

# TEACHER

Newsmagazine of the BC Teachers' Federation

## Public opinion supports teachers' bargaining objectives

By Nancy Knickerbocker

Here's some good news, folks! Almost nine out of ten British Columbians (87%) believe it is important that BC teachers have a contract that protects learning conditions such as class size and composition, including almost six in ten who regard such a contract as very important.

In addition, 84% of British Columbians believe it is very (57%) or somewhat (27%) important that the right to negotiate such aspects of their working lives should be restored to teachers.

These were among the extremely heartening results of a province-wide survey of adult British Columbians recently undertaken by Viewpoints Research for the BCTF.

"Here we see that parents and citizens understand that the right to full and free collective bargaining for teachers results in better learning conditions for students," said BCTF President Susan Lambert.

Between February 2 and 12, 2011, Viewpoints researchers interviewed 803 BC residents, a sufficient number to get a very accurate reading of the population. This poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.3%, 19 times out of 20.

"The BCTF often uses polling research to gain a clear understanding of public opinion on a

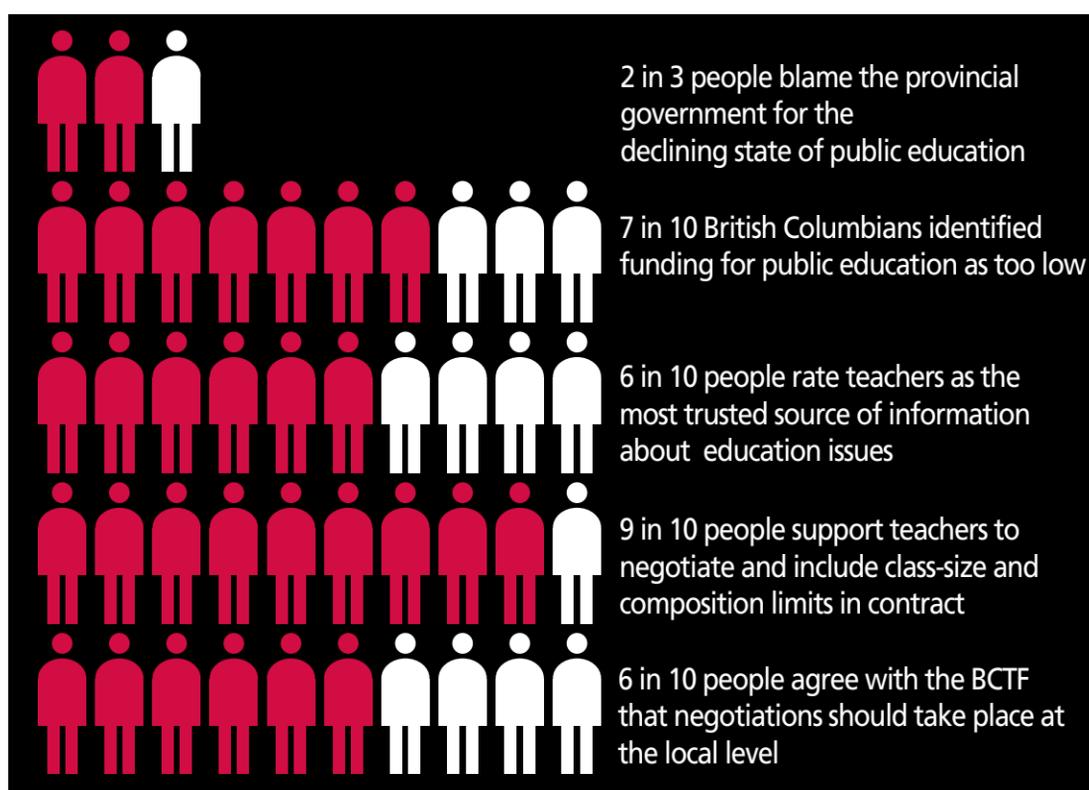
wide range of issues pertaining to public education and labour rights, and to inform our outreach to parents and the public," Lambert said. "These results show us that British Columbians understand why teachers are speaking out about the deteriorating teaching and learning conditions in our schools."

**Even more important in the minds of British Columbians is returning civility and stability to the education landscape, the survey found. Ensuring more co-operation with teachers, parents, school boards, and other education partners should be the top education priority for Premier Christy Clark's government, according to almost eight out of ten (79%) respondents.**

Four in ten British Columbians believe the quality of public schools has gotten worse (27%) or much worse (12%) in the past 10 years. Just 13% of British Columbians feel the quality of education is better now than it was 10 years ago.

Among those respondents who believe education has improved, 44% credit teachers for the improvement. Among those who believe the quality of education has gotten worse, 68% blame the provincial government.

Asked to identify the biggest problem with public education today, 28% said a lack of funding and resources. Half as many people



mentioned too many students per class or class size (14%) as being the biggest problem.

Asked specifically about education funding, seven out of ten British Columbians said they believe funding for public schools is too low. Approximately one in five (21%) think it is about right, while only 2% believe it is too high and 7% said they are unsure.

"We are deeply concerned about the impacts of a decade of under-funding on students' educational opportunities and teachers' professional morale," Lambert said. "Now we know parents and the

public are also concerned."

Another important result to note is that almost two out of three British Columbians believe there are too many students per class in BC schools (64%). Only 28% think that class size is about right, 2% think there are too few students per class, while 7% are unsure.

The study also revealed that British Columbians are concerned about cuts in services to students with special needs, and the impact of those cuts on class composition. Almost seven out of ten respondents (69%) said they are concerned about reductions in the number of

resource teachers working with students who have learning problems and need extra help.

Public school teachers continue to enjoy very high credibility and respect among the public. Almost nine out of ten British Columbians have either a very (30%) or somewhat (58%) favourable feeling about BC public school teachers.

Asked about education priorities for the new BC Premier, 70% of respondents said the government should rehire learning assistance

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BC Teachers' Federation  
100-550 West 6th Avenue  
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## Showdown in Wisconsin



A thinly disguised attempt to eviscerate labour unions and support for the Democrats in the United States, called the *Budget Repair Bill* has been signed into law by the Republican Governor of Wisconsin Scott Walker. After almost a month of deadlock, Republican senators introduced an edited version of the controversial bill, removing economic language from the original to manoeuvre

around a Democrat strategy to block it.

As of Sunday, March 13, 2011, state workers in Wisconsin, including teachers, have been stripped of their right to collectively bargain on almost every front and have been blanketed by harsh organizing restrictions.

This vicious assault has been met with an unprecedented outpouring

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## On the inside

Uncertainty prevails. A new premier has been chosen and there is the possibility of a provincial election in the near future. Over-shadowing all is the ongoing federal election. Bargaining for a new collective agreement is underway with the prospect of struggles over the split of issues, its affect on local bargaining, and the provincial government's net zero opening position. The future of the BC College of Teachers has yet to be decided and speculation continues into what "Teaching and learning in the 21st century" should look like. Attacks on the public sector continue unabated in the US with no guarantee that the contagion will not spread.

The annual general meeting of the

BCTF was held in Victoria this year and a two-page feature gives readers a sampling of the highlights, important decisions, awards, and elections.

The provincial bargaining team is introduced along with an opinion piece on the government's position.

Our series of articles on the structure and operation of the teachers' pension plan continues along with an update on changes to the CPP.

The problems and perils of technology and social media within, and outside of school are scrutinized as is the troubling issue of teachers contemplating leaving the profession in mid-career.

This issue of the newsmagazine reflects this swirl of issues and the how it affects our work and everyday lives.

## President's message



Susan Lambert

Forty-nine per cent of eligible Canadians voted in the last federal election. How can we call ourselves a democracy when a majority of our citizens refuse to participate in the

most basic of democratic responsibilities and vote?

We are very aware of our responsibility to teach students the skills, attitudes, and knowledge and encourage in them the self-confidence to be effective citizens in a democracy. This means we teach them to be critical thinkers, to engage in questioning authority, to be aware of and value the attributes of a caring and equitable society, and at the very least to participate in electing their governments.

We have a unique opportunity right now to encourage student participation in elections at so many levels. The federal election is the first. The context of this election makes it a prime opportunity for teachers to engage in the myths, debates, and tensions that swirl

around it.

For example, critical thinking questions could challenge the myth that is promoted by the press that the Conservative-Reform Coalition didn't want to go to the polls. This in the midst of the \$28 million Economic Action Plan ad campaign, the branding of the federal government as the "Harper government," and the "attack" ads. Another topic to challenge students' analysis of current policies is the purchase of fighter jets. What is Canada's role on the world stage? What forces influenced the shift that Harper has made in our international presence from one of peacekeeper to one of active military intervention? What is happening in Libya and what is our responsibility there? Canada's rejection of the *Kyoto Accord* is also

controversial. What would our students think are the responsibilities of national governments with respect to climate change? All these topics and so many more should be seen as opportunities to engage students in the critical thinking they need to practise and hone, if they are to develop into responsible citizens in the future.

The second myth many of the press would have us believe is that we suffer from voter fatigue. As if democracy is something we have to take in small doses or it will exhaust us. Rubbish. Rather than portraying voting as a troublesome burden we should be characterizing elections as exciting and participatory. Young people especially, should view voting as an opportunity to express their views and influence change.

As teachers, we should model responsible citizenship for our students. Our obligation right now is to examine the record of the current federal government, especially with respect to policies that impact the students in our schools. We were on the cusp of a national childcare program when this government won its first minority. The *Kelowna Accord* was a protocol agreement that would have paved the way to addressing the poverty and institutional racism faced by our Aboriginal peoples. What will a further reduction of corporate taxes mean for transfer payments and provincial budgets?

This federal election is our chance to shape a federal government that has as its priority, the welfare of all Canadian citizens.

## Readers write

### Corporate infiltration

I read with interest "To Market to market" by Oslem Sensoy (*Teacher*, March 2011) wherein she describes the infiltration of corporate sponsors into our cash-strapped schools.

Readers may be interested to know of Juliet Schor's book, *Born to Buy*, published in 2004. Schor chronicles the insidious methods used by marketing companies to reach an ever-younger age group of consumers. In fact, her interviews with marketing insiders reveal how companies are not only reaching the young but developing them as consumers and life-long brand loyalists.

Parents and teachers, fortunate enough to listen to Juliet Schor at past public education conference sessions, will remember her inspirational and cautionary message. Parents and teachers may wish to encourage their PAC to book the parent presentation the BCTF offers titled, "Born to Buy," based on Schor's work. She happily lent her book's title to this informative presentation.

**Sylvia Bishop**  
Delta

### Teacher buy-in critical

Regarding "Here we go again" (*Teacher*, Jan./Feb. 2011).

Many of us feel that the Year 2000 Program would have resulted in best practice pedagogy. Implementation failure was indeed a costly nightmare and may even have led to the current "accountability" agenda and ministerial reluctance to support "the creativity of hands-on teaching methodology" desired by Ken Abramson and others.

While adequate funding is a prerequisite for success, teacher buy-in (unfortunately insufficient for the Year 2000 Program implementation) is critical.

**Neil McAllister**  
Vancouver

### 24-hour Teacher

Instead of calling this magazine *Teacher*, I think it should be called *Preaching to the Choir*. The money and effort used to create this noble publication should not be spent on distribution to teachers and then hopefully trickled down to parents and the rest of the public. Instead, the magazine should be aggressively distributed publicly; perhaps hiring people to hand out at Skytrain stations like the Pattison Group does with its *24 Hour* newspaper, could be an option.

I strongly believe that we need to reach the public more and gain their support, if we are to have success with public education in this province.

**Jacob Larsen**  
Burnaby

### Pension matters

All teachers, school administrators, and BCTF administrators pay into the same pension fund, but not everyone draws out a pension in proportion to the amount they pay into the fund.

Pensions are based on the best five years of salary. The amount we collect as a pension is determined by the compounding effect of the contributions made for the duration of our careers.

However, teachers who become administrators or BCTF administra-

tors receive a huge pension increase without making an equivalent increase in their pension contributions.

For example: A teacher, who becomes a vice-principal five years prior to retiring, receives a pay raise of approximately \$20,000 per year. During these last five years of work, the VP will contribute, with interest, approximately an additional \$29,000 into the pension plan. This figure includes the school board's contribution as well.

This small, extra contribution makes this vice-principal eligible to collect 70% of their \$20,000 pay raise for their entire retirement. This amounts to \$14,000 per year plus indexing.

Therefore, the vice-principal has totally withdrawn his additional contributions to the pension plan in approximately the first 2.5 years. From that point forward, teachers are subsidizing this VP's pension. If the VP, in this example, lives the expected 25 years on pension, he will withdraw \$425,000 (including indexing) more out of the pension plan than he has contributed! Even if this VP works 10 years as a VP, he will withdraw his entire contribution in about six years of retirement. From that point, their pension is subsidized by the contributions of teachers.

The huge amount teachers contribute to subsidize the pensions of administrators and BCTF administrators is alarming and unfair. Principals, assistant superintendents, and superintendents are double and triple the subsidy of a vice-principal.

This inequity is a major reason why our contributions have

increased from 6.5% in 1998 to over 12% in 2010. Almost one of every eight dollars earned now goes to pension payments. (By contrast, CUPE staff still pays just 7%). This July, our pension contribution increase negated the entire final raise of the five-year contract. With this inequity, will our contribution have to increase to 15% and 20%?

To verify these inequities for school administrators, you can ask for the SOFI numbers (Statement of Financial Information), a public document. See link: <http://tinyurl.com/3lj3ke2> for the annuity calculator.

**Miles Mumford**  
Delta

*[Editor's note: The incorrect assumptions, upon which the above letter is based, are addressed at [bctf.ca/SalaryAndBenefits.aspx?id=4780](http://bctf.ca/SalaryAndBenefits.aspx?id=4780).*

*There has been extensive correspondence between Miles Mumford, BCTF staff, and two of the table officers culminating in a special meeting with the Delta Teachers' Association. Jim Iker (BCTF first vice-president), Rob Taylor (BCTF staff person responsible for pensions), and Linda Watson (member of the Teachers' Pension Plan Board of Trustees) were in attendance.*

*Members are reminded that the Teacher newsmagazine is running a four-part series entitled "Dignity in Retirement" that examines in detail, the structure and operation of the teachers' pension plan. Part three is included in this edition on page 14. Part one was printed in Jan./Feb. 2011 and part two appeared in March 2011.]*

### The Finnish Miracle

In the March edition of *Teacher*, we printed "Le miracle finlandais," by Moh Chelali. We had requests for an English translation.

You can find the English translation on our website at: [bctf.ca/publications/NewsMagArticle.aspx?id=22699](http://bctf.ca/publications/NewsMagArticle.aspx?id=22699)

### Oops...

In the March edition of *Teacher*, we incorrectly reported two authorships of articles.

"The right to public education," on page 4, was written by Joanna Larson (president of BCTF local 52, Prince Rupert) and Karen Bernath.

On page 12, "To market to market" was written by Jane Turner, BCTF assistant director, Professional and Social Issues Division.

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Newsmagazine of the BC Teachers' Federation  
100-550 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5Z 4P2  
604-871-2283, toll free 1-800-663-9163, Fax 604-871-2289  
E-mail: [newsomag@bctf.ca](mailto:newsomag@bctf.ca) Web: [bctf.ca/newsomag](http://bctf.ca/newsomag)

**Editor**  
David Denyer

**Assistant editor**  
Kathleen Smith

**Design consultant**  
Betty Sommerville

**Copy editor**  
Vanessa Terrell

**Staff writers**  
David Denyer  
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## BCTF is a living-wage employer

*Working for a Living Wage* is an initiative launched in 2008 that seeks to tackle poverty and the plight of low-income workers by paying wages that adequately meet the costs of a basic standard of living for a two-parent family (both of whom are working) with two children. In an update, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) has calculated for 2010 that each parent would need to earn \$18.17 an hour in Metro Vancouver.

Employers, both public and private, are being urged to make a commitment to provide work that ensures families a basic level of economic security, not keep them in poverty. At present the story of child poverty is very much a story of low wages. More than half of BC's poor children (55.7%) live in families where at least one adult has a full-time, full-year job.

At the winter representative assembly, the BCTF gained recognition, and was awarded certification, as a living-wage employer. In order to be certified as a living-wage employer, the BCTF had to meet certain criteria:

- All employees of the BCTF must be paid the current living-wage rate for Metro Vancouver (currently \$18.17 an hour).
- Externally contracted staff providing services to the BCTF in excess of 120 hours of labour per year should also be paid a living wage.

The living wage is calculated annually to take into account living expense changes and changes to government transfers and deductions. Living wage employers are asked to re-certify every two years based on the existing living wage figure at that time.

The BCTF is currently in the process of reviewing any new contracts for services and contracts that are up for renewal. We will be asking vendors to include a living-wage clause in these contracts. The goal is to influence organizations, which provide services to the BCTF, to become living-wage employers.

Further information and living-wage calculations for other communities can be found at the CCPA website: [www.policyalternatives.ca/livingwage2010](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/livingwage2010).

- David Denyer

## POLLING from page 1

and resource teachers, school counsellors, teacher-librarians, and ESL specialists.

Even more important in the minds of British Columbians is returning civility and stability to the education landscape, the survey found. Ensuring more co-operation

**The poll also showed strong support for local bargaining. Almost six in ten British Columbians agree with the BCTF's position that negotiations should take place between local teachers' associations and school boards because it will "mean that more unique solutions to local issues can be developed instead of relying on blanket solutions for the whole province."**

with teachers, parents, school boards, and other education partners should be the top education priority for Premier Christy Clark's government, according to almost eight out of ten (79%) respondents.

Respondents also identified as high priority restoring funding to programs to improve graduation rates among Aboriginal students (61%) and stopping school closures (54%).

The survey found that a majority (58%) of British Columbians support teachers' right to strike, with one-

quarter strongly supporting this right.

The poll also showed strong support for local bargaining. Almost six in ten British Columbians agree with the BCTF's position that negotiations should take place between local teachers' associations and school boards because it will "mean that more unique solutions to local issues can be developed instead of relying on blanket solutions for the whole province."

Thirty-six percent agree with the government's position that "negotiations should take place at the provincial level because education is provincially funded and dealing with issues in this way will ensure equality for students across the province." Four percent of respondents said it depends, while 3% are unsure what they think.

The survey also asked British Columbians about BC teachers' salaries in comparison to teachers in other provinces. Almost two out of three respondents agree (63%) that teachers in BC should move from eighth-highest, back to third-highest paid in Canada. Almost three in ten (28%) disagree that salaries should increase to that level, while approximately one in ten (9%) are not sure.

Nancy Knickerbocker is the BCTF's media relations officer.

For detailed graphs illustrating these results, go to: [bctf.ca/BargainingAndContracts.aspx?id=21655](http://bctf.ca/BargainingAndContracts.aspx?id=21655).

## WISCONSIN from page 1

of collective rage including daily rallies, and sleep-ins inside the state capitol building, culminating in a massive demonstration on Saturday, March 12.

The BCTF has donated \$20,000 to the teachers of Wisconsin and on March 10, a decision was made to send BCTF President Susan Lambert and First Vice-president Jim Iker to Madison to attend the rally in solidarity.

By mid-afternoon there were more than 100,000 people from all walks of life—farmers, correction officers, municipal workers, police, nurses, doctors, teachers, small business owners, and religious leaders. The highlight of the farmer's rally, said Lambert, was the

cows, udders forward, spelling out solidarity.

"We were able to go inside the State Capitol where hundreds more demonstrators were singing in the main rotunda. It is hard to describe the massive turnout. The entire square and all the streets leading into it were jam-packed."

Lambert and Iker met with Mary Bell (president of the 98,000-member Wisconsin Educators' Association) and Betsy Kippers, vice-president, along with many other teacher and labour leaders who expressed sincere appreciation for them coming.

Clearly this is a defining moment in labour history in the US that may well influence some political attitudes in Canada and elsewhere.

There are plans to challenge the legality of the bill in Wisconsin and a statewide effort is under way to recall several Republican senators and the governor. As Susan Lambert has said in her description of events: "We need to continue to support these people and inform teachers of the critical struggle between the rights of workers to organize into unions and collectively bargain wages and working conditions vs the unconstrained ability of the rich and powerful to continue to structure financial and governance systems to rob the poor."

—David Denyer



# Who is writing nasty things about us at the college?

By Kelly Shields and Jane Turner

An anonymous article which follows on the heels of College of Teachers' Registrar Kit Krieger's editorial in the latest issue of the BCCT magazine presents a diatribe against the BCTF and ultimately teachers themselves. Under the guise of a summary of a report on the College of Teachers commissioned by former Minister Margaret MacDiarmid's appointee Don Avison, the article repeats the shoddy scholarship of the original report.

In a rather confused leap of logic, the unnamed author equates teacher membership in a "self-regulating" college with professional standing. In addition, teachers' competence is questioned. The article calls into disrepute the quality of public school teaching in BC as a whole. These aspersions are unwarranted and unsubstantiated and sound like the squawks of someone with an axe to grind.

Teachers do not get their validation as professionals from belonging to the college. By government decree, public school teachers became members of a college in 1987. Teachers were professionals before this time and will remain so regardless of whether the college continues to exist. By definition, teaching is a profession and those in it are professionals. One might ask if our colleagues in other provinces and territories across the country, save Ontario, are now to be deemed unprofessional, as they do not work under the auspices of a college?

Researchers Anne Phelan (UBC) and Alice Pitt (OISE) in their work on teachers' professional autonomy note that teachers are working in a "context of heightened—and often shrill—demands for public accountability in an atmosphere of damaged trust between teachers and the public." (*Paradoxes of Autonomy in Professional Life: A Research Problem*, ISSN 1358-684X,

print/ISSN 1469-3583 online, 2008)

The *TC Magazine* article is an example of how the public trust in teachers and the profession is being further damaged. While no real

**Teachers do not get their validation as professionals from belonging to the college. By government decree, public school teachers became members of a college in 1987. Teachers were professionals before this time and will remain so regardless of whether the college continues to exist.**

evidence is cited in the article for the sweeping pronouncements made against teachers' professionalism, the conclusion the reader is meant to reach is that without a college controlling all aspects of teachers' lives, there can be no professional status attachment.

As professionals, teachers put the interest of students ahead of the interests of the profession and themselves. Long before there was a college, teachers swore an oath to uphold their *Code of Ethics* saying aloud, along with other statements from the code:

- The teacher speaks and acts toward students with respect and dignity, and deals judiciously with them, always mindful of their individual rights and sensibilities.
- The teacher recognizes that a privileged relationship with students exists and refrains from exploiting that relationship for material, ideological, or other advantage.

Reviewing teachers' professionalism and their professional autonomy, authors Phelan and Pitt write, "Teaching involves placing one's autonomy at the service of the best interests of children." (2008). They continue to state that "Autonomy is also foundational to the making and development of a profession." (p.

190). Had Avison or the unnamed author of the *TC* article consulted the work of Drs. Phelan and Pitt, they might have been able to test their claims against the academic research and found them as wanting as we do.

Instead, teachers and the public have to endure yet another round of damaging aspersions against both our professionalism and our competence.

Teachers in British Columbia are highly trained and skilled, committed to ensuring that the students in our schools receive the highest quality of education we can provide within the system we teach. As representatives of the teachers in

the public schools of BC, we are open to discuss how we can ensure that teacher training and certification are effective and comprehensive. We are open to discuss how we can best ensure that members who transgress boundaries are disciplined. We are open to working with those who also have the best interests of students at their core.

We are not open to sitting by when agencies criticize teachers from an unfounded and spurious position.

Kelly Shields and Jane Turner are assistant directors, BCTF Professional and Social Issues Division.

## Looking back

### 70 years ago

Is your luncheon room attractive? Cover the tables with cream or white oilcloth. Put bright paper curtains to the windows. Many of the stationery stores have figured crepe paper with autumn leaves, Hallowe'en, Christmas, Valentine and Easter designs as well as flowers and butterflies. While fresh flowers are plentiful, ask for donations for the tables. Even the boys will be glad to donate, though they may not be willing to carry them to school. Radio programmes or phonograph records would delight the small listeners. To make the lunch hour really enjoyable, serve piping hot cocoa. A teacher who gently corrects outstanding breaches of table etiquette can greatly improve the social atmosphere of the lunch room.

— April 1941, *The BC Teacher*

### 50 years ago

What is the future of Grade 13? The Chant Commission has recommended that facilities for offering a full Grade 13 course be provided as quickly as possible throughout the

public school system. The Commission states, "A considerable percentage of the pupils who enter university after completing Grade 12 fail in the first year. It was evident that a number of them had not reached a level of maturity that would enable them to assume responsibility for doing their own work without the closer supervision that is given in the secondary schools. Many young people mature rapidly during this stage of their development, and the additional year in Grade 13, particularly if living at home, would help them to become better prepared to meet the exacting demands of university study."

— April 1961, *The BC Teacher*

### 30 years ago

Teachers' ability to influence the education system is diminishing. The ministry is exerting centralized control over curriculum, textbooks, testing of students and assessment of school programs. School boards are "accountability conscious" and impose restrictions through administrators that further erode the autonomy of teachers. What

## College elections

The following are the BCTF endorsed candidates for the upcoming BC College of Teachers elections:

Zone 1—North Coast

Cathy Lambright

Zone 3—South Central

Lynda Nicholson

Zone 8—Lower Mainland East

Henry Thiessen

Zone 10—Lower Mainland West

Pat Gudlaugson

The ballots will be mailed out by the BCCT on April 29 and ballots must be received by the college before May 27 at 4:30 p.m.

results is a body of teachers who feel helpless in controlling their working lives. Despite the stressful conditions, teachers receive little support for their efforts. Instead, they are blamed for all the ills of the education system.

— March–April 1981, *The BC Teacher*

### 10 years ago

Jim Sinclair, president of the B.C. Federation of Labour, referred to the recent Alberta election, in which voters returned Premier Ralph Klein with a huge majority even though education and healthcare funding have been slashed. But the direction Gordon Campbell is taking as he heads to the polls "has to strike fear into anyone who cares about education in this province," Sinclair said. "In Gordon's world, we'll have charter schools and privatization under the guise of choice. In Gordon's world, education workers have no right to strike."

— April 2001, *Teacher* newsmagazine

Compiled by Chris Bocking, Keating Elementary School, Saanich

# The deadly, unforeseen consequences of Canada's widening inequality

By Murray Dobbin

Last May, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) put out figures comparing infant mortality rates in countries around the world. Perhaps the biggest story of all the figures were those attributed to Canada. This country has always boasted of its social stats—life expectancy, infant mortality, university graduates, and other measures of our success as a nation.

But not this time.

The numbers were “shocking,” a word used by half a dozen prominent commentators, including the Conference Board of Canada. We had slipped from 6th place in the world to 31st out of 40, a virtually unprecedented fall for any country. We are now just above Poland and Hungary, with 5.1 deaths per 1,000 live births of infants less than one year of age.

The numbers prompted the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada to push for a national birthing strategy. Others were convinced it was how Canada deals with premature births.

But the answer might lie elsewhere, and a recent book on the deadly and profound consequences of income inequality sheds light on just what has gone wrong in Canada. *The Spirit Level*, by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, brings to bear some of the most thorough scientific studies on the effects of economic inequality and it has the potential to completely transform our attitude toward inequality.

## Rise of the top 1%

What gives it even more potential to change the way we think about issues like infant mortality is a recent study, “The Rise of Canada's Richest 1%” – the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) authored by senior economist Armine Yalnizyan. The CCPA study

**The CCPA study reveals that this group of Canada's wealthiest citizens took home almost a third of all income growth during the decade from 1997 to 2007. According to Yalnizyan: “That's a bigger piece of the action than any other generation of rich Canadians has taken. The last time Canada's elite held so much of the nation's income in their hands was in the 1920s.”**

reveals that this group of Canada's wealthiest citizens took home almost a third of all income growth during the decade from 1997 to 2007. According to Yalnizyan: “That's a bigger piece of the action than any other generation of rich Canadians has taken. The last time Canada's elite held so much of the nation's income in their hands was in the 1920s.” The top 1% pocketed 13.8% of all personal income by 2007, levels virtually identical to the mid-1920s.

The richer you are, the richer you get. According to the study: “The richest 1% has seen its share of total income double, the richest 0.1% has seen its share almost triple, and the richest 0.01% has seen its share more than quintuple since the late 1970s.”

We have come full circle since the mid-1920s. During the post-war decades of our so-called golden age (economic growth and the growth of democratic government through progressive taxation), the share of the richest 1% steadily declined, until it reached 7.7% in 1977. Then the wealthy's share started its upward climb again, as government began to impose free-market policies.

Part of the picture is the extraordinary tax cuts that the wealthiest Canadians have enjoyed since the early 1980s. Between 1948 (when top marginal rates were as high as 80%) and 2000, the tax rate on the wealthy has been cut in half, according to Yalnizyan. And since then, there have been two additional sets of massive tax cuts—Paul Martin's in 2000 and the Harper Conservatives in 2007. “Between 1990 and 2005, the richest 1% experienced twice the reduction in taxes as the average Canadian.” By 2005, taking all taxes into account, the richest 1% of taxpayers was taxed at a slightly lower rate than the poorest 10%.

While the rich and super-rich have been getting wealthier, the middle and working classes have been going in the opposite direction. A 2008 Statscan study revealed that median earnings of full-time employees in Canada were completely flat from 1980 to 2005. In that 25-year period, the income of the richest fifth of Canadians grew 16.4%, while the poorest fifth saw their real earnings decline by 20.6%.

The authors of *The Spirit Level* present compelling evidence that income inequality has an impact on virtually all kinds of statistics that measure a nation's success. The chapter titles tell the story—mental health and drug use, physical health and life expectancy, obesity, educational performance, teen births, violence, imprisonment and punishment, social mobility—all correlate to how equal incomes are in a given country.

And these are the results of inequality within a nation—not between nations. Less wealthy societies that are more equal do

better. Indeed, when the World Wildlife Fund matched the UN Human Development Index with a measure of ecological sustainability, only Cuba, nominally a very poor country, made the grade.

In more equal societies, people work less (workers in Canada and the US work hundreds of hours more a year than their counterparts in more-equal northern European countries) because their more equal incomes are adequate to their needs. The most equal societies are also the most innovative (the US and Canada are at the bottom amongst developed nations in terms of patents per million population). There is also direct correlation between equality and a high percentage of unionized workers. Unionization rates in Canada have declined by nearly half since the 1960s.

What is perhaps most disturbing about this story is that we know that income much beyond that needed for basic comforts does not bring happiness. *The Spirit Level* cites a study that demonstrates we pursue higher income for status reasons, not happiness. “People were asked to say whether they'd prefer to be less well-off than others in a rich society, or have a much lower income in a poorer society

**A 2008 Statscan study revealed that median earnings of full-time employees in Canada were completely flat from 1980 to 2005. In that 25-year period, the income of the richest fifth of Canadians grew 16.4%, while the poorest fifth saw their real earnings decline by 20.6%.**

but be better off than others. Fifty per cent of participants thought they would trade as much as half their real income if they could live in a society in which they would be better off than others.”

In a US survey, participants were asked to look at three unidentified pie charts with different divisions of wealth going to 20% chunks of the population. One chart showed wealth distributed equally, another showed the actual US division, and a third showed the Swedish reality. When asked which their ideal chart was, fully 92% of Americans chose the Swedish model. In Sweden, the wealthiest 20% own just 32% of the wealth, compared to the US, where they hold 84%.

These surveys suggest that even the wealthy think we should be more equal. If so, who is to blame for this appalling and destructive trend? If it's just ideology, and I suspect that's a big part of the explanation, then surely we are imaginative enough to get beyond it and decide that we want a more equal society. And fewer infants dying unnecessary deaths.

*Murray Dobbin is a BC-based writer and commentator on social, economic, and political issues.*



## MyBCTF, member-only portal goes live April 18

By Geoff Peters

A demonstration of the portal was provided to AGM delegates in March.

Members will have access to:

- timely bargaining updates
- Advantage program information
- collective agreements
- interactive tools, including discussion groups
- easy registration for conferences and meetings
- updating of personal information
- targeted information based on your union role.

During our communications audit, many members asked for a secure member portal, more use of new electronic tools, and reduced paper use.

Details about sign-on procedures will be distributed starting in April, using all available internal communication vehicles.

### First time sign on

1. At [bctf.ca](http://bctf.ca), click on “BCTF Members Only” tab.
2. At sign-in page, (“BCTF member portal”) click “First time here? Sign up now.”
3. Enter BCTF member number (if known) or enter your name, school district number, and your school district employee number.
4. Choose a password.
5. Record/remember your BCTF member number and password!
6. Navigate the site and update your personal information. (If there are problems signing on, e-mail [portal@bctf.ca](mailto:portal@bctf.ca) or call 604-871-2119 or toll free 1-800-663-9163, ext. 2119.
7. Forgot your password or login ID? Click on “Forgot your login?” or “Forgot your password?”

*Geoff Peters is director of the BCTF Communications and Campaigns Division.*

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## Meet your bargaining team

Susan Lambert, president of the BCTF, is pleased to introduce your provincial bargaining team. Susan herself is part of that team and needs little introduction. She has an extensive teaching background in special education and as a teacher-librarian, and has served as a staff-person and elected officer in the BCTF for a number of years. "This is a strong team representative of all members and dedicated to the task of securing a strong collective agreement."



**Gabriel Bureau**

I have been teaching French and socials studies in Prince Rupert since 1989. Prior to this, I taught briefly in Quebec and Alberta.

I put my name forward for the provincial bargaining team as I strongly believe it is important to have teachers from outside the

Lower Mainland on the team. We have, in the Northwest, needs that have not been addressed for almost 20 years. I believe I can also represent francophone teachers, as we are often isolated in our locals. I am grateful to the BCTF Executive Committee for selecting me, and I am looking forward to working with the rest of the team to ensure we are getting the collective agreement we deserve.



**Kathy Couch**

I grew up in Telkwa, BC and am now living in Nelson. I belong to Local 7 (Nelson), which is one of the two locals in SD 8 (Kootenay Lake).

I started teaching in Prince Rupert as a Kindergarten teacher and moved to Nelson where I taught Grade 1 and 2 (in a now closed school) until my children arrived, at which time I took a 12-year hiatus from teaching. Upon my return, I signed up as a TTOC and have taught in nearly every school and grade, at one time or another, in our side of the district.

I have been on our local executive, serving in a number of capacities. Although, I am currently the local representative and political action chairperson, I have also served as secretary and local elections contact.

I am inspired by the hard work of those colleagues who, in the early 1990s, grew our four- or five-page contract to a full collective agree-

ment of nearly 100 pages. We must honour that accomplishment by continuing to make improvements for all of our members.



**Tara Ehrcke**

I am a teacher in the Greater Victoria School District. I teach secondary level math and information technology and have been teaching in Victoria for eight years.

I am currently serving as president of the GVTA. Prior to this year, I served in the position of contract chair, social justice chair, member-at-large, and treasurer on the GVTA executive. For three years, I was a member of the BCTF Professional Issues Advisory Committee and have attended many BCTF Annual General Meetings.

I was motivated to become a member of the provincial bargaining team to ensure that the team represents the aspirations of teachers. I believe teachers should be able to teach in an environment of respect and dignity and with working conditions that enable teachers to experience the joy and love of teaching and learning, not the exhaustion of burn out. I strongly support the move toward local bargaining and greater involvement of members directly in the bargaining processes.



**Jim Iker**

- Elementary teacher, learning assistance, counselling
- past president of the Burns Lake District Teacher Union
- chief negotiator—all three rounds of local bargaining team in 1995, 1998, and 2006.

My passion for and experience in both local and provincial bargaining will be important for our bargaining team as together we try to achieve a renegotiated split of issues to enable more meaningful local bargaining, and to secure much-needed improvements in our benefits, prep time, and salaries. We must also look for ways to address class size and composition and learning specialist ratios in every school.



**Bill MacFarlane**

I am the president of local 19, the Revelstoke Teachers' Association. I am in my 34th year of teaching (I taught Grades 2-7 for 28 years and I am currently in my sixth year as local president.

I have served in various roles on

my local executive including LP, LR, bargaining chair, and PD chair. I have attended close to 30 AGMs and currently serve as the AGM nominating chairperson. I also am a member of the Working and Learning Conditions/Bargaining Advisory Committee.

I was encouraged to apply for the team by a number of colleagues and I look forward to being a part of the team that will meet the challenge of bargaining the best collective agreement possible for the teachers of BC.



**Chris Stewart**

My traditional name is *Galksi' Gibaykwhl Sook'*-Wilps Ksim Xsaan from the Nisga'a Nation and my English name is Chris Stewart.

I am very excited to be working with amazing colleagues. We are from very diverse backgrounds committed to achieve significant improvements to our collective agreements. It is also very exciting that BCTF local teacher unions are seeking improvements to their local agreements.

I am currently a member-at-large on the BCTF Executive Committee.

I am a teacher-counsellor for a large inner-city secondary school in Vancouver. I am on our local teacher union executive (VSTA) as a member-at-large.

I am committed to do the work necessary to bring a collective agreement to our membership with substantial change for the better.

## Why I believe the BC government wage freeze is indefensible

By Tara Ehrcke

In the wake of teachers expressing their intention to negotiate a fair and reasonable salary increase, commensurate with what teachers earn in other provinces, came a litany of "excuses" from government. These are almost always predicated on the BC government's "net zero" mandate—a wage freeze for the public sector.

To defend the government's position, newly minted Minister of Education George Abbott had this to say: "net zero is the order of the day" (as reported in the *Globe and Mail*). How enlightening. My question is: WHY?

I am firmly opposed to accepting a net zero contract and zero wage increase. Here are my reasons.

### It is a pay cut

Inflation is running at about 3%. This means that a 0% increase amounts to a pay cut for teachers. Zero over two years would be a 6% pay cut. And we would likely never make that up (it being very rare to bargain raises significantly above current inflationary pressures).

### Teachers already took a pay cut in the last decade

In the 10 years of Liberal government, the CPI increases (which are actually below inflation, as they do not include fuel increases, for example) have been 25% and teacher salary increases have been 21%. So we have already taken a 4% pay cut.

### Public sector workers already took a pay cut in the last decade

While inflation ran at 25%, public sector increases were on average 17%. Private sector increases kept

pace with inflation. While teachers did better than other public sector workers, they are still behind their private sector colleagues. If public/private sector equity is a consideration, we are behind and need to catch up.

The government likes to argue that the net zero mandate needs to be applied fairly across the public sector. Yet that same government provided 3% increases to nurses, breaking it's own rule. When asked why, the PSEC chair simply said the nurses "were lucky". Many public sector unions have yet to settle and many, like the teachers, don't believe the net zero mandate is fair. The government should eliminate the mandate and treat public sector workers fairly.

### MLAs gave themselves 29-54% increases

In 2007, the Liberals gave MLAs an increase of 29%, with 54% for the premier (<http://tinyurl.com/4dn9cbk>).

Exactly how do they justify "net zero" for the rest of us if they are deserving of so much more? Even spread over four years, this amounts to 7.25% per year, all front loaded, while every other public sector worker was expected to live with "net zero."

If they were so concerned about finances come the recession in 2008, surely they should be paying their fare share with a wage rollback? They did that to healthcare workers. Are politicians the only public servants who deserve increases?

The hypocrisy is overwhelming.

### BC is not in a recession

The "net zero" mandate was brought in immediately after the



recession of 2008. But BC has had reasonably positive economic growth in the last year (above 2.5% in 2010 with similar projections for 2011). A two-year-old recession is not a justification for a wage freeze now. Even CEO's project four years of solid growth (<http://tinyurl.com/494eayz>).

This fact has been recognized by Ontario arbitrators who have refused to uphold Ontario's wage freeze and instead awarded wage increases in accord with inflation and private sector increases. If the argument is that public sector employees need to be subject to market forces, then government bargaining positions need to change to be in accord with current realities—not those of two years ago.

### Teachers are working harder and longer

The stripping of the collective agreement in 2002 had a tremendous impact on teachers' workload. Combined with budget pressures on local boards, the expectations on teachers have risen dramatically. Not only do teachers have incredibly challenging classes to teach, we

also read/write/ implement more IEPs, attend more meetings, call more parents, do more filing/paperwork. The average teacher is now working 49 hours per week and 10% of teachers are working 60 hours (as reported in the 2009 BCTF study on teacher work-life).

### Low wages impact the teaching profession

Countries with excellent education systems, such as Finland, consistently point out that one aspect is the respect and treatment of the teaching profession. This includes high educational standards, and also higher wages. If we want the most capable to enter the profession, it must be one worth pursuing—both in terms of job satisfaction as well as remuneration. Currently, BC teachers are eighth amongst provinces for wage levels. Yet BC is one of the most expensive places to live. A teacher near the border with Alberta will be earning upwards of \$10,000 less than their counterpart just across the provincial border. BC will lose excellent teachers if this wage discrepancy continues.

### The government can afford it

Despite the rhetoric, this government is all about priorities, not belt tightening. There was little discussion of afford-ability when first a 25% tax cut and then the aborted 15% tax cut was introduced. Or what about the \$1 billion for the Olympics? The BC stadium roof? From contract stripping, to back to work legislation, to the zero wage mandate, this government has attacked public sector workers. This is an ideological attack. It is not based on reason, finances or good government.

### The government can change it

There is no wage control legislation. What there is, is simply the "net zero mandate." It is time for the government to review this unfair practice just as it did the minimum wage and gaming grants. There is no reason to stick stubbornly to an unfair policy.

Tara Ehrcke is president, Greater Victoria Teachers' Association, and author of *Staffroom Confidential* at <http://staffroom-confidential.blogspot.com>. Follow me on twitter: @taraehrcke.

# It's time to pull the plug on the Fraser Institute's skewed rankings

By Noel Herron

"Bountiful school rated among the best in BC" was the attention-grabbing and, to many, shocking headline in *The Province* newspaper in early February when the Fraser Institute announced its 2011 ranking of the province's 875 elementary schools.

It certainly cast doubts once again on the legitimacy of the Fraser Institute's (FI) annual rankings and in the process, despite denials, embarrassed this conservative organization.

Peter Cowley, the FI's director, responding to a blizzard of questions about the bizarre Bountiful bounce, characterized the FSA tests as "a reasonable test of the curriculum expectations that the ministry of education sets for three subject areas in two grades." He went on to say, "You get the measure (of the FSA test results) and let the chips fall where they may."

But the chips did not exactly fall the way Cowley wanted.

In some school districts, participation has fallen to less than 50% and in one Vancouver school alone not a single child participated in FSA testing this year.

Critics such as Jane Friesen, director of Simon Fraser's Center for Education Research and Policy, commenting on the Bountiful bounce to the top in rankings noted that, "...we have to be careful not to interpret those results as a measure of the effectiveness of schools and I think that is where the real issue comes in."

Susan Lambert, BCTF president, flatly labelled the Fraser ratings as "worthless," adding "the Bountiful school (in question) has failed to live up to provincial standards for teaching and curriculum."

Once again the methodological manipulation of FSA tests by the Fraser Institute has come under assault this time from UBC's Donald Gutstein when he writes that the institute's ranking formula for schools "doesn't use the FSA data directly but weighs the indicators. The average FSA scores for each of the reading, writing, and numeracy tests for each of the two grades (Grades 4 and 7)—six tests in total—are allotted a possible 7.5%, for a total of 45% of the overall rating." The prominence given some variables over others, while ignoring factors such as socio-economic data, ethnicity, ESL, disability, and geographic location underline the misuse of FSA data.

Over the past decade, both the

technical validity and reliability of the FSA tests (loosely characterized as standardized) were sharply criticized not just by teachers but by individual principals, superintendents, academics, and school trustees. These challenges are now accelerating with opposition politicians joining in.

The 2011 FI's rankings, coming as they did in the centre of leadership races of BC's two major political parties, drew the attention of candidates from both sides of the political spectrum—Liberal Moira Stilwell called for the abolition of the FSA tests entirely with the NDP's Adrian Dix questioning the usefulness of the FI's rankings. At a late March NDP leadership forum on education, in Surrey, all five leadership candidates called for a reinvestment in K-12 education and

**The diminishing legitimacy of FSA testing and the escalating controversy with each passing year of FI province-wide rankings, underline the fact that there is now a pressing need for a provincial dialogue on this issue.**

it is doubtful if the current FSA/FI linkage would survive under an NDP government.

Two NDP leadership candidates specifically referred to their visits to Roosevelt Park Elementary School in the Prince Rupert School District—the disadvantaged school with a high poverty rate that ranked dead last in the FI listing. Tellingly, the CBC did a follow-up program on this school and gave it a very positive rating.

Adding to the uproar was the welcome call by the BC Principals' and Vice Principals' Association (BCPVPA) for the dropping of the FSA tests completely. Newly elected association president, Jameel Aziz noted that the FSA's assessments have been undermined by the FI's "misuse" of the results to rank schools. He added, "It's time for the FSA to be replaced with another standardized measure that does not have the political baggage or rhetoric around it."

This call stemmed mostly from the annual political battle on the

administration of the tests as the number of pupils taking tests dwindled and principals often found themselves caught in a local cross fire.

At least three Liberal education ministers (of the seven we have had since 2001) have indicated "serious" misgivings about the FI's rankings but tellingly have done nothing about it.

On the one hand, some Liberal ministers acknowledge and effusively praise "progress" by some schools on the Fraser rankings, while others bemoan the "serious limitations" of the skewed ranking process. This two-faced stance may make for good politics but it trumps both sound education policy and practice.

The diminishing legitimacy of FSA testing and the escalating controversy with each passing year of FI province-wide rankings, underline the fact that there is now a pressing need for a provincial dialogue on this issue.

Over the years, these unfair rankings have damaged public schools. Every year hundreds of fine rural and urban public schools, with diverse populations, broadly based curricula embracing hard working, creative staffs and students—be they ranked in the middle or end of the 875 schools list—become demoralized and see their skewed placement as a very public put-down. The energy, drive, and talents of these fine schools are swamped in the endless, soul-destroying list by what is essentially a market-driven strategy by an external, business-oriented organization.

Indeed the public perception of the FI, commonly regarded as the ideological arm of BC corporatism, has been reinforced, not only by the annual publication of these questionable competitive rankings, but also by the long lists (reportedly over 160) of corporate sponsors supporting Liberal candidates in their recent leadership races. Such support provides an insight into where the corporate beliefs and priorities of the well-heeled FI intersect with those of the governing provincial party.

An upcoming "Great Schools" forum, sponsored by the Canadian Association for Public Education, will explore alternatives to student evaluation and school improvement. A broad-based committee has been studying the situation for the past year and has cast a wide net.

None of the key participants deny the need for provincial assessments, thus the need to establish a fair and balanced, school-based or provincial assessment model. And, if need be, the piloting of other alternative avenues that will contribute to the genuine enhancement of BC's public school system, generally regarded as one of the finest in this country.

Until this issue is resolved or, at least, a reasonable accommodation reached, this controversy will only grow and fester.

Noel Herron is a former Vancouver principal and school trustee. He is a member of APPLE BC, an organization advocating for public schools in BC.



## Le syndrome de la page blanche

Par Olivier Salvas

Être un nouvel enseignant, c'est un peu comme avoir le syndrome de la page blanche quand on nous demande d'écrire un article pour une revue : tu as la tête remplie d'idées mais tu ne sais pas par où commencer. Je m'appelle Olivier Salvas. J'enseigne la première année à l'école William Bridge de Richmond. Je suis un nouvel enseignant et j'ai le syndrome de la page blanche. Tous les jours, je pense à des projets des plus farfelus que j'aimerais faire avec mes élèves. Soyons plus précis ; disons que je veux faire un voyage chez les martiens tout en faisant un détour par l'ère des dinosaures. Toutefois, la réalité du quotidien me rattrape bien assez vite : mes élèves devraient-ils être capables de lire plus à ce temps-ci de l'année ? Écrivent-ils assez ? Est-ce qu'ils parlent assez le français ? Ces soucis peuvent me hanter du matin au soir et souvent même pendant la nuit. Le pire est quand je crois pouvoir respirer et mon mentor me rappelle que je dois rédiger une infolettre, que je dois préparer les conférences avec les parents et que je dois terminer mes bulletins pour la fin de la semaine. Cette tornade se reflète aussi sur mon bureau ; j'étais quelqu'un de si ordonné et maintenant on doit me chercher derrière une pile de travaux à corriger, des affiches à plastifier, ou mon dîner que je n'ai pas encore mangé.

C'est ici que mon syndrome de la page blanche prend son sens. Être un nouvel enseignant, c'est un peu comme si on te donne les pièces pour construire une étagère sans te donner le mode d'emploi. C'est facile de créer une unité d'enseignement comme on nous enseigne à l'université mais j'ai vite réalisé que ce n'était pas facile de rédiger un programme de lecture. J'ai eu un blanc et je me suis demandé longtemps par où je devais commencer, surtout puisque je n'avais aucun matériel pour apprendre la lecture à des élèves de première année. J'étais habitué de travailler au Québec où des manuels étaient fournis pour tous les élèves. J'ai donc passé mes fins de semaine à rédiger un programme de lecture et j'ai utilisé un peu de mes économies pour bâtir une petite bibliothèque pour ma classe. Malgré tous ces efforts, je n'étais pas certain à cent pour cent que ma méthode était la bonne.

Jusqu'ici, mon article peut sembler négatif mais détrompez-vous ; j'aime cette folie et plus les jours avancent, moins je regrette d'avoir choisi cette profession. Je

réalise ici que mon plus grand succès en tant que nouvel enseignant est que je n'ai jamais eu peur de poser des questions et de me remettre en question. C'est pour cette raison que je n'ai pas hésité à m'inscrire au programme de mentorat pour les nouveaux enseignants de la commission scolaire de Richmond où on m'a appris à célébrer mes succès plutôt que de m'inquiéter de ce qui n'était pas parfait.

C'est à ce moment que j'ai accepté le fait que je ne pouvais pas avoir une salle de classe aussi remplie qu'un enseignant d'expérience après quelques semaines de travail. J'ai aussi compris que la qualité de mon enseignement n'était pas dans le nombre de jeux et de livres que j'avais, mais dans une façon simple et efficace de transmettre la matière. C'est ainsi que j'ai laissé ma personnalité et mon instinct guider mon enseignement et c'est ce qui allait rendre l'année mémorable pour mes élèves. J'ai ouvert la porte de ma classe aux parents et j'ai insisté sur le côté communautaire de l'école. Quand j'enseigne, je fais jouer la musique que les élèves aiment, je m'assois avec eux sur le tapis au lieu de m'asseoir sur une chaise, je vais jouer avec eux à l'extérieur au lieu que de tout simplement les surveiller, etc. J'essaie aussi de parler à chaque enfant d'un sujet non relié à l'école de tous les jours et je leur raconte des anecdotes sur ma vie pour qu'ils se sentent bien avec moi.

Après tout, ce n'est pas toujours nécessaire de se casser la tête à trouver l'idée la plus originale pour s'assurer que les jeunes aient le meilleur souvenir de leur première année. L'important, c'est d'entrer en relation avec eux. Aussi, en tant qu'enseignants, on veut toujours donner le meilleur de nous-mêmes, et c'est normal de se remettre en question ou de ne pas être certain d'avoir une bonne méthode d'enseignement. Je n'étais tout simplement pas habitué à me sentir de la sorte. En fin de compte, si on n'était pas des gens passionnés, on ne s'embarquerait pas dans un tel métier.

Olivier Salvas teaches at William Bridge Elementary School, Richmond.

This article is about the joy and challenges of being a new teacher.

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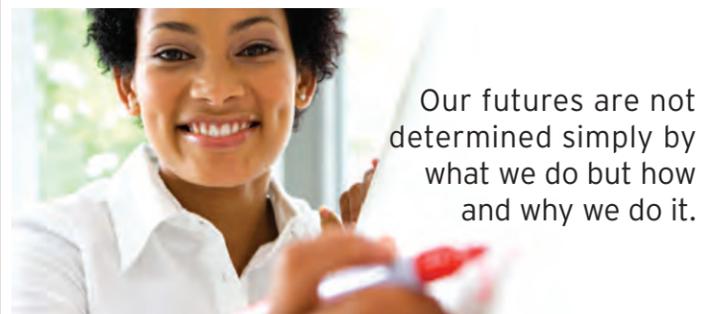
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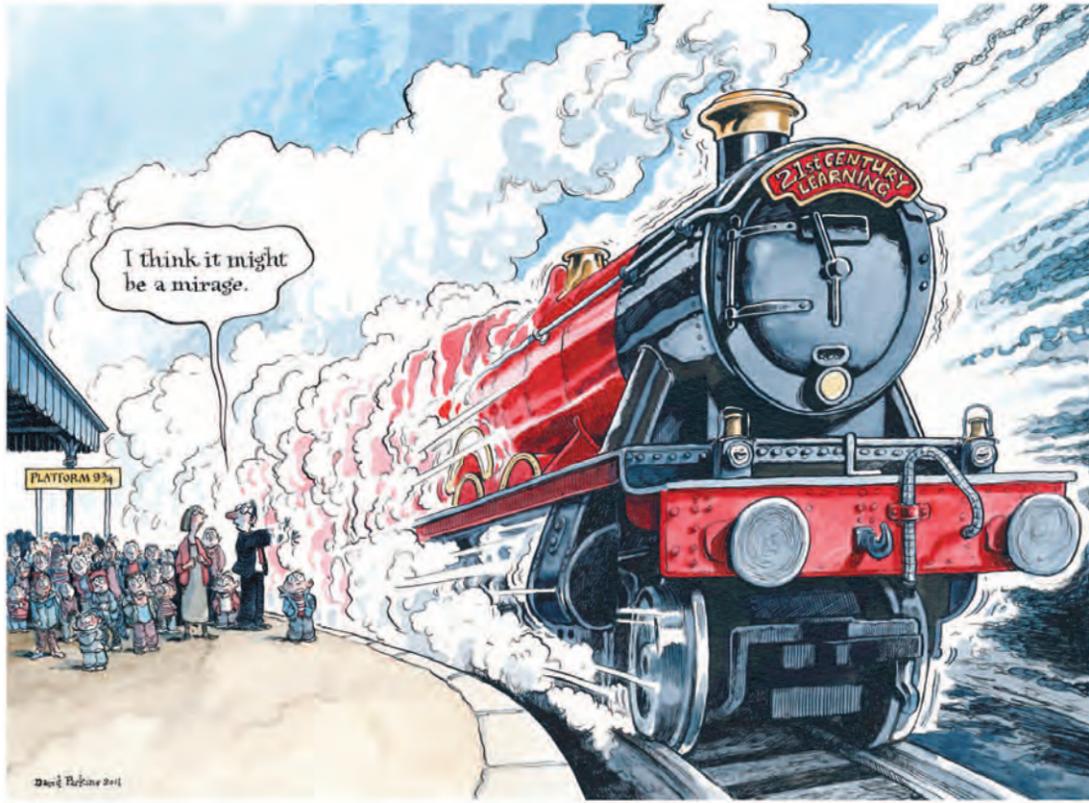
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# 21st century learning: Get ready



By Dave Van Bergeyk

People get ready; there's a train a comin'. For some time now, people in various roles in education have been echoing some form of this old refrain. I have heard school administrators, fellow teachers, district leadership, ministry personnel, and various others all predicting some significant changes in education, not only locally, but across the globe. The two most common names for this train are: 21st century learning and personalized learning. The basic claim is that our current system, especially in secondary schools, is outmoded, a relic of the pre-information age, and based on a factory model that may never have been all that appropriate, but certainly is less so now.

The trouble is, alternative models seem ill-defined and mysterious right now. If it is a train coming, it is like a night train, screeching unseen around the corner in the dark. Or perhaps some might suggest it is like the Hogwarts Express of Harry Potter fame. It may transport us to a magical place of learning, but attempting to board it requires finding its hidden platform by running headlong into a brick wall. And while the Ministry of Education

has made some public announcements about its intentions to be on this train, the ministry is nevertheless somewhat directionless right now as a consequence of the strange state of BC politics.

Just recently, my school district invited Bruce Bearisto, retired superintendent from Richmond, to speak to administrators about learning in these interesting times. Rather than complain about the lack of direction and the absence of a definition of personalized learning, Bearisto celebrated the opportunity we now have to be part of defining the change. He challenged leaders to get creative, finding innovative but practical ways of personalizing learning for students.

Whether you accept the premise that change is needed or not, it is worth paying attention to talk about 21st century learning, and engaging in the conversation in constructive ways. Of course, cynics might say that when all is said and done, we will find more has been said than done, but I venture to suggest, at least broadly speaking, the ideas being discussed here are going to stay with us.

Excerpts from Dave Van Bergeyk's *President's Message*, newsletter of the BC Association of Mathematics Teachers, January 2011.

## Ten million \$ cuts in Burnaby alone

By James Sanyshyn

On a cold winter's night on February 2, 2011, concerned Burnaby citizens and school district employees gathered at the Schou Education Centre for a public town hall meeting on public education funding in Burnaby and throughout BC. The 60 or so audience members listened attentively to the Burnaby Teachers' Association and CUPE Local 379's panelists. Glen Hansman, 2nd vice-president of the BC Teachers' Federation opened with some poignant remarks. The concept of "inflation" is not included in the minister's claim of "highest funding ever." "Highest needs ever" mitigates "highest funding ever." Hansman shared a statistic from a survey of 1,000 teachers in BC—80% feel the government is heading down the wrong track on education policy.

Larry Hayes, the new chair of the Board of Trustees in Burnaby spoke of the difficult decisions that trustees have had to make in the last number of years. Ten million dollars worth of cuts have been imposed on the Burnaby Board of Education, which has a relatively stable enrolment pattern. The district serves 100 language groups

including substantial refugee populations. Hayes stated that the district is "just trying to stay afloat and can't address class-size and composition issues with status quo funding."

Iglika Ivanova, economist with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, named the white elephant in the room—tax cuts over the past decade. Education spending has fallen from 3.4% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2001–02 to 2.9% in 2010–11. Does 0.4% sound like a small percentage cut to you? It did to me, until Ivanova explained that \$800 million less per year are being given to the education system in BC. Billions of dollars have been diverted into our pockets and away from students and schools. She asked which of us were richer as a result of tax cuts? Not a single hand went up. As revenues are reduced, user fees are introduced to make up shortfalls, meaning no substantial savings to the average worker, with fewer public services to show for it. Yet, the top wage earners continue to make more and more money. Ivanova challenged all of us in attendance to stop the anti-tax rhetoric and to embrace a fair tax commission for all citizens to set

priorities and give direction to government on what we see as fair return for our contributions, while protecting our common public services.

John Malcolmson, from CUPE's National Ottawa office was the fourth presenter of the evening. The inherent structural shortfalls mean

**Overall, the consensus at the town hall meeting was that "highest funding ever" is a slight-of-hand, a card trick meant to obfuscate and mislead the public. The real solution is to match funding to meet the "highest needs ever." Let's hope the next premier cares enough to do so.**

that boards are forced into crisis management oriented cuts, he reminded us, and that downloaded costs, such as salary and benefit increases promised by government, BCeSIS, the carbon tax, etc., continue to eat into local school board budgets each year.

The chairperson (Lesley Ziegler of BTA's Political Action/Public Relations Committee) accepted

questions from the audience.

A question for Hayes arose around public school trustees rallying together to raise the underfunding issue with the government. His response: this has been the case for several years now, with 95% of trustees sharing an understanding on the underfunding issue. The difference is the vocal nature of some local trustees over others, and whether the minister's interference (as in Vancouver) is meant to be a deterrent for speaking out.

Issues of school cleanliness were raised.

Malcolmson and Hayes expressed concerns about the spread of communicable diseases and

the development of mould. When asked if more educational assistants would help, Malcolmson suggested making current employees full-time would provide better service to our children with special needs in BC because the vast majority of employees are working part-time hours.

Overall, the consensus at the town hall meeting was that "highest funding ever" is a slight-of-hand, a card trick meant to obfuscate and mislead the public. The real solution is to match funding to meet the "highest needs ever." Let's hope the next premier cares enough to do so.



James Sanyshyn is vice-president, Burnaby Teachers' Association.

O

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# AGM 2011 VICTORIA

## AGM elects Executive Committee for 2011-12

By Nancy Knickerbocker

Delegates voted for continuity of leadership at the helm of their union coming into this next challenging year of collective bargaining.

President Susan Lambert, First Vice-President Jim Iker, and Second Vice-President Glen Hansman were all re-elected by acclamation to continue in their respective positions.

Also elected to serve as members-at-large on the BCTF Executive Committee were: David Komljenovic from Kamloops, Joanna Larson from Prince Rupert, Teri Mooring from Quesnel, Paul Steer from Delta, and Christine Stewart from Vancouver.

### Teachers welcome education minister at 95th AGM

For the first time in a decade, the minister of education addressed the BCTF Annual General Meeting, held over spring break at the Victoria Convention Centre.

In advance of his arrival, dozens of teachers lined up at the microphones for an opportunity to tell Education Minister George Abbott about the difficult reality confronting them in classrooms across BC. The two teachers who were able to speak in the brief time available spoke eloquently about their frustration with current teaching and learning conditions, and their distress when students' needs can't be met.

BCTF President Susan Lambert contrasted their experiences with the excellent teaching and learning conditions in Finland, which many scholars consider to have the finest public education system in the world. She quoted from Henna Virkkunen, the Finnish Minister of Education, on how teachers are highly respected and enjoy professional autonomy, the average class sizes are 21 even without legislated limits, and the teachers' union works in partnership with government.

Virkkunen said: "For me as Minister of Education, our teachers' union has been one of the main partners because we have the same goal: we want to ensure that the quality of education is good, and we

are working very much together with the union. Nearly every week we are in discussions with them. They are very powerful in Finland."

Lambert said: "Minister Abbott, we'd like to go to Finland. My question to you is: How can you help us get there?" She then quipped: "I don't expect an answer today. This is homework!"

Abbott received a warm welcome from the delegates, particularly after Lambert introduced him as the only education minister in decades with any experience in the classroom. Abbott taught political science at the college level for 15 years, and briefly worked as a TTOC.

In his remarks, Abbott reached out to teachers, thanking them for the important work they do with the children of the province. He said that he attended public school, as did his three children, and all were well-equipped for life by their school experiences. He spoke of the joy of teaching, the need to improve teachers' job satisfaction, and his desire to work co-operatively with the BCTF and the other education partner groups to improve public education in BC. "Let's dream expansively," he suggested, "and work together to take a good education system and make it excellent."

Foreshadowing the difficulties that will inevitably arise during this round of collective bargaining, he said, "we'll have lots of things that divide us...labour relations will be fraught with many challenges in the weeks and months ahead." Nonetheless, he promised: "As minister of education, my door will always be open to Susan and it will always be open to you."

Lambert presented Abbott with a copy of the BCTF's newest

**When first cajoled into attending, I had no expectations whatsoever! However, that has changed. Through listening to many opinions from both sides of each motion, I've come to realize that we are thoughtful, considerate, intelligent, and informed. Overall, this AGM has allowed me to see the BCTF as a vibrant, dynamic, informed, membership working together to a common goal of excellence in education.**

—Linda Maslen, new delegate, Cowichan Valley

publication, *Better Schools for BC*, which contains "recommendations for a road map to take us to our version of Finland."

In a media scrum after his presentation, the minister was challenged on whether the government is heading for "a showdown with teachers." As one reporter pointed out: "You're offering zero, and you're not willing to move on class size and composition." Abbott noted that the parties had only met at the bargaining table once so far, and that it was premature to say job action is inevitable: "It's early days yet."

Then reporters posed the same question to Lambert: "He said he's serious about zero and zero. Where's your room for hope?"

Lambert pointed out that the net zero mandate has not been maintained across the public sector. The nurses, for example, negotiated 9% over three years. "It's a function of bargaining. We're going to work very hard at the table," she said. "He's absolutely determined, but so are we."

**Very well organized; kept on schedule; excellent and inspiring speakers; delegates' needs anticipated and well taken care of. It was a great "working holiday" experience—I'll be back next year!**

—Sharon Kehoe, new delegate, Abbotsford

### Linda Watson honoured with G.A. Fergusson Memorial Award

Throughout her 35-year teaching career, Linda Watson made a significant contribution to public education in BC at the provincial, local, and personal levels, through her union leadership, professional mentorship, and personal caring for teachers and students.

Watson first became involved in the North Vancouver Teachers' Association in the 1970s. After the NVTA and other BCTF locals became full-fledged unions in 1987, she served on the bargaining committee that negotiated North Vancouver's first full-scope collective agreement in 1988-89. Watson was elected first vice-president of the NVTA in 1988, and a year later was elected president, a position she held for the next three years, and again from 2005-09.

The NVTA bargaining committee that Linda led won professional

**Kevin Epp, conducted the new delegates' session, which proved to be informative and valuable information. Having an opportunity to speak with Susan Lambert was a highlight for new delegates. The networking with teachers from all around the province is the best ProD and inspiration teachers can receive.**

—Pamela Ana and Reid Nelson, new delegates, Kitimat

autonomy rights, real limits on class size and composition, and duty-free recess and lunch breaks. It took dedicated effort by the negotiating teams, tremendous support from all members, two strike votes, several study sessions, and one full strike to achieve a very strong collective agreement that continues to serve North Vancouver teachers well more than two decades later.

Fortunately, Watson's gifts were not limited to North Vancouver but were used to serve the needs of teachers across the province. During the 1990s, Linda served on the BCTF Executive Committee for nine years, including three years as second vice-president (1997-2000).

Those were turbulent times. The provincial government unilaterally changed the bargaining structures and, in 1994, imposed provincial bargaining. Watson served on the BCTF bargaining team during the second round, when teachers successfully negotiated primary class-size limits and staffing ratios for non-enrolling teachers.

In 2001, the Joint Trusteeship of the Teachers' Pension Plan was achieved, and Watson has served as a trustee ever since. Her extensive knowledge and ability to analyze and articulate the implications of changes mean that her views and advice are respected by all decision-makers.

Watson's keen intelligence, her excellence at public speaking, her passion in defending teachers' rights, her meticulous attention to detail, her ability to collaborate with management to effect positive change, her persuasive skills at the negotiating table, her strong work ethic, and her deeply principled approach earned Linda Watson the respect of all who have been fortunate enough to work with her.

Nancy Knickerbocker is the BCTF media relations officer.



For the first time in a decade, George Abbott, the minister of education, addressed the BCTF Annual General Meeting. BCTF President Susan Lambert introduced Abbott as the only education minister in decades with any experience in the classroom.



Linda Watson, North Vancouver teacher and union activist, was honoured with the BCTF's most prestigious award—the G.A. Fergusson Memorial Award. Watson also received BCTF honorary life membership.



Sir Ken Robinson, former professor of education at the University of Warwick addressed the AGM.

**Sir Ken Robinson**

Sir Ken Robinson, PhD, was a professor of education at the University of Warwick in the UK and is now Professor Emeritus. In 1998, he led a national commission on creativity, education, and the economy for the UK government. The Robinson Report, entitled "All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education," was published to wide acclaim in 1999. Sir Ken has received several honorary degrees, many international awards and a knighthood by for his service to the arts and education. His latest book is *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*, published by Penguin/Viking.

Sir Ken Robinson began his speech to delegates at the BCTF AGM with an anecdote about how, as a boy, he loved French because the teacher made it fascinating. On the other hand, his own daughter is utterly bored by the subject. When he asked her teacher why his daughter was not doing well in French, the teacher said she seemed bored in class. Sir Ken asserted that "nothing is inherently boring. Good teachers can make anything engaging."

In a wide-ranging talk on the impact of technology on education and society, he predicted that "in the next 10 to 15 years we'll see changes that will dwarf what we've seen so far." He said: "A transformative technology doesn't merely add itself onto the culture, it changes it fundamentally."

He spoke of the risks to the health of planet Earth due to population growth and unchecked consumption in the Western world. "The only reason we're getting away with it [overconsumption and waste of resources] is that the rest of the world puts up with it."

Confronting these enormous global challenges, human beings have to think differently about ourselves and have to educate ourselves differently.

"Our education system was designed for the 19th Century...we need to revolutionize it for the 21st Century," he said. "The key problem is our education system is based on conformity, not diversity."

He spoke of the importance of teachers helping students to discover their skills and passions, so that they can be "in their element" and even after a long period of

concentration they will feel "physically depleted but spiritually uplifted."

"If you really love something you'll be good at it, and you will never work again."

Sir Ken said that he believes the change that is needed is gathering force across cultures as teachers and young people harness the revolutionary power of technologies in imaginative and creative new ways.

*Seeing the huge number of active members provides me with reassurance that teachers are seriously considering what is best for the BCTF as a collective.*

—Leighann Rodger, new delegate, Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte

**Key decisions of the 2011 AGM**

**Leadership report**

**Recommendation 1**

That the priority for 2011–12 be to engage and mobilize members to:

1. achieve significant collective agreement improvements.
2. make funding and support for public education a priority for all levels of government.
3. develop Aboriginal employment equity agreements in every local.
4. improve professional autonomy and enhance professional development.
5. strengthen teacher influence on education policy.
6. support and strengthen social justice principles and practices in our schools and our communities.

**Education policy**

**Recommendation 9**

**21st century learning initiative**

In setting the agenda for 21st century learning the AGM recommendation builds on the involvement of teachers in discussions that examine the purpose and principles of public education. A number of conditions are identified as key for pursuing change that will enhance teaching and learning:

- the centrality of teachers in the learning process
- using varied forms of instruction including inquiry-based

approaches

- integrating new technology into teaching and learning
- recognizing the diversity of the student population
- assessment that supports students' learning needs.

**Recommendation 11 Membership fee**

That for the 2011–12 membership year, the fee for those who are members under By-law 1.1 (a) shall be 1.49% of the actual salary of the member, allocated as follows:

- 1.31%—General Operating Fund
  - 0.06%—Public Education Defence Fund
  - 0.06%—Collective Bargaining Defence Fund
  - 0.05%—Provincial Bargaining Fund
  - 0.01%—Contingency Fund
- except that the fee for active members who are teachers teaching on call shall be 0.36% of the actual salary of the member allocated in the same ratio as above.

**Pensions**

**Recommendation 25**

**Ethical investing**

That the BCTF, as a plan member partner, request the Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees to request that the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation (bcIMC) develop or invest in a fund that is comprised only of companies that:

- do not manufacture weapons or military machinery.
- do not produce tobacco.
- do not contribute to systemic human rights violations.
- do not contribute to severe environmental damage.
- do not support the privatization of water.
- have fair labour practices.
- have a sound corporate governance and meet the targeted actuarial assumption (December 2008) of 6.5% investment return for the investment of future Teachers' Pension Plan contributions
- do not use child labour.

**Recommendation 33**

**Aboriginal education**

1. That additional secondary school IRPs with an emphasis on Aboriginal culture (such as First Nations Studies 12, and English First Peoples 10, 11, and 12) be created, across the subject areas.

2. That ministry funding be available to support the implementation of these courses.

3. That should such additional courses be created and made available with the necessary

supports, the completion of such a (one) course be a requirement of graduation for all students.

4. Aboriginal content be embedded in all K–12 IRPs.

**Wisconsin's Betsy Kippers speaks at the AGM**



*Wisconsin Educators' Association Vice-President Betsy Kippers with BC Federation of Labour President Jim Sinclair.*

**BCTF blog post**

*The Governor Got a Fight He Didn't Bargain For*—that's the name of a video about the labour battle in Wisconsin that was shown to the BCTF AGM. It showed the teachers and many others who took over the state legislature building and marched in the streets against the anti-labour legislation brought in by Governor Walker.

This was the introduction for the vice-president of the Wisconsin Education Council, Betsy Kippers at the BCTF AGM. Kippers was met by a standing ovation before speaking in respect for the resistance of the teachers in Wisconsin. She received an even longer one after an inspiring speech.

Kippers outlined the campaign on behalf of labour rights that arose immediately after legislation was introduced to take away the rights of teachers and other public sector workers.

Across the state there have been forums, bus tour protests, demonstrations, and many other actions.

She told the delegates not to be afraid to be open with the public in

talking about what is important to you.

"Our governor was lying. We knew it, but the public did not. Our actions were necessary to let the public know the truth...What this is really about is scratching the backs of the rich supporters."

She said that the fight for education is now on the world stage from the resistance that has been put up in Wisconsin. Kippers thanked Susan Lambert and Jim Iker for going to Wisconsin to show support when the large demonstration was held on March 12, 2011.

"We know that our working conditions are our children's learning conditions," Kippers said. The importance of a contract to protect those conditions is essential."

*As the conference progressed, I began to realize how fortunate I am to be part of such a strong organization that supports its members and ethical issues. Looking forward to the 96th AGM.*

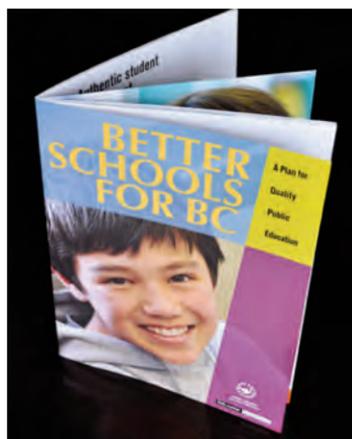
—Sylvia Jackson, new delegate, Vancouver

DAVID DENYER PHOTOS



*Clockwise from left: Margaret McMaster receives the Stewart Schon Award for her contributions to the health and safety of teachers; Pat Gudlaugson was awarded BCTF Honorary Life membership; Quesnel delegates mark their ballots for the Executive Committee elections; Delegates attended a celebration at the Longhouse attached to the BC Provincial Museum; BCTF press conference on bargaining with local presidents in attendance.*





## Better schools for BC

### A plan for quality public education

As British Columbians, we are in a period of political transition. As teachers, we are faced with an accelerating pace of social, educational, and technological change. At the same time, our values for public education remain timeless. This spring, the BCTF decided to publish a foundation document that articulates our vision and values for public education, as well as practical strategies for improvement. Our new publication, *Better Schools for BC*, examines the following building blocks for positive change:

- class-size and composition guarantees
- a child poverty reduction plan
- specialist teachers in every school
- authentic student assessment
- respect for diversity and equal opportunities for all
- increased investment in public education
- full-scope collective bargaining rights.

To read the full document, visit: [www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/BetterSchoolsForBC.pdf](http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/BetterSchoolsForBC.pdf)

# Support for Heartspeak



Shannen Koostachin, seen here at a Pow-Wow, had a dream that all First Nation children would have an education in safe schools. Tragically, this courageous 15-year-old leader in the Attawapiskat School Campaign died in the summer of 2010, however, her dream lives on in a new DVD entitled "Shannen's Dream."

Heartspeak is a registered charity that works to provide mentoring for youth 12 to 22 years of age. One of its goals is to encourage youth, educators, and members of the broader community to add their voices to the growing demand for equitable education for First Nations children.

A new DVD entitled *Shannen's Dream* documents the journey of Shannen Koostachin as she becomes an activist after witnessing the stark contrast between the situation in her home reserve of Attawapiskat—where the children are taught in portables in environmentally unsafe conditions—and the safe and comfy high school she was attending in New Liskeard. She embarked on a path that took her to Parliament Hill, where she spoke urging the federal government to build a new school in her home community. Shannen died in a tragic car accident in June 2010. This galvanized her community, including her peers, to take up the torch of Shannen's dream and work hard to realize it.

Her dream is for all First Nations children to have an equal right to high-quality, culturally relevant education, and for government to provide the necessary financial and policy supports required to put reserve schools on an equal footing with non-reserve provincial schools.

The DVD features two videos: a 15-minute documentary to show in classrooms and to the general public, and 3-minute video with a message for the educational community.

The video outlines suggested strategies to help make Shannen's dream a reality. After viewing the video, students may wish to participate in the Make Shannen's Dream a Reality video contest (ending May 29th, 2011)—visit: [heartspeak.strutta.com](http://heartspeak.strutta.com)

—David Denyer

# Why teachers are considering leaving the profession

By Margaret White and Charlie Naylor

In previous issues of *Teacher*, BCTF Research has shared results of the 2009 Worklife of BC Teachers survey, that show that teachers are experiencing significant stress in the classroom, in large part due to inadequate support to meet complex student needs and class-size and composition issues. Increasing workload and stress have immediate implications for students in the classroom and for teachers' quality of worklife, and based on the survey results, will likely have an impact on teacher retention in future years.

The survey asked teachers if they were considering leaving the teaching profession for reasons other than retirement, and if so, their reasons for doing so. As researchers, we were surprised to learn that one in five teachers said they are considering leaving the profession, with teachers who are mid-career being the most likely to say so.

### Why are teachers considering leaving the profession?

A few teachers said they may leave teaching for family reasons, although not necessarily on a permanent basis, but most of the comments indicate that teachers are considering leaving the profession due to deteriorating working and learning conditions.

This article provides an overview of the main reasons teachers gave for considering leaving the teaching profession and illustrative quotes to give voice to their concerns.

Some teachers reported considering leaving the profession due to job burn out or other adverse effects of work stress on their emotional and physical well-being:

*"Burn out due to children not receiving timely support, e.g., a school nurse for one morning a week for [a large school] (low income, transient, immigrant), waits for all referrals for testing. Not enough appreciation from parent groups, e.g., PAC."*

**As researchers, we were surprised to learn that one in five teachers said they are considering leaving the profession, with teachers who are mid-career being the most likely to say so.**

*"I feel that I cannot keep up, physically, with the demands of parents and administrators when the needs of students continue to grow, but support and resources continue to diminish."*

A few teachers said they would retire earlier than planned owing to the effects of poor working conditions on their health:

*"I will retire as soon as I am able to. The work drains me of energy and*

*basically leaves me with not much left at the end of the week. I go from week to week, recuperate during the weekend and then do it all over again."*

The following quote illustrates how this decision may come at a great financial cost to the teacher:

*"I find it very difficult to control my illness given the stresses of the job and the lack of time to take care of myself. Because I was working as a TOC for many years my pension would only be about \$1,000 a month if I retire early."*

Teachers' comments indicate that increasing work demands in the context of diminishing resources to support students is making it more difficult to feel effective as a teacher:

*"Teaching is no longer as fulfilling and rewarding as it was when I began teaching 20 years ago. I feel it is much more difficult to have an impact...or effect change. I blame this on long term, chronic underfunding of education for over 20 years."*

*"Marking, marking, and marking. Giving feedback to students is essential to their development and learning, but finding time to give adequate and accurate meaningful feedback is difficult."*

Dissatisfaction was expressed toward the provincial government and to some extent school districts for eroding support to students and implementing too many changes in the classroom:

*"After 23 years, having started with*

*the intention of teaching 35 years, I am preparing to leave teaching. I love French Immersion. I love the kids, the colleagues, the parents, the stuff we teach. The ministry's approach, and our loss of teaching and non-teaching support, have made me feel desperate about the job. We need paper, computers, staff assistants, educational assistants."*

Some new teachers said they were considering leaving due to a lack of job security:

**Teachers' comments indicate that increasing work demands in the context of diminishing resources to support students is making it more difficult to feel effective as a teacher.**

*"It is hard to get a full-time continuing job. I feel every year is insecure in regards to work for me and I have a mortgage to pay. The division between school board and teachers is also very frustrating."*

Poor remuneration compared to other professions was also mentioned as a reason for wanting to change careers.

*"Financial and hours of work. I have significantly better paying prospects with significantly less hours of work, without all of the governmental interference."*

The following quote illustrates how it is the combination of factors such as excessive workload, high stress, lack of work-life balance, low salary relative to other occupations, and feeling unappreciated, that may influence a teacher to consider leaving the profession.

*"Not enough time for my personal life. Always carrying the stress of school around, 24 hours a day."*

*Seeing that there are many other occupations where people work 40 hours/week, not 60-70, and get paid more than teachers do but with less education. Not feeling appreciated by the general public."*

### Conclusion

The finding that one in five teachers is considering leaving the profession is a warning sign. The study results suggest that the steady erosion of learning and working conditions in BC schools is making teaching less attractive as an occupation and that BC is in danger of losing committed, experienced teachers.

Several factors that may be influencing teachers to consider leaving the profession were identified in the qualitative analysis, including increased workload, stress and burn out, lack of appreciation, job insecurity, and dissatisfaction with provincial and district governance. A reduced sense of professional efficacy may also be a factor, as teachers struggle to meet growing student needs in the context of diminishing resources. The written responses also reveal that making a decision to change careers is due to a combination of factors that interact with each other to make teaching less tolerable. These findings need to be explored in more depth in future research, as does the complex interaction of factors that are making teaching less attractive as a profession.

*This research was conducted by Margaret White, senior research analyst, and Charlie Naylor, senior researcher, of the BCTF Research Department.*

See [www.bctf.ca/IssuesInEducation.aspx?id=21498](http://www.bctf.ca/IssuesInEducation.aspx?id=21498), for the full report: "Worklife of BC Teachers in 2009."

# Changes to the Canada Pension Plan

Now that we know what it really looks like!

This is a follow up article to the one published in the March 2011 edition of the *Teacher Newsmagazine*. The Ministry of Finance has finalized and approved the changes, and we now know what the impact will be, beginning on January 1, 2012.

All the changes are staggered over a 5-year period and they are intended to encourage workers to remain in the workforce for a longer period of time, or to think twice about collecting their Canada Pension Plan early.

## Early and late adjustments to CPP benefits

Under the Regulations, the normal age at which a worker receives 100% of the CPP pension to which they are entitled is 65. However, workers can choose to receive a reduced benefit beginning at age 60 or an improved benefit as late as age 70. The new changes will see a greater reduction in benefits at age 60 and a greater increase up to age 70. The table below outlines the percentage of reduction that will be phased in over the next five years. Once you begin receiving your CPP and decide not to return to work, the percentage increase or decrease is permanent. CPP is indexed annually, so your pension will increase based on increases in the cost of living.

## Introduction of post-retirement benefits

At the moment, if you begin collecting your CPP, you and your employer no longer make contributions even if you return to work. Under the new regulations, anyone returning to work before age 65 will recommence contributions. Between age 65 and 70, you can choose whether to contribute or not. If you choose to contribute, the employer will be required to make contributions as well. If you are

contributing while working, your CPP benefit will be recalculated at the beginning of each calendar year, based on the new contributions that were made. If you have earned the fully Yearly Maximum Pensionable Earnings then your CPP could increase by as much as 2.5%. The exact amount will depend on your earnings during the previous year.

## Changes to the drop-out provisions

Currently, anyone who elects to receive CPP benefits will have the lowest 15% of their earning years within the age of 18 and the year they begin receiving CPP dropped out of the calculation of their benefit. Typically, if you choose to receive CPP at age 60 they will drop out about 6.3 of your low earning years. Beginning in January of 2012, the dropout increases to 16% or 6.7 years. As of 2014, that increases to 17% or about 7.1 years. Someone who waits until age 65 will see the dropout increase from 7 years to 8 years over the same time period. This will have the effect of increasing your CPP benefit by a very small margin.

## Elimination of the work cessation period

Beginning on January 1, 2012, contributors can begin receiving their CPP benefit without having to stop working. If individuals continue to work and receive CPP benefits, then they must continue to make contributions to CPP until age 65.

## What is your CPP entitlement?

Periodically, all workers in Canada should receive a Canada Pension Plan Statement of Contributions from Service Canada. This outlines CPP contribution history and projects an anticipated CPP benefit at age 65. If you have not received a CPP statement in the last two years, you should contact Service Canada at 1-877-454-4051 and ask them to send you one.

— Rob Taylor

Percentage of reduction to be phased in over next five years

Age of election to receive CPP	Current pension adjustment	New pension adjustments				
		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
60	-30%	-31.2%	-32.4%	-33.6%	-34.8%	-36%
65	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
70	+30%	+34.2%	+38.4%	+42%	+42%	+42%



## Spring update

The BCTF Advantage Program has four new additions to its marketplace offerings. Thanks to our new partners at Canadian Direct Insurance, we have struck a deal for special rate tickets to the **Vancouver Giants** hockey games.



Hockey tickets are available to BCTF members and their families for \$15 each.

In addition, we have two new partners offering valuable discounts to teachers in the market for pool and spa supplies. **Sunshine Pools and Spas**, in Kelowna, is offering a 12% discount to teachers on water care, pool and spa accessories, and hot tubs. They hope to attract potential customers from all over the Okanagan.



In the Lower Mainland, **H2O Spas**, in Delta is offering a 15% discount on pool chemicals, and a further BCTF discount on hot tubs—a substantial savings on their factory-direct hot tubs, which suit all massage therapy conditions.

Finally, with summer plans now beginning to take shape for many teachers, we encourage you to have a look under the travel page of the Advantage Program. Our newest edition there is **BCTF Advantage Discount Hotels**—our partner, **Local Hospitality**, has been able to provide BCTF members with hotel rooms discounted by 10–20% on average. Check and compare Advantage Discount Hotels with other online providers.

Just a reminder, the goods and services offered through the BCTF Advantage Program are available to BCTF members, BCTF retirees, and their families.

— Patti McLaughlin



## Health and safety

### Inception and development of the BCTF Occupational Health and Safety Program

Prior to 1997 there was no division of the BCTF that addressed teachers' health or safety.

In 1997, Lynne Sinclair was assigned the task of developing and implementing a provincial health and safety program for BCTF members. At that time, most members did not think of themselves as workers and there was little knowledge of the *Workers Compensation Act* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation* and their application to BCTF members.

In 1998, Sinclair compiled and published the first BCTF occupational health and safety manual with information from resources such as the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB), labour laws, the *School Act*, building codes, and fire and safety codes. The manual has been updated several times over the years but remains the primary resource for the health and safety program.

In 1999–00, Sinclair developed the Health and Safety training program with a small cadre of health and safety activists. The Health and Safety Advisory Committee to the BCTF Executive Committee was also formed at that time.

In May 2000, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the WCB and BCTF to administer the WCB education and training courses. The training program began with basic Modules 1–5 adapted for the educational environment. These modules required the approval of WCB as they came with certification and complied with the mandatory annual eight-hour training. As such, the BCTF is an internal training partner with WorkSafeBC. The BCTF is not on the external partners' list published by WSBC as the mandate is to provide training and education only to the public education system.

Since then, the Federation has expanded the number of modules to include indoor air quality, ergonomics, construction and renovation, violence prevention, an in-depth look at joint committees

and new and young workers. The training department currently has nine facilitators from various parts of the province.

The training modules are delivered to joint health and safety committees with the intent being to increase the knowledge of health and safety rights and responsibilities for all workers. The most important feature of this model is that they are designed to be delivered not only to BCTF members but also to support staff and employers and their representatives. The point emphasized is that the responsibility to maintain health and safety falls on all workers. The tripartite format remains the focus of the BCTF Health and Safety Program as it addresses all workers and it is this inclusivity that ensures the health and safety of all our colleagues. The WCB processes step outside the collective agreement and labour relations issues.

Health and safety training is provided at School Union Representative Training (SURT) and the Professional Development level as well.

In February 2010, a Manager of Interest for Public Education K–12 was assigned at WorkSafeBC (WSBC). A committee comprised of representatives from BCTF, CUPE, BCPSEA, and WSBC was formed. The intent is to discuss health and safety issues and provide guidance and information to the respective health and safety contacts in WorkSafeBC offices, school districts and locals.

The BCTF health and safety program also includes the WCB advocate for members who file WCB claims. The BCTF WCB advocate helps them through appeal processes if their claims are denied or they do not receive appropriate compensation.

For further information, please contact: Karen Langenmaier, prevention officer at 604-871-1891 or Patti McLaughlin, WCB advocate 604-871-1890 (toll free 1-800-663-9163).

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## New Teacher's Conference 2011: Engaging students in learning

By Moh Chelali

The BCTF's 2011 New Teachers' Conference was another success and one of the finest professional development events that one can attend. The conference is always popular because the majority of presenters are active classroom teachers.

The conference is designed to welcome, support, and guide new teachers entering the profession. This year's theme was engaging students in learning and all the workshops explored the best ways to engage and motivate students. The 2011 conference featured presentations on a wide range of issues pertinent to new teachers' interests and needs such as classroom management, integrating students with special needs, student assessment, teaching and learning with technology, and working with parents, to name few.

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.

This year we had more than 64 workshops in the program over two days, 400 attendees, and more than 30 displays from different educational and non-profit organizations.

New teachers represent the renewal of commitment to our profession and their needs and interests are of utmost importance to our society. 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.

Once again this year, we had very talented and skilled workshop presenters. Presenters and new teachers were unanimous about the

benefit of these two professional development days to those entering the profession.

Most of the workshop presenters are also teachers who volunteer their time to share their knowledge and expertise with their colleagues. Connie Cirkony from Victoria, one of many presenters, said: "It is always a pleasure to attend this well-organized and welcoming conference, to participate as part of the community of support for teachers, and of course to meet with new teachers themselves—their enthusiasm and dedication is a wonderful reminder of why we are all here!"

Shannon Leddy, an art teacher from Vancouver, who was a first-time presenter, said, "...the willingness and enthusiasm of the group with whom I worked was absolutely great!"

David Lafontaine from Kelowna said, "I like to end my presentation by telling them that if I had to go back to university and choose again, I would choose to be a teacher because it is a fantastic profession with great people." Amy Newman from Surrey agrees with Lafontaine; "While each of the three sessions I facilitated were very

different, a consistent theme was the energy, enthusiasm, and curiosity the new teachers brought to the experience. They are an inspiring group of young educators!"

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.

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. 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 passion for education and social justice.

Moh Chelali is assistant director, BCTF Professional and Social Issues Division.

## What new teachers who attended the conference are saying:

- The conference was extremely eye-opening about the realities of teaching and being a teacher teaching on call.

—Jennifer Gardener, Vancouver

- This conference was an amazing experience for me and I feel like I learned so much. I hope to use some of the tips that I learned from the co-operative learning workshop on building positive interdependence and pairing up partners from the primary toolkit workshop.

—Yukari Naka, Nanaimo

- Great information, amazing networking; able to connect with other French Immersion teachers. Thank you for a great conference.

—Martine Janicki, Victoria High School

- As a student teacher, I found the conference to be a wonderful welcome to the BCTF. The presenters were passionate, the food was superb, and the atmosphere was one of excitement for the future of the teaching profession.

—Michelle Moore, UBC BEd student

## Sexting and teenagers



By Tony Wilson

One of the more troublesome and disconcerting aspects of online communication is communication by children and teens on cellphones and other mobile devices that allow for the transmission of text and images from device to device or from device to the Internet, outside any supervision by parents or other adults. Cellphone use among adults is staggering in the industrialized world, but perhaps the use of cellphones by teens just as endemic. In 2004, 18% of 12-year-olds in the United States owned (or had regular use of) cellphones. In 2009, 58% of 12-year-olds owned (or had regular use of) cellphones. And in the same year, 83% of 17-year-olds owned (or had regular use of) a cellphone. Many of these teens with cellphones use their phones for a number of purposes in addition to mere phoning another person. One of the more disturbing consequences of easy online digital communications over mobile devices such as cellphones is so-called "sexting," which is a word combination of "sex" and "texting."

A survey in 2009, conducted by Pew Internet and American Life Project, a US-based think tank studying issues on the attitudes and trends shaping modern life in the United States and the world, conducted surveys of teens aged 12 to 18 about their cellphone use and particularly, whether they had ever sent out or received sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude photos or videos of themselves or of someone they knew, on their cellphones.

Amanda Lenhart, senior

research specialist and author of the Pew Study, discussed what the teens said to the researchers:

"Teens explained to us how sexually suggestive images have become a form of relationship currency," she said in the report. "These images are shared as a part of, or instead of, sexual activity, or as a way of starting or maintaining a relationship with a significant other. And they are also passed along to friends for their entertainment value, as a joke or for fun."

Teens also described to researchers within the focus groups the pressure they are under to share these nude or nearly nude digital images. One high-school girl wrote as part of her contribution to the study: "When I was about 14–15 years old, I received/sent these types of pictures. Boys usually ask

**One of the more disturbing consequences of easy online digital communications over mobile devices such as cellphones is so-called "sexting," which is a word combination of "sex" and "texting."**

for them or start that type of conversation. My boyfriend, or someone I really liked asked for them. I felt like if I didn't do it, they wouldn't continue to talk to me. At the time, it was no big deal. But now, looking back, it was definitely inappropriate and over the line."

Lenhart, the report's author,

said: "The desire for risk-taking and sexual exploration during the teenage years combined with a constant connection via mobile devices creates a perfect storm for sexting. Teenagers have always grappled with issues around sex and relationships, but their coming-of-age mistakes and transgressions have never been so easily transmitted and archived for others to see."

In the United States these "sexting" issues are occurring regularly, and are creating a line in shifting sands of the "culture war battlefield." On the one hand it's a battle between those who see "sexting" in the same vein as underage drinking, teenage sex, and other rites of passage that should be dealt with as a social issue rather than a criminal one, and on the other hand, politicians, religious leaders, and prosecutors who seek to use the full weight of the criminal law to punish those who would take, send, receive, and re-transmit nude images from cellphone to cellphone.

George Skumanick Jr., a Pennsylvania district attorney, threatened a number of students with possession and distribution of child pornography after a sexting incident at a high school. The issue arose when a

student's cellphone was confiscated in class, and her teacher discovered nude images that had been "sexted" to other high school students in the same school.

The district attorney demanded that the students (there were close to 20 involved at one point) take a five-week counselling program plus probation, or he would press child pornography charges. "An adult would go to prison for this," he said in an interview with *CNN.com*. "If you take the photo, you've committed a crime. If you send the photo, you've committed a different crime, but it's essentially the same crime."

In an article for *CNN International*, authors Deborah Feyerick and Sheila Steffen, wrote about the plight of 18-year-old Phillip Alpert, who is listed as a registered sex offender for the next 25 years in Florida because he was convicted of sending nude images of his then 16-year-old girlfriend to her family and friends after a breakup with her, as revenge.

"It was a stupid thing I did" he told Feyerick and Steffen for the article. "Because I was upset and

tired and it was the middle of the night and I was an immature kid. You will find me on the registered sex offender list next to people who have raped," he said.

Alpert's lawyer Larry Walters is trying to get Alpert's name taken off the sex offender registry. He told *CNN.com* that the law lags behind the technology, "Sexting is treated as child pornography in almost every state and it catches teens completely off guard because this is a fairly natural and normal thing for them to do. It is surprising to us as parents, but for teens it's part of their culture. Some judges have the good sense and reasonableness to treat this as a social problem and others are more zealous in their efforts to put everybody away and I think it's time, as a society, that we step back a little bit and avoid this temptation to lock up our children."

"You think child pornography, you think 6-year-old, 3-year-old little kids who can't think for themselves, who are taken advantage of. That really wasn't the case," Alpert told *CNN.com*.

Alpert can't get a passport to travel outside the United States, and

is having trouble finding employment. "I'm being punished for the rest of my life for something that took two minutes or less to do," he said.

In September, 2010, Canadians were shocked by the report of a vicious sexual assault by 7 boys on a 16-year-old girl who was allegedly drugged and "gang raped" after a rave party near Maple Ridge. At the time of writing, police had arrested two suspects and were obtaining evidence to lay charges on others.

As repugnant as the event was,

**Lenhart, the report's author, said: "The desire for risk-taking and sexual exploration during the teenage years combined with a constant connection via mobile devices creates a perfect storm for sexting. Teenagers have always grappled with issues around sex and relationships, but their coming-of-age mistakes and transgressions have never been so easily transmitted and archived for others to see."**

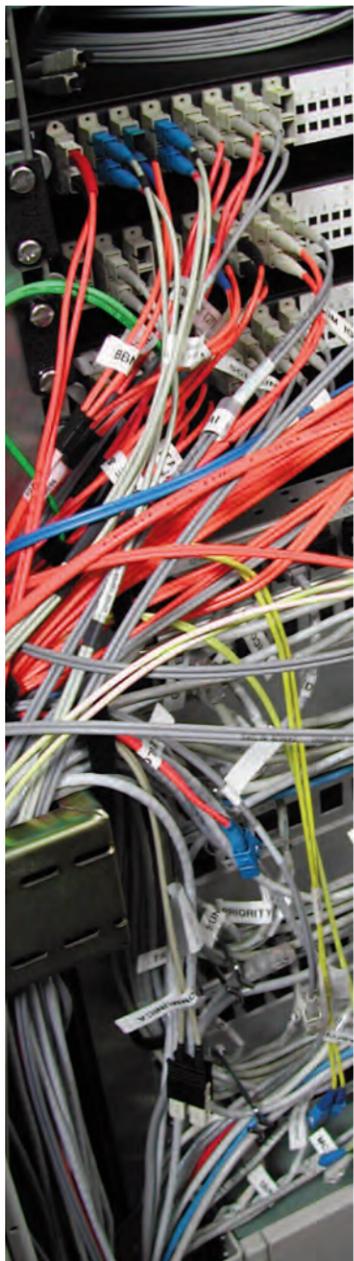
one of the observers took photos of the gang rape as it happened, and posted the photos to Facebook. When advised, Facebook immediately took the photographs off the site, but not before copies had been saved to individual hard drives on other computers and re-circulated. The photographs went viral within days.

A 16-year-old boy who took the photographs and uploaded them to Facebook was arrested by police and prosecutors have charged the youth with possession and distribution of child pornography.

Parents and teachers should be justifiably concerned about the use of cellphones for the transmission of sexual images, and should be letting their children and their students know about the social and indeed legal repercussions of taking and electronically circulating sexual images through the use of cellphones and other mobile devices.

Tony Wilson is an Intellectual Property Lawyer at Boughton Law Corporation in Vancouver and an Adjunct Professor at Simon Fraser University. He is rated as a leading Canadian lawyer by *LEXPRT* and *WHO'SWHO Legal*. He is a regular columnist with the *Globe and Mail*, *Lawyers Weekly*, *Canadian Lawyer* and *Bartalk Magazine*. His book "Manage Your On Line Reputation" was published in November 2010.





Looking beyond BCeSIS:

# An information system that works for teachers and students

By Larry Kuehn

*"Every tool shapes the task."*

— Ursula Franklin

Tools are not neutral. An information system created to manage information about students—such as BCeSIS—shapes what happens in the classroom. It does that in two ways. One is in the functionality, how it works, how fast it works, how it links different parts of the system. Another way is in the values that are imbedded in the choices of what and how information is structured.

Many of the complaints from teachers (and administrators) about BCeSIS have been related to the functionality of the system. It is slow, outdated in the design and rigid in structure. It drops information.

Because BCeSIS is a centralized system that requires all information to go into a central server, it requires enough capacity to meet the needs of peak times—the opening of the school year, report card time, the beginning of class periods, the end of the day.

#### A chance to start over

Usually, you don't get a chance to start over with a huge information technology system. The high expenditures already made confine future choices. That may not be true with BCeSIS.

**The company that developed the software (aal) went out of business. A giant, transnational corporation, Pearson, took over aal's customer base. Its interest (as often happens in this industry) is not to further develop the software taken over, but rather, it supports the software for a limited time and hopes to move customers over to its own software.**

The company that developed the software (aal) went out of business. A giant, transnational corporation, Pearson, took over aal's customer base. Its interest (as often happens in this industry) is not to further develop the software taken over, but rather, it supports the software for a limited time and hopes to move customers over to its own software.

In addition, the student information needs of the system are changing. The Ministry of Education says the education system is moving to

"21st century learning" and "personalization." BCeSIS was built with a different set of assumptions about the way that education is organized. The lack of future for BCeSIS provides an opening for a new start to create a student information system that supports teaching and learning for the 21st century.

This time teachers must be involved directly, so that, to paraphrase Ursula Franklin, the task shapes the tool, which, in turn, shapes the task in an appropriate way. This must be both in the functionality and in the educational values built into the software.

#### Ministry of Education calls for help

The collapse of BCeSIS at the beginning of the 2010–11 school year finally forced the ministry to acknowledge that BCeSIS is not up to the task it was supposed to achieve. The response of the ministry was to call for a consultant to tell them what to do and they contracted Gartner Consulting for a quarter-million-dollars.

The new system, said the ministry, must work for personalized learning: "This strategy will feature personalized student learning plans, irregular periods of registration and completion, and intensive collaboration and communication among teachers, students, and parents."

#### All the options are scary

The planning and development of BCeSIS started nearly a decade ago. "Early adopter" districts started using it in 2005. Despite warning signs that it was not up to the task (meltdowns at key times, capacity limits), more and more users were added to the system until it was beyond capacity. So what are the options now?

#### Option 1: Stick with BCeSIS

Stumble along, optimizing what capacity it does have and add no new elements. Try to get access to the code and hire programmers to fix and add things over the next several years. This seems like a ridiculous and unlikely scenario.

BCeSIS is based on a model of education that the ministry says is "last century" and not living in the 21st century. For example, BCeSIS is hardwired to assessment of learning, but not assessment for learning. It is based on standardized provincial data needs, not on a flexible system of keeping track, at the school level, of each objective set by the students, teachers, and

parents in consultation. In the talk of "personalized learning," objectives and how the student reaches them are not standardized, they are personalized. The tool and the task—BCeSIS and personalized learning—to use Ursula Franklin's concept, are not compatible.

#### Option 2: Move to another centralized system

This will probably be the recommendation of the consultants. They mostly work for corporations that want "enterprise" solutions. This is the model of information systems that provide to the people at the top of the hierarchy of a business the details that let them make strategic decisions about multi-centred operations.

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That is the kind of system that consultants for big corporations understand.

*What are the problems with moving to another centralized system?*

At the functional level, holding all the information in a central database requires huge server space and bandwidth. We don't have enough of either of these for BCeSIS, nor would we for another centralized system without paying a lot more.

Besides, most of the information in BCeSIS—or another centralized system—is not of interest (or shouldn't be) at the central level. Someone in the Ministry of Education should not be going into a database to see what Johnny got for the fourth assignment in the Science 10 class. If the information is not needed centrally, why would you purchase and implement another system that does the same thing, just a little better than BCeSIS?

One of the concerns about any centralized system is how the data will be used, not just within education, but as a part of the "e-government" strategy that is already under way in BC and many other jurisdictions. In this e-government plan, databases from a number of different areas would be matched in

ways that allow for "data-mining" to control actions.

#### Option 3: Create a distributed, decentralized system

The information needs for "personalized learning" would be rich at the level of those who are directly involved in determining the objectives and activities and ongoing assessment of the learning process. That data should not have to be structured in a standard way. Very little of it needs to be reported beyond the direct users of the information.

Education is an incredibly data-rich environment, but much of that richness is specific to the direct relationships between student and teachers. Much of the data never needs to be recorded and only a small amount needs to be passed on beyond the classroom. Much of what is transmitted beyond the school should be aggregate, anonymous information, not tied to individuals.

#### Who will make the decision, and how?

If past ministry practice is a guide, teachers will not be seriously consulted.

Teacher complaints about BCeSIS were dismissed by the ministry with assurances that all was well.

Ministry staff pushed the blame for problems onto the backs of districts and teachers. Only when the system broke down did pointing the finger of blame at teachers end, and the ministry finally acknowledged that the problem was with the system, not the users.

Having a say in the directions for the future must be open for many more than those who brought us to the inadequate and inappropriate system that we now have.

A more detailed version of the analysis of the future of BCeSIS is available at:

<http://tinyurl.com/3m45qmg>.

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

**Teacher complaints about BCeSIS were dismissed by the ministry with assurances that all was well. Ministry staff pushed the blame for problems onto the backs of districts and teachers. Only when the system broke down did pointing the finger of blame at teachers end, and the ministry finally acknowledged that the problem was with the system, not the users.**

## Honduran teachers need our support

In the year since a new president was installed in Honduras, 17 teachers have been killed. Teachers first protested against the coup that removed an elected president. Now they have to protest actions taken against teachers and their unions.

The current Honduran president, Pepe Lobo, has plans to privatize the public schools, fire teachers, and cut their social benefits, including pensions. Some teachers have not received their pay for up to six months. Not surprisingly, teachers are opposing these actions with mobilizations and a strike.

Teachers have been attacked with

tear gas, beaten, and many have been jailed. When a group of teachers retreated to their union office, they were attacked by government forces to force them out of the building. One of the teachers in the mobilization was killed when hit by a tear gas canister.

The Harper government, along with that of the US, has been one of the few in the Americas to recognize the new president as legitimate. Harper appointed a lawyer whose company works for mining interests as part of a committee set up by Pepe Lobo, supposedly to

investigate the truth about the coup.

The BCTF has been supporting the teachers in their struggles. When Irene Lanzinger was

**Teachers can support colleagues in Honduras by sending messages to the teachers of Honduras and the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights, which is supposed to investigate human rights abuses anywhere in the Americas.**

president, she joined an international delegation of observers of the illegitimate election. She was with a group of Hondurans who were attacked by the police with tear gas.

BCTF president Susan Lambert was part of a solidarity delegation that met the teachers in 2010.

The repression of teachers has stepped up dramatically in the last weeks. Only Colombia, with its long history of assassination of teacher activists, has a comparable level of repression to that now faced by teachers in Honduras.

Teachers can support colleagues

in Honduras by sending messages to the teachers of Honduras and the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights, which is supposed to investigate human rights abuses anywhere in the Americas. Messages should also go to the organization of the families of the disappeared.

CoDevelopment Canada provides information on their web page for sending messages of support. Check back frequently to the CoDev web page for updates: [www.codev.org](http://www.codev.org).

— Larry Kuehn

## Teachers' Pension Plan

# Dignity in retirement: A social justice issue for BCTF members



*Solidarity action = Working with others*

The act of working together for collective betterment is familiar territory to teachers. How have teachers worked to build coalition within the BCTF and with other groups to work across differences to find common ground and move toward greater equity in pension matters? With this question in mind and using the Social Justice Lens dealing with Solidarity Action: collectively working for change, the BCTF Pensions Committee has zoomed in on joint endeavours with others resulting in the collective betterment for all members, active and retired in the area of pensions with the goal of dignity in retirement.

### A history of working together on pensions

The right to a pension was an early concern of the BCTF. Two years after its 1917 founding, the BCTF at a Special General Meeting held on January 3, 1919, called upon the provincial legislature to establish a Superannuation Fund for Teachers. The BCTF was requesting a pension of 1/60 of salary (based on the average salary of the last ten years) for each year of service. So early in its history the BCTF began clearly enunciating some clear principles about the way our pension plan should be shaped. The government amended the *Civil Servants' Pension Act* in 1921 to allow teachers to receive a pension, but there was a stipulation. The local school board had to choose to offer a pension to teachers, and the local municipal council had to agree. The net result was that not one public school teacher received a pension under this provision! It took another eight years of lobbying by the BCTF and continued pressure from its members before the provincial legislature finally enacted the first *Teachers' Pension Act* on April 1, 1929.

The BCTF recognizes the right of Honorary Associate members (retired teachers who have been active in the BCTF for a minimum of 10 years) to enter into debate and vote at the BCTF AGM on recommendations and resolutions concerning pensions as a Special Committee as a Whole.

Around 1945, a retired member was appointed as a voting member of the BCTF Pension Committee—this was later increased to two members around the early 1970s. The BCTF Pension Committee's prime responsibility was to active members of the BCTF and the members of the BC Retired Teachers' Association. In 1992, the Teachers' Pension Plan Advisory Committee (TPPAC) was formed to include a representative of the BC Principals' and Vice Principals' Association and the BC School Superintendents' Association—all members of the Teachers' Pension Plan.

*Solidarity action = Coalition with a group*

### The 40th anniversary of the 1971 one-day strike over pensions

On October 30, 1970, in a province-wide referendum, 88% of teachers voted in favour of a province-wide strike to back demands for pension improvements, not only for active teachers but also for retired members. Thus, the first province-wide strike in BCTF history, which occurred March 19, 1971, was over pensions! Side-by-side, active and retired members campaigned for improvements to the pensions of those already retired and for those who would retire in the future. Retired teachers lobbied their MLAs in their constituencies and at the legislature in Victoria. The unity of the profession sent a strong message to the BC government that the BCTF represented teachers.

*Solidarity Action = Achieving equity*

### Joint Trusteeship of the Teachers' Pension Plan

In 1994, the Teachers' Pension Board was established. The board consisted of three representatives of the pension plan members (one was a retired member), three representatives of the government with the Superannuation (now the BC Pension Corporation), commissioner acting as chairperson. All were appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

In 2001, teachers across the province were engaged in a consultation on whether or not to enter into joint trusteeship of the pension plan. In a province-wide vote, 87% of plan members voted in favour of joint trusteeship. This year, 2011, marks the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Joint Trustee Agreement by the BCTF as the Plan Member Partner and the BC Government as the Plan Employer. Effective April 5, 2001, the Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees (with five appointees from each partner) became responsible for managing the pension plan and the pension fund.

*Solidarity Action = Working together to find common ground*

### 2009 Consultation on pensions

All members were consulted on the future of indexing pensions. Both active members and retired members participated. Strong member support for maintaining full cost of living adjustments to pension benefits was confirmed in an online survey and by motions passed at the 2010 BCTF Annual General Meeting. An agreement was then made by the plan partners to amend the Joint Trust Agreement in order to bolster the Inflation Adjustment Account (IAA) and sustain the indexing of pensions. Active members now contribute an extra 1% to the IAA and retired members will no longer receive the Extended Health Benefit subsidy after December 31, 2011. All members recognized the impor-

ance of equity in terms of indexing for those who have retired and those who will retire in the future.

The BCTF has advocated for both active and retired members in those areas where omissions or errors have been made in terms of their enrolment dates, pension service, payments, etc. People who worked as a TTOC prior to 1992 were able to purchase that TTOC service if they submitted an application to do so by March 31, 2007. As of July 1, 2005, TTOC service was fully recognized with enrolment in the plan compulsory with the first day of service.

*Solidarity Action = Recognition of injustices*

### What about responsible investing?

Our investment manager, the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation (bcIMC) works tirelessly to ensure that our pension funds are safe, secure, and responsibly invested. bcIMC actively engages with the companies in which it holds assets on our behalf on issues involving human rights, climate change, and best practices in corporate governance. bcIMC further collaborates on this engagement with like-minded groups such as the Canadian Coalition for Good Governance, the Asian Cooperate Governance Association, the International Corporate Governance Network, The United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment, and the Carbon Disclosure Project to advance the policies of good governance and responsible investing with companies and corporations around the world.

In addition, the four public sector pension plans (TPP, College Pension Plan, Municipal Pension Plan, and Public Service Pension Plan) meet together regularly to discuss those investment issues that could affect the performance of the individual plans positively or negatively as well as endeavours to enhance responsible investing. An example of this was the creation of US Social Index Fund benchmarked to the Domini KLD 400 index in 2006 for the college, public service, and the teachers' pension plan funds. The Municipal Pension Plan joined the pool in 2009.

In 2009, a motion passed at the BCTF AGM regarding responsible investing that read: "That the trustees of the Teachers' Pension Board be encouraged to further enhance responsible investing through actions such as positive screening of future investments, shareholder engagement, support of appropriate shareholder initiatives, proxy voting, and participation in socially screened investment pools."

At the 2011 BCTF AGM, a motion passed asking that the Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees investigate the creation of a new pooled fund, screened on specific criteria and with a targeted earning threshold. Again, the teachers are leading the way toward responsible investing.

*Solidarity action = Building coalition through co-operation*

### How are we contributing to the improvement of pensions to all Canadians?

The BCTF supports the Canadian Labour Congress' campaign to double Canadian Pension Plan benefits for all Canadians and to increase the amount of Guaranteed Income Supplement (means tested) and Old Age Security to all recipients. Recently, the BCTF submitted briefs to the Canadian Labour Congress, all the Provincial Ministers of Finance, and the Federal Minister of Finance in

support of dignity in retirement for all Canadians.

The BCTF submitted a brief to the 2007 Alberta/British Columbia Pension Standards Review supporting a defined benefit pension plan model for provincial workers without a pension and encouraging the expansion throughout the private sector. In addition, the Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees made a joint submission along with the College and the Public Service Pension Boards of Trustees to the same panel.

*Solidarity Action = Achieving equity*

*This is the third of a four-part series of articles by the BCTF Pensions Committee that will appear this year in Teacher newsmagazine.*

## Factor 88? Don't wait

A member who has attained age 64, has reached factor '88' (age plus contributory service), or is in receipt of a retirement pension under a registered pension plan, may voluntarily withdraw from the long-term portion of the Salary Indemnity Plan. Withdrawal may be made during any school year in which one of the foregoing conditions has been met and upon the completion of the appropriate withdrawal form. Withdrawal will be effective, upon approval, in September for applications received in that month. Applications submitted later will be effective the month following approval of the application.

In making application for withdrawal, you should ensure that in the event of serious illness or accident you have sufficient accumulated sick leave which, when combined with 120 days of benefit from SIP: short-term, will protect your salary to the end of the month in which you reach factor '90' or the end of the month you attain age 65, whichever comes first.

Principals and vice-principals should contact their HR department to inquire if they are members of the BCTF SIP or the disability plan offered through the BCPVPA. The

BCPVPA plan will have its own withdrawal guidelines.

Applications are available online at: [bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/SalaryBenefits/SIP/LT-withdrawalForm.pdf](http://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/SalaryBenefits/SIP/LT-withdrawalForm.pdf) or call the BCTF Income Security Division at 604-871-1921.

## Seminars: Your pension, your future and/or Thinking about retiring

Preregistration is required for these two seminars co-presented by BCTF staff and Pension Corporation staff. The time and the location will be confirmed by mail or e-mail. Check out the poster in your school staffroom or go to the Teachers' Pension Plan website ([tp.pensionsbc.ca](http://tp.pensionsbc.ca)) or contact the plan by phone 1-877-558-5574 or e-mail [TPPseminar@pensionsbc.ca](mailto:TPPseminar@pensionsbc.ca).

## There is more to it than money

The BCRTA has developed a workshop designed to complement the pension plan seminars, but with limited enrolment to facilitate sharing and learning.

Attend a seminar. We know that entering retirement is more than choosing a pension option, and you better to share information, ideas, and experiences with you than retired teachers?

Retirement brings with it life-altering situations and a wide variety of choices, some financial, some legal. Some physical, some social, and all are connected with lifestyle. Achieving a workable balance of activities and fulfilling dreams doesn't just happen. Once you have determined that it's time to retire, it's also time to concentrate on all the other aspects of your new venture.

If a pension seminar is coming to your area, ask your BCTF local president to contact the BCRTA to book this highly acclaimed follow-up workshop.

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Enter before June 30th and you will also be entered into an early bird draw for a brand new 16GB Apple iPad!\*

Canadian Direct Insurance is proud to be your new Advantage Partner for home, auto and travel insurance. As a BCTF member you qualify for enhanced coverage and an extra 10% off your home insurance!\*\*

Now purchase travel insurance online at [bctfadvantage.com](http://bctfadvantage.com)!

\*No purchase necessary. Approx. value of prizes is \$3,500. For full contest details log on to [canadiandirect.com/bctf.aspx](http://canadiandirect.com/bctf.aspx).  
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# Classified

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**MAUI** Privately owned, beautiful fully furn. 2 bdrm, 2 bath condo, across from Kamaole Beaches. Great complex, Great location. 250-598-6955.

**TOFINO.** Owned by a Salt Spring teacher's family, this cozy condo is on the harbor in Tofino, at Elk Landing, across from The Shelter Restaurant, walking distance to town. To view, go to [www.tofino](http://www.tofino) beach homes, go to select your property, go to Eagles Nest. Call 250-725-2570.

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

**BLACKCOMB** Luxury 2 bdrm/loft, 3 bath, sleeps 8, ski-in/ski-out, 604-940-0156.

**GULF ISLANDS** Deluxe waterfront cottage, 1 bd./sleeps 4, winter and summer rates, call Alma 250-629-3008, [www.ainsliepointcottage.com](http://www.ainsliepointcottage.com)

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**PUERTO VALLARTA** Bright, clean, quiet, 1 bdrm, 2 blks from beach, downtown, \$350/wk., monthly rates. 604-608-4268, [dbemc@hotmail.com](mailto:dbemc@hotmail.com)

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**WATERFRONT P.E.I.** Beautiful 3 bdrm. cottage for rent May through Oct., \$1700/wk. July and Aug. or \$850/wk. spring/fall. Contact: [brucehaven@hotmail.com](mailto:brucehaven@hotmail.com)

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**OCEANFRONT SUITE VICTORIA BC** Weekly vacation rentals. Details at <http://judyak.shawwebpace.ca>. Contact [judyak@shaw.ca](mailto:judyak@shaw.ca) or call 250-380-6682.

**GABRIOLA ISLAND, BC.** 2 bdrm. Cottage, 250-247-9883, [www.gabriolacottage.netfirms.com](http://www.gabriolacottage.netfirms.com), [boysen@shaw.ca](mailto:boysen@shaw.ca)

**TEACHING EXCHANGE.** Consider an exchange to another country and receive your regular salary and benefits! Hundreds of BC teachers have done it, why not you? Contact BC Exchange Teachers' Assoc. [teather\\_t@sd36.bc.ca](mailto:teather_t@sd36.bc.ca) or go to [www.ceef.ca](http://www.ceef.ca) for more information.

**FRANCE FRANCE 2011** holiday rental. Well renovated converted barn & stoned houses in ancient, traditional vineyard village, SW France. Great walking, cycling, food, wine, Cathar castles. C\$765/C\$1051/wk. per family. U18. E-mail [mjcapper@hotmail.com](mailto:mjcapper@hotmail.com), visit [www.ourhouseinfrance.com.au](http://www.ourhouseinfrance.com.au)

**DEEP BAY** waterfront 2 bdrm. cottage, Vancouver Island, overlooking Denman, Hornby Islands. Relaxing, private. Sleeps 4-6 people, N/S, N/P. Available June to September. 604-939-0121 or [joyce.buckham@shaw.ca](mailto:joyce.buckham@shaw.ca)

**FRANCE HOLIDAY RENTALS** Languedoc near Montpellier, Mediterranean. Medieval house & studio apt. Self catering. From \$650/wk. for 2 people, [www.ruemontbel.com](http://www.ruemontbel.com), [sjevent@shaw.ca](mailto:sjevent@shaw.ca)

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**OKANAGAN LAKE** vacation home in Penticton located on the strip. Deluxe 3 bdrm suite, sleeps 6, full kitchen, patio, backyard and only seconds to the beach. 250-809-2474

**OKANAGAN COTTAGE** for rent July 9-16, Aug. 27-Sept. 3. Sleeps six. 40 min. from Westbank on Okanagan Lake. To view: [www.carrsareus.com](http://www.carrsareus.com) \$1400/wk., [johncarr@telus.net](mailto:johncarr@telus.net)

**MAUI HAWAII,** great S Kihei location, 1 bdrm. with ocean view, across the street from great beach. For more information 209-599-5248 or [www.maui342.com](http://www.maui342.com)

**WAILEA, MAUI.** 2 bdrm. condo, beautifully renovated and spacious. Available to teachers at a discounted rate. Pay in Canadian funds! Air conditioned, free long distance, free WiFi, flat screens, new furnishings, private lanai, washer & dryer, onsite property manager, beach gear. Email [waileavacationrentals@shaw.ca](mailto:waileavacationrentals@shaw.ca).

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**TIME SHARE** Buy \$3,250 or rent mid-July week \$825. Banff Rocky Mt. Resort, 1 bdrm., 1 bath, sleeps 4, fully furn., many amenities. Phone 604-526-4247.

**HORNBY ISLAND COTTAGE** - Holiday rental, sleeps 5, 1 block from Sandpiper Beach, laundry, shower, d/washer, stove, fridge, internet, cable, phone, private, pets ok, \$1150/wk., 250-335-0305, [doninnes@hotmail.com](mailto:doninnes@hotmail.com)

**CHRISTINA LAKE** 3 bdrm., 1 1/2 bath, cabin on beautiful Christina Lake. Aug. 14-28. Road access, 100' private sandy beach, private dock. \$3,000. [adeluca@telus.net](mailto:adeluca@telus.net).

**BEACHFRONT COTTAGE** for rent on sunny Cowichan Lake. Beautiful, new, luxury cabin available weekly. Visit [www.members.shaw.ca/watermanproperties/ForRentAtCowichan](http://www.members.shaw.ca/watermanproperties/ForRentAtCowichan), colleague discount, 250-656-9711.

**KELOWNA** 1 bdrm. vacation suite. Sleeps 4-5, \$400-\$600/wk. e-mail: [KelownaFamilyVacation@gmail.com](mailto:KelownaFamilyVacation@gmail.com)

**CULTUS LAKE** 3 bdrm. home, 50m to lake, N/P, N/S, avail. July 3-31, \$800/wk. Phone 604-464-2890 or [delia\\_cooper@telus.net](mailto:delia_cooper@telus.net)

**THETIS ISLAND, BC.** Tranquil waterfront cottage, kayak, canoe, \$725/wk. [frankel@island.net](mailto:frankel@island.net)

**SUNSHINE COAST** Pender Harbour oceanfront 1 bdrm. self-contained suite. Private dock. Spectacular location, great ocean kayaking. Hiking, lakes, and Skookumchuck Rapids nearby. Fabulous rates. [www.penderharbourcottage.ca](http://www.penderharbourcottage.ca) or [susanwalker@telus.net](mailto:susanwalker@telus.net)

**SAVARY ISLAND** deluxe 3 bdrm. cabin, 2 rental wks left! Aug. 19-26, Aug. 26-Sept. 2. 200 metres to sandy beaches. \$950/wk. kayak, bikes, mooring. 604-736-0741, [moira@awma-bc.ca](mailto:moira@awma-bc.ca)

**OKANAGAN LAKE-LA CASA RESORT** vacation home for rent. Luxurious privately owned, beautifully furnished, 3 bdrms, 2 full bath with all the extras, loaded with amenities and just 30 min. from Kelowna. Rates are \$175/night (2 night min) off season and \$315/night (3 night min) peak season or \$1800/week. Visit our website: [www.lacasa.com](http://www.lacasa.com) for more information, contact [nicalhouse@yahoo.ca](mailto:nicalhouse@yahoo.ca) or 604-209-1525.

**PT. ROBERTS** Deluxe, fully furnished cabin includes bbq, firepit, cable, beautifully landscaped. Sleeps 4, Pets ok. \$100/night, 2 night min., photo's contact: [kkurtenbach@shaw.ca](mailto:kkurtenbach@shaw.ca)

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**SUNSHINE COAST** house renovated and furnished. Upper part of a duplex located in a rural setting. 3 bdrms, 1 bath. 1/2 acre private wooded area with swings, trampoline and track mountain biking. Surrounded by hiking and mountain biking. 15 min. walk from the beach and 10 min. from town of Sechelt. \$950/mo. 604-740-0431.

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**VANCOUVER** Clean, bright, quiet, centrally located condos at Robson & Bute. 1 bdrm. \$95. Daily/wkly/mthly rates. 604-608-4268, [dbemc@hotmail.com](mailto:dbemc@hotmail.com)

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**VANCOUVER.** Lovely, 1 bdrm. suite, Killarney, large kitchen and livingroom, female preferred, no pets/no smoking, \$800/mo., includes heat, cable and electricity, 604-591-8908, 604-591-2651.

**KELOWNA** 3 bdrm. home available Aug. 1, 2011 to Aug. 1, 2012. Furn. or unfurn. Rent negotiable. 250-869-5087.

**HOUSEKIT** Sask. teacher wishes to house-sit in Victoria for July 2011 (babysitting grandchildren in their home weekdays). 306-586-9442, [kim.steele@sasktel.net](mailto:kim.steele@sasktel.net)

**VANCOUVER** Newly refurbished, furnished studio apt for rent in West End, 2 blks from Stanley Park & English Bay. \$450/wk., [jkathleen@shaw.ca](mailto:jkathleen@shaw.ca)

## MISCELLANEOUS

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**OUTBACK KIDS FIELD TRIP** "Survivor" team building, lunch, kids rafting... all in one great day! "The highlight of the year!" Glenayre Elementary. "The best field trip ever!" Scott Creek Middle School. [www.CanadianOutback.com/outbackkids](http://www.CanadianOutback.com/outbackkids), [info@canadianoutback.com](mailto:info@canadianoutback.com), 1-800-565-8735.

**DON'T GET BOGGED DOWN!** Book a field trip to Burns Bog. Discover the wonders of this globally unique ecosystem. Ask about our teacher's guides. 604-572-0373 or [www.burnsbog.org](http://www.burnsbog.org).

**RETIRING?** Join the BC Retired Teachers' Association. Keep current. Be informed about and lend your voice to: Pension plan discussions, Indexing, Health plans, Health benefits. For more information, go to [www.bcrta.ca](http://www.bcrta.ca) or call 604-871-2260, 1-877-683-2243.

**SEE CHINA FOR FREE** and teach English conversation with Tianjiao English. Short-term assignments (10 wks) or (20 wks) in China. All levels, K, Primary, Intermediate, Secondary. Starting next school year (2011-2012): Sept; Nov; Feb; April. Contact [grahammul@canadatj.com](mailto:grahammul@canadatj.com)

**PENSION QUESTIONS?** Ask Arnie - now retired and available for expert, personal, one-to-one consultation including pension estimates, options, bridge, CPP/OAS, and pension splitting. Call Arnie Lambert at 604-354-5624 or e-mail [arnielambert@shaw.ca](mailto:arnielambert@shaw.ca)

**THEATRE ALBERTA** presents ARTSTREK—a residential summer program for teens with a passion for theatre. Students will explore acting, voice, movement, directing, sound/music, design, creation, and integration. July 10-24 at Red Deer College. Visit [www.theatrealberta.com](http://www.theatrealberta.com) or call 780-422-8162.

**FOR SALE** Affordable Okanagan. Teacher-owned singlewide 4-yr-old mobile home in Vernon. New park near golf course. 3 bdrm., 2 full baths, 5 appl., central air-con., large deck, nicely landscaped. Ready to move in. \$129,500. Call Eva 250-964-2432 or [celllott@sd57.bc.ca](mailto:celllott@sd57.bc.ca)

## BCTF committee vacancies

The following committees have vacancies commencing July 1, 2011. The terms of reference for most of these committees can be found on page 193-195 of the *Members' Guide to the BCTF at: [bctf.ca/AboutUs.aspx?id=4298](http://bctf.ca/AboutUs.aspx?id=4298)*.

Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee

Adult Education Advisory Committee

Advisory Committee on French Programs and Services

BCTF Assistance Society

Committee for Action on Social Justice

G.A. Fergusson Memorial Award Trustees

Health and Safety Advisory Committee

Income Security Committee

Internal Mediation Service

International Solidarity Fund

Pensions Committee

Professional Issues Advisory Committee

Teacher Newsmagazine Advisory Board

Teachers Teaching on Call Advisory Committee

Working and Learning Conditions/Bargaining Advisory Committee

**Deadline: June 6, 2011**

Elections for the following two positions will take place at the Spring Representative Assembly May 27-28, 2011 (application deadline, **May 21, 2011**).

- BC Federation of Labour Executive Council
- Judicial Council

To apply for all committees, send a completed curriculum vitae form to Mary McClure, BCTF, 100-550 West 6th Ave., Vancouver, BC V5Z 4P2, Fax 604-871-2289.

A CV application form can be found on the BCTF website at [bctf.ca/opportunities/BCTFCommittees.aspx](http://bctf.ca/opportunities/BCTFCommittees.aspx).

## BCTF facilitators needed

Successful applicants must be available to attend the Facilitators' Institute Training (FIT) on August 17-19, 2011, at Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, be available to facilitate workshops throughout the school year, and to travel extensively throughout the province. These three-year terms will commence July 1, 2011.

- Aboriginal education
- Health and safety
- Peer support service consultants
- School union rep trainers
- Social justice
- Teachers teaching on call
- Workshops plus
- Program for quality teaching/Teacher inquiry (Training dates: September 30 and October 1, 2011)

**Deadline: May 13, 2011**

To apply send a completed curriculum vitae form to: Marion Shukin, BCTF, 100-550 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5Z 4P2 or by fax to 604-871-2286.

Facilitator CV forms are available on the BCTF website:

[bctf.ca/OpportunitiesForMembers.aspx](http://bctf.ca/OpportunitiesForMembers.aspx), "BCTF Workshop Facilitator Postings"

Please ensure you identify which position you are applying for.

# Talking piece takes to the stage



Ramona Orr

Drawing on the power of theatre to depict pathos, violence, and restitution, the Senior Theatre Company class at Van Tech Secondary School, in Vancouver, recently presented a musical play entitled *Talking Piece*. Co-directed by Ramona Orr and Artstarts artist-in-residence Kevin Crofton, the play bluntly tackles the problem of cyber-bullying with the emotional, psychological torment, and trauma laid bare. Plays for secondary schools are often somewhat preachy, said Orr, so the directness and honesty of *Talking Piece* was what captured her attention and imagination. Kevin Crofton rewrote the script for a wider audience and it has played over a period of two weeks in March to five elementary

**Ramona Orr is full of praise for the students who embraced the concept of violence being done to them within their characters and imagined the situation with empathy, conviction, and emotional depth.**

schools, alternate education programs, families, teachers, youth workers, and many Grade 9 and 10 students.

The play is about a fight breaking out fuelled by a mob mentality that encourages the violence. The main female characters who have the fight are Vicki, played by Natasha Pheko and Mercedes, played by award-winning singer Sarah

Cantuba. Their inner emotions and views about each other are expressed through solo songs and duets along with other characters using group raps with a solo rap performed by Jason, the bad boyfriend of Mercedes played by Markiel Simpson. A live band, *Far Far Fiction* is featured, along with a multimedia film of the main characters in the talking circle presenting witness testimonials to the fight.

In the talking circle, actors sitting in mask pass the talking piece (feather) around to each other dealing with conflict by using a restorative justice model, making everyone involved accountable for their actions. We were very fortunate, said Orr, to have Veronica Godard, our first nations worker play a character in the play during a naming ceremony scene where one of the characters finds her voice to help her friend who is being bullied at school.

Ramona Orr is full of praise for the students who embraced the concept of violence being done to them within their characters and imagined the situation with empathy, conviction, and emotional depth. "I was often moved in rehearsal," she said, "as their director and teacher, but it wasn't until the actual performance that I realized how far they had come." The two lead characters, Vicki and Mercedes are played by students who are, in reality, good friends so they were really challenged by having to play a character different from themselves. "It was important to cast the students as someone who could play the character but not be like them in their real life. The gang member and the violent girl were played by the nicest students. It is always fun to play a character who is different from yourself."

"Talking Piece has been a wonderful experience for both myself and the students."

— David Denyer



## Day of pink

### Teachers launch new learning resource while ignore homophobia in schools

To mark the Day of Pink, the BC Teachers' Federation and the Pride Education Network (PEN) have launched a new resource for teachers entitled "The Gender Spectrum: What Educators Need to Know." This new guidebook complements the resources currently available to help teachers address homophobia and transphobia in schools.

"For over a decade, the BCTF and PEN have been working together to create safe and inclusive schools for all students and families—whatever their place on the gender spectrum," said BCTF President Susan Lambert. "I'm very proud of our ongoing work in this area."

The BCTF and PEN are making a difference by providing resources, lesson plans, and professional development workshops on anti-homophobia education and by supporting Gay Straight Alliance clubs—65 are currently active in BC secondary schools. As well, local teacher unions, parents, and students have been calling for discrete policies to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-



L-R: Faune Johnson, Coquitlam retired teacher; Susan Lambert, BCTF president; and Jessica Campbell, Ecole Jules Quesnel, Vancouver.

spirited, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) students and same-gender families. To date, 12 school boards in BC have adopted policies in this area.

By contrast, neither political party in BC has taken any concrete action to protect LGBTQ students, despite years of lobbying and advocacy work. Recently, PEN conducted a survey of BC Liberal and BC NDP leadership candidates, but only BC

and transphobia can affect any student at any age. I see it in my classroom. Hatred is a learned behaviour. Teachers are trying hard to eradicate it without any support from the Ministry of Education. What we really need are mandatory LGBTQ policies in every school district and concrete support for us to do this critical work," Campbell said.

Lambert noted that the Day of Pink is not a generic antibullying day. It originated when students came together to assert that homophobic bullying in particular, had no place in their schools. "As teachers, we know that our students often teach us important life lessons. The Day of Pink is an important example of how adults can learn from young people about how to build a better world," Lambert said.

### New resource

## The Gender Spectrum: What educators need to know

This professional resource is designed for Kindergarten to Grade 12 teachers and has many practical

lesson plans. It focuses on gender role stereotyping and how rigid beliefs about gender identity and expression limit students' ability to fully express themselves. It includes information on using gender inclusive language in the classroom, gender roles and play in primary classrooms, use of literature to challenge gender stereotypes, examining novels for gender bias, discussing gender with secondary students, First Nations' perspectives of gender and much more. The lesson plans are designed to be embedded within your existing curriculum. There is also a comprehensive list of resources included which would be very useful for school libraries. Teacher Librarians are encouraged to catalogue it as a professional resource for their staff and highlight its existence at a future staff meeting.

You can view the entire handbook online at:

[bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=17990](http://bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=17990)

You can also order hard copies by sending a cheque payable to Pride Education Network for \$7 per copy to: Pride Education Network, Box 93678, Nelson Park PO, Vancouver, BC V6E 4L7.