

TEACHER

Newsmagazine of the BC Teachers' Federation

Bargaining 2011

Charting a new course

By Jody Polukoshko and Tara Ehrcke

Desperate for a discretionary day? You must teach in Victoria. Getting sick from mouldy teacher-ages? Sounds like Vancouver Island West. Still doing lunchtime supervision? Welcome to Vancouver Secondary.

After almost two decades of a broken bargaining system, teachers are preparing to chart a new course. Last year, the Annual General Meeting and the Representative Assembly decided to pursue a new bargaining strategy. Local after local spoke out about the failure of provincial bargaining to address local issues. Stale language, a broken midcontract modification process, provincial interference (in the form of both legislated contracts and the incessant interference of BCPSEA in local matters) has meant that our experience with provincial bargaining has had limited benefits for many of our members.

Each of our locals has a unique demographic profile and specific issues that need to be dealt with. Some examples are the need to address housing conditions for rural teachers, professional development funds and processes, summer school provisions, and post-and-fill language. Each of these issues is a

CLASS SIZE AND COMPOSITION
 FUNDING AND SUPPORT
 BARGAINING WORKLOADS
 CHANGING THE WAY
 WE BARGAIN
 IMPROVING
 OUR RIGHTS
 SUMMER SCHOOL
 PROVISIONS
 PROFESSIONAL
 DEVELOPMENT
 HOUSING
 CONDITIONS FOR
 RURAL TEACHERS



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priority for the locals that are affected, but those locals have not found the provincial bargaining model responsive to such issues. As a result, an Ad-hoc Committee on Bargaining Structures was struck and made a series of recommendations to work toward changing our model of bargaining.

Three primary issues guided the committee:

1. bringing a greater number of bargaining issues back to the local table. Currently, our ability in locals to bargain many issues directly with our local employer is limited.
2. providing funding that locals may use to bargain improvements on issues that their membership determines are most important.
3. bringing class-size and composition issues back to our collective agreements, and away from legislation that does not reflect our experiences in the classroom.

Split of issues

In the past 16 years, since many of our local bargaining rights were removed by legislation, there have been both local and provincial bargaining tables, often at the same time, but the local tables were severely limited by the *Public Education Labour Relations Act* legislation in 1994. The split of issues that are allowed to be discussed at each table was negotiated at that time by the BCPSEA (the provincial bargaining agent for all school districts) and

the BCTF with all cost items (and several non-cost items like harassment and evaluation) being removed from locals and given to the provincial table. This agreement is no longer satisfactory, so the Federation will first seek a renegotiation of the "split of issues." This is a high priority because the outcome will provide us with the information necessary to make good decisions as members of our locals, as well as provincially, when it comes to setting objectives.

Local after local spoke out about the failure of provincial bargaining to address local issues. Stale language, a broken midcontract modification process, provincial interference (in the form of both legislated contracts and the incessant interference of BCPSEA in local matters) has meant that our experience with provincial bargaining has had limited benefits for many of our members.

Class size and composition

Our local collective agreements once had significant language on workload. Many locals bargained limits on class size and composition, with reductions in maximums for split grades, classes with Kindergarten in them, and for numbers of

students with special needs. Many locals had specific language around inclusion, and ratios for specialist teachers. In 2002, that language, which was hard-fought and won, was stripped unilaterally from our collective agreements through legislation introduced by the provincial Liberal government. A few years later, Bill 33 arrived, which does not address the needs of teachers or students in any meaningful way, and does little to

address violations of this law. Bill 33 is, however, a great example of what happens when non-educators determine what is best for education! Years later, we are still addressing this law's inadequacy through the grievance process.

We believe that it is our right to bargain workload. The new bargaining structure seeks as a priority, the ability to bring class

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On the inside

This is the time when myriad tasks descend on teachers as the school year accelerates toward its end. Included in this edition is a piece of summer reading to bridge that long gap between now and September. Henry Giroux of McMaster University has written a particularly incisive, cogent article analyzing the malaise infecting public education in North America. It is a lengthy piece but well worth a close read. The stage is being set for

bargaining in 2011 so we begin with a primer on a new process that the BCTF is seeking. Taxes and the HST are very much at the forefront of the political landscape, so a number of articles address the issues of value, fairness, and equity in this debate.

Teachers involved in international projects recount their journeys and the progress to which they contribute. Irene Lanzinger has penned her last message as BCTF president. She returns to teaching math and science next year and we all extend our thanks for her service and wish her well.

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President's message



Irene Lanzinger

About 20 years ago, I was sitting in the staffroom at Magee Secondary School in Vancouver at a school union meeting. We needed a representative for the Status of Women Committee. "One meeting a month," I thought. "I can do that." I raised my hand to volunteer. I was sucked into the vortex of BCTF activism. Before I knew it I was a local president, on the provincial bargaining team, and eventually president of the BCTF.

In my role as president, I have come to experience firsthand the work we do together as a union and professional association. We have a culture in the BCTF that responds to

the ideas that teachers bring forward through their provincial specialist associations, through committees, through motions in locals, at representative assemblies, or annual general meetings. As a result, we are engaged in a seemingly endless array of activities and campaigns.

We build in many ways for our members to become involved—staff representatives, local executive committees, or as representatives in a wide variety of areas: professional development, health and safety, social justice, bargaining, working and learning conditions, TTOC issues, Aboriginal education, French

programs, and more.

Teachers become involved through their provincial specialist associations, as workshop facilitators, as parent presenters, as peer mentors, or through the internal mediation service and judicial council. They become involved in international solidarity work on our committee or as English teachers in Cuba and Peru. They serve on our pensions committee, our income security committee, or help with the Assistance Society. And I am sure I have missed a few ways!

We have a wonderful union in the BCTF. We are always willing to put in a lot of work to achieve the

things we believe in. Our commitment to our profession, to public education, and to social justice runs deeply through all the work we do.

As I finish up my last term as president, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunities I have had to learn, to grow, and to contribute to everything we stand for as teachers.

It has been such an honour and a pleasure to represent the teachers of BC. I am always impressed by the professional commitment, integrity, and courage of BCTF members. It is no wonder we have such a strong, principled, and active union. Let's keep it that way.

Readers write

A bridge or no bridge

While the pension issue has been dealt with at the AGM, I for one, feel some issues still need to be addressed.

[AGM] Recommendation #44 is a betrayal of members who have accrued, or will accrue, their 35 years of pensionable service. They have played by the rules and are rightly entitled to make no further contributions at that point. Some would say that further contributions to the IAA would be to their benefit. Perhaps. But I would say the contributions are designed for the benefit of those that retire early. If you are going to change the rules of the game for one set of members, then they should be changed for all. Get rid of the bridge benefit.

Yes, I know that is a controversial statement. However, hear me out. Two of our raises in this five-year contract are being effectively wiped out by pension issues. Why is that? We had an unfunded liability in the general fund and a projected shortfall in the IAA. Why is there an unfunded liability? Quite simply, teachers are retiring earlier and living longer, thus drawing more pension benefits than has historically been the case. In fact, all things being equal, a person retiring at 57 or 60 could draw more from the fund than those that choose to retire at 65. Recommendation #44 basically is asking older teachers to subsidize the indexing portion of this early retirement.

I've always been against the bridge benefit. Retiring early is a wonderful thing, if that's what you want and can afford to do. If you choose that path, you should have been saving outside of the plan to make that economically feasible. The plan shouldn't subsidize early retirement. I suspect the unfunded liability would be substantially lower were it not for the bridge benefit. Furthermore, as there is a shortfall predicted for the IAA,

indexing shouldn't begin until 65.

There is no free ride in life and if we continue down this path, younger teachers and those yet to join teaching are going to be faced with intolerable deductions off their pay cheques. So...you want to change the rules of the game? Then make it equitable for all.

Martin Lee
Quesnel

A lasting memory

While reading your March 2010 issue, I was delighted to discover that a Vancouver elementary school has been named for Miss Elsie Roy!

She deserved this accolade and every one she ever earned, as she was instrumental in developing an excellent Primary Program in all Vancouver schools in the 1950s and 1960s.

I must be one of the few people still around who taught for her. I was employed at David Lloyd George Elementary School in 1954 and 1955 as a Grade 2 teacher.

She ran a "tight ship" in Vancouver at that time. She insisted that every primary teacher follow her excellent programs, mainly in language arts. She was instrumental in developing a strong phonics program for primary grades, for which I will always be grateful.

All teachers new to the district were required to attend weekly after-school classes at the Vancouver School Board offices. During this time, she showed us how to obtain the best pupil results. We often had to bring samples of class work.

Miss Roy obviously took the job of supervisor very seriously. She visited all the primary classrooms, and was famous for her trick of backing you up to your class so she could observe the mayhem when the teacher wasn't looking.

Her creative ideas for education stayed with me throughout my 39-year teaching career and the 10 years of retirement when I was

tutoring.

I remember her as a tall, thin, dark-haired lady who was a dedicated teacher first. She strictly required that her methods were used universally, but was kind and had a warm sense of humour.

Elsie Roy Elementary School can be very proud of her contribution to BC education.

Joan Boyd
Saanich

Response to young teacher

I would like to respond to the letter sent in by Ellen McDonnell, Young Teachers Need A Break (*Teacher*, April 2010). First off, I agree with Ms McDonnell that retired teachers should not be taking away jobs from younger teachers. I had never heard of the acronym TTOC until recently. That in itself says a lot. When teachers retire they should do just that. I realize that there are unique circumstances that might require a retired teacher to supplement their income by TTOCing but it seems that many retired teachers immediately get on the TTOC list to help pay for travel expenses. The young teachers are often caught in a *Catch 22*, they have to be available to be called as TTOCs so cannot work at another job while waiting to be hired as a full-time teacher. Some have had to move back home because of this situation. Also, retired teachers cost more to hire so I am wondering why school districts would not want to have young teachers? It doesn't make sense economically.

Today with the challenges that teaching brings, it really is a job that should attract young, enthusiastic, energetic individuals to the profession. Let's give the young teachers an opportunity to fill the positions that retired teachers vacate.

Joanne Nokleby
Cultus Lake

Letter of thanks from Chilean teachers

We are writing in thanks for the solidarity from your teachers for teachers in Chile affected by the earthquake and tsunami.

The education system was affected with the destruction of 4,000 schools. At least 480 teachers have been left homeless and 281 have suffered serious damage. Just yesterday, the students most affected in the central and southern regions returned to school.

The policy is to "normalize" the return to school despite poor conditions. Many schools are operating in tents or in private homes.

The government is taking this as an opportunity to merge public schools into private schools, dismissing teachers and cutting working days. In short, it is using this tragedy to further consolidate privatization and labour flexibility.

It is in this context that we want to thank you for the support you have given us. That, of course, has

served to reduce the gaps and needs that the huge earthquake and tsunami left us. Your gesture and generosity has the gratitude of all Chilean teachers.

In the first stage, we have detailed the count of victims and material damage and provided concrete assistance with food, clothing, medicines, etc. All teachers are donating 0.5% of their salary a month for a disaster fund. We also have various solidarity campaigns aimed at delivering aid to our students.

Reiterating our gratitude for your support and solidarity in difficult times for our country, we send a fraternal embrace on behalf of all the Chilean teachers.

Sergio Gajardo Campos,
Secretary General

Jaime Gajardo Orellana,
National President

Jorge Pavez, National Executive

[Note: The BCTF International Solidarity Committee approved a grant of \$5,000 for the Chilean teachers.]

Teachers missing from the Ministry of Education Service Plan

Every time a provincial budget is announced, a "Service Plan" for each ministry is a part of the budget. It is supposed to provide the public with an indication of the "goals, objectives, strategies, and performance measures" of that section of government.

An indication of what this ministry thinks of the role of teachers in education is indicated by how often it talks about teachers. A search of the 27 pages of the most recent Ministry of Education Service Plan shows that the word "teacher" appears only once. Even then, it is not about teachers; it is in a photo caption that says "A child's first teacher is always a parent or caregiver."

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Let's take a look at one example of a goal and performance measure. Goal 2 is to have "Responsive K-12 education" and one of the objectives to be measured is "Engage students through new and flexible choices."

What are the strategies identified to engage students? The Service Plan talks about "new forms of schooling," curriculum revision to prepare for the future, neighbour-

hood learning centres, jurisdiction for First Nations, support for French immersion, and more distributed learning. It also claims students will be more engaged through "choice for families through independent schools and home schooling options."

Does the budget provide extra funds to make sure these things can happen? No, not for most of these items. Except for independent schools which, as usual, get more of a percentage funding lift than public schools in this budget.

And what are the performance measures for these strategies?

One projects that FSA reading results will increase to "75% of students in Grade 4 who meet reading expectations." Another offers "The percentage of students who pass a Grade 10 language arts provincial exam."

How will these tired approaches measure the excitement and engagement of students that these initiatives are supposed to increase?

The Service Plan also reports on what the ministry claims to have discovered from 10 years of FSA results: "The clear correlation between student's reading scores and the likelihood they will complete school now allows educators and parents to develop appropriate interventions to assist individual students."

Why did it take the ministry 10 years of FSA exams to discover that there is a correlation between reading skills and graduation rates? Teachers hardly needed FSAs to know this and to try to do something about it.

Want to read more commentary on the Service Plan? You can find it on the BCTF web site at bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Issues/EdFinance/MoEdServicePlan2010-11.pdf or <http://tinyurl.com/yjdpvgz>.

— Larry Kuehn

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BARGAINING from page 1

size and composition back to the bargaining table. It empowers the BCTF full-time table officers to meet with government to seek this improvement. Class size and composition is an issue that is of the utmost importance to our members and to our students, and is placed at the start of our negotiation process.

Funding and support

The third component of this new model is to bargain an "envelope" of money to be fairly distributed among BC locals. This funding envelope will provide resources for districts and locals to negotiate monetary items. It will support any improvements we negotiate based on our locals' unique needs.

On the ground

What will this mean for teachers? Many of us have never lived through local negotiating. Many of us don't remember the class-size and composition language that used to be part of our collective agreement. Over the last two decades, our engagement with the bargaining process has diminished as there were fewer and fewer opportunities for teachers to have an effect on improving our rights.

Much of the hard work will be done before our local or provincial tables even open—the negotiations that the BCTF is already engaged in with government and BCPSEA to change the structures will require a united membership. Member involvement will be of the utmost importance in this upcoming year. In the past, when bargaining, we have taken action, rallied, raised public support, and we have worked together to advance objectives. This time, the need for solidarity will be of equal importance, but will also need to be mobilized in response to changing the way we bargain.

Opportunities for input

As this is a new approach, it will require new processes. As the BCTF Executive Committee seeks changes to the way we bargain, and to reverse some of the profoundly destructive legislation that has limited our bargaining rights, it is essential that we, as members, keep informed about progress. In May and June, and in the early fall, there will be activity in your local as you set your objectives, appoint your bargaining teams, and make budgetary decisions to support bargaining in your local. Your local would be doing these things regardless of what bargaining structure we have. Assessing members' needs and priorities, as well as their commitment to attain those needs and priorities, is all part of what we do in locals—whether those needs and priorities end up being dealt with at the provincial or the local table.

We believe that it is our right to bargain workload. The new bargaining structure seeks as a priority, the ability to bring class size and composition back to the bargaining table.

Provincially, your locally elected officers as well as your local representatives to the BCTF will be participating in several meetings in the next year. These include the Bargaining Conference in October 2010, bargaining training in November, and one or more special representative assemblies to update and discuss progress at each table, and to make decisions based on that progress. Bargaining preparation will also be a focus of the upcoming Summer Conference.

The new structure itself is adaptive and responsive—timelines are longer, there are more opportunities for member feedback, and it is an attempt to build provincial support for local bargaining without

simultaneously fettering local autonomy. Our collective agreements are unique and reflect the unique characteristics of our locals. However, we remain a provincial body that always seeks to support and advance the needs of public education. We believe that this new structure respects both of these roles of teachers, and will strengthen our membership in new ways.

Jody Polukoshko is vice-president and grievance officer, VESTA and Tara Ehrcke is contract chair, Greater Victoria Teachers' Association.

AGM bargaining survey responses



Nicole Davie, Cariboo Chilcotin

What would you like to achieve in the next round of bargaining?

- Improved teaching and learning conditions
- Increased pay and benefits

Most important issues for you?

- pay increase—teaching is a stressful job that is below scale in BC when compared to other provinces and professions
- better learning conditions—I teach art and although my school is very supportive of the program, we still have too many students in a windowless room with not enough money to give a holistic, rich experience. Our government needs to FUND education properly.



Robb Stevenson, Boundary

What would you like to achieve in the next round of bargaining?

The next round of bargaining must achieve a restoration of stripped class-size and composition language, development of a comprehensive benefits package, cost of living wage increases, and pressure the employer to take action on pertinent TTOC issues.

Most important issues for you?

The collective agreement is a powerful tool in our fight against the privatization of public education by the BC Liberals. We must demand complete and full funding restoration of education to guarantee improvements in the learning conditions of our students, the working conditions of our teachers, and support for our new teachers and TTOCs.



Natasha Tattersall, Burnaby

What would you like to achieve in the next round of bargaining?

1. return to local bargaining
2. improved benefits
3. improved class size and composition
4. lower counsellor/student ratios
5. defined teacher/student ratios for non-enrolling teachers.

Most important issues for you?

1. return to local bargaining
2. improved class size and composition
3. improved benefits.

Another successful New Teachers' Conference

By Mohamed Chelali

New teachers represent the renewal commitment of our profession and their needs and interests are of utmost importance to our society. The BCTF New Teachers' Conference is designed to welcome, support, and guide new teachers entering the profession. It is one of the finest professional development events that one can attend. The conference is always popular because the presenters are almost all active classroom teachers and they volunteer their time and energy to share their passion and knowledge with their colleagues. The needs of beginning teachers are different as they enter the era of teaching in the digital age. Beginning teachers not only require initial assistance, advice, and information, but also need ongoing support during their first few years of teaching.

This conference was designed to explore best teaching practices, current challenges, research, and innovation. It is always the BCTF's goal to offer workshops that are interactive, collaborative, practical, analytical, and cover a range of teachers' needs from elementary to secondary. They are also designed to cover different subjects and topics from mathematics, to social justice issues, to French immersion and Francophone education.

The 2010 conference featured presentations on a wide range of issues pertinent to the new teacher's interest and needs such as classroom management, integrating students with special needs, student assessment, teaching and learning with technology, and working with parents to name a few.

This year, we had more than 64 workshops in the program over two days, 400 attendees, and more than 30 exhibitors from different educational and non-profit organizations. Unfortunately, 100 registrants were on the waiting list and could not attend the conference because it was full.

Once again, we had very talented and skilled workshop presenters. Presenters and new teachers were unanimous about the benefit of these two professional development days for new teachers entering the profession.

Most attendees affirmed that they have gained a great deal of advice, instruction, strategies, and practical

ideas that they can use directly in their classes.

• Presenter Holly Lloyd, from Burnaby, said, "I had a wonderful time at the New Teachers' Conference and was encouraged to see so many teachers attend my workshop on yearly planning. Several teachers came up later to say it was 'exactly what they needed'."

The needs of beginning teachers are different as they enter the era of teaching in the digital age.

• Starleigh Grass, from Gold Trail found that new teachers have great energy and the workshops she attended were excellent!

• Sundip Nahal, workshop presenter from Vernon, was a first-time presenter at the conference and was impressed by the dedication of the new teachers and the role of the BCTF in professional development. "I really appreciate what the BCTF has done for us, and we, as teachers, are very lucky to be involved with such caring and supportive BCTF staff. I absolutely enjoyed my time meeting and

connecting with others and being able to spread the news of supporting our profession. I had awesome feedback e-mailed to me from people who attended my workshop."

Who are the best teachers of teachers? Teachers, of course...just ask them about their own learning. Who inspired them to become teachers? Who helped them when they became teachers? To whom do they constantly turn for advice? Where do they get many of their ideas? The most common answer is almost universal—other teachers. And this is why the whole theme of the BCTF conference was teachers helping teachers. Teaching is a never-ending story—it is a journey of passion and hope.

Beginning teachers teach from the heart—they are the new guides, not only to teach, but also to stimulate and motivate. They know how to instill in the minds of the citizens of tomorrow the love of learning and the passion of education and social justice.

Mohamed Chelali is assistant director, BCTF Professional and Social Issues Division and co-ordinator of the BCTF French Programs and Services.

JUST KIDDING



Looking back

70 years ago

The Canada Year Book for 1938 gives us wage statistics on different classes of labour. If we take \$933 as representative of a year's pay for unskilled labour, and apply it, we find that about 6,000 men teachers, or 42% of those tabulated, do not rate unskilled labour wages for a year's work. It is sad, but true, that the colossal industry of educating Canada's 2,200,000 school children claims only 27 per thousand of the young men who go through Canadian universities; for the remaining 973, we may well believe that the rewards of an educational career are too uncertain and too meagre.

— May 1940, *The BC Teacher*

50 years ago

There is no problem with the seriously inefficient; the only real problem is with the border-line case, the teacher who "gets by" but just barely so. This teacher, too, will recognize himself. The symptoms are plain; he keeps the class under

reasonable control but he is fighting off trouble all the time; he is always on the defensive with the pupils, never relaxed; he finds no real enjoyment in his work; by 3:30 he is depressed—not just some days but every day. He remains in the profession, not because he takes any pleasure in his work or considers he has any genuine aptitude for it, but because it is the only kind of work he knows, and he cannot face up to the prospect of preparing himself for some other occupation.

— May/June 1960, *The BC Teacher*

30 years ago

Here are several suggestions to help you cope with stress. The first is that you must recognize the symptoms of burnout. You must face those symptoms squarely, without relying on food, drink, drugs, or withdrawal as a way of coping with the stress. You must realize that you are not responsible for many of the factors that cause stress, but rather for how you respond to the crisis. The burnout syndrome is not a response of the

weak or unable. Education has made tremendous strides over the past generation, but if it is to survive, the teacher can no longer be considered expendable.

— May/June 1980, *The BC Teacher*

10 years ago

The other side defines education as a product to be bought, sold, and traded on the "free" market. Schools are reduced to job preparation sites and students are seen primarily as future workers and consumers. With global public spending on education estimated at \$2 trillion a year, corporations are eyeing public schools as a vast, untapped market. Indeed, thousands of would-be profiteers are converging on Vancouver for the World Education Market, a trade show for those seeking to profit from the "education industry."

— May/June 2000, *Teacher newsmagazine*

Compiled by Chris Bocking, Keating Elementary School, Saanich

Canada's quiet bargain

The benefits of public spending

By Hugh Mackenzie and Richard Shillington

Over the past 30 years, and particularly since the early-1990s, public debate over broad fiscal issues in Canada has been dominated by tax cuts, without reference to the services for which taxes pay.

The tax and service debate in Canada in the past 15 years has been almost completely one-sided, and has created a political atmosphere in which tax cuts have become the default answer to virtually every political question.

The overall impact of tax cuts—and the cuts in public services that accompany them—has not been addressed in any substantive way.

At the philosophical level, opponents of widespread tax cuts often make arguments that are a variant of the oft-quoted view of former US Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes that “taxes are what we pay for civilized society,” although this leaves open the questions of how we define civilized society and how much of civilized society we actually want to buy.

Another approach is to list services that are dependent on revenue from the tax system for their existence. While this serves politically and rhetorically to remind advocates for tax cuts that there is another side to the question, it doesn't actually provide a meaningful measure of the benefits we receive from public services or address directly the trade-off between the taxes that we pay and the benefits we receive from the services those taxes fund. This paper provides answers to these questions.

Using data and analytical tools from Statistics Canada, we estimate that Canadians enjoy an average \$17,000 benefit from the public services that our taxes fund—roughly equivalent to the annual earnings of an individual working full-time at the minimum wage.

Lower-income Canadians benefit more from personal transfer payments (most of which are income-related) but middle- and upper-income Canadians benefit fairly equally from all public services. The public services we use and benefit from change as we go through the life cycle. Seniors, for instance, benefit less directly from public education than they do from

public health care—but when they were young parents raising children, the opposite was true.

No matter how you cut it, the data in this study shows how powerful a role public spending plays in ensuring the majority of Canadians enjoy a better quality of life.

For the vast majority of Canada's population, public services are, to put it bluntly, the best deal they are ever going to get. The median Canadian household income (half of Canadians live in households with incomes below that amount; half live in households with incomes above that amount) is approximately \$66,000 in 2.6 person household. That median household realizes a \$41,000 benefit from public services. That is equivalent to roughly 63% of that household's private income.

More than 2/3 of Canadians benefit from public services, which are worth more than 50% of their household's total earned income.

This paper also shows that the vast majority of Canadians would also be better off without tax cuts. Our analysis estimates that 80% of Canadians would have been better off if, instead of cutting the GST, the Harper government had transferred money to local governments to pay for more and better public services.

Compared to the broad-based income tax cuts implemented by provincial governments in the late-1990s and early-2000s, 75% of Canadians would have been better off if their provincial governments had spent the money on healthcare and education.

And had the federal government invested in improved federal public services instead of cutting capital gains taxation by one-third in the early 2000s, 88% of Canadians would have been better off.

In other words, tax cuts made to sound like free money to middle-income Canadians are anything but. Indeed, the tax cuts implemented in Canada in the last 15 years have had the effect of reducing the living standards of most Canadians.

Hugh Mackenzie is a research associate, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Richard Shillington is a senior associate of the Ottawa-based economic consulting firm Infometrics Ltd.

Excerpted with permission from the *Introduction to Canada's Quiet Bargain: The Benefits of Public Spending*, published in April 2009 by the CCPA's Growing Gap Project.

The full study is available online at: growinggap.ca, policyalternatives.ca.

BC and the HST

By Marc Lee

In its first post-election policy announcement, the BC government announced that it would be harmonizing the 7% provincial sales tax (PST) with the 5% federal GST, as of July 1, 2010. What is striking about the new Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) of 12% is that it did not feature in any party's platform. And yet, according to the premier, “this is the single biggest thing we can do to improve BC's economy.”

Since being announced, the HST had led to BC's biggest tax uprising since the GST, its federal parent. While there is much to dislike about how the tax is being implemented, progressives should be careful not to get caught up in antitax rhetoric either. Here's a guide to the sense and nonsense of the HST.

1. The HST will not help a slumping economy

BC is in its worst downturn since the early 1980s. The province needs major government expenditures to strengthen demand and preserve jobs—actions the BC government is failing to take. To the extent that the HST is an economic strategy, it is the same old plan of reducing costs of business in the name of “competitiveness.”

In principle, there is nothing wrong with a harmonized tax. It streamlines administration, treats all goods and services equally, and is more efficient than the PST, as it allows businesses to get credit for the tax they pay on inputs (as a deduction of the tax they collect). For exporters, in particular, this allows them to reduce their prices by the amount of the tax they pay in imports that previously would have to be covered in the price.

But will the HST create jobs, long-term growth, make us more competitive, enhance productivity, and increase investment? Not likely. That is because business investment is not enhanced by efforts to reduce operating costs, whether through tax cuts or deregulation. Rather, it is a function of the outlook for sales and profits. No companies in BC who are looking at cutting costs or laying off workers will now make substantial new investments on the basis of the HST.

2. The HST has more to do with reducing BC's deficit

The federal government is providing BC with \$1.6 billion in transitional funding, and yet those funds are simply being used to reduce provincial deficits over the

next three years, not to ensure an equitable transition. Moreover, the BC government estimates it will save \$30 million a year in administrative costs, music to a budget cutter's ears.

In contrast, Ontario is also introducing an HST, but has accompanied it with transfers to Ontario households. When the HST was introduced in the Maritimes, it was accompanied by a cut in the tax rate for goods and services previously subjected to the PST.

Since being announced, the HST had led to BC's biggest tax uprising since the GST, its federal parent. While there is much to dislike about how the tax is being implemented, progressives should be careful not to get caught up in antitax rhetoric either. Here's a guide to the sense and nonsense of the HST.

3. The HST transfers income from consumers to business

What harmonization means in practice is that a number of goods and services that were previously exempt from the PST will now incur the 7% provincial portion of the HST. These include a variety of common goods and services, although there will be some exemptions as well. This has led to some bizarre choices about coverage. For example, why is motor fuel exempt but not bicycles? Why are children's car seats exempt but not school supplies? Why feminine hygiene products but not other medications and vitamins? As part of its climate-action plan, the BC government eliminated PST on certain energy efficient products, but it looks like these are now again subject to sales tax. And the tax applied to meals has the restaurant industry up in arms.

For the public, the HST is a transfer of almost \$2 billion from businesses paying PST on their inputs to consumers who will pay new taxes on goods and services previously exempt from the PST. Arguably, some of the savings on inputs will get passed along to consumers, but only if markets are highly competitive and in the form of slightly lower inflation rather than immediately lower prices. Expect many companies operating in BC to simply pocket the difference and not pass along the savings

to consumers.

4. The HST will hurt modest- to middle-income households

The BC government is proposing an HST credit of a maximum \$230 for individuals with income up to \$20,000 and \$230 per family member for families with incomes up to \$25,000. At the maximum of \$230, this would mean that an individual with \$20,000 or less in income would have to spend more than \$3,285 per year on the previously exempt goods and services listed below in order to be worse off.

These thresholds are extremely low. While there is some benefit to the poorest British Columbians, individuals and families with modest incomes and middle incomes will be hit with hundreds of dollars a year in additional taxes.

5. The HST can be fixed

The whole point of a general sales tax is that almost everything, except for basic necessities, should be covered. What really matters for inequality is what we do with the revenues. For example, in Nordic countries, HST-like taxes are progressive because they are used to support decent public services and reduce poverty.

Fixing the HST would require government to flow back substantially more of the revenues to low- and middle-income households by increasing the thresholds for the credit and phasing it out more slowly as incomes rise. Income transfers like the Canada Child Tax Benefit and Old Age Security are a good model for the HST credit, with some 90% of families receiving benefits (although not necessarily the maximum).

Marc Lee is a senior economist with the CCPA-BC and editor of BC Commentary.

For a list of goods and services exempt from the existing PST that will be taxed under the HST, see www.progressive-economics.ca/2009/07/27/bc-and-the-hst/

BCTF opposes HST

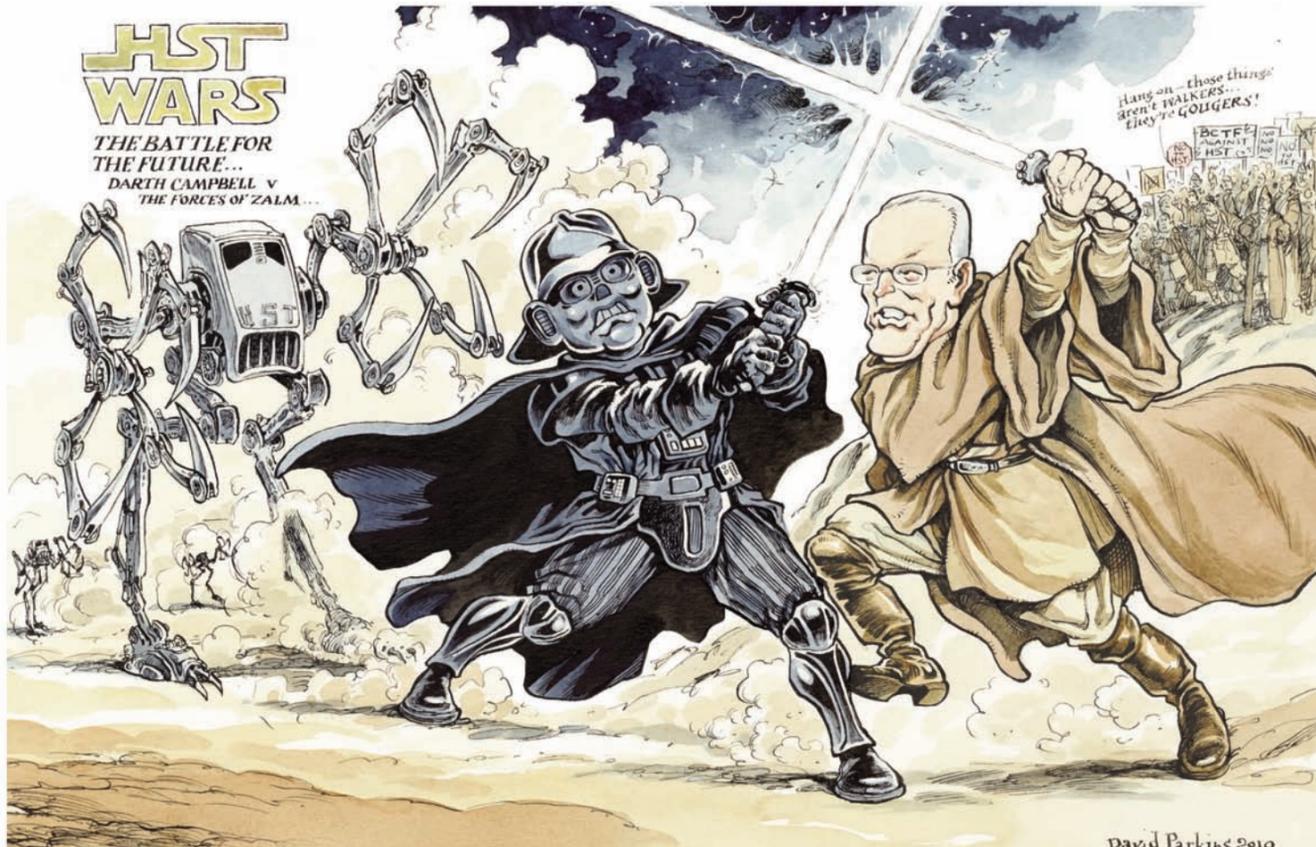
The fall Representative Assembly passed a motion to oppose the provincial government's plan to implement the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) and call for a progressive taxation system. A grassroots group of British Columbians from all walks of life and political stripes are organizing to fight the HST. This initiative is the one vehicle at our disposal to block the passage of the agreement between the federal government and BC to establish the HST as of July 1, 2010.

In accordance with BC's Citizens Initiative law, a petition will be conducted to repeal the HST. The Citizen's Initiative petition requires the signatures of 10% of registered voters in every one of BC's 85 Electoral Districts to be successful. If the Initiative petition is successful, the BC Government must submit a draft Bill that would reinstate the 7% provincial sales tax with the same exemptions as were in effect as of June 30, 2010.

The Fight HST petition started on April 6, 2010, and signatures must be collected within 90 days, ending on July 5, 2010.

The BCTF supports a fair progressive tax system. The HST will increase taxes on those who can least afford them and, in general, transfers income from consumers to businesses in the order of \$2 billion. For the BC Liberals, who previously opposed any such idea, the promise of \$1.6 billion in transitional funding from the federal government was too much to resist in the light of BC's deficit. Tax shifts and cuts are not the answer to reducing the deficit.

For information on the petition initiative, visit www.fightHST.com.





HST and the crack in the door

By Peter Ewart

The vast majority of people in British Columbia are opposed to the imposition of the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST). Even the most diehard government supporters would have a hard time disputing that.

Why is there such strong opposition? Part of the reason is that many people feel that there are already too many taxes. And part of the reason is that people recognize that, essentially, the HST is transferring a tax burden from the economic elite onto the backs of the general population.

But there is something else that is eating away at the credibility of the government in regards to the HST. And that is the method by which it

was brought in. It is here that the government is weakest, its arguments most feeble and illogical.

Prior to, and during, the provincial election in May of 2009, the Campbell government made no bones about it—BC Liberals were steadfastly against the HST. And the Liberals won the election.

Just a couple of months later, BC voters woke up one day to hear this same Liberal government announce that, surprise, surprise, it would, indeed, be bringing in the dreaded HST. All of this was done in such a tawdry, slipshod way—arrogance breeds its own clumsy style—as if the government knew that it would, once again, get away with, not just breaking, but smashing to smithereens another election promise. Just like it got away with the

controversial sale of BC Rail after promising—again, before an election—that it wouldn't sell the railway. But history has its own cunning. Like that hornet's nest under the pile of lumber in the backyard, the BC Rail scandal won't disappear no matter how much water is squirted on it. In early May, the trial of the political aides charged with breach of trust is scheduled to begin, and who knows which government leader or minister could get stung by a soggy, wayward hornet.

And so it goes with the HST. The initiative campaign to repeal the HST, launched by former premier Bill Vander Zalm, gathers more momentum every day and has an excellent chance of succeeding. People all over the province are

flocking to sign the anti-HST petition. They don't like the tax, but they also don't like the way that it was brought in.

Indeed, the government's *modus operandi* in imposing the tax is just one symptom of a much larger problem. People do not have control over the political process. Instead,

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the establishment political parties, in the service of a tiny but powerful economic elite, dominate it.

To even call them "parties" is to give them too much justice, as they operate very much like corporate election machines, dominated, not even by their own membership, but by paid communication experts, "consultants," "insiders," and "backroom boys." Indeed, the membership passes resolutions at "conventions," only to have the party brass flush them down the toilet after the convention is over. In the parliament and legislatures, these same establishment parties work together like cartels to keep the people in a passive position and out of the process, as well as to commandeer public funds to finance their election campaigns, research projects, junkets, and other pursuits.

It is a strange fact of modern life that such creatures, which resemble feudal monopolies in organization, dominate the political affairs of the province and the country at the expense of the people. In effect, it is democracy of the parties, by the parties, and for the parties. For the global multinationals and financiers it is most convenient—one stop shopping, so to speak. For the

people, it is something of a different character—an elected dictatorship and voter serfdom.

Which brings us to the *Recall and Initiative Act* of British Columbia. The doors and walls that the establishment political parties have erected around the parliament and legislatures are made up of the thickest oak reinforced with steel plate. Back in 1991, because of pressure from smaller parties and from ordinary citizens, the political parties in the provincial legislature were forced to open up the door just a crack and have voters decide whether the province should adopt a *Recall and Initiative Act*. The response was overwhelming—over 80% of the voters said yes.

Of course, no sooner was the legislation brought in than the government of that time, the NDP, proceeded to make it as difficult and unwieldy as possible for voters to utilize this new mechanism. Later, when the opposition Liberals came to power, they refused to reform or improve the legislation.

However, they couldn't get rid of the act without being exposed as antidemocratic. It is that tiny "crack" in the door that voters are flocking to in their opposition to the HST.

But what a different world it would be if the whole door itself was blasted down, if people, not parties—and definitely not the economic elite—had control over the political process. What a difference there would be in political and economic priorities, in healthcare, in law, in forest policy, in taxation, and countless other spheres.

The establishment political parties and the economic elite do not want us to get even a glimpse of such a world, and thus they constantly try to reinforce the door and install more bars and locks on it, the better to keep the people out. But British Columbians are making it clear that they want to open the door up even wider. And therein lies the struggle ahead.

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Privatization is the wrong word

By Kip Wood

There may be a compelling argument for privatization in our society. It could even be argued that there should be more privatization.

Privatization implies that a public service is being transformed into a private service. The dictionary defines "privatize" as follows: *to transfer from public or government control or ownership to private enterprise.*

In our society, it is clear that the process of privatization is not a complete transfer. It is always partial privatization. A better description of what is happening is a transfer of public wealth to private hands or, more bluntly, a redistribution of wealth from poor to rich. The redistribution of wealth from rich to poor is the fundamental purpose of taxation. Therefore, the modern version of privatization opposes the reason civilized societies tax their citizens.

Private schools all want to procure funds from government coffers to subsidize the tuitions they collect. Private clinics want public support. Private retirement homes charge \$5,000 a month and still expect public money. And independent power projects sell power to BC Hydro at inflated prices. These are all examples of privately operated "for-profit" enterprises that are dependent on public funds. They are not truly private or independent.

The entrepreneurial spirit is a key ingredient of our economy and our society. The examples above do not embody an entrepreneurial spirit nor do they exemplify a free market. A better descriptor is organized theft. Privatization is the wrong word.

Like the massive bailouts following the financial meltdown in 2008, these hybrid services pervading our society enjoy the security of the public purse and the opportunities provided by the marketplace. The public assumes the risks; the corporation reaps the benefits. When things went south in 2008, the decoupling of risks and rewards was exposed in a devastating way through the socializing of losses and the privatizing of gains.

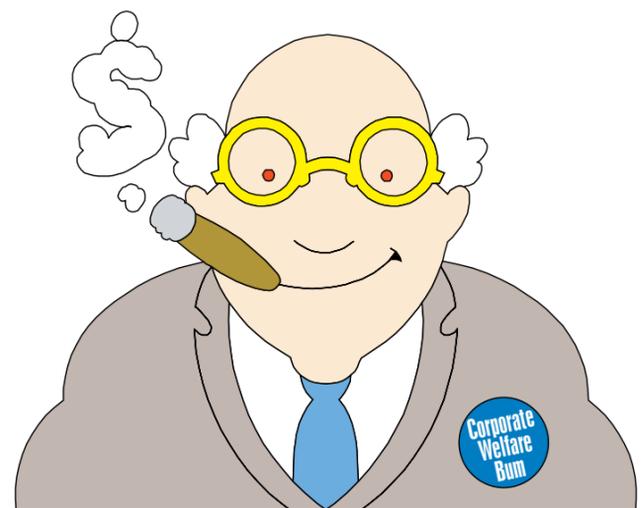
Proponents of these so called privatization schemes, sometimes called "public private partnerships" or P3s, argue that the private sector does a better job of providing these services. This is a valid argument. However, we may never be able to have this discussion because the private sector is not delivering these services without taxpayer dollars. Like the massive bailouts

following the financial meltdown in 2008, these hybrid services pervading our society enjoy the security of the public purse and the opportunities provided by the marketplace. The public assumes the risks; the corporation reaps the benefits. When things went south in 2008, the decoupling of risks and rewards was exposed in a devastating way through the socializing of losses and the privatizing of gains.

Warren Buffett, chairman of Berkshire Hathaway and one of the richest people in the world, claims to be in favour of welfare programs. Buffett also stated that the best welfare programs have been designed for rich people. Canadian politician David Lewis described the recipients of these generous handouts as "corporate welfare bums."

BC Ferries is another example. Formerly a Crown Corporation accountable to the public, BC Ferries is now a private corporation with a profit motive. CEO David Hahn recently defended his million dollar annual salary by saying, "I'm not a public sector guy." Hahn oversees a private company that gets over \$150 million in tax money every year. Their financial books are concealed all year long; however, BC Ferries does make a point to announce their profits at year-end (over \$50 million in 2009).

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tradition in BC since 1977. These schools (351 in 2008 according to ministry figures) are obviously not independent when you consider that most of these schools receive

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redistribution program until 1991 when the NDP was elected. Rather than reversing the welfare program for tuition schools, the NDP supported the policy of funding them.

Since 2001, corporate welfare under Gordon Campbell has become a religion. His government has condemned their "tax and spend" opponents while having a nine-year liquidation sale of the public commons. The mandate of governments in civilized societies is to tax its citizens in order to redistribute wealth in the form of accessible public services. Schemes erroneously called "privatization" also redistribute wealth, and in doing so, erode the public commons that we used to call the fabric of civilized society.

Kip Wood is president of the Nanaimo District Teachers' Association.

In defense of public school

By Henry A. Giroux

There has been a long, though declining, tradition in the United States in which public school teaching was embraced as an important public service. It was assumed that teachers provided a crucial foundation for educating young people in the values, skills, and knowledge that enabled them to be critical citizens capable of shaping and expanding democratic institutions. Since the 1980s, teachers have been under an unprecedented attack by those forces that view schools less as a public good

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than as a private right. Seldom accorded the status of intellectuals that they deserved, they remain the most important component in the learning process for students, while serving as a moral compass to gauge how seriously a society invests in its youth and in the future. Yet, teachers are being deskilled, unceremoniously removed from the process of school governance, largely reduced to technicians, or subordinated to the authority of security guards. Underlying these transformations are a number of forces eager to privatize schools, substitute vocational training for education, and reduce teaching and learning to reductive modes of testing and evaluation.

Indications of the poisonous transformation of both the role of the public school and the nature of teacher work abound. The passage of laws promoting high-stakes testing for students and the use of test scores to measure teacher quality have both limited the autonomy of teacher authority and devalued the possibility of critical teaching and visionary goals for student learning. Teachers are no longer asked to think critically and be creative in the classroom. On the contrary, they are now forced to simply implement predetermined instructional procedures and standardized content, at best; and, at worst, put their imaginative powers on hold while using precious classroom time to teach students how to master the skill of test-taking. Subject to what might be labeled as a form of bare or

stripped-down pedagogy, teachers are removed from the processes of deliberation and reflection, reduced to implementing lock-step, time-on-task pedagogies that do great violence to students, while promoting a division of labor between conception and execution hatched by bureaucrats and "experts" from mainly conservative foundations. Questions regarding how teachers motivate students, make knowledge meaningful in order to make it critical and transformative, work with parents and the larger community, or exercise the authority needed to become a constructive pedagogical force in the classroom and community are now sacrificed to the dictates of an instrumental rationality largely defined through the optic of measurable utility.

Little is said in this discourse about allocating more federal dollars for public schooling, replacing the aging infrastructures of schooling or increasing salaries so as to expand the pool of qualified teachers. Nor are teachers praised for their public service, the trust we impart to them in educating our children or the firewall they provide between a culture saturated in violence and idiocy and the civilizing and radical imaginative possibilities of an educated mind capable of transforming the economic, political, and racial injustices that surround and bear down so heavily on public schools. Instead, teachers are stripped of their worth and dignity by being forced to adopt an educational vision and philosophy that has little respect for the

Put bluntly, knowledge that can't be measured is viewed as irrelevant, and teachers who refuse to implement a standardized curriculum and evaluate young people through objective measures of assessments are judged as incompetent or disrespectful.

empowering possibilities of either knowledge or critical classroom practices. Put bluntly, knowledge that can't be measured is viewed as irrelevant, and teachers who refuse to implement a standardized curriculum and evaluate young people through objective measures of assessments are judged as incompetent or disrespectful. Any educator who believes that students should learn more than how to obey the rules, take tests, learn a work skill or adopt without question the cruel and harsh market values that dominate society "will meet," as

James Baldwin insists in his "Talk to Teachers," "the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance." And while the mythic character of education has always been at odds with its reality, as Baldwin noted in talking about the toxic education imposed on poor black children, the assault on public schooling in its current form truly suggests that "we are living through a very dangerous time."

As the space of public schooling is reduced to a mindless infatuation with the metrics of endless modes of testing and increasingly enforces this deadening experience with disciplinary measures reminiscent of prison culture, teachers are increasingly removed from dealing with children as part of a broader historical, social, and cultural context. As the school is militarized, student behavior becomes an issue that either the police or security forces handle. Removed from the normative and pedagogical framing of classroom life, teachers no longer have the option to think outside of the box, to experiment, be poetic, or inspire joy in their students. School has become a form of dead time, designed to kill the imagination of both teachers and students. For years, teachers have offered students advice, corrected their behavior, offered help in addressing their personal problems, and gone out of their way to understand the circumstances surrounding even the most serious of student infractions. Couple this role of teachers as both caretaker and engaging intellectual with the imposition of a stripped-down curriculum that actually disdains creative teacher work while relegating teachers to the status of clerks. Needless to say, the consequences for both teachers and students have been deadly. Great ideas, modes of knowledge, disciplinary traditions, and honorable civic ideals are no longer engaged, debated, and offered up as a civilizing force for expanding the students' capacities as critical individuals and social agents. Knowledge is now instrumentalized and the awe, magic, and insight it might provide is stripped away as it is redefined through the mindless logic of quantification and measurement that now grips the culture of schooling and drives the larger matrix of efficiency, productivity, and consumerism shaping the broader society.

One current example of the unprecedented attack being waged against teachers, meaningful knowledge, and critical pedagogy can be found in Senate Bill 6, which is being pushed by Florida legislators. Under this bill, the quality of teaching and the worth of a teacher

are solely determined by student test scores on standardized tests. Teacher pay would be dependent upon such test scores, while the previous experience of a teacher would be deemed irrelevant. Moreover, advanced degrees and professional credentials would now become meaningless in determining

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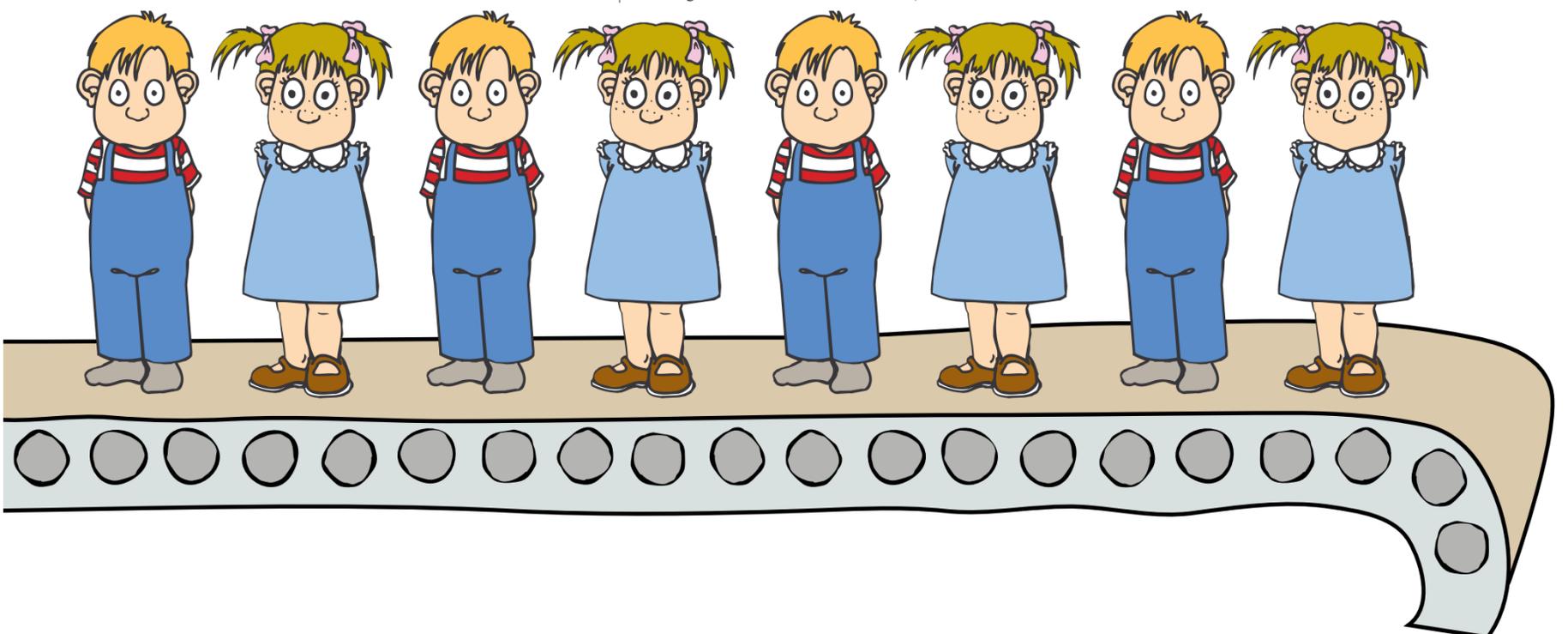
a teacher's salary. Professional experience and quality credentials are now made irrelevant next to the hard reality of an empiricism that appears divorced from any semblance of reality. The real point of the bill is to both weaken the autonomy and authority of teachers and to force the Florida teacher's union to accept merit pay for teachers. But there is more at stake in this bill than a regressive understanding of the role and power of teachers and the desire to eliminate the very conditions, places, and spaces that make good teaching possible. The bill also mandates that the power of local school boards be restricted, that new teachers be given probationary contracts for up to five years and then placed on a contract to be renewed annually. Moreover, salaries are now excluded as a subject of collective bargaining. This bill degrades the purpose of schooling, teaching, and learning. It is not only harsh and cruel, but educationally reactionary and is designed to turn public schools into political tools for corporate dominated legislators, while depriving students of any viable notion of teaching and learning. This bill is bad for schools, teachers, students, and democracy. It lacks any viable ethical and political understanding of how schools work, what role they should play in a democracy, and what the myriad forces are that both undermine critical teaching and critical learning. Moreover, it turns the curriculum into a tool box for ignoramuses.

We need a new language for understanding public education as formative for democratic institutions and for the vital role that teachers play in such a project. When I first wrote "Teachers as Intellectuals" in 1988, I argued that education should be viewed as a moral and political practice that

always presupposes particular renditions of what constitutes legitimate knowledge, values, citizenship, modes of understanding, and views of the future. In other words, teaching was always directive in its attempt to shape students as particular agents and offer them a particular understanding of the present and the future. And while schools have a long history of simply attempting to reproduce the ideological contours of the existing society, they are capable of much more, and therein lay their danger and possibilities. At their worst, teachers have been viewed as merely gatekeepers. At best, they are one of the most valued professions we have in educating future generations in the discourse, values, and relations of democratic empowerment. Rather than viewed as disinterested technicians, teachers should be viewed as engaged intellectuals, willing to construct the classroom conditions that provide the knowledge, skills, and culture of questioning necessary for students to participate in critical dialogue with the past, question authority, struggle with ongoing relations of power, and prepare themselves for what it means to be active and engaged citizens in the interrelated local, national, and global public spheres.

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Defining teachers as public intellectuals and schools as democratic public spheres is as applicable today as it was when I wrote "Teachers as Intellectuals." Central to fostering a pedagogy that is open and discerning, fused with a spirit of critical inquiry that fosters rather than mandates modes of individual and social agency is the assumption that teachers should not only be critical intellectuals, but also have some control over the conditions of their own pedagogical labor. Academic labor at its best flourishes when it is open to dialogue, respects the time and conditions teachers need to prepare lessons, research, cooperate with each other, and engage valuable community resources. Put differently, teachers are the major resource for what it means to establish the conditions for education to be linked to critical



teachers in a time of crisis

learning rather than training, embrace a vision of democratic possibility rather than a narrow instrumental notion of education, and embrace the specificity and diversity of children's lives rather than treat them as if such differences did not matter. Hence, teachers deserve the respect, autonomy, power, and dignity that such a task demands.

The basic premise here is that if public education is a crucial sphere for creating citizens equipped to exercise their freedoms and learn the competencies necessary to question the basic assumptions that govern democratic political life, public school teachers must be allowed to shape the conditions that enable them to assume their responsibility as citizen-scholars, take critical positions, relate their work to larger social issues, offer multiple forms of literacies, debate and dialogue about pressing social problems, and provide the conditions for students to conjure up the hope and belief that civic life matters, that they can make a difference in shaping society so as to expand its democratic possibilities for all groups. Of course, this is not merely a matter of changing the consciousness of teachers or the larger public or the ways in which teachers are educated. These are important considerations, but what must be embraced in this recognition of the importance of public school teachers is that such an investment is an issue of politics, ethics, and power, all of which must be viewed as part of a larger struggle to connect the crisis of schooling and teaching to the crisis of democracy itself.

Teachers all over America now labor under the shadow of a number of anti-democratic tendencies extending from a ruthless market fundamentalism that mistakes students for products and equates learning with the practice of conformity and disciplinary mindlessness. On the other side are those anti-intellectual and residual religious and political fundamentalists who view schooling as a threat to orthodoxy and tradition and want to silence critical forms of pedagogy as well as eliminate those teachers who value thinking over conformity, teaching over training and empowerment over deskilling. What all of these anti-democratic tendencies share are a disregard for critical teaching and a disdain for the notion of teachers as critical

and public intellectuals. Against these anti-democratic tendencies is the challenge of redefining and re-imagining teachers as public intellectuals and the schools as a democratic public sphere, both of which provide an invaluable resource in reminding the larger society, if not teachers and everyone concerned about education, of their responsibility to take ethical and risky positions and engage in practices currently at odds with both religious fundamentalism and the market-driven values that dominate schooling.

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Educators now face the daunting challenge of creating new discourses, pedagogies, and collective strategies that will offer students the hope and tools necessary to revive education as a political and ethical response to the demise of democratic public life. Such a challenge suggests struggling to keep alive those institutional spaces, forums, and public spheres that support and defend critical education, help students come to terms with their own power as individual and social agents, exercise civic courage, and engage in community projects and research that are socially responsible. None of this will happen unless the American public refuses to allow schools and teachers to surrender what counts as knowledge, values, and skills to the highest bidder. In part, this requires pedagogical practices that connect the space of language, culture, and identity to their deployment in larger physical and social spaces. Such pedagogical practices are based on the presupposition that it is not enough to teach students how to read the word and knowledge critically. They must also learn how to act on their beliefs, reflect on their role as engaged citizens, and intervene in the world as part of the obligation of what it means to be a socially

responsible agent. As critical and public intellectuals, teachers must fight for the right to dream, conceptualize, and connect their visions to classroom practice. They must also learn to confront, directly, the threat from fundamentalisms of all varieties that seek to turn democracy into a mall, a sectarian church, or an adjunct of the emerging punishing state. What the concept of teachers as public intellectuals references, once again, is that the most important role of teachers is not only to educate students to be critical thinkers, but also prepare them to be activists in the best sense of the term—that is, thoughtful and active citizens willing to fight for the economic, political and social conditions, and institutions that make democracy possible. The reason why public education has become so

dangerous is that it associates teaching and learning with civic values, civic courage, and a respect for the common good—a position decidedly at odds with the unbridled individualism, privatized discourse, excessive competition, hyper-militarized masculinity, and corporate values that now drive educational policy and practice.

There are those critics who, in tough economic times, insist that providing students with anything other than work skills threatens their future viability on the job market. While I believe that public education should equip students with skills to enter the workplace, it should also educate them to contest workplace inequalities, imagine democratically organized forms of work, and identify and challenge those injustices that contradict and undercut the most fundamental principles of freedom, equality, and respect for all people who constitute the global public sphere. Moreover, public education should be about more than learning how to take a test, job preparation, or even critical consciousness raising; it is also about imagining a more just future, one that does more than replicate the present. In contrast to the cynicism and political withdrawal that screen and mainstream media cultures foster, a critical education demands that its citizens be able to translate the interface of private considerations and public issues; be able to recognize those anti-democratic forces that deny social, economic and political justice; and be willing to give some thought to their experiences as a matter of anticipating and struggling for a better world. In short, democratic rather than commercial values should be the primary concerns of both public education and the university.

If the right-wing educational reforms now being championed by

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the Obama administration and many state governments continue unchallenged, America will become a society in which a highly trained, largely white elite will continue to command the techno-information revolution, while a vast, low-skilled majority of poor and minority workers will be relegated to filling the McJobs proliferating in the service sector. The children of the rich and privilege will be educated in exclusive private schools and the rest of the population, mostly poor and non-white, will be offered bare forms of pedagogy suitable to work in the dead-end low-skill service sector of society, assuming that these jobs will be available. Teachers will lose most of their rights, protections, and dignity and be treated as clerks of the empire. And as more and more young people fail to graduate from high school, they will fill the ranks of those disposable populations now filling up our prisons at a record pace. In contrast to this vision, I strongly believe that genuine, critical education cannot be confused with job training. At the same time, public schools have to be viewed as institutions as crucial to the security and safety of the country as national defense. If educators and others are to prevent this distinction between education

and training from becoming blurred, it is crucial to both challenge the ongoing corporatization of public schools, while upholding the promise of the modern social contract in which all youth, guaranteed the necessary protections and opportunities, were a primary source of economic and moral investment, symbolizing the hope for a democratic future. In short, those individuals and groups concerned about the promise of education need to reclaim their commitment to future generations by taking seriously the Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's belief that the ultimate test of morality for any democratic society resides in the condition of its children. If public education is to honor this ethical commitment, it will have to not only re-establish its obligation to young people, but reclaim its role as a democratic public sphere and uphold its support for teachers.

Defending teachers as engaged intellectuals and public schools as democratic public spheres is not a call for any one ideology on the political spectrum to determine the shape of the future direction of public and university education. But at the same time, such a defense reflects a particular vision of the purpose and meaning of public and higher education and their crucial role in educating students to participate in an inclusive democracy. Teachers have a responsibility to engage critical pedagogy as an ethical referent and a call to action for educators, parents, students, and others to reclaim public education as a democratic public sphere, a place where teaching is not reduced to learning how to master either tests or acquire low-level job skills, but a safe space where reason, understanding, dialogue, and critical engagement are available to all faculty and students. Education, if not teaching itself, in this reading, becomes the site of ongoing struggles to preserve and extend the conditions in which autonomy of judgment and freedom of action are informed by the democratic imperatives of equality, liberty, and justice, while ratifying and legitimating the role of teachers as critical and public intellectuals. Viewing public schools as laboratories of democracy and teachers as critical intellectuals offers a new generation of educators an opportunity to understand education as a concrete reminder that the struggle for democracy is, in part, an attempt to liberate humanity from the blind obedience to authority and that individual and social agency gain meaning primarily through the freedoms guaranteed by the public sphere, where the autonomy of individuals only becomes meaningful under those conditions that guarantee the workings of an autonomous society. The current vicious assault on public school teachers is a reminder that the educational conditions that make democratic identities, values, and politics possible and effective have to be fought for more urgently at a time when democratic public spheres, public goods, and public spaces are under attack by market and other ideological fundamentalists who either believe that corporations can solve all human problems or that dissent is comparable to aiding terrorists—positions that share the common denominator of disabling a substantive notion of ethics, politics, and democracy. The rhetoric of accountability, privatization, and standar-

dization that now dominates both major political parties does more than deskill teachers, weaken teacher unions, dumb down the curriculum, and punish students; it also offers up a model for education that undermines it as a public good. Under such circumstances, teacher work and autonomy are not only devalued; learning how to govern and be a critical citizen in a fragile democracy are hijacked.

As Baldwin reminded us, we live in dangerous times, yet as educators, parents, activists, and workers, we can address the current assault on democracy by building local and social movements that fight for the rights of teachers and students to

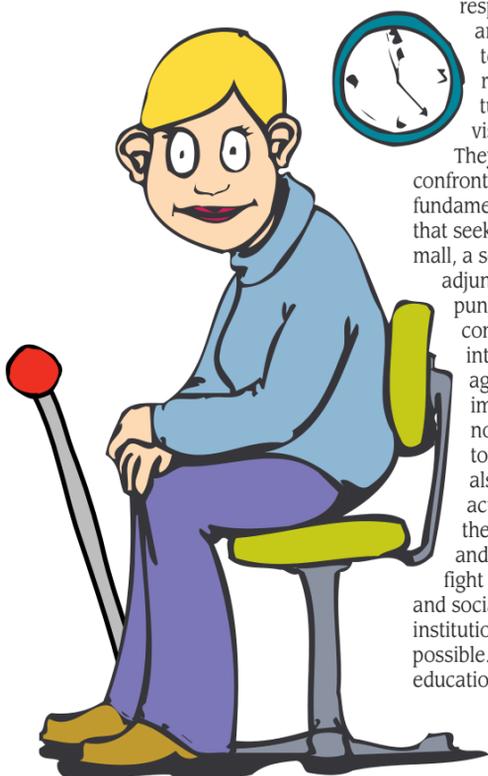
Democratic struggles cannot over-emphasize the special responsibility of teachers as intellectuals to shatter the conventional wisdom and myths of those ideologies that would relegate educators to mere technicians, clerks of the empire, or mere adjuncts of the corporation.

teach and learn with the necessary autonomy, resources, and dignity. Democratic struggles cannot over-emphasize the special responsibility of teachers as intellectuals to shatter the conventional wisdom and myths of those ideologies that would relegate educators to mere technicians, clerks of the empire, or mere adjuncts of the corporation. As the late Pierre Bourdieu argued, the "power of the dominant order is not just economic, but intellectual—lying in the realm of beliefs," and it is precisely within the domain of ideas that a sense of utopian possibility can be restored to the public realm.^[3] Teaching in this instance is not simply about critical thinking, but also about social engagement, a crucial element of not just learning and social engagement, but politics itself. Most specifically, democracy necessitates quality teachers and critical pedagogical practices that provide a new ethic of freedom and a reassertion of collective responsibility as central preoccupations of a vibrant democratic culture and society. Such a task, in part, suggests that any movement for social change put education and the rights of students and teachers at the forefront of such a struggle. Teachers are more crucial in the struggle for democracy than security guards and the criminal justice system. Students deserve more than being trained to be ignorant and willing accomplices of the corporation and the empire. Teachers represent a valued resource and are one of the few groups left that can educate students in ways that enable them to resist the collective insanity that now threatens this country. We need to take them seriously by giving them the dignity, labor conditions, salaries, freedom, time, and support they deserve. This may be the most important challenge Americans face as we move into the 21st century.

Henry A. Giroux currently holds the Global TV Network chair professorship at McMaster University in the English and Cultural Studies Department.

References available on request.

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Five Coquitlam teachers bring hope—Yaakaar

By Madeleine Mulaire

On that day when I reached into my cupboard for the bag of flour, I knew I had to do something to help women on the other side of the world. I was inspired to take action after a trip to Mbour, Senegal, in March 2008, with my husband Raymond Lemoine, principal of Ecole des Pionniers de Maillardville in Port Coquitlam. We were on an exploratory trip to visit three schools, meet teachers, social workers, and medical personnel with the hope of organizing a humanitarian trip for the school's Grade 11 and 12 students. The trip to Senegal would be part of a credited course called Global Perspectives that would be offered to students in order to raise their awareness on worldwide issues such as extreme poverty, education, cultural awareness, and the use and abuse of natural resources. We were accompanied by Senegal by Nadine, our 21-year-old daughter, and two other members of Ecole des Pionniers de Maillardville. The Canadian delegates were taken to various villages by the local NGO representatives, Mathilde Thior and Emile Diouf.

Upon our arrival in each village, I was very touched by the warm welcome, called *teranga*, of the Senegalese people. Their *joie de vivre* permeated their every day

activities. Though their life situations were very poor, their exuberance, love for life, hospitality, laughter, and generosity were extraordinary! It was as if their happiness factor did not match their actual living conditions. I was also struck by the level of poverty everywhere we turned. Yet, the smiles from children made my heart melt with tenderness.

In one of the villages, a group of women had been involved in an alphabetization program for a few years. There were 48 women between the ages of 15 and 50 who did not know how to read and write or do basic math. As is the standard in most of the villages, families are large, with up to 10 children in the home. In some cases, widowed women are struggling to raise up to 9 children on their own. As the priority is caring and cooking for the family and household chores, frequently the women are unable to attend the offered educational classes on a daily basis. In these villages, there was no running water or electricity. Every minute of their day has been allocated with tasks; preparing food and feeding their children, cleaning their huts, and doing laundry (all by hand I may add) for the family.

Cooking food is a major undertaking and extremely time-consuming because of the limited tools, the use of outdoor fire pits,

and scarce basic supplies. One of the staple foods in their diet is millet. Millet grows easily and abundantly in Senegal. It is our equivalent of flour and a basic staple to the Senegalese; it is cheaper than rice and very versatile. Tortillas, bread, and couscous are all made with millet. The problem is that millet needs to be prepared from the long stalks found in the fields to finely ground powder similar to the process of making wheat into flour, but without the machinery. The task of grinding millet is often done by hand using a large mortar and pestle which can take two to three hours every day.

As I observed the activities of the women, I asked our NGO worker, Mathilde Thior, how this process could be expedited. Thior explained that some villages have millet grinders but the cost to purchase one is totally beyond their means. As an alternative to grinding the millet by hand, some of the women would walk to the closest village to have their millet ground in that village's grinder, but this is a two-hour walk in a very hot climate. Additionally, there would be a cost (a portion of the millet) when the other village allows others to use their grinder.

It's no wonder the women did not attend their twice weekly classes. I asked the price of a millet grinder and learned that the cost was \$6,000. Not so bad according to our Canadian standards.

By the end of the 10-day trip, I had a sense of direction, a sense of how we could help, and which way we would do it.

Soon after returning to my home in Port Moody, I gathered a group of 20 women—some friends, other co-workers, and even my hairdresser. I explained the situation of the women in a remote Senegal village, called Ndoundokh. At the first meeting, armed with compassion and ambition, my proposal to the 20 women of the Tri-Cities was: Can we raise \$6,000 in the next six months to buy a millet grinder for the women of Ndoundokh? The women were hesitant. No one had

ever done anything like this before. Slowly, the women started speaking up and proposed that as a group \$3,000 would be a reasonable objective. Half the money was better than none at all and it would be a beginning. I agreed to this though I was really hoping for the full amount.

The fundraising activities began. At monthly meetings, activities were planned, and volunteers offered their time for the projects. There were garage sales and raffles; selling greeting cards and cookie mix at various venues; holding bake sales and catering a gourmet Christmas dinner for school personnel. The women worked tirelessly on these volunteer projects, giving freely of their time and their talents. The dedication of the Canadian women's group supporting the women of Ndoundokh was intense and steady. As the money started to roll in, a name for the group emerged—*Entre-Femmes/Women Helping Women: Canada-Senegal*. The women's group is an off-shoot of the larger project called Yaakaar (the word for hope in the local Senegalese Wolof language). This defined the women as a group and affirmed them in their continued volunteer hours of work.

Donations by individuals, who were touched by the nature of the project, as well as the continued fundraising activities poured in until March 2009 when the trip to Senegal was scheduled. There were 29 students and 6 accompanying adults, including a nurse heading off to Senegal.

The group, *Entre-femmes/Women Helping Women: Canada-Senegal*, had managed to raise just over \$10,000 in six months, proving that human determination and dedication can make miracles happen.

Where are we now?

As the school year comes to an end and the Yaakaar *Entre-femmes/Women helping women: Canada-Senegal* concludes our second year of activities, what projects have been accomplished?

The millet grinder in the village of Ndoundokh has been purchased and installed and is working very well. With this time-saving device, the women have the time in their day to attend classes.

An education bursary of \$500 was offered to a young 19-year-old woman, Mounass Tinne, enabling her to take a course in hotel management and therefore help herself become financially independent on completion of her certificate.

Using the \$3,000 that we raised this year, the women of the village of Back-Seck will be starting a micro-financed business. In this village, the women are organized in a group with a president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer and hold regular meetings. They will start a small business of making batik (tie-dyeing fabrics) which will then be made into tablecloths, dresses, and purses. These items will then be sold at the local markets. The income generated by the village women will help their families and the entire village will reap the benefits as more income is generated. In addition, our intention is to offer an annual bursary of \$500 to a young woman who wishes to continue her education for September.

In conclusion—When we educate women, we also educate children.

The best part of this endeavour is that the Canadian women benefit from learning about women around the world. We all face similar challenges. The living conditions and the culture of each may be totally different, but our similarities are the threads which tie us together. We all share the joys and sorrows of our children's lives. We share the responsibility of caring for our families. We share the emotional welfare of each member of the family. We care, we nurture, we support....after all, we are women.

Madeleine Mulaire is an elementary school counsellor at Ecole Porter Elementary and Cedar Drive Schools, Coquitlam.



L-R: Armin Samiei, Danielle Dahl, Jill Riley, and Madeleine Mulaire.

Kenya, Summer 2009

By Steve Fairbairn

Education Beyond Borders (www.educationbeyondborders.org) is a Canadian Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that was started and is currently being organized by Noble Kelly, a teacher on leave from West Vancouver School District (and they should be thanked whole heartedly for supporting him in his life's journey).

EBB is an organization with a difference, as it is truly a grass-roots project that has been quietly growing over the last three years by making connections directly with the local teachers and other like-minded NGOs. EBB fundraising even covers the costs of providing travel, accommodation, and food for the local Kenyan teachers attending the workshops. The issue of providing financial support to the Kenyan teachers is important. They often do not have access to personal transportation (some have small motorcycles, the odd participant had a small tired-out car, but most depend on public transportation to get to the workshop sites), personal computers, professional development funding, classroom supplies, or many other things we take for granted here in Canada.

We came from across Canada and the USA. We came from many different teaching backgrounds and situations, from Fine Arts schools and Alternate Education settings, as

well as your more run-of-the-mill primary and secondary schools. Over the course of two-and-a-half weeks, we shared our enthusiasm, passion, excitement, flexibility, dedication, and a willingness to share our skills and passions with our colleagues in Kenya. We debated, we laughed, we questioned, and we grew together.

We arrived in Africa, met each other, and packed our belongings into two small vans (and when I say packed, think sardines. I travelled for eight hours with luggage on my lap and on the floor between my legs. Forget air conditioning, think dust). That day was worth the price of admission on its own. You haven't lived until you've travelled the roads of Africa after dark.

From our first accommodations in a beautiful grass-roofed house beside a watering hole in a nature conservancy, we traveled daily to Nanyuki High School for Boys, where we met our co-presenters and began to plan in earnest for our first set of week-long workshops.

Our days were filled from dawn to well past dusk with planning, visits to schools, and ministry officials. On one school visit, we were able to gather together enough money between us to purchase a classroom full of brand new desks and chairs. I was able to donate 50 scientific calculators (solar powered) to a secondary school that had never before had a

calculator. Just imagine Grade 10 math (and a national exam too) without a calculator—and by the way, their curriculum is very similar to ours here in BC!

The school system in Kenya is modeled on the old English system, with forms and standards instead of grades, and where progress through each grade is solely dependent on passing a final exam worth 100% of your mark. It is a system that is nominally free, if you can afford the uniform, and/or the boarding fees. It is a system where there are only about a third the spaces for secondary school as there are for elementary school, so that Grade 8 standardized test really does mean success or failure. The schools reflect the small tax base—if the principal and the teachers haven't raised the money, likely the school doesn't have it (plumbing, floors, books, learning aids, and so on).

Before we knew it, the first week was over and we'd presented nearly 50 separate workshops on teaching methodologies such as learning styles, co-operative classrooms, inquiry learning, understanding by design, creating a positive classroom environment, formative assessment, assessment for learning, rubrics, professional learning communities, co-operative and discovery learning, and study and organizational skills. We worked on subject-based topics in the curricular areas of math, science, and English at both the elementary and secondary levels. We'd also begun to grasp the unique challenges of teaching in schools without resources, in class-

rooms with 40, 50, or more children. We tried to understand a system where all children are learning in their second (or third) language, as English is the language of instruction but it is not the mother tongue in Kenya. The light bulb went on a bit brighter when I figured out that every teacher was teaching in his or her second language too!

With Saturday coming to an end we packed up our stuff, loaded those vans again, and hit the roads for a six-hour drive across central Kenya. We arrived at Utumishi High School for Boys, and once again we tossed coins to see who'd share which bedroom with whom. Planning began again on Sunday and the workshops ramped up first thing Monday morning. We had the luxury of having access to a computer lab here; so many of the Kenyan teachers got to access "technology"—some for the very first time!

I got the special treat of being taken under the wing of the workshop cook—Walter. He let me help him serve and haul buckets of food. I got a tour of the school kitchen (anyone see a refrigerator?) and I got lessons on how to properly cook ugali—a porridge made of maize flour, water, and heat. You know it is ready to eat when the paddle comes out of it without any ugali sticking to it. Then it lasts for hours—just keep it warm on the charcoals.

Not all of my time was spent at work in Kenya. I took the opportunity to travel (camping safari) through large parts of Kenya. I got

to sleep on the dirt of Africa. I got to shower, and do everything else that the body does, just like a rural Kenyan. I saw animals up close and personal. "Nice kitty, nice kitty, go away nice kitty" is a phrase I used more than once. Yes sir, to recognize that you are food (and when I say food, I mean easy snack) puts one's place on the planet in a different perspective.

Ask me about Max the rhinoceros. "Nice Max, sit boy, roll over, go to sleep Max." He was being handraised by two park rangers. Max loved those two men, so much so that they had to build a fence to keep him from crashing into their sleeping hut at night.

I am so proud to be part of Education Beyond Borders, an organization that is striving to bring quality education to the world. I was so very lucky to be in the company of such a dedicated group of teachers—Canadian, American, and Kenyan. I was in awe of the amazing skills, techniques, approaches, dedication, and personalities of my fellow team members—I am a better teacher and a better person for the experience.

Would I go back again? Yes. Thank you Noble Kelly and the other members of the team who put up with me—you all taught me so much—and, of course, to the BCTF who supported my journey with financial aid (including all of my friends and colleagues in the Representative Assembly—you helped to fund those calculators!).

Steve Fairbairn is president of Fernie Teachers' Association.



Bob Dugas with his 92-year-old father, Al Dugas, who made the trek in 1935.

The On To Ottawa Trek—75 years later

By Dan Blake

In the Jan./Feb. 2010 edition of *Teacher*, I published an article on the 75th Anniversary of the On To Ottawa Trek. Barb Pannell, a special education assistant in Courtenay, read the article and remembered hearing her father-in-law, Al Dugas, speak of his involvement in the trek. Pannell told her husband, Bob Dugas, a retired special education teacher, about the article and he contacted the On To Ottawa Historical Society.

At that point, the society was not aware that there were any surviving members of the famous trek. David Yorke, one of the society's directors, contacted Bob Dugas and arranged to interview his 92-year-old father, Al Dugas. An extraordinary piece of oral labour history was about to be made. Dugas was only 17 when he took part in the historic 1935 trek, but his memory of the 75-year-old event is still very vivid. Below is an edited portion of the interview.

The 75th Anniversary Commemorative Ceremony and Rally, to honour Al Dugas and all his fellow Trek participants, will be held Sunday, June 6, 2010, at 1:00 p.m., at Crab Park at the north foot of Main Street in Vancouver, where the 1935 trek began.

Check the OTOHS website—www.ontootawa.ca—for the latest details on the event.

—Dan Blake, retired Surrey teacher

Memories of the trek

Al Dugas: I ran away from home. I was 16. And I just shoveled into it I guess, somehow. It was just there. My dad said, if you're working for anybody else you wouldn't earn your salt. So I took off, and proved him wrong.

Yorke: It was pretty hard to find work then I guess.

Al Dugas: There was none existing at all...anybody with a job in those days was a big shot.

Bob Dugas: 1934...before your 17th Birthday.

Al Dugas: Yeah, it was May...I never begged. I went from door to door asking for jobs. Like I said, I could cut grass, split wood, wash windows, floors, anything for something to eat. And a lot of the times I got something to eat, sometimes I got nothing, but it worked. But I never did ask for something for nothing you know.

Yorke: Were you in the relief camps?

Al Dugas: Oh yes several of them—Squamish, Merritt, Hope.

Yorke: What were things like in the relief camps?

Al Dugas: Oh, they were good, especially for the hungry—there was lots to eat. There was one we had a bad storm, Camp 213 out of Hope, it was 13 miles out of Hope. We were hungry and we got word out that we had no food so they sent an airplane across and dropped food. We never got a bite of it; it went down in amongst the trees and was never seen again.

The 75th Anniversary Commemorative Ceremony and Rally, to honour Al Dugas and all his fellow Trek participants, will be held Sunday, June 6, 2010, at 1:00 p.m., at Crab Park at the north foot of Main Street in Vancouver, where the 1935 trek began.

Yorke: There was a strike in the camps?

Al Dugas: The On to Ottawa Trek, yes...it was a protest against the relief camps. Like I said, you are talking 2,000 unemployed, leaving Vancouver on box cars, and another 3,000 waiting in Winnipeg and Toronto.

Al Dugas: (singing) Hold the fort for we are coming, union men are strong(*)—it was getting to be pretty big...concerned to have that many men in Ottawa...

Yorke: How far did the trek get?

Al Dugas: Regina. And then R.B. Bennett was the Prime Minister. He said "Keep everybody in Regina. If this is peaceful, send five delegates down and I will deal with them. And in the meantime you will be fed in Regina." So we took him for his word, and when they got there he said, "Now you gave me enough time to round up all the police, so go back and tell them that we will give 'em bullets instead of bread." And that is what blew it...started the riot.

Yorke: Were you there in Regina yourself?

Al Dugas: In Market Square, yeah.

Bob Dugas: You saw stuff happening behind the crowds...vehicles moving in.

Al Dugas: That meeting was in Market Square. When we were there a flat deck truck was there

with the speakers and Jerry Winters was at the mike, and outside these closed moving vans and Allied Vans were lining up one behind the other all the way around the square and all of a sudden the whistle blew and the doors open and the horses ran out and they started swinging their batons.

Bob Dugas: The police were on horses? The police or army?

Al Dugas: The police, RCMP...they started swinging the batons on everybody's head.

Yorke: When the police came in, what were the police trying to do?

Al Dugas: Hammer our heads... they just came in and started swinging.

Yorke: What was the reaction of the crowd?

Al Dugas: Panic, running around, trying to get out of the way. It was bedlam for awhile. There was a guy called Alan McKay, he was from Toronto I think, he had a stick in his hand and he says, "they are firing blanks." Pinnnggggg...the bullet went right through the stick and through the bank window. We were down on our knees...crawling through the alley.

Well, what happened at the Exhibition Ground (in Regina) is they lined up five machine guns on top of boxcars pointing at the doors of the stadium and we were rounded up and put in there and after nothing to eat or drink for a day. This Red Walsh, he had more guts than Dick Tracy, he just came to the door and he said, "That's it, we're coming out! And if you fire on us, the streets of Regina will run with blood." And he said, "You're in charge of that. And we are coming out." And we walked out. It took guts...

* The song, *Hold the Fort*, became the anthem of the trekkers.

The interview is available in text and audio on the On To Ottawa Historical Society website (www.ontootawa.ca).

Teachers interested in incorporating this important anniversary into their lessons will find the resource, *Youth, Unions, and You*, a wonderful source of additional information about the trek.

There is also the excellent video, *On To Ottawa*, that was produced for the 50th anniversary of the trek. Both the video and the resource mentioned above are available on the OTOHS website.

The "Memory Museum" and the neo-liberal experiment

By Larry Kuehn

The teachers' organization in Chile (the CPC) has been carrying out, for the past 10 years, a project they call the Pedagogical Movement. It is a union teacher research project that has been supported by the BCTF International Solidarity Fund, along with teacher unions in France and Sweden and by Education International.

They call it a movement because it is not individuals doing research just for their own situation. Rather, it is a collective way of reflecting on the important educational issues, particularly in the context of reviving civil society and a sense of the right to participate after the many years of dictatorship.

I was in Chile because they wanted not just to share among themselves, but also with the international groups that have supported this work on its 10th Anniversary.

Teams of teachers in each region in the country have carried out research on areas of concern, from curriculum to student and societal issues. They are working in the country that was the experimental farm for the neo-liberal ideas.

Milton Friedman and his cronies at the Chicago school in the 1970s advised the Pinochet dictatorship to privatize schools, services, industry, and even pensions. Private schools (with state subsidies) now have 55% of the students in the country. Privatized pensions lost 30% or more in the market declines of the past year. If Chileans live too long or investments lose their value, when the funds in a personal pension account run out, they no longer get a pension.

Some of the teacher projects looked at the impact of these policies on education. While the formal power of the military dictatorship has faded, history is very much alive in Chile.

On the second day, our program began with a visit to the Memory Museum. It is aimed at keeping alive the memory of the coup that overthrew Salvador Allende, the elected president, in 1973 and that initiated a long period of dictatorship. A second focus of the museum is on human rights violations in other countries. It displays, for example, copies of Truth and Reconciliation reports, including that from South Africa.

This new museum was just opened a couple of days before by the president of the country. President Bachelet had herself been arrested, tortured, and forced into exile. Her father, a military officer, died of cardiac arrest from torture after supporting president Allende rather than going along with the military coup.

The presidential runoff for a new president was to take place on January 17, two days after the end of the pedagogical conference. Chile has a one-term limit, so Bachelet was not able to run again, although she is so popular that 70% of the country supports her according to polls. The two runoff candidates from the left and the right were neck and neck, the pollsters said. One candidate had just over 50% and the other just under.

The Memory Museum shows a very moving multiscreen film. Military jets take off and then bomb the presidential palace. President Allende is shown in a military helmet and carrying a gun, looking as uncomfortable with it as one might expect from an academic and politician used to fighting with

words. Later, Allende is heard making what he knows is his last radio broadcast to the people.

I recall hearing an interview on CBC's *As It Happens* from within the presidential palace as it was under attack. My memories of listening to the radio report of these events from September 11, 1973, are as strong as those from watching on TV the towers fall on another September 11.

Just before the presidential palace was taken by the military, Allende was killed, with the official story that he killed himself, rather than be captured, tortured, and sent to exile.

You get an idea of what he might have expected when you come to one corner of the museum and see a metal bed frame with a wooden

They are working in the country that was the experimental farm for the neo-liberal ideas. Milton Friedman and his cronies at the Chicago school in the 1970s advised the Pinochet dictatorship to privatize schools, services, industry, and even pensions.

box next to it with wires coming out. People were tied down on the bed, then electricity was run through it, reaching everywhere a body pressed down on the metal criss-crossing the frame.

One wall holds pictures of former members of the Allende government who were later assassinated while in exile. The car of the former foreign minister was blown up right in Washington, DC. Another wall of pictures shows some of the thousands killed or "disappeared" after the coup.

The bilingual staff person from one of the US teacher unions pointed out to me that the narration said that the final word to the military to go ahead with the coup came in English, not Spanish. Nothing more needed to be said to understand the underlying message of complicity.

The Chilean teachers we were with were clearly affected greatly by their first visit to the museum, talking later about the importance of remembering so this is never allowed to happen again.

However, I think back less than two months ago to when I was in Honduras. As in Chile, people resisting the coup in Honduras, many of them teachers, have disappeared, been killed, or detained. The military there was in the streets and even running the so-called election. Many Latin Americans elsewhere are afraid of another round of the coups and military governments that dominate the region, not just Chile.

The Memory Museum is intended as an inoculation against Chile going down that road again. However, on January 17, the right-wing candidate was elected with just over 50% of the vote. TV news in Latin America showed some of the right-wing supporters celebrating not by shouting the name of the new president, Sebastian Pinera. Instead, they were shouting "Pinochet."

Not everyone wants to remember the same things.

Larry Kuehn is the director of the BCTF Research and Technology Division.



Pink Shirt Day at Chief Maquinna Elementary

By Bill Hood

This year on April 14, for the third consecutive year, our school participated in "Pink Shirt Day" thereby taking a stand against bullying in general, and against homophobia specifically. This event has been strongly supported by our entire community, and has presented an excellent opportunity for all of us, adults and children, to talk more openly about homophobia, the dangers of and damage caused by bullying, and the contribution we make to our whole society when we stand up for the civil rights for all.

It is especially gratifying for our students to learn that this event comes from the brave and thoughtful actions of students, just like them, in another part of the country, as they stood up for a friend and classmate. Wearing a pink shirt on this day, gives each person a chance to connect personally to these acts of solidarity and courage.

The issue of speaking openly about homophobia continues to present a few challenges in some classes, and so the opportunity of a broad, fun public day focusing on fairness and equal treatment for all is a brilliant choice. It is especially gratifying for our students to learn that this event comes from the brave and thoughtful actions of students, just like them, in another part of the country, as they stood up for a friend and classmate. Wearing a pink shirt on this day, gives each person a chance to connect personally to these acts of solidarity and courage.

You may well understand then, when we found out this year, that through some electronic miscommunication, our school's entire order of pink shirts was not going to be filled, we were frantic. We were afraid that families who had been looking forward to the discussion and connections of this day would feel left out and possibly isolated. Fabulous good fortune arose from

this problem. A small group of us spent some time after school brainstorming how to make the best of this situation. Our solution ended up being so successful that I think we will now make it a regular part of this annual event, even when our shirt orders are filled.

We decided to make pink triangles, out of card stock, for every student to wear, pinned to their shirts. These symbols were a reference to the treatment of homosexuals by the Nazis during the Second World War. Many adults did not know the history of this symbol, or the fact that Nazis used it to identify arrested homosexuals who were sent (along with Jews, Communists, Roma, and other groups the Nazis tried to destroy), to the death camps.

After we compiled a fact sheet based on the information posted at the Wikipedia entry for "Pink Triangle," almost all of the intermediate grade classes then used this as a teachable moment to connect the current struggle against homophobia to the historic obscenity of the Holocaust. While carefully not equating the struggle against homophobia to the mass extermination of Jews by the Nazis, the parallel was very useful, and a clear illustration of the ultimate potential of where bullying and hate can lead was illuminating.

Students were also told how, in the 1970s, gay-rights activists reclaimed this symbol of terror, turned it upside down, and began to use it as an icon of their refusal to let this happen again. At our school on April 14, the adults and children proudly wore their pink triangles as they taught, played soccer, asked and answered questions in class, ate their lunch, and did their work. Some classes even used the opportunity to write personal messages of hope and determination on their triangles.

Just as in recent history, what began out of desperation and a problem is now a symbol of pride. My guess is that in future years everyone, at our small school in East Vancouver, will probably be wearing a pink triangle on this important day, and talking about it to anyone who is interested.

Bill Hood teaches at Chief Maquinna Elementary School, Vancouver.

Bullying won't stop anytime soon

The following letter was sent to CKNW regarding the Christy Clark show.

By Deb Taylor

April 14, 2010, was declared Pink Shirt Day. In the days leading up to April 14, Christy Clark promoted this year's antibullying campaign in her current role as a talk-show host for CKNW. This is the woman, who when she was the Campbell Liberal government's education minister, relentlessly insulted and criticized public school educators.

Although I'm pleased that efforts to prevent bullying have achieved this level of media support, I'm disheartened by the approach that Christy Clark took in order to shed light upon this issue.

Unfortunately, most of her shows during this campaign dealt with examples of bullying where, as she often put it, "...the school did nothing."

It makes me think that perhaps Clark's prime motivation for "championing antibullying" is to give herself another platform from which to continue bashing public school teachers and administrators.

I say this because if Christy Clark and CKNW really wanted to make a difference that would bring an end to bullying in our schools, they would have also spent time

exploring the challenges schools and parents face in addressing this complex issue. They would have highlighted programs that are working and given recognition to those in our public schools that are making a difference. Clark would have also spent time delving into the impact that multiple years of underfunding to our public schools and to the Ministry for Children and Families continues to have upon children's safety in this province.

If schools are to deal with bullying effectively, they need teachers, counsellors, and administrators who are trained and available to meet with students as issues arise.

Instead, Pink Shirt Day this year should have been named—Pink Slip Day. As once again, Gordon Campbell made hollow promises on the steps of the Legislature by proclaiming that "Bullying Stops Here" while continuing to underfund public education.

In the next two weeks, school boards around the province are having to make painful decisions around where to make cuts to the very services that help keep students safe.

When these cuts take place and elementary counsellors lose their jobs due to funding shortfalls and the counsellors that remain see their caseloads go from one counsellor for 900 students to one

for 1,800 students, when secondary counsellors and administrators are required to spend more time teaching, and when the teaching assistants responsible for aiding students with severe behavioral challenges lose their hours and in some cases their jobs...who's going to be there when a student or group of students needs a hand at working through a conflict? Who's going to teach the antibullying, conflict resolution, or restorative justice classes, who's going to train and supervise school mediators or Playground Pals, and who's going to offer small group social skills training for students whose disability is dealing with social situations? Who's going to make sure our playgrounds, cafeterias, and hallways are safe when noon-hour supervisors numbers and hours are cut?

The scary reality is that Christy Clark may well have even more upsetting stories to tell by Pink Shirt (alias Pink Slip Day) 2011. I sincerely hope I'm wrong. I also hope that when Pink Shirt Day comes around next year, Christy Clark can get over whatever personal unresolved issues she has with our public schools and spend her time promoting positive solutions to this issue.

Deb Taylor has spent over 35 years as a teacher and a counsellor of students from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

Acknowledging serious mental illnesses

By Susan Inman

One night last week, I received a desperate phone call from another teacher whom I've known for over 20 years. She was frantic. An ambulance and two police officers were on their way to her house to take her very psychotic teenage son to Vancouver General Hospital's emergency unit. His psychiatrist, from a community mental health team, hadn't been able to persuade him to go back on to his antipsychotic medication; he has very little insight into the serious mental illness that he's living with and this involuntary hospitalization was the next necessary step. My friend has been learning a lot about these illnesses, but the imminent arrival of the police was understandably frightening to her and she was very worried about her son's response. Fortunately, the likely scenario I painted for her did play itself out; the police and ambulance attendants were very sensitive and skilful, and my friend's son is now safe in the psychiatric assessment unit and responding well to treatment.

Both of us were the kind of mothers who assumed we knew a lot about child development. We were both in the position to give our children just the kind of careful nurturing we believed would lead to fairly predictable results. Our children's genetic codes and a complex mixture of environmental factors had a different and a more

Most of us who are teachers have had very little opportunity in our training to learn about new ways of understanding serious mental illnesses. This lack of training, unfortunately, often makes it difficult for us to interpret behaviour in our own classrooms...

cruel fate in store for them. Even though we've now both educated ourselves to understand the research into environmental factors like flu during pregnancy, birth complications, age of fathers, and

other newly researched issues, we knew very little when we were tossed into these chaotic circumstances.

When I was in grad school at UCLA in the 1980s and later took courses in UBC's Counselling Psychology Program, I trained in theories based on the assumption that nurture, not nature, determined a child's destiny. It was a comforting belief system but, even when I was sitting in those courses, the bigger world of neuroscience had already begun transforming psychiatry. Rather than continuing to base interventions in dealing with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder on the unscientific, non-evidence based theories of Freud, psychiatry had begun to take its rightful place in medicine.

Families today still have to confront the legacies of parent blaming as they try to get help for their ill children. The shifting of paradigms doesn't happen quickly. Most of us who are teachers have had very little opportunity in our training to learn about new ways of understanding serious mental illnesses. This lack of training, unfortunately, often makes it difficult for us to interpret behaviour in our own classrooms; this is a problem because one in 100 people have bipolar disorder and one in 100 have schizophrenia, and these disorders often begin to manifest themselves in adolescence. At the secondary school where I teach, the counsellors have connected to Vancouver's Early Psychosis Intervention Program; this helps ensure that ill students can receive the timely treatment that can lead to better outcomes. This program not only offers necessary medical treatment but helps the students and their parents learn to adjust to these disorders. I have no idea what people in many other parts of the province can do.

My daughter had one of the most severe schizo-affective disorders that psychiatrists in Vancouver had seen and after a two-year psychotic episode had a grim prognosis; some psychiatrists predicted she would have to be institutionalized for life. My ability to take unpaid leaves of absences and to teach part time

enabled me to assume responsibility for her recovery. Eventually, a new medication strategy freed my daughter from her hellish psychosis. I could not find the stories of other parents when I was the most overwhelmed during these ordeals and in my memoir, *After Her Brain Broke, Helping My Daughter Recover Her Sanity*, I share the complicated story of helping my daughter get her life back. In the introduction to the book, Senator Michael Kirby, chair of the Mental Health Commission of Canada, talks about "...the work we still have to do to ensure that people with mental illness and their families get the same treatment... that individuals with physical illness receive." The work to be done is immense.

At the secondary school where I teach, the counsellors have connected to Vancouver's Early Psychosis Intervention Program; this helps ensure that ill students can receive the timely treatment that can lead to better outcomes.

As teachers, my friend and I both know that educational institutions need to do more if we want our students to receive the kind of care that offers the best opportunities for recovery. The Counselling Psychology program, where I took classes, still doesn't offer any course on serious mental illnesses and none of the student teachers I've asked have received any training at all in understanding these disorders. This training would not only assist us in spotting potential crises and later help us reintegrate students back into our classes, but would improve our understanding of our many students who grow up in households impacted by these disorders. The institutions that train us have a responsibility to help us understand these issues that they have ignored for too long.

Susan Inman teaches at Windermere Secondary School, Vancouver.

The clash between queer rights and religion in schools

By David Butler

Lisa Reimer, a non-Catholic lesbian music teacher, was essentially fired from her teacher job at Little Flower Academy, an independent Catholic school in Vancouver. Told to stay home with pay for the remainder of her contract, she was to stay away from the premises and have no contact with the students. She has been asked to submit “electronic assignments” to students and give them letter grades while all music classes for them have been cancelled. This came about because Lisa had formally requested family leave in December 2009 to be with her pregnant partner around the time of the baby’s birth in April 2010. Effectively, she “outed” herself to the administration by requesting parental leave. Being denied leave in January, the school convinced Reimer to take her accumulated sick days. The school asked her to keep her sexual orientation and family status quiet. She complied and never once mentioned either to students or staff at the school. Then one day before she was scheduled to return to work, she was called to an emergency meeting and effectively terminated.

This event has set off a firestorm of controversy. The media has incorrectly framed the debate as one between religious rights and individual freedoms. However, when a LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer) person is fired because of their identity or family status, this issue is not only around individual rights. It involves group rights since this very identity is protected from discrimination in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and the *BC Human Rights Code* prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and family status. Since the charter became law in 1982, there have been many clashes between the freedom of religion and the right to equality, both of which are enshrined within the charter.

There is one case that has particular relevance in elucidating the grey area within these two competing rights claims. It demonstrates the legal precedent that claims for queer equality rights, even in religious space, are valid. In 2002 Marc Hall, was denied taking his boyfriend to the prom in a Catholic school because that particular Ontario Catholic school board felt such behaviour was not in line with Catholic beliefs and that students, by attending their institution, have agreed to abide by its ideological underpinning (an argument similarly made by Little Flower Academy). The Ontario Supreme Court felt differently by writing, “...the idea of

equality speaks to the conscience of all humanity—the dignity and worth that is due each human being.” (CBC, 2002).

In Ontario, because Catholic education is fully funded, Catholic schools are not entirely private, but they are religious and the spirit of the ruling speaks to limiting discriminatory behaviour based on religious beliefs. But Little Flower Academy Catholic School is not entirely private either since 50% of its funding comes from the public purse. It falls into the category known as a Class A Independent School. Their funding is tied to how closely they follow the standards of the BC curriculum. What could be more basic as a standard for schools that receive funding from the BC public than to adhere to basic human rights legislation prohibiting discrimination based on immutable characteristics such as race, sex, family status, and sexual orientation? One of the first chants I had ever heard in the many Pride parades I’ve attended is “We’re here, we’re queer, and we pay taxes.” Yes, we pay taxes, and so does my sister, my queer-friendly family and friends. They are incensed that their tax dollars are going to an institution that practices this kind of egregious discrimination. It’s like taxing black people so as to run a hospital that will not treat black patients or employ doctors or nurses who are people of colour.

Which leads to another area of consideration that has been absent from this debate thus far. The BC curriculum has PLOs around health that include discussions of queer people. After the challenge by the Correns, a queer activist teacher and his husband, the Ministry of Education created documents such as “Making Space” that has updated the curriculum with inclusion of positive representation of queer identities and of their contribution to society, just like Aboriginal people and other marginalized groups. What is the likelihood that a Catholic school, following a religious ideology that openly marginalizes queer people, is following that aspect of the standardized curriculum? I would suggest—not much.

Little Flower Academy, like all schools, has queer students in its care. Let’s stop for a moment to consider how a closeted teenager going to that school would feel about her burgeoning identity given that her school has fired a teacher who shares the same identity (or even, consider a straight student who has a family member or friend who is LGBTQ). There can be no question about the message Catholic schools, informed by ever-



increasing oppressive ideology against queers, have articulated to the students with alternative sexualities: their attractions are devalued, vilified and deemed an “intrinsic moral evil” (Vatican, 2002).

Nancy Fraser, a significant philosopher on social justice argues that socially just arrangements, “...requires that institutionalized cultural patterns...express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem.” There is no chance a queer kid in a Catholic school is getting an equal chance at achieving social esteem. In one way, I see it as similar to residential schools for indigenous children—not the starving, the beating, and the systemic cultural erasing of the imprisoned students, but in the way residential schools systemically bashed their identities as inferior, problematic, dangerous, and unwanted in colonial space. Catholic schools do that to queer students when they fire LGBTQ teachers, erase them from the curriculum, and make official statements that homosexuality is an “intrinsic moral evil.”

Lisa Reimer’s rights, as enshrined in the *BC Human Rights Code* and the *Canadian Charter*, have been violated and the rights of all queer people have been challenged in this case. But by far our main concern should be for the vulnerable queer students who show elevated levels of bullying, suicide, drug addiction, truancy, and feelings of isolation at school. These students have to navigate a heterosexist culture—one that still articulates the message that being queer is wrong, immoral, and problematic. By firing a lesbian teacher who is by all accounts a highly respected teacher and a wonderful role model for students, Little Flower Academy has taken another good kick at the queer can. This time though, the can ain’t movin’.

David Butler teaches at Henderson Elementary, Vancouver, and is a member of the LGBTQ action group of the BCTF Committee for Action on Social Justice.

A gift

By Susan Marshall

Just over two years ago, my good friend Barbara Jarvis died of cancer. She left a grief stricken Kindergarten class at Holly Elementary School in Delta along with many saddened colleagues and friends. While family, friends, and the entire school district mourned the loss of a great teacher, her husband, Ab Singh, approached Sue Pudek and me with the idea of setting up funds to be used to help Delta teachers. The idea blossomed and the Delta School District Barbara Jarvis Foundation was established.

The Barbara Jarvis Foundation is growing and as it does, more teachers and students are benefiting from the generosity of Ab Singh. From an event that was very sad, a very positive memorial and legacy to a wonderful teacher is growing.

During the first year, Colleen Politano was engaged to present a series of three workshops on early literacy to Delta district primary teachers. Politano is a consultant to school districts and the Bureau of Education and Research. This series entitled, *‘Revving Up’ Reading in the Primary Classroom* was widely received and teachers spent two after-school sessions plus an all-day professional day honing their skills in literacy instruction. Some money was also spent on purchasing supplies for needy Kindergarten classrooms.

The foundation also provided funds to develop a special Reading Centre in the Holly Elementary School library. A wall was painted with a fantasy theme, and colourful carpet and pillows presented a warm and inviting space for students to enjoy the new books



that filled the shelves. An author was brought in to present books to students. Students and staff enjoyed the presentation and this new environment.

For the workshop series this school year, we have been lucky enough to engage Dr. Marilyn Chapman, professor in the Department of Language and Literacy Education and director of the Institute for Early Childhood Education and Research at UBC. Chapman’s workshops, entitled *Enhancing Oral Language and Writing in the Primary Grades*, focus on the importance of oral language and a developmental approach to teaching writing in the primary grades. Again, we have been lucky to be able to program a series of three workshops during the 2009–10 school year.

Also, during the course of this year, the Barbara Jarvis Foundation will be providing each of seven elementary schools in Delta with grants of \$1,000 for their libraries. This will give the schools an opportunity to invite an author to give a presentation to students and teachers. Hopefully, this visit will encourage and motivate students to read and write. Money left over after the speaker is paid may be used to purchase books for the school library. It is planned that over the next three years, the foundation will have provided such a grant to each elementary school in the Delta School District.

Also, during the 2009–10 school year, the foundation will provide 12 additional schools with a \$300 grant to purchase educational materials for their Kindergarten classrooms. It is again the plan to provide these grants to all Delta schools within the next few years.

The Barbara Jarvis Foundation is growing and as it does, more teachers and students are benefiting from the generosity of Ab Singh. From an event that was very sad, a very positive memorial and legacy to a wonderful teacher is growing.

Susan Marshall is a retired Delta teacher.

Could this be your story?

By Kathryn Askew

Ben had been teaching primary children for 17 years. He was a quiet person, not given to animated conversation in the staffroom at lunch, nor one to participate in group professional growth activities after school, and rarely one to speak out at staff meetings. He was, however, well-liked by his students who enjoyed his gentle sense of humour and his co-operative gym games and the way he recognized their hidden talents. He had collected many kind notes from parents who appreciated the extra time and attention he gave their children. His colleagues counted on him in many ways.

At the end of a year of declining enrolment when it became apparent

that his school would be down-sized and that a promising and very popular younger teacher would be bumped, Ben volunteered to transfer to a different school, with a different principal, a different set of parents, and was placed in a significantly different grade area, with a completely different curriculum, in a portable.

He spent the summer reading and researching new topics in science and social studies and browsing through new novels. He attended a summer institute in math. He walked through the neighbourhood and explored school resources. He just managed to squeeze 30 battered desks into his classroom before the children showed up on the first day. And then he met his students.

Of 31 children, 5 were in Grade 6 and 26 in Grade 7. Eight were girls.

Christine had a moderate intellectual disability and was assigned a full-time educational assistant who often took the child out of the classroom to an activity room. Gregor was on the Autism spectrum and generated one hour per day of educational assistant time. Hamid and Rachel had moderate to severe behavioural issues. Quinn and Quenilla had been identified as having learning disabilities. Each of these students had individual education plans and fell under Bill 33 guidelines. In addition, there were seven children reading and spelling well below grade level, one child who attended a gifted students’ pull-out program, three children who had recently entered an English program from French immersion schools and three children who just didn’t seem to be “in tune” with school at all.

By the end of the first reporting period in mid-November Ben was

exhausted and extremely worried. Parents seemed hostile; the principal unsympathetic; staff members dismissive. How Ben regretted opening his mouth and volunteering to change schools—and grade levels! His entire life seemed to be one long race to an uncertain finish line.

One Thursday, out on recess supervision in the rain, Ben was approached by the staff rep who learned that it was Ben’s first year teaching intermediate students and that, although Ben had tried to speak with other teachers he knew, he was truly puzzled about how to plan curriculum units to meet all the outcomes for both grades as directed by the principal.

“What do you think would make things better for you, Ben?” the staff rep asked.

“I wish I knew,” replied Ben. “If I knew what to do, I’d do it! I don’t know where to start. I used to think

I was good at teaching, but this year I can’t seem to do anything right.”

“I was at a staff rep training session last week,” said the staff rep. “They told us about a BCTF program called Peer Support Services where the union sends another teacher to work with you to find out what isn’t going well, and then helps you figure out what to do. Does that sound like it might be useful?”

“It wouldn’t hurt,” responded Ben as the bell rang. “How do I get involved in that?”

“You just contact our local president and she’ll help you get started. You both fill in a form requesting support and the BCTF connects you with someone in the same teaching area. I’ll bring you the phone number at lunch.”

“Thanks,” said Ben as they returned to the school building. Life already looked a little brighter.

Kathryn Askew is a retired Comox teacher.

CanWest newspapers in Vancouver to discontinue publishing Fraser Institute rankings

By Noel Herron

In what is being interpreted by some as a major blow to the Vancouver-based Fraser Institute, two of CanWest's leading newspapers *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* will not publish the controversial annual, comparative, ratings of BC's elementary schools this year. These results are released each year in early February.

This information was confirmed by Peter Cowley, the lead researcher for the Fraser Institute's controversial rankings of the province's elementary and secondary schools.

When asked why the two Vancouver-based newspapers are no longer willing to publish the institute's elementary rankings, he cited CanWest's reluctance to give up space because of the upcoming Olympics. "We are not disappointed with this decision as other outlets, namely the Black Press with 78 daily and semi-weekly papers across BC will pick up where CanWest left off."

An upbeat Cowley stated, "We have had a long and good relationship with both *The Sun* and *The Province* over a 12-year period," and he feels that this decision will not impact negatively on the Fraser Institute's determination to continue its work. Last year, both newspapers devoted less space than usual—just two pages in fact, one for truncated results and one for commentary—to the institute's rankings. Because of the ongoing controversy surrounding the rankings, some feel that the impact

of these rankings has diminished over the past few years.

However, the Black newspaper chain, which owns the majority of smaller, local, newspapers across BC, has confirmed in a recent press release that it will publish this year's full or partial rankings with, in some instances, accompanying commentary from the heads of local teacher unions. This "decentralized" move, in itself it appears, is not without controversy in the corporate BC journalistic world as some rural editors were less than enthusiastic in publishing these rankings alone.

Outside BC, the province of Manitoba was accused by the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies and Frontier Centre for Public Policy of operating "...in the dark ages..." because it doesn't compare students' performances like some other Western provinces.

Manitoba's Education Minister, Nancy Allen, pointed out that while Manitoba does provide province-wide information on high school graduation rates and on overall performance she does not agree with the Fraser Institute's approach. Responding in *The Winnipeg Free Press*, she stated, "...we don't really have a comfort level of pitting one school against another. One school ends up at the bottom, and it could be a great school. It could be demoralizing for everyone involved." The position was endorsed by the Manitoba School Board Association.

With *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* now discontinuing publishing the Fraser Institute's elementary rankings this month, speculation focuses on whether the

two papers will continue publishing secondary school rankings in the spring. Peter Cowley was unable to confirm if this would take place. And CanWest has not commented publicly on its recent decision regarding elementary schools leading to speculation that the two high-profile city newspapers have dropped the institute's rankings altogether.

Two reasons for this surprise move are being put forward—the newspaper chain's current deepening financial difficulties, coupled with the fact of dwindling parental support in some school districts for the controversial analysis.

The annual publication, with great fanfare, of more than 20-page plus supplements ranking every elementary and secondary school in BC in both city papers, while welcomed by some parents was scored by all of the province's professional groups. The technical validity and reliability, from a strictly assessment perspective, of the province's Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) results on which the Fraser Institute's rankings were based, were repeatedly challenged by various professional groups representing teachers, principals, superintendents, and school trustees. (These latter groups were dismissed by Crowley as "the educational establishment.") An internal working group within the Ministry of Education, a few years ago, expressed strong reservations on this particular point in a memo to the education minister of the time, and went on to challenge the

usefulness of the comparative rankings.

However, it now appears that the estimated cost of over \$400,000 for both newspapers was too much for the cash-strapped CanWest chain in its current financial difficulties. The added space required by the newspapers for Olympics coverage was the reason given to online reporter Sean Holtman. The Fraser Institute also does not have the resources, according to Cowley, to shoulder this expense. (A full-page ad costs between \$20,000 to \$25,000.)

The other alternate explanation offered for this sudden cancellation of publication was the increasing withdrawal by parents across the province of their offspring from participating in the Grades 4 and 7 provincial tests in response to an aggressive anti-Fraser Institute program by the BCTF. For example, in Maple Ridge, 40% of the student population did not participate last year; Vancouver had a 30% withdrawal rate, while the provincial withdrawal rate rose to 16.5%.

All of this raises questions about the future of the Fraser Institute's rankings. Will our local dailies publish the secondary school rankings? Will rural newspapers continue next year to publish these results now that the province's two largest newspapers have dropped their elementary sponsorship? Or will the Fraser Institute go it alone and be willing to fund a province-wide or limited dissemination of its rankings? Only time will tell.

Noel Herron is a former school principal and Vancouver trustee.

Health and Safety

Who are you going to call?

Did you know?

Health and safety reps at your school do more than check to see if the floors are slippery or if your boxes are stacked too high.

What is a health and safety rep?

Health and safety reps are elected by members of the teaching and support staff unions at each work site. Together, with an administrative rep, they comprise the joint occupational health and safety committee to prevent and address all health and safety concerns for all workers at your workplace.

What is a health and safety concern?

- Violent incidents including verbal or electronic threats, dangerous intruders, and physical assault by students or parents.
- Indoor air quality issues including lack of ventilation (fresh air), asbestos, mould, toxic cleaning supplies, and lack of cleaning. (Often when budgets are cut, the first thing to go is custodial support.)
- Ergonomic issues such as height of work stations, working on cement floors, work practices such as sitting in small chairs in primary grades, bending over to help students, and using ladders or step stools instead of chairs.
- Noise reduction in gyms, music rooms, shops, portables, and classrooms.
- Communicable diseases such as H1N1, measles, and fifth disease.
- Working alone in portables, isolated wings of schools, after hours, and during extracurricular activities, all of which require policies and procedures to ensure the safety of the workers.
- New- and young-worker training and orientation of health and safety issues before starting work.
- The right to know of any health and safety issues.

What should you do if there is a health and safety concern?

If you recognize any health and safety issue as those listed above for you or any other worker, you should:

- report the concern to your admin.
- report to a health and safety rep.

What should happen next?

The administrator deals with the issue if it can be addressed immediately. If not, then members of the joint committee will investigate and make recommendations for remediation to the employer.

When should WorkSafeBC be contacted?

A worker has the right to contact WSBC to speak to an officer at any time about any health and safety issue. Depending on the issue, the officer may refer the worker back to the health and safety committee or come out to the site to do an inspection or investigation.

If there is a health and safety emergency such as discovering asbestos, a violent intruder, or gas or chemical leak, then WSBC should be contacted and an officer should investigate immediately.

What should you do if you are injured at work? (Remember, injuries are not just physical.)

- Report to the first aid attendant.
- Report to the administrator.
- Fill out a WCB 6A form and give it to your administrator and health and safety rep.
- Call Teleclaim 1-888-WORKERS.
- Go to your doctor.

Who should you call if you have any questions?

- your health and safety rep
- your local president
- the BCTF health and safety officer in prevention—Karen Langenmaier
- the BCTF WCB advocate—Patti McLaughlin.

—Karen Langenmaier,
BCTF Health and Safety officer

Beyond the flickering screen: A new course in media literacy for the 21st century

By Marian Dodds

Parents and teachers often joke about their need to call on their tech savvy kids to help them with the rapidly multiplying media tools that are de rigeur in today's world. But listen to your students chat about the media they consume (and create) and the need for universal media literacy becomes crystal clear. Technical skills are one thing but where is the critical thinking that we know needs to accompany this consumption and creation of new media? Where are the conversations taking place that will enable this next generation to move past technological skills to become media-literate citizens?

Media education is now mandated in every provincial curriculum. This is an acknowledgement of the need for universal media literacy in the Information Age. Students entering today's workplaces require skills to access, assess, evaluate, and produce media. But teachers seeking professional development in media education have found little support.

To fill this gap, John Pungente and Gary Marcuse, the originators of the widely used *Scanning Television* classroom resource, gathered Canada's top media educators and distance education experts to collaborate in writing an online media literacy course, inspired by a parable of the cave in Plato's Republic. Plato describes the situation of prisoners who are trapped in a cave. All that they can see are the flickering shadows of the outside world cast on the wall of the cave. Unable to escape, these phantom images are the only reality they know. Only knowledge, Plato suggests, can enlarge our perceptions

and liberate us from these illusions.

The result of this collaboration is *Understanding Media Literacy: Inside Plato's Cave*, which was field tested in Vancouver, London, and St. John's by teachers who provided feedback and a generous amount of praise, like this comment from Connie Morrison in St. John's:

"This is just what our students need—teachers who have a grasp on the complex media machine and an understanding of how to teach about it. The potential for this project has me awake at night and dreaming of the possibilities. Having used many of these clips and activities...I can say with complete confidence that they were probably the most meaningful and memorable classes I have been privileged to teach. Every teacher begins her or his career vowing to make a difference—but at the end of these classes, I know that I actually did."

Teachers exploring Plato's Cave can expect to be illuminated by the following units:

- *Introduction to Media Education* explores the roles of media in our daily lives and what constitutes media education.
- *Media Literacy and the Curriculum* examines curriculum documents and involves developing a curriculum unit and cross-curricular activities that meet provincial learning goals.
- *Canadian Popular Culture* examines the many perspectives needed to explore the elusive "Canadian identity."
- *The Art of Persuasion—Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations* examines advertising and marketing to teens, sponsorship, personal testimonials and celebrity spokespeople.
- *Media and Values* examines



contentious issues such as materialism, narcissism, and the acceptance of superficial lifestyles.

- *Media Languages* is an examination of how visual, sound, and structural languages combine to create meaning.
- *The News* examines the processes newsmakers use when producing the news of the day.
- *New(er) Technologies* analyzes developments in communications technologies and social networking.
- *Ideology and Representation* explores how cultural groups are represented, how their representations reveal ideologies and how these representations reveal sites of struggle.
- *Audience* explores the notion of audience in a broad sense; how audiences are influenced by, and how they influence, media messages.
- *Movies* helps students understand society's longstanding love affair with story, ritual, entertainment, and our unending urge to

understand the human condition.

- *Prime Time Television* examines the daily entertainment that remains on top of most people's lists, from sports and sitcoms to reality-based TV.
- *Popular Music* provides an historical and pedagogical context for the study of music as a medium of communication and social force.

Understanding Media Literacy: Inside Plato's Cave is available online from Athabasca University as a six-week course starting July 5, 2010 (registration is June 1–10). In September, it will be open to individual sign up, with up to a year to complete. While the focus is currently on Grades 7 to 12, additional units addressing elementary media literacy are planned. To learn more, visit www.athabasca.ca/platocave.

The course is suitable for undergraduate and graduate studies and has been approved by the BC Teacher Qualification Service.

Marian Dodds, educational consultant.

Book review

The Boy in the Moon: A Father's Search for His Disabled Son by Ian Brown, Random House, 2009.

By Janet Nicol

When Ian Brown completed this award-winning book in 2008, his severely disabled son Walker was 12 years old. He and his wife, Johanna Schneller, also a writer, had lived through eight years of raising Walker at home and much of those eight years were grievous and painful. Finally giving up, the couple moved Walker into a nearby group home in the Toronto area, ensuring Walker continued regular overnight visits with family twice a month. Brown, who also writes for the *Globe and Mail*, kept a diary of these times, (originally for medical purposes) and has mined the results into an exceptional father and son story.

Walker Brown was born with a genetic mutation so rare that doctors call it an orphan syndrome, with only about 300 people around the world who live with it. Walker cannot speak and must eat with the assistance of a device. He also habitually hits himself so has to wear protective gear. But as a toddler, he does learn to walk and while intellectually delayed, at some level, Walker feels, desires, and connects with others. By the last page of this story, the reader has as much affection for Walker as his family, his caretakers, and many special friends.

"Sometimes watching him," Brown writes, "is like looking at the man in the moon—but you know there is actually no man there. But if Walker is so insubstantial, why does he feel so important? What is he trying to show me?"

Every burning question a parent, educator, or special needs expert may have is answered somewhere

in this highly readable exploration of Walker and his unique world. Brown moves back and forth in time as he ponders, investigates, researches, and visits other families with similarly afflicted children. He offers glimpses into the life of his wife and to a lesser extent, their first-born daughter, Hayley, as well as extended family and friends, all in aid of understanding his son's extreme condition. Another star performer in this story is Olga de Vera, the Filipino nanny hired to perform the normal duties of a nanny with Hayley and who stays on to embrace Walker with remarkable dedication.

Brown gives us the small details—the grinding daily (and nightly) routines of parenting Walker and occasional moments of joy and grace. He is also able to pull away and paint the bigger picture, resulting in several insights—and more questions.

Tension in the marriage is duly recorded: "We have our private moments, our intimacies, but they are so rare and so urgent they're like hallucinations," Brown writes. Walker doesn't always unite the family as one might think, he observes, he "scatters us."

The author monitors the Internet, a connector for thousands of parents with disabled children. It is the "daily bread of the listserve" where Brown reads "habitual discussions" about cleaning and feeding children with special needs

as well as sharing of medical and other advice.

"Sometimes Walker was in agony as he smacked himself and screamed with pain," Brown observes, in one of his many heart-wrenching passages about his son's condition. "At other times he seemed to do it more expressively, as a way to clear his head, or to let us know he would be saying something if he could talk. Sometimes—and this was unbearably sad—he laughed immediately afterwards. He couldn't tell us anything, and we had to imagine everything."

Medical professionals (including Americans) give the couple as much assistance and expertise as possible, but it is apparent there are still so many question marks in this field of human knowledge. The medical and caretaking costs add up for the family too, another topic Brown considers vital to public discussion.

The author is generous and grateful with his praise for all those who are able to help Walker, some who give in simple, unconscious ways, illuminating the many pools of kindness in the world.

But Brown is also unflinching in his examination of the dark side of this underworld that fate has handed him. For example, he discusses his own inadequacies when he appears in public with Walker. "The staring used to bother me," he confesses. And from the reactions of people on the streets of Toronto as he pushes Walker in the

stroller, "I have known what it is like to be stared at, to be an object of fear and pity and even hatred. I hope Walker can't see it; he seems to ignore it, and gradually he taught me to ignore it as well."

Brown searches for reassurances about Walker's future, that inevitable time when he and his wife won't be able to watch over him. He travels to France and visits L'Arche, one of the world's most progressive environments for disabled people, run by Jean Vanier. The community reveals a unique place of hope and pushes Brown to reflect further on his own values and beliefs.

There are not many air-tight conclusions by journey's end, but Brown and his wife do come to realize it takes a team to look after Walker's many special needs, so surrender their son to a wider network of support. This may be an obvious observation to outsiders, but a very painful and difficult decision for the family, as the author reveals.

Brown also builds a convincing case for more public support of parents coping with a disabled child. In his family's case, it took a very long frustrating search to find an appropriate group home in Toronto for Walker.

The book ends, but the life of Walker goes on. "He is becoming a different boy there, in his other house," Brown notices. He hadn't anticipated Walker to have an independent life. "The latest

development, the workers in the house tell me, is that he shouts "Bus bus bus!" when it arrives. I find that hard to believe. But there have been other shifts too, subtler changes in his current."

The Boy in the Moon succeeds in elevating our understanding of disabled people and their families and is a valued resource for educators and other specialists. Ultimately, this is a story for everyone, as any great story is, because we learn so much more about our capabilities, despite our limitations.

Janet Nicol teaches at Killarney Secondary School, Vancouver.

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100th ANNIVERSARY-NORTH VANCOUVER High School, August 14, 2010. Former teachers: Celebrate as honoured guests. Contact Linda 604-987-5062. Former students: registration forms available www.northvanss.com. Contact Laurel 604-980-7429. Everyone welcome who attended the school—NOT a grad reunion.

100th ANNIVERSARY-TECUMSEH School. Thurs., June 3 (4-8 pm) Register: phone 604-731-6671 or www.tecumsehelementary.ca

KITSILANO HIGH SCHOOL. 50th Reunion, Class of 1960, Teachers from 1954 to 1960 are invited to attend the 50th Reunion as guests of the Class of 1960. 7:00 p.m., Fri., September 10, 2010—Meraloma Clubhouse, Connaught Park, 10th Ave. between Larch and Balsam. We'd love to see you. RSVP to: Sheldon Cole 604-241-7751, scole@telus.net or Karen Mclure 604-985-5757 or 604-666-5992, mormc@shaw.ca.

SCHOOL TATTOOS 1,000 tattoos with your school's logo \$149. Visit www.schooltattoos.ca or e-mail info@schooltattoos.ca or call 613-567-2636.

LEARN TO PLAY the Hawaiian steel guitar. <http://members.shaw.ca/steelguitar>

TEACHERS' TUTORING SERVICE needs high school tutors for Math and Science. BCCT teachers, Metro Vancouver, flexible hours, good rates. 604-730-3410, teacher@utor.bc.ca, www.tutor.bc.ca

PRO-D PRESENTATIONS that revitalize your teaching skills in creative writing. Visit www.beaconlit.com/Teacherworkshops.htm, then call 604-469-1319 or e-mail info@beaconlit.com to book Julie Ferguson for your classroom or next conference/school event.

VARIETY-THE CHILDREN'S CHARITY Working with children is your passion. Leaving a legacy to Variety in your Will for BC's special kids is your gift of a lifetime. There are estate planning benefits too. Contact Peter Chipman or Paul Spelliscy for information. Toll free 1-800-381-2040 or 604-320-0505 or e-mail peter.chipman@variety.bc.ca

THINKING OF RETIRING? Join the BC Retired Teachers' Association. Keep current. Be informed and lend your voice to: Pension plan discussions, indexing, health plans, health benefits. For more information, go to www.bccta.ca or call 604-871-2260, 1-877-683-2243.

RETIRING EARLY? Confused by your lump-sum pension payout option? Let me guide you to a wise and secure decision. Learn more about the issue and my unbiased approach at www.creatingthegoodlife.com

PD CRUISE FOR EDUCATORS July 10-17. Join us onboard our beautiful 117' ship; snorkeling, kayaking, hiking, exploring and discovering the Sea of Cortez, followed by a 2 night stay in Cabo San Lucas. For more info: www.panterra.com Adventure Cruising the Sea of Cortez.

AUSTRALIA. Live and teach. Emigrate and become a citizen or just a working holiday. www.hallmarkimmigration.com.au

JOB UNCERTAINTY Inadequate pension? Proven income diversification program, home-based business with significant tax benefits. Inquiries welcome. A fellow educator: 778-245-2901.

HOME FOR SALE. Comox Valley-Vancouver Island, 3 bdrm, 1700 sq.ft. rancher on .6 acres. \$295,000. www.bcislandhomes.com/krueger

PD Calendar

JULY 2010

1-13 7th Peace & Reconciliation Study Tour for BC teachers. This is an excellent and heavily subsidized professional development opportunity supported by BC Social Studies Teachers' Association. The tour is organized to enhance teachers using "Human Rights in the Asia Pacific 1931-1945: Social Responsibility and Global Citizenship"—a teachers' guide developed by the BC Ministry of Education to support aspects of senior social studies curriculum. The study tour facilitates selected teachers to have better understanding of the cultural and historical background of China during the Asia-Pacific War (1931-1945) through meeting survivors and historians, as well as visiting museums and historical sites in Beijing, Quzhou, Nanjing, and Shanghai. The organizer, BC ALPHA, covers all ground costs inside China while teachers basically need only to take care of their own international travel costs between Canada and China. For application details and highlights of the study tours from previous years, visit <http://alpha-canada.org/StudyTour> or contact Thekla Lit at 604-313-6000 or bcalpha@alpha-canada.org.

5-23 Quebec City, Quebec. Institut de Français, UBC à Québec, French Bursary Program for Teachers. This French immersion program is intended for all teachers and administrators interested in learning or improving their French language skills. www.frenchcentre.ubc.ca/quebec or toll-free 1-866-528-7485

18-23 Vancouver. 37th Annual International Systemic Functional Congress, UBC. Hear the latest in research and teaching in the field of functional systemic linguistics. Congress Theme: Language Evolving: Language is constantly evolving, whether we consider it from the perspective of its use in practical contexts or as a system. Learn about, reflect on, and extend SFL's various ways of thinking about language evolving. Plenary speakers include Michael Halliday, Jim Martin, Terrence Deacon and Gunther Kress. July 21 opens with a plenary session given by Mary Schleppegrell, a professor of education, University of Michigan School of Education and author of *The Language of Schooling* (Erlbaum, 2004). Followed by parallel sessions from both practicing teachers presenting classroom-based work involving SFL and academic leaders in the field of SFL, or functional grammar in educational contexts. Further information is available at: isfc2010.ubconferences.com

AUGUST 2010

13-16 Parksville, BC. The three-day Achieving Excellence in Writing Workshop, presented by Susan Augustyn, offers an exciting and effective method of teaching writing. Workshop demonstrates teaching various structures and stylistic techniques that are easy for students to learn. Students are motivated to write, given the tools to write well, and led to take ownership of their writing. Teachers will leave ready to teach a repertoire of writing skills that will greatly improve their students' writing. Used widely across British Columbia and Alberta, this method has empowered thousands of students and proven to be effective for those students who struggle with writing as well as those who are gifted. Applicable for Grades 2 to 11. Contact: saugustyn@shaw.ca or phone 250 248-6434.

23-27 Parksville, BC. Summer Institute with Dr. Gordon Neufeld, Level II Week Intensive "Challenging Childhood Problems." Understanding and dealing with the challenging problems of childhood and youth: aggression, resistance, opposition-

ality, anxiety, dominance problems, bullying, compulsiveness, attachment problems, separation problems and much more. Registration fee \$450 (refreshments and course materials provided). Limited registration. For more information call Barb Witte at 250-720-2770 or e-mail: bwitte@sd70.bc.ca

27 Richmond. BCPTA Full Day Kindergarten Conference, "Doing It Right—The Primary Program Way." Keynote address by Marilyn Chapman, writer of the *Primary Program and Full Day Kindergarten Guide*. Breakout sessions by the Primary FDK Team: Colleen Politano, Kevin McKenzie, Pam Quigg, Lorraine Taylor, Brenda Boylan, David Tod, Fionna Morrison, Debbie Tobin. Conference site and hotel: Executive Airport Plaza Hotel, 7311 Westminster Hwy. Call 604-278-5555. Rates \$129 (S/D) Fee: \$150, includes breakfast/lunch/BCPTA Membership. Registrar Joy Silver: odetojoy@telus.net. Online registration in May: www.bcpta.ca

OCTOBER 2010

22 Vancouver. Trauma: The Impact of Violence, Abuse and Neglect on Children presented by the Children's Foundation. Guest Speaker Diane Benoit, MD, FRCPC, associate professor, Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto. \$125, \$100 (students), 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., includes workshops, lunch, coffee, snacks. Four Seasons Hotel, 791 West Georgia Street, Vancouver. Registration contact Dorothea Kraas, dorothea.kraas@childrens-foundation.org

22-23 Richmond. BCPTA Primary Leadership Conference Fri.: Keynote Speaker, Debbie Miller "Reading with Meaning—Teaching With Intention" a.m. & p.m. breakout session choices. Evening component: Jenn Johns & Gretchen Fletcher "New Primary Teacher (K-3) Toolkit." Sat. Mini-Conference, full-day sessions, Debbie Miller, Primary FDK team: Carole Saundry, Bonnie Davison, Conference Site: McMath Secondary, 4251 Garry Street, Richmond. Conference Hotel: Executive Airport Plaza Hotel, Richmond 3711 Westminster Hwy. Rate \$129 (S/D). Fee includes catering & BCPTA Membership: BCTF member: Fri. \$145. Sat. \$120. Two Days \$195. TOC/Student/Retiree: Fri. \$73. Sat. \$60. 2 days \$98. Non-BCTF: Fri. \$191. Sat. \$166. 2 days \$241. Fri. evening New Teacher component: \$50 (Includes a light meal). Registrar: Joy Silver: odetojoy@telus.net

22-23 Surrey. PITA Fall Conference, Featuring over 60 workshops in literacy, math, science, social studies, PE, and so on. Learn from: Adrienne Gear: Reading Power; Diana Cruchley: Writing; Mary Moody: Teaching Strategies; Liliana Lanfranchi: French strategies; Action Schools, Elaine Jaltema: Literature Circles; Ray Myrtle: Start UP Your class Successfully, and many more! Watch for details at www.pita.ca or contact Ray Myrtle president@pita.ca

Future October PSA days (BCTF procedure statement 30.A.14) 30.A. 14 That for the purposes of a province-wide PSA day, the BCTF supports the third Fri. in October as the day on which all districts hold a professional day, except in years in which Thanksgiving Monday falls in the same week, in which case the fourth Fri. would be the designated day.
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 22, 2010
PD Calendar website: bctf.ca/ProfessionalDevelopment.aspx
Additions/changes: sdrummond@bctf.ca

It's time to dump declining enrolment

By David Denyer

The story told by the minister of education never changes; "highest funding ever" coupled with a precipitous decline in enrolment, should enable boards to manage. The claim of ever-increased funding is rapidly losing its effect as boards of education throughout the province struggle to cope with setting a budget with little or no increase in funding and ever-increasing downloaded costs and inflationary pressures. Rally after rally of concerned and angry parents show clearly nobody is buying the spin. Now it's time to put enrolment decline into perspective.

Enrolment declines this year were less than had been projected. This is the front end of a likely recovery

and increase in numbers of students. In 2009–10, the government overestimated the decline in student enrolment. Enrolment did decline, but only by about half as much as expected. In September 2009, there were 3,595 more students enrolled in public schools than the number initially estimated by the ministry in the 2009–10 Operating Grants estimates.

Looking ahead to the 2010–11 school year we do not see a decline overall, but a significant increase. Two documents from the Ministry of Education paint a somewhat confusing picture but trend in the same direction. The ministry media release, "School Districts receive \$112 million in Operating Grants (March 15, 2010)," shows student enrolment increasing from 541,917

students to 544,223 students, for an increase of 2,306 students, with a note indicating this slight increase is due to the implementation of full-day Kindergarten.

The Budget and Fiscal Plan: 2010/11 to 2012/13 (p.164) shows student enrolment increasing from 555,345 FTE students in 2009–10 to 561,734 students in 2010–11 (estimated). This represents a total increase of 6,389 students. This increase is due to the 7,543 additional Kindergarten students when the full-day Kindergarten program is implemented in 2010–11, and an increase of 1,484 distributed learning (DL) students, for a total of 9,027 new students that will be partly offset by a projected decline of 2,638 Grade 1 to 12 students.

Why are the ministry media releases using a lower figure for enrolment changes, when the government's own fiscal reports using data prepared by the ministry suggest the enrolment change is

much higher?

Barry O'Neill, president of CUPE BC, writing recently in the *Georgia Straight* says the answer is political. "At a time when the province is casting about for ways of containing its deficit, fostering the idea that student enrolment is still in free-fall provides justification for giving education funding a lower priority." He goes on to say "Overstating the enrolment decline also serves the important purpose of driving down expectations within the school community...the practice undermines confidence in public schools (at a time when private school enrolment is growing). It seriously detracts from a necessary focus on the state of quasi-permanent fiscal distress facing public education and the province-wide "structural funding shortfall" boards face that now totals over \$300 million."

What is clear is that student enrolment is increasing. What is not clear is whether the 2010–11 Operating Grants allocation is intended to fund the 561,734 students listed in the Budget and Fiscal Plan, or the 544,223 students listed at the bottom of the funding tables in the ministry's media release, "School Districts receive \$112 million increase in Operating Grants (March 15, 2010)"? Either way the funding just isn't there. As Barry O'Neill says, "...it's time to come clean on school enrolment and funding in BC."

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

Rallies, Rallies, Rallies

A large number of rallies have happened over the past few weeks protesting the cuts not only to education, but also to other vital public services. Pictured here are just a few of them: Build a Better BC, Langley teachers marching along Broadway, and Vancouver teachers and parents outside the minister's office.



Let's take a stand for public education

The Daily News (Kamloops), March 26, 2010, "On the Run" column

By Susan Duncan

Education is a topic that can make people hate those with opposing views. I'm expecting to make a lot of enemies with this column.

Watching the goings on in the Kamloops-Thompson School District, in fact around the province, over the past few months was disturbing to say the least. It was an example of school boards lost in the valley of trying to be all things to all people.

It's a process that began many years ago across Canada. Parents started demanding special treatment for their children—and good on them for being advocates for their youngsters. The problem occurred when governments of all levels responded without considering the long-term impact.

Their solutions were OK when lots of children filled schools and the demands were small. Soon, though, more and more parents adopted the mindset that their children would die on the vine if they were thrown in with the masses and forced to endure what millions of children before them survived.

From this belief, private schools began to spring up across the country. Then government saw an opportunity to help its bottom line by subsidizing those schools. That devious plan drew children from the public schools where government provides full funding into private schools where only some government funding is allotted per pupil.

Before all the students in private schools in Kamloops take up their pens to extol the virtues of their schools, relax. We know you love your school.

As the exercise of public meetings in the district between November and February revealed, both students and parents have deep loyalties to their particular schools. That's a good thing.

This is a column about practicalities and a personal opinion that there is only one question to be asked when government considers education: What is best for the greater good?

Some of you will go apoplectic about that "socialist" term. But really it's just a matter of common sense.

Government has a duty to provide education for its children. That mandate should mean education officials put all the students and all the money into one pot and then develop a plan based strictly on

what would work best for the most children.

That doesn't mean every family would be forced to send their child to public school. Private schools should be free to operate as they choose, with parents covering the full cost.

The public school system is for all students. Families who decide it's not right for their child should have to do what we all do when we want something more than what is being offered. Pay for it.

And, yes, everyone pays school taxes, but that doesn't mean individual taxpayers get to decide where that money goes.

No one person gets to dictate where his or her taxes go in any other ministry. Why education?

The public school system is for all students. Families who decide it's not right for their child should have to do what we all do when we want something more than what is being offered. Pay for it.

That means government would have to pay more for public education because of additional students, but it will mean a better

system for the greater number of students.

It would also have meant some neighbourhood schools would not have had to close. Their student numbers would have been sufficient to stay afloat.

Added to the already chaotic problems within the education system are schools of choice. Governments that allowed parents to force specialty schools upon districts seriously weakened the public system.

No school should get first dibs on fine arts or science or math. That dilutes schools of talented students, teachers, and strong programs in those areas. Those courses and that style of teaching should be part of every school.

And really, how healthy is it for students to be immersed in only one aspect of society? They go to school only with students who share the same interests? Somehow that does not instill confidence that they will emerge as well-rounded people.

Of course, some students will not succeed in the public school system that I envision. They don't anyway. There will also be failures at Beattie School of the Arts, Bert Edwards Science and Technology School, St. Ann's Academy, Kamloops Christian School, and Our Lady of Perpetual Help School.

Nothing is perfect, but when it comes to education, providing the best education possible will save more children. That will only happen when governments ask that one question—what will work best for the greater number of students.

Parents who have, or think they have, gifted children don't need to worry. Gifted students succeed wherever they study.

But if those parents believe their brilliant youngster needs more attention in physics or drama outside what the public school offers, they will, sadly, have to pay for it outside of class.

Government cannot be all things to all people of all religious beliefs, of all talents, and all strengths. When they try to do that, more children lose out so fewer numbers can get what they want.

How is that fair? A strong society should be judged partly on its public education system. This province should stop following the paths of other provinces that are watering down public education.

BC could be a leader if politicians would only stand up for public education.

Susan Duncan is city editor of *The Daily News*. Her column "On the Run" appears Fridays.

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