells fair trade coffee and helps support the work of CoDev. In working with us, Café Etico will give a special price for teachers and their households giving us an advantage.

Some cynical voices out there would often say, "What's the advantage in Advantage?" We believe that the concept of no surprise pricing in the high-risk travel industry is a huge advantage. That's why we have partnered so effectively with BCAA on different aspects of an industry that is being jolted by the recession.

The relationship between the BCTF Advantage program and BCAA is unique because we work so well together to develop a range of travel options, travel/medical

insurance, and other programs that members expressed satisfaction with in a summer survey that was done among Advantage members.

Industrial Alliance Pacific, one of Canada's largest insurance companies has been associated with the BCTF for more than a quarter of a century and their current association with the BCTF Advantage program has given us an opportunity to build a variety of insurance programs for members.

One of the key features in the home insurance program is the teacher tool kit that enables an Advantage member to benefit from unique features at very little cost. The "teacher tool kit rider" offers school computer and theft protection; home exchange insurance coverage, and other unique features.

One of the most important aspects of the BCTF Advantage program is to build a network of partners who respect our commitment to socially and ethically responsible corporate values and who meet the criteria set by our union.

Toshiba is a company that meets the criteria and offers a range of laptops marked down 18%. We think that those laptops offer good value and a price advantage to our members.

The recent decision by the Campbell government to introduce the HST will see a definite rise in the cost of buying a house. We believe that Ellis Mortgages Canada, one of the best mortgage brokers in Canada, to design a mortgage for you as a teacher, gives you a distinct advantage. The key value is having someone do the work for you, acknowledge your financial needs as a teacher, and work with you from anywhere in the province to acquire a win-win situation. Of course, to strengthen your position, the Advantage program, has partnered with LaVRES, an independent sales organization made up of leading Royal LePage and associate sales professionals.

LaVRES has alliances with established industry partners that ensure your real estate transactions are smooth and trouble free.

It is really important that we build a strong community local market with the intent of ensuring that no matter where you are in BC, you will be able to order online, purchase a product directly from a community partner, or use a service if you happen to be traveling through that community.

Our goal is to continue building the program. The recent survey we took with Advantage members showed strong satisfaction with the advantages already gained but we need to continue to add products and services that meet the needs of our members and their families across the province.

We need to continue moving the program, as they did in Ontario and the UK, to the mature phase and encourage more members to participate. The challenge for us on the subcommittee developing the program is to keep asking the question, "Where is the advantage for teachers and will they be able to see it?"

We also need to ensure that we develop a contact in each local to encourage members to look for the potential benefits in joining the BCTF Advantage program.

You have a unique opportunity to join the program and to take advantage of potential benefits. Click on the Advantage Program link on the BCTF webpage. It is on your immediate lower right side of the website with the stylized Advantage logo. There may be an opportunity for you to take advantage of the program and discover your advantage.

Laurence Greeff, a Langley teacher, is a member of the BCTF Advantage sub-committee.



## Peace art from toys of violence

By Myriam Dumont

At the BCTF AGM, I came across the curriculum for the Acts of transformation—war toys to peace art project. I quickly skimmed it and decided to purchase it thinking it seemed like an interesting project.

**So what is a toy of violence? This question sparked an intense debate among my students. Violence means different things to different people.**

When I was able to really sit down and read through it, I realized what an incredible idea this was and, although I did not have much time, I knew I had to do it.

Over the course of the past year, I have integrated issues of social justice into all subject areas. This project seemed so appropriate because it gave the students the ability to create something artistically using knowledge that they had gained throughout the year.

So what is a toy of violence? This question sparked an intense debate among my students. Violence means different things to different people. Guns, soldiers, weapons were all toys that we agreed normalized violence. But what about those toys that reinforced stereotypes? Could Barbie be considered a toy of violence? This was a tricky question and after a long discussion it was up to the students to decide what they felt was deemed to be violent. Students had different ways of defining violence based on their own

experiences and upbringing. Perhaps one of the most powerful moments was when one of my students put up her hand and asked if she could use policemen in her project. I asked her if, for her, the police represented violence and she replied that they did. I felt that if this was the case, she could absolutely use policemen in her project. She did not share anything else that day and I felt that if she wanted to explain herself she would have. I think it is important, especially with a project like this one, to let students express themselves the way they choose to.

The students went home, collected their toys of violence and brought them back to school. Some students worked by themselves, while others worked in groups. Projects included a peace pyramid made from toy soldiers, a giant peace tree, and three-dimensional steps showing the evolution of war. I was amazed at how well they organized themselves, planned their projects, and how the final product turned out.

It took a lot longer than I had anticipated but on June 5 we had our exhibit and the students were extremely proud to share with everyone what they had been working on for so long.

This project was not only valuable for my students but also for the community and other students in my school. A few days before we had our big exhibit, the teacher across the hall from me mentioned how disturbed she had been when her Grade 2 students were playing with toy soldiers from home. When she asked them what they were doing they said to her they were playing "war in Afghanistan." Many students are disconnected from the reality of what takes place in a war zone and are instead exposed to it in the form of video games and

toys. It is important to have these discussions with them about what war is and what are its consequences. It is also important to realize that many of our students might come from places in the world that have experienced wars and that their knowledge should be brought into the classroom so that other students can learn from it.

An incredible book that I recommend to anyone who teaches at the elementary level is called *Playing War* by Kathy Beckwith. It is the story of a boy coming from a country where a war is taking place. He educates his peers when he sees them one day playing war outside in the school yard. His message and this book's message are clear. War isn't a game, it is something that is

**Many students are disconnected from the reality of what takes place in a war zone and are instead exposed to it in the form of video games and toys. It is important to have these discussions with them about what war is and what are its consequences.**

real and real people are involved in these conflicts. These are the books that we should be reading to our students because through these stories wonderful discussions emerge. Although not always easy and sometimes uncomfortable, these discussions are necessary to create a better world than the one we currently live in.

Myriam Dumont teaches at Strathcona Elementary School, Vancouver.

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C. C. NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_  
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122-1020 Mainland Street Vancouver, BC V6B 2T5  
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- M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education - Westminister - May 2010  
Info Sessions: Sep.23 & Oct.10, 2009
- M.Ed. in Secondary English Language - Richmond - May 2010  
Info Sessions: Sep.22 & Oct.8, 2009
- Urban Learner #9, M.Ed. Vancouver - September 2010  
Info Sessions: Oct.21 & Nov.19, 2009
- M.Ed. in French Immersion Vancouver & Montreal - September 2010  
Info Sessions: Nov.2, 2009 (others TBA)

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**WHISTLER GETAWAY** Pinecrest Estates, 4 bdrm cabin, sauna, deck, BBQ, tennis, private lake, suits 2-8. 604-936-3346, [glush@shaw.ca](mailto:glush@shaw.ca)

**WHISTLER** Condo. Sleeps 4, views, close to village, 604-943-9423, [preddyplace@telus.net](mailto:preddyplace@telus.net).

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**TUTORING.** Vancouver Academic Tutoring Service needs certified teachers for part-time tutoring in the Lower Mainland for all subjects and grades. Min. \$25/hr. Car required. Please leave name and phone number at 604-813-5455.

## PD Calendar

### SEPTEMBER 2009

**28** New Westminster. 7th Annual BC Field Trip Fair hosted by the Fraser River Discovery Centre, BC Teachers and pre-service teachers are invited to this FREE after school event to meet educators from more than 50 community groups—museums, parks, heritage sites, galleries and cultural groups—that offer field trip opportunities in the Lower Mainland and beyond. Refreshments, door prizes, bus bursaries and 50 free field trips for a whole class will be given away to pre-registered guests! Conveniently located adjacent the New West Skytrain station. For more information visit [www.bcfieldtrips.ca](http://www.bcfieldtrips.ca)

### OCTOBER 2009

**1-2** Whitehorse. The Stikine Teachers' Association is hosting their annual Fall Conference at the Westmark Hotel. Daniel Tlen will give a short keynote address on the importance of both English and First Nations languages. Oct. 1, Mark Boynton presents an all-day workshop on Working with Students with Challenging Behaviours. Oct. 2, participants choose between Catherine Feniak (reading strategies for K-6 teachers) and Kim Boettcher (reading strategies for Grades 7-12 teachers). For registration or information, contact Cathy Bouman at [librarylizard@gmail.com](mailto:librarylizard@gmail.com), or 250-771-3043. This conference will benefit new teachers.

**2-3** Vancouver. Learners on the Autism Spectrum—Creating a Culture of Inclusion through Designing Peer Pay and Friendships Programs presented by Pamela Wolfberg and Heather McCracken at SFU Vancouver Harbour Centre. Two-day seminar designed to prepare participants to carry out the practices of the Integrated Play Groups (IPG) model for children and teens. Register online at [www.friend2friendsociety.org](http://www.friend2friendsociety.org) For more information e-mail [friend2friend@shaw.ca](mailto:friend2friend@shaw.ca) or call 604-528-0560.

**3** Kamloops. Start UP Your Class Successfully. For student teachers, TTOCs, and early career teachers, this workshop will help you successfully start and manage your classroom by building good routines and planning the year. Receive a 33-page booklet with lesson descriptions, checklists, and suggestions. The workshop is offered as part of the KTA's new teacher conference. For online registration, go to [www.pita.ca/workshops](http://www.pita.ca/workshops) or contact Ray Myrtle, [president@pita.ca](mailto:president@pita.ca). To register, contact Don Row, [donkamloops@hotmail.com](mailto:donkamloops@hotmail.com).

**22-23** Richmond. The BCBEA presents "Celebrating 50 Years of Teaching Business Skills." The 50th Anniversary of the BC Business Education Association PSA will be celebrated during the 2009 Fall Conference at the 5-Star RiverRock Casino Resort. Starts Thursday with a keynote speaker and wine & cheese attracting 500 business guests and teachers and continues on Friday with keynote speakers, breakout session workshops, awards presentations, and exhibitor area in the conference centre. Check us out at [www.bcbea.ca](http://www.bcbea.ca) or contact [kkuhn@sd43.bc.ca](mailto:kkuhn@sd43.bc.ca)

**22-23** Richmond. BCTLA hosts the Champions of Literacy conference. Imagination, Information, Innovation. Keynote: Roch Carrier, a national treasure and a champion of Canadian culture. Wine and cheese at the Olympic oval. Information: [bctf.ca/bctla/conference/index.html](http://bctf.ca/bctla/conference/index.html).

**22-24** Burnaby. BCTELA hosts the 2009 National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Northwest Regional Conference at the Delta Burnaby Hotel and Conference Centre.

Conference theme: Asking the right questions: Engaging today's learners. Featuring: Jeff Wilhelm, Carol Jago, Faye Brownlie, David Booth, Beverly Ann Chin, Kathleen Gregory, Sharon Jeroski, Carl Leggo, John Golden,

Shelly Stagg Peterson, Susan Close, & Sue Montabello. To register, go to [www.bctela.ca](http://www.bctela.ca).

**22-24** BCMEA "Gioco 2009" will be held at the Pacific Academy for all the details visit [www.bcmeaconference.com](http://www.bcmeaconference.com)

**22-24** Surrey. CUEBC is hosting the Horizons 2009 Fall Conference at Sullivan Heights Secondary School in Surrey. The conference theme is "Turning the Classroom...On the Edge of 2.0." Feature over 50 presentations, 20 vendors, and 500 participants. This is the main educational technology event for the province in 2009! Check it out at [www.cuebc.ca](http://www.cuebc.ca).

**22-24** Vancouver. "Inside-Out 2009" hosted by the BC Art Teachers' Association and the Canadian Society for Education through Art at UBC. Thursday night reception, Vancouver Art Gallery, Friday sessions at Prince of Wales Secondary School, Vancouver; Friday night reception at the UBC Museum of Anthropology; Saturday sessions at the Education Building, UBC. <http://bcata.wikispaces.com/Conferences>.

**22-24** Whistler. BCAMT hosts the 2009 Northwest Mathematics Conference at the Fairmont Chateau and Westin Resort in Whistler. Our conference theme is "Going for Gold: Let the Mathematics Begin." Keynotes: Trevor Calkins, Carole Saundry, and Peter Liljedahl. Conference includes an NCTM Learn & Reflect Strand and a Teachers Teaching with Technology regional conference. For more information go to [www.bctf.ca/bcamt/nw2009](http://www.bctf.ca/bcamt/nw2009).

**23** Burnaby. Learning Assistance Teachers' Association will be held at the Holiday Inn Metrotown. "Why Math is Failing Our Children." Shad Moarif (Ed.M, Harvard.) Shad is the founder of Karismath formerly known as CLSO-MATH which is guided by the principles of Universal Design for Learning. For more information contact Alan Peterson at [lataconference@hotmail.com](mailto:lataconference@hotmail.com)

**23** Chilliwack. THESA PSA annual conference "Footprints in the Valley" at G.W. Graham Middle-Secondary School. Engaging seminars and workshops to help energize you and your school Home Economics program, and a fashion show are just part of what is planned. Watch our web site [www.thesaconference.ca](http://www.thesaconference.ca) for more info or contact Paula Aquino, [paula\\_aquino@sd33.bc.ca](mailto:paula_aquino@sd33.bc.ca)

**23** Vancouver. The ESL PSA's 19th annual conference "Diversity: Expect, Respect and Celebrate" will be held at John Oliver Secondary School. For more info contact Joy Wild, ESL PSA Conference Co-chair [joywild@hotmail.com](mailto:joywild@hotmail.com)

**23** New Westminster. The 23rd annual Quality Day of Physical Education (QDPE) Conference at Douglas College. An absolute must for all PE teachers, coaches and/or athletic directors. Attendance includes a one-year PE-BC membership, and NEW in 2009, a Student Leadership and Campus Life Conference for your high school student leaders! For a full conference brochure, contact Denise Rutherford at the Sports Institute at 604-527-5492 or e-mail [rutherford@douglas.bc.ca](mailto:rutherford@douglas.bc.ca).

**23** Surrey, BC. 2009 EAR PSA Conference, "Anti-Racism Education: Building Something Greater," Queen Elizabeth Secondary School, King George Highway and 95th Avenue, Surrey, BC. 8:00 am to 3:30 pm. Contact Michael Aaku, L.A. Secondary School, Surrey, 604-588-3418, ext 2129 or 604-507-1933, email: [aakutoto@shaw.ca](mailto:aakutoto@shaw.ca)

**23** Vancouver. BC Science Teachers' Association presents "Discover The Gee! In Genome," a high school teacher conference from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Telus World of Science. This unique one day conference will provide opportunities for you and your colleagues to: experience a guided

tour of the Gee! In Genome exhibition, discuss advancements in genetics, participate in practical hands-on workshops, practice innovative ways to capture your students attention, access ready to use classroom resources, collaborate with other teachers. Visit the BCScTA website [www.bcscta.ca](http://www.bcscta.ca) for more details.

**23** Vancouver. The BC Dance Educators' Association presents "JUST DANCE 2009." Gladstone Secondary School, Vancouver. We welcome all generalist and specialist teachers of dance Grades 4-12. Workshops: Dance for boys, Braintance, More body beats, Hip hop, Jazz dance, modern dance, creating dance and more. For more information visit [www.bctf.ca/bcdea](http://www.bctf.ca/bcdea) or contact Linda Medland, [lindamedland@shaw.ca](mailto:lindamedland@shaw.ca), 604-876-0644 or Judy Herridge, [judy\\_g@shaw.ca](mailto:judy_g@shaw.ca), 604-541-8170.

**23** Vancouver. The Association for Educators of Gifted, Talented and Creative Children in BC presents Dr. Joanne Foster of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, co-author of the award-winning Being Smart About Gifted Children (2005), and the second edition Being Smart About Gifted Education (2009). All educators, administrators, gifted program facilitators, advocacy group members and parents are welcome. Plaza 500 Hotel, 500 West 12th Avenue. For conference details and registration information, go to [www.aegtcabc.org](http://www.aegtcabc.org).

**23** Victoria. The Green Challenge Conference. Sponsored by the BC Teachers for Peace and Global Education PSA, Esquimalt Secondary School, keynote speaker: Elizabeth May, forum panelists include David Orchard, world cafe, workshops include Acts of Transformation, War Toys to Peace Art. Check us out at [www.pagebc.ca](http://www.pagebc.ca) for more information.

**23-24** Abbotsford. BCPTA Primary Leadership Conference, Friday keynote concert by Charlotte Diamond "The Joy of Singing Leads to a Love of Language." Presentations across the Curriculum by popular speakers and classroom primary teachers. Final details and online registration will be on the BCPTA web site [www.bctf.ca/bcpta](http://www.bctf.ca/bcpta) Registrar: Sandra Huggett [shuggett@sd57.bc.ca](mailto:shuggett@sd57.bc.ca)

**23-24** Surrey. PITA Fall Conference, Growing Ideas, featuring over 60 workshops. For details and to sign up for online registration go to [www.pita.ca](http://www.pita.ca) or contact Ray Myrtle [president@pita.ca](mailto:president@pita.ca)

**23-24** Vancouver. ABCDE fall conference PANORAMAS 2009 will be held at Crofton House Independent School. The following hotels are giving special rates: Park Inn & Suites and The Coast Vancouver Airport Hotel. For more information contact the ABCDE conference co-chairpersons Larry Bauer [lbauer13@hotmail.com](mailto:lbauer13@hotmail.com) Robert Morgan, [rmorgan5@shaw.ca](mailto:rmorgan5@shaw.ca)

**23-24** Harrison Hot Springs. Farm Fresh Harrison, BCCASA conference. Slow Food Movement and Sustainable Farming: Various local and artisan food producers will present their products. AGM and executive elections. Saturday bus tour for tasting and presentation to Farm House Cheese. Go to [web.me.com/lesgau/BCCASA/Conference.html](http://web.me.com/lesgau/BCCASA/Conference.html).

#### Future October PSA days

2010-11: October 22, 2010  
2011-12: October 21, 2011  
2012-13: October 19, 2012  
2013-14: October 25, 2013  
2014-15: October 24, 2014  
2015-16: October 23, 2015

#### PSA PD Day October 23, 2009

PD Calendar website:  
[bctf.ca/ProfessionalDevelopment.aspx](http://bctf.ca/ProfessionalDevelopment.aspx)

Additions/changes: [sdrummond@bctf.ca](mailto:sdrummond@bctf.ca)

*Celebrate October 5*

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