

TEACHER

Newsmagazine of the BC Teachers' Federation

Supporting your local bargaining team

By **Glen Hansman**

Our collective agreements came about through a long history of struggle and initiative with teachers working together since the BCTF was founded in 1917. Over the years these agreements have played a key role in the welfare and worklife of teachers and in the quality of education we provide in public schools. Working together is something that has always served us well. Ken Novakowski points out in a *Teacher* article from September 1999 (see <http://bit.ly/iVENTb>), "From the beginning, BC teachers established that they were going to pursue their collective objectives with serious rigour when in 1919, Victoria teachers held a two-day strike to achieve a salary agreement. This was the first teacher strike in what was then referred to as the British Empire. From that point forward, BC teachers used job action, political action, and professional influence to help attain their goals."

That isn't to say that there haven't been setbacks. Certainly, Bills 27 and 28—the BC Liberal government's legislation that removed class size, class composition, hours of work, integration, learning specialist teacher caseloads and ratios, and other language from our collective agreements—are among the worst

setbacks, and their effects have been horrendous. We always need to remember what teachers sacrificed to get this language in the first place. BC teachers stood on the picket line for that language, they gave up salary and benefit improvements for that language, and they advocated forcefully at the bargaining table and with

Conversations will be occurring this month about what steps we will need to take collectively to support the work of our local teams and to push individual trustees, their boards, and their management teams to get to local bargaining tables on a more frequent basis and to take seriously the objectives you have set through your locals.

government to secure it. In April 2011, nearly a decade on from government's taking that language away from us, the BC Supreme Court decided that the BC Liberal government's actions were unconstitutional. And, through the court proceedings, we now know much more about the activities of government (which included Christy Clark, who was minister of education at the time) behind the scenes in the lead up to committing its unconstitutional acts during the 2001–02 school year (see Susan Lambert's article below).



This is only one part of the context in which we find ourselves bargaining at the provincial and the local tables.

Having the privilege to travel around the province to speak to members and hear from them about bargaining, the court decision, and other issues of concern, I have found it remarkable how interested members are in the current round of bargaining. Many locals have been reporting the highest member turnout in years at local meetings, and the questions that are being asked demonstrate that members have

been paying attention to the bargaining bulletins arriving at their schools from the provincial and local tables.

It is clear at this point, though, that the majority of school boards are not taking negotiations as seriously as they should be. Many school boards have only agreed to a handful of dates between now and the end of the school year. Several of them have shown little or passing interest in hearing from teacher locals about the important objectives and issues of concern that teachers in those locals have deter-

mined should be addressed at the local bargaining table. This is unacceptable.

Conversations will be occurring this month about what steps we will need to take collectively to support the work of our local teams and to push individual trustees, their boards, and their management teams to get to local bargaining tables on a more frequent basis and to take seriously the objectives you have set through your locals.

Glen Hansman is the BCTF second vice-president.

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Run silent and run deep

BC Liberal cuts and the targeting of teachers' rights

By **Susan Lambert**

On January 26, 2002, then-Education Minister Christy Clark stood in the BC Legislature and avowed that she was "delighted" to speak in favour of Bill 28, the *Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act*. "This bill," she said, "is about putting students first on the agenda. It ensures that decisions about children's education are made based on the needs of those individual children."

Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? And it would have been, if only it were true.

In fact, Bill 28 was never about quality public education, and it certainly was never about children's needs. It was always about the government's need to pay for the 25% tax cut Gordon Campbell announced on his first day in office. And it was about the BC Liberals' plan for radical restructuring of the public sector, a process that began

even before their overwhelming 77–2 election victory in May 2001.

Confidential government documents entered in evidence during the BC Teachers' Federation's successful *Charter* challenge of Bills 27 and 28 reveal that Clark knew months in advance that the legislation would mean cuts of hundreds of millions of dollars a year, massive teacher layoffs, larger classes, and less support for students with special needs.

On April 13, 2011, the BC Supreme Court ruled that the government's actions in eliminating hundreds of provisions from the collective agreement were unconstitutional and invalid.

In her ruling, Madam Justice Susan Griffin quotes from cryptic but clear notes of an April 2001 meeting when representatives of the BC Public School Employers' Association discussed bargaining strategy vis-a-vis the BCTF.

See *RUN SILENT* page 3

On the inside

As we hurtle toward the end of the school year, rather than this being a time for some reflection, we find ourselves in this edition looking to the future. Topping the list is bargaining and the restoration of the working and learning conditions language stripped from collective agreements by Bills 27 and 28. The resulting neglect of children with special needs is examined. The negative consequences of the FSA are further explored against a backdrop of ministry idealism around personalized learning.

Whether you are finding yourself approaching the end of your career or at the beginning, what are the

prospects for your future? Personal finances and pensions are important topics pondered by writers for this edition.

A number of articles illustrate how, at home and abroad, teachers reach out to help and support others and demonstrate remarkable resiliency in difficult circumstances.

The level of involvement and industriousness of teachers in myriad projects continues to impress and clearly show, contrary to ministry assertions, that teachers are very much in touch with, and leading, in contemporary practice and innovation.

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President's message



Susan Lambert

Is it possible to be elated and outraged at the same time? That is

how I, and I know tens of thousands of BC teachers, greeted the court ruling on April 13. The ruling struck down Bills 27 and 28—legislation that had outlawed our constitutional right to bargain class size and composition and stripped collective agreement language of any clause related to these working and learning conditions. We were outraged by the violation of our democratic rights in 2002. We are outraged that it took almost a decade, fighting government every inch of the way at great financial and psychological cost, to get our rights back. We are outraged by the duplicitous process this government used to secretly construct these bills while at the

same time BCPSEA pretended to bargain class size and composition with us. And we are outraged that Premier Clark, then Minister of Education had the gall to suggest, when speaking to these bills in the legislature, that they would “ensure that decisions about children's education are made based on the needs of those individual children.”

Such a statement is evidence of the contempt Clark held for teachers at the time, and her absolute disregard for the effect the legislation would have on public education in the province. While making this statement in the legislature, Clark was well aware of her governments' motivation for the

legislation. They had reduced taxes by 25%, were building a trade and convention centre with cost over runs, had plans to twin the Port Mann bridge and wanted to host the Olympic Games. They needed the money. Clark had been warned that class sizes would increase and that parents would notice a decline in services. And yet she trumpeted the legislation would put “students first.”

Parents too, should be outraged because over the course of this decade children have gone to school each year in worsening conditions. Not a day goes by without some legacy of this legislation being keenly felt in

schools. This legislative vandalism allowed the provincial government to rob the school system of \$275 million in 2002–03. Three thousand teachers were laid off. The ranks of learning specialist teachers like teacher-librarians, counsellors, ESL teachers, and teachers who assist children with special needs have been decimated.

Parents and teachers must demand, at the very minimum, that this fall students go back to school to the conditions that were in place in 2001–02. Translate the \$275 million that was stolen from education coffers to 2011 dollars and that means \$337 million to truly put families and their children first in this province.

Readers write

Questionable finding

I just read the April edition of *Teacher*, which I always enjoy. Yet it is tendentious and biased to the political left. One example is the headline article “Public opinion supports teachers' bargaining rights,” which is not true; the lead objective of teachers across the province is for a salary increase. A great number of British Columbians want their taxes to go down, not up, so I question Nancy Knickerbocker's finding, noted in the last paragraph of her article, that only 28% of respondents “disagree that [teacher] salaries should increase.” I think it is more accurate to write that people generally want their own salaries to go up but not everybody else's, then taxes would have to rise. As a teacher, I would dearly love to see a salary increase, but I don't think we can count on either government support—whether NDP or Liberal—or public support.

Jim McMurtry
Surrey

[Editor's note: The findings reported in the article are not a matter of the author's opinion. Rather, they reflect the opinions of 803 British Columbians who were surveyed by Viewpoints Research, a professional public polling firm. The results are accurate plus or minus 3.3% 19 times out of 20.]

A lasting education

When I was in my teens, I was often sent off by my mother to do various chores. One of the few I didn't really mind was taking meals, desserts, and other culinary treats up to my uncle, who lived just a few blocks away. He was in his 90s by

this time, but I didn't think of him as old; more as a well-seasoned encyclopedia of stories and information.

He lived in a tiny, two-roomed shack, with no running water or plumbing. He ran a hose from his neighbour's back yard to supply himself with water. His stove was an old wood-burning monstrosity that supplied the shack's only heat. He had an outhouse attached off the back porch. He didn't own much either. I know this because he was always wearing the same thing—a one-piece pair of long underwear, a heavy pair of black woolen slacks (his britches he called them) held up with suspenders, woolen socks, and a heavy work shirt. When it was warm he would forgo the work shirt. One warm summer day I came over to find him standing outside in his long underwear, stretching his britches and shirt over a wooden saw horse. He informed me that he figured it was a good time to do his laundry. He got the hose and proceeded to soak down his britches and shirt. Then, leaving them to dry in the sun, we retired indoors. I never asked him how he cleaned his long johns.

Two cups, a plate, and a very limited supply of cutlery and other kitchen items were the only decorations around the room. When I came over he would wipe out one of the cups with his shirt, then make us both a cup of tea. We would sit at his crude wooden table and talk. I would tell him about school, friends, girls, and what I was up to. He would entertain me with yarns, tales of his youth, and life in the area when he was growing up. I still remember when he decided to tell

me about his secret fishing spot, including where I could find his rowboat hidden in the bush nearby. He had learned of the spot when he was invited to a then illegal potlatch. He allowed that it had been awhile since he had been able to use it himself, so I might as well get some use from it. The next weekend I snuck out of the house, fishing pole in hand, excitedly off on my private adventure. A boat and place I could go where parents and other adults wouldn't intrude! I followed his instructions, only to find myself looking at the walls of the local pulp mill. His time frame was clearly a bit off, the mill being built 20 years earlier.

I don't remember many of the details of his many stories now; what I do remember is him sparking my imagination and curiosity, making me laugh, teasing, and encouraging me. I remember the warmth and security of sitting around his battered table drinking tea, imagining the past, and being encouraged to dream of the future. I think he was probably the best teacher I ever had.

We've just come through a period of assessing our students for the facts, figures, and skills they have managed to learn and/or remember. Those measurements are then used to determine if our students have succeeded or failed. Some organizations use them to determine the success of our school as well. It's a sad reality that we have to evaluate our students on things that, like the specifics of the stories I heard from my uncle, will probably fade and be forgotten in time. If only we could find a way of evaluating the things that are really

important—exciting curiosity, encouraging dreams, and ensuring students feel accepted, safe, and secure enough to follow those dreams. Of course, we wouldn't be evaluating the kids then. Maybe we just need to pair them each up with an old man.

Russ Simpson
Langley

To divest or not

At the BCTF AGM in March, the delegates debated whether to direct the pension fund managers to divest of shares in specific corporations earning profits in part from the production of tobacco, weapons and pornography, and environmental degradation. In the end, only the resolution regarding the environment (Enbridge stock) passed with a slim majority. As a delegate I was heartened by that one small win, as in my community lying on Enbridge's proposed pipeline to the Coast, opposition to the pipeline in both the Aboriginal and wider populations is very strong.

The case against divesting of the other activities centred on the argument that pressure for change could more effectively be made from within, although no past examples of such a success were cited. Some investment activists maintain that divesting of specific stocks, accompanied by publicity, is an effective strategy. To me, the argument is moot: I simply don't want to profit from unethical activities. If it results in a slightly smaller pension for me down the road, so be it. The peace of mind is worth it to me. Having said that, I appreciate that the careful work of our pension fund managers gives us educators a peace of mind about our finances that many in society do not enjoy, and I understand directing them to divest of specific assets makes their job more difficult.

Our Federation, like it or not, is a political force in our society, and as such, needs to be concerned about optics. I worry that the passionate work done by our colleagues involved in the Federation's social justice initiatives, when viewed through the lens of our questionable investments, could be belittled as disingenuous posturing.

I look forward to a public announcement that we have divested of our Enbridge stock, citing the reasons advanced by delegates. As we enter a bargaining year, I believe such an announcement will strengthen public perception that we are principled and not just “all about money.”

Walter van der Kamp
Burns Lake



Gift cookies

I was sent a box of cookies from some well-meaning kid. Featuring a picture of Candy-coating on the lid. The picture looked pretty. I guessed not good for me. Squinting at the label I was disappointed to see. It read: Processed sugar Preservatives A and B Artificial flavour Hydrogenates, MSG. I opened the bag to see Between two darkened disks White pasted centres I wondered, What the risk? I had a little nibble Soon the dam was down I chomped the whole bag Took a week to get unwound.

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RUN SILENT from page 1

"We need to know policy direction from government to shape barg strat, i.e., concessions on class size...." The notes also record someone present saying: "Suggest run silent & run deep."

And that is precisely what they did: "run silent and run deep." Evidence at trial made it abundantly clear that, unbeknownst to

"It is assumed that the largest opportunity for savings will come from school boards taking advantage of the opportunity to increase class sizes and reduce non-enrolling teacher positions."

teachers, government and the employer were quietly sharing strategic information throughout the bargaining period.

In June 2001, Clark and Gary Farrell-Collins, then Finance Minister, met to discuss issues including "teacher bargaining and essential services." A bill declaring public education an essential service was enacted in August—just in time for the new school year and the next round of collective bargaining. Teachers saw this as a deliberate move to undermine labour rights and limit their ability to take job action.

But that was just the first salvo. In the chaotic months after 9/11, the BC Liberals swiftly and aggressively began implementing their agenda: Cut taxes. Slash public services. Weaken strong unions. Bolster big business. Sell off public assets. Drive to privatize. It was Naomi Klein's "shock doctrine" in action.

Education ministry and Treasury Board officials worked feverishly to achieve enormous cost reductions. How? Cut teachers and services to students. A November e-mail to Clark advised that the education budget projected cuts of 6,300 FTE teachers, but warned that: "Parents are apt to notice significant reductions in service levels." In addition, it stated: "These budget reductions will be impossible to achieve without changes to the contract."

The changes proposed were removal of class size, class composition, and staffing ratios for non-enrolling teachers. A ministry document dated 8 December 2001, states: "It is assumed that the largest opportunity for savings will come from school boards taking advantage of the opportunity to increase class sizes and reduce non-enrolling teacher positions." Treasury Board calculated these

changes would reduce expenditures by \$275 million a year, but that still fell short. **"This legislation does not go far enough to allow MED to meet its budget target."** (Emphasis in original.)

Clark claimed Bill 28 was needed because "absolutely inflexible" class size and composition rules were causing hardships for families. She recounted anecdotes about siblings being separated and students with special needs being denied help. In court, however, Judge Griffin found these and other examples to be "anecdotal hearsay" and "it would be unfair to give it any weight for the truth of its contents."

Even as Bill 28 gutted working conditions, its companion piece, Bill 27, imposed a collective agreement that gave teachers salary hikes of 2.5% annually for three years. But there was a hidden catch: Victoria intended to freeze funding for the same three years and simply download the salary increase onto school districts.

The public message was quite different. "This government has committed to protecting the education budget," Clark said. At the time, few British Columbians suspected that "protecting" education funding actually meant freezing it.

Bills 27 and 28 marked the beginning of a difficult period in

Teachers have resisted the cuts and spoken out about their impact on classrooms at every opportunity. We even took to the streets for two weeks in 2005. And, of course, we sought redress through the courts.

BC's public education system. More than 190 public schools have been closed. About 3,000 fewer teachers are in schools to work with students. Services to children with special needs are decimated. School libraries are empty.

Teachers have resisted the cuts and spoken out about their impact on classrooms at every opportunity. We even took to the streets for two weeks in 2005. And, of course, we sought redress through the courts.

Now the legislation has been found to be illegal and unconstitutional. The hidden agenda behind it has been revealed in court. Now it's time for the education minister who spoke so proudly in favour of it to recognize the damage it has done. Now, as Premier, Christy Clark should restore the funding that was wrongfully cut and return the learning conditions that were taken from hundreds of thousands of BC students 10 years ago.

Susan Lambert is the BCTF president.



Looming layoffs

The following letter was written to President Susan Lambert.

Dear Ms. Lambert,

I returned home today, after a long day of teaching 30 Grade 6 and 7 students, six of whom are designated students, one is in the process of receiving a PsychEd. assessment, and more than six students who require additional supports to minimally meet writing PLOs, to open another devastating letter from the Vancouver School Board. This is the second letter I have received in the past 10 months. Both letters informed me that it does not matter that I am a good teacher, that I work very hard to fulfill the social, emotional, cognitive, creative, and physical requirements of growing children or that the board recognizes that I mother and parent over half of the children in my class while their parents/guardians are working hard to make a living; rather, it tells me to beware that one of the accomplishments that I am most proud of in my life, hangs by a thread.

The letter told me for the second, crushing time that I must prepare myself for a potential layoff in May. How do I get through this with my self-esteem and my dignity intact? How do I tell my family that, yet again, our lives are about to be turned upside down. Most importantly though, how do I tell my students and their parents that they should not count on the support they need to get through another year of education or that

our ministry and school board can not guarantee them an education that is supportive of their learning needs. The letter states that, "As required by the Collective Agreement and Hope Arbitration Awards, when layoff is contemplated a committee of Human Resources and VTF personnel must meet to discuss process." (VSB letter, 20/03/11) Where are the parents and teachers in this process; they are the stakeholders, yet they are not mentioned in the process? They are to be the recipients of the cutbacks.

It is my opinion that parents need to know the truth of what is about to happen again to their children's education and that the state of education in British Columbia is about to be degraded even further. This is especially significant for those children who require additional learning services in order to prepare them for a world that will be tremendously more difficult to function in even if you have no exceptional learning needs.

My frustration with the state of education in our province has moved me to write this letter to you and I am not naive enough to think that my letter is going to change anything. You may say, "You are speaking to the converted!"; however, I have to believe that you are my representative in this process, along with VESTA and VSTA. Mine is not the worst case scenario that will come from these layoffs, but it is my life and I have to live it. More importantly though, how sad for those children who are at risk for falling even further through the educational cracks that

deepen each year. Theirs' will be an education of have-not, of enormous struggles to meet the basic requirements of learning, and an education beginning to resemble the bare bones education that significantly under-developed nations struggle to maintain. What do we tell students who fall further and further behind because we cannot meet their learning needs? What message do we send these students who want a chance to do well? The message is becoming louder and clearer each year with the enormous shortfalls in funding. The board and ministry of education shout, "The learner is not important!" We have become dangerously close to a cliff that is about to give way and there may be no repairing the damage done.

I want to know, will another "special advisor" be hired to write another "faulty" report, which does no one any good? Will the public be left in the cold about the alternatives to closing five older schools down? Will parents be informed, in due time, to have their say about the impending layoffs and how their children will not receive the time they must have in order to maintain some semblance of success at school? Will the reputation of the Vancouver School Board and its' teachers suffer further bruising as we are unable to maintain even basic learning practices?

My hope is that this time, parents are told everything and told in time to have a voice in how they want their school board to conduct the business of educating their children.

— Vancouver elementary school teacher

Looking back

70 years ago

It is a matter of common knowledge that stammering afflicts men and boys to a peculiar degree, the number of female sufferers being only a small fraction of the number of males. Thirty years ago Dr. Dunlap suggested the theory that this might be due to the efforts of boys to prevent inadvertent utterance at home of dirty words learned on the streets. His studies have convinced him that in certain cases there is truth in it. He emphasizes, however, that seldom or never can we attribute stammering to any single cause; almost invariably there is a pattern of causal factors.

— June 1941, *The BC Teacher*

50 years ago

Teachers should not take part-time or summer employment except that directly related to education, such as summer school instruction. Part of our campaign for higher

professional status depends upon teachers refraining from taken extra employment. All teachers should be aware of the detrimental effect that part-time employment has on professional status.

— May/June 1961, *The BC Teacher*

30 years ago

There is little doubt that energy is now a matter of global concern. All over the world, we see signs of an exploding population struggling for control over limited and diminishing resources, especially energy resources. And it's no wonder when we consider that about 90% of the total energy used in the world today comes from such non-renewable sources as oil, coal, and natural gas. Canadians want and deserve a high standard of living. Our natural gas resources and hydroelectric potential are so great that we could easily export large amounts. We should use our resources to provide for a great society.— May/June 1981, *The BC Teacher*

10 years ago

The images are gruesome and the sounds are sickening, but the pace is exhilarating and the points mount up as the shooter hits his mark again and again. Welcome to the imaginary but frightening world of violent video games. With bullying and school violence high on the agenda of public concerns, teachers and parents increasingly question the impact of violent interactive media on children's growing minds and bodies. Police are concerned about "first-person shooter" games in which the player's point of view is down the barrel of a gun. These games replicate the simulators used to train soldiers to kill.

— May/June 2001, *Teacher newsmagazine*

Compiled by Chris Bocking, Keating Elementary School, Saanich



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The disgraceful treatment of BC's children with special needs

By Noel Herron

George Abbott's appearance before BCTF's March annual general meeting in Victoria—the first new minister of education to do so in a decade—served as an occasion to highlight the ongoing, disgraceful treatment of thousands of this province's K–12 children with special needs over the past decade.

The warm welcome accorded the new education minister—the first minister in 20 years with any classroom experience—was overshadowed by the emotional appeal of a Grade 6 teacher from Burnaby, who spoke eloquently and passionately about the three designated special needs students in her class and several other undesignated students receiving little or no assistance.

This situation is replicated again and again in the so-called integrated classrooms across this province with the jaw-dropping 12,240 classrooms with four or more unsupported students with special needs under the province's current rigidly restrictive and dysfunctional Bill 33.

This legislation often places regular classroom teachers in an untenable instructional situation. It denies these children with special needs (kids with mild, moderate, and often severe learning disabilities and kids with mild, moderate, and often severe behavioural problems) the assistance they need, leaving the regular classroom teacher shorthanded (without a classroom aide) to fend for themselves.

The dramatic impact of the lack of assistance and support for both teachers and parents of kids with special needs can be considerable and to date seems to have been endorsed or ignored by the educational hierarchy in this province. When official representatives of principals, superintendents, and school boards “sign-off,” as required by the legislation, certifying that the instructional environment within overloaded or unsupported class-

rooms in schools is satisfactory or appropriate for student learning, one wonders quite frankly if they are living in an alternate universe.

Students with special needs are not the only victims of this politically motivated and callous legislation, as recent BCTF surveys show. This can lead to increasing numbers of committed teachers either leaving the profession entirely or, in some instances, being forced to opt for long-term disability.

The gap between the official rhetoric of Victoria's representatives and the reality of the everyday instructional landscape of classrooms overwhelmed with unsupported kids with special needs is deeply disquieting. Equally as disturbing is the failure of the province's school trustee association (BCSTA) to speak out on this specific issue. Individual trustees, deferring to the official position of their employers' group (BCPSEA) or sadly, to the opinions of conservative and, at times, out-of-touch senior management staff at the local board level, are unaware, or choose to ignore, the threatened viability/integrity of the instructional programs of such classrooms in their districts.

There is much more to the job of school trustee than sitting at interminable, soul-destroying school board meetings. Leaving their hidebound provincial association to advocate for an improved learning environment is simply not on.

As for the provincial principals and vice-principals' association (BCPVPA), this legislation widens the gap between what should be a co-operative and shared professional relationship at the local level by pitting principals against classroom teachers in determining appropriate learning environments.

This is the real insidious part of Bill 33 as it perpetuates the “us versus them” politicization of the education landscape that must be laid squarely at the doorstep of the BC Liberals and our current premier, Christy Clark, who was minister of education on whose watch this

regressive labour law was introduced.

All of the political posturing up to now was dealt a devastating blow by the BC Supreme Court last month when it ruled that the BC Liberals' legislation in 2002 excluding kids with special needs was both “unconstitutional and invalid.” The judge slammed the vague claims, secretive agenda, and the lack of consultation of both the government and the BCPSEA in their rush to advance a patently phoney position that there was “a virtual paralysis of the school system” in 2002.

Evidence submitted at the Supreme Court trial showed that the government expected to save in, 2001 dollars, \$275 million each year by taking class size out of the teachers' contract, dramatically underlining once again the chronic underfunding of public schools.

Even more astounding and outrageous was the “evidence” brought forward in the court case by the province, as it rode roughshod over teachers' bargaining rights, that class-size limits were actually causing hardships to both students and parents!

While there are eight specific special needs categories that are officially funded, which include, for example, “autism spectrum, physical disability/health impairment, and visual impairment,” the shocking fact remains that only those kids with mostly intensive behaviour intervention or serious mental illness are currently supported by Victoria.

As for the famous “grey area” kids—those who struggle on a daily basis with learning but with added assistance would succeed—well, with diminished funding and cutbacks they are also out of luck.

To top it off, most classroom

teachers in this situation have little or no help from a teacher's aide or assistant, not to mention the near collapse of professional development workshops, in-service, and learning assistance related activities for beginning teachers.

In the recent Supreme Court ruling the judge noted that “the (imposed BC) legislation undoubtedly was seen by teachers as evidence that the government did not respect them or consider them to be valued contributors to the education system, having excluded them from any freedom to associate to influence their working conditions.”

The composition of contemporary school classrooms is a variegated and complex mosaic of diverse students who have been completely ignored by the provincial government.

These range from the so-called average student to the high achievers or gifted kids, add in increasing numbers of ESL kids, plus a wide range of kids with special needs ranging from mild, moderate to intensive learning disabled, not forgetting the famous “grey area” kids and kids living in poverty in the inner city, or Aboriginal children in rural settings.

Not all classrooms have these components but today's classrooms are a far cry from the classrooms of even two or three decades ago.

To meet the needs and teach students in these classrooms requires not only the material and human resources, updated and ongoing in-service, but skilled and dedicated classroom teachers supported by all parts and parties of our educational enterprise.

Union grievances have escalated and the government and school boards lose arbitration case after arbitration case at a cost of over \$1 million with the prospect of this figure doubling if not tripling if the legislation remains unchanged.

Up to now, the massive amount of time spent, for example, by Vancouver principals reviewing and tabulating classroom statistics (one school submitted four full binders),

not to mention the huge legal bills that all sides accumulated, highlights the waste of time and scarce education dollars flowing from Victoria's misguided legislation.

Remember, undergirding all of this controversy is the perennial and hypocritical boast by the province that we are currently experiencing the highest ever per student funding level of support, while school board after school board continues with plans to cut programs and services next September.

Evidence submitted at the Supreme Court trial showed that the government expected to save, in 2001 dollars, \$275 million each year by taking class size out of the teachers' contract, dramatically underlining once again the chronic underfunding of public schools.

Last month's BC Supreme Court ruling has now given the province a year to rectify its unfair and unilateral trampling on the collective bargaining rights of teachers by introducing legislation that respects the rights of both teachers and students.

But the real scandal of Bill 33 is not in the legal shenanigans and spin-doctoring by the BC Liberals. It is the harsh bureaucratic denial of support and services to thousands of the province's neediest and most vulnerable of kids in our public school system.

Leaving these kids behind over the past decade is the disgraceful legacy of our contract-breaking provincial government that now claims, according to Christy Clark, that “we're going to make sure that we get on a different footing with the teachers' union, just as the court has suggested.”

With a BC fall election increasingly likely, two key promises last month by prominent politicians, newly minted NDP Opposition Leader Adrian Dix, and newly re-appointed Education Minister George Abbott now carry hope for BC's children with special needs.

Dix has stated, “...that we're [the NDP] going to present a clear agenda on education, on class size and composition, which is a key issue in our public schools.” Abbott has promised that early identification of learning problems, long neglected by previous education ministers, will be a top priority for BC Liberals.

Noel Herron is a former Vancouver principal and school trustee.

Radio labour

By Marc Bélanger

RadioLabour is working with the global union federations to build a world-wide radio news distribution system for the international labour movement.

The goal is to create increased awareness of international labour issues and help build better North-South relations between unionists. We could use your help.

RadioLabour produces daily (Monday to Friday) news programs. The Monday to Thursday programs are five-minute updates of the latest international labour news. The Friday program is 10 minutes of breaking news, features, and interviews with labour leaders around the world.

The radio news distribution system is currently in use. It works like this: A RadioLabour button is put on a union website. The button provides access to daily labour news that is updated automatically (without the need for a web person to update the file). In this way, news can be distributed to thousands of trade unionists around the world almost instantly.

During the recent revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and other countries, RadioLabour provided daily reports about the events from a labour perspective. As soon as those reports were produced they were

The goal is to create increased awareness of international labour issues and help build better North-South relations between unionists. We could use your help.

available on all the sites that included the RadioLabour button. For example, a statement by the general-secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, Sharon Burrow, was included in a RadioLabour broadcast. As soon as the broadcast was released it was available to the thousands of unionists who visited their union's website. The same procedure has been used to build international support for unions struggling to win better wages and working conditions for their members.

Here are just a few examples of how the system is working:

- Public Services International (PSI) www.world-psi.org
- International Chemical, Energy, and Mineworkers (ICEM) www.icem.org
- International Union of Foodworkers (IUF) www.iuf.org

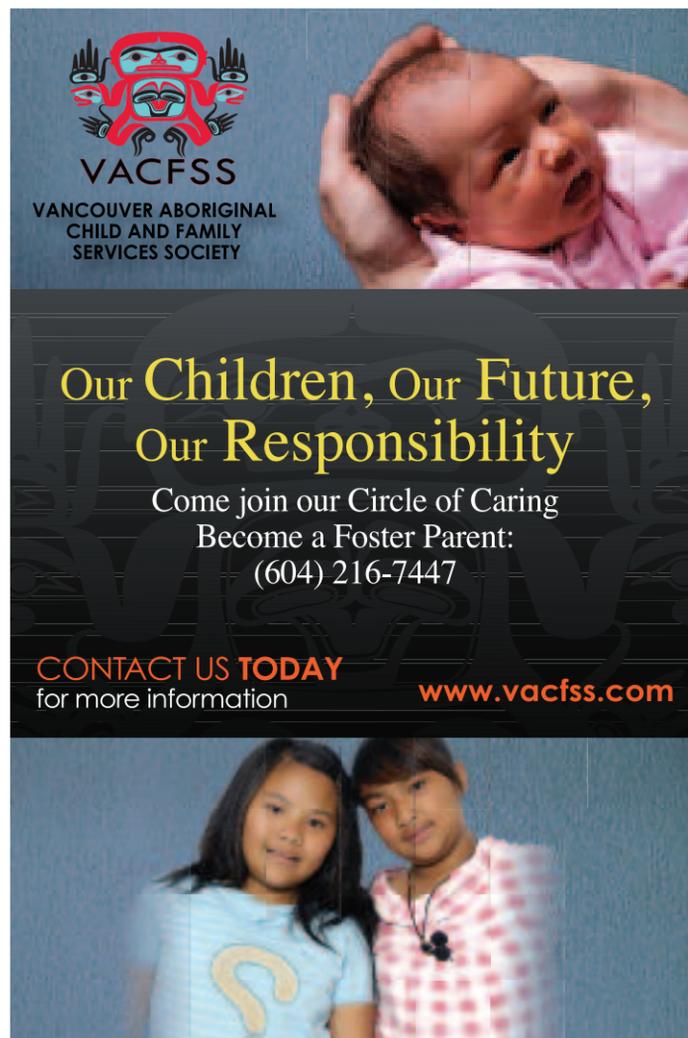
For instructions on how to put a RadioLabour button on a website, please visit: www.radiolabour.net/rl-on-site.html

The service, by the way, is free of charge.

Besides union websites, RadioLabour's newscasts are available on Facebook, iTunes, and LabourStart plus RSS feeds and mobile phones. You can also follow the service on Twitter. All the newscasts can be found on our website at: www.radiolabour.net.

Please help build a progressive, international media outlet for the global labour movement. Help us get the RadioLabour button on as many union websites as possible.

Marc Bélanger is a labour union educator specializing in information technology and distance education via computer communications.

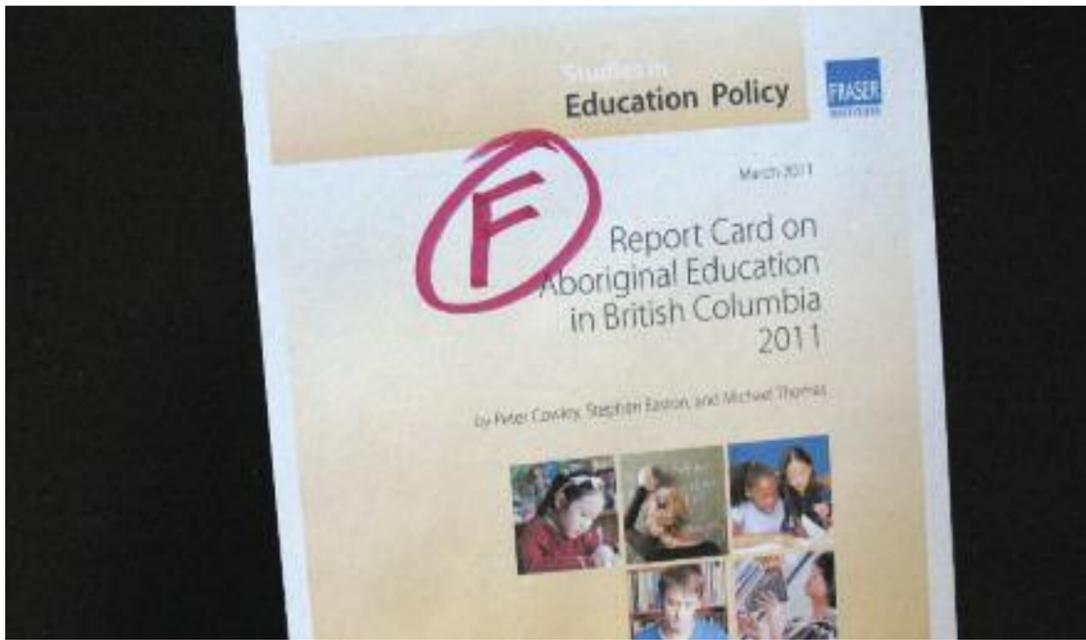


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The Fraser Institute's report card on Aboriginal education in BC

By Robert Genaille

I was dismayed to read the *Report Card on Aboriginal Education in British Columbia 2011*, released March 31, 2011. As a teacher working in this province, I have always looked upon releases with some apprehension, as I do perceive a bias in the research that does not reflect the working and learning conditions of the classrooms or the lived experiences of the students, their families, or their teachers.

I recently made the argument that, in order to effect real change, we need to be willing to hear and consider all voices, even if we do not necessarily agree with them. To deny the voice of the other does a disservice to the transformative potential of education and weakens the strength inherent in the indigenous ways of knowing and learning.

1. I need to point out that the report card seems only to make a quantitative analysis of standardized statistics culled from FSA results and success rates on provincial exams, using a narrow set of criteria to shrink down Aboriginal education to a simple formula based on success versus failure. In doing this, the report does say that it is using these statistics to allow parents of Aboriginal ancestry the right and freedom to make choices about the schools where they place their children.

Freedom for Aboriginal parents to choose is supported in the 1972 policy paper delivered to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development by the National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations:

If we are to avoid the conflict of values which in the past has led to withdrawal and failure, Indian parents must have control of education with the responsibility of setting goals. What we want for our children can be summarized very briefly:

- to reinforce their Indian identity.
- to provide the training necessary for making a good living in modern society. (p. 6)

The statement seems to be a noble assessment of the Indian Control of Indian Education (1972) document, but I do not believe that the report card is respecting the intent of the document in its declaration above. To give parents control of education with the responsibility means to allow them a seat at the table to work toward a consensus of the needs of their children and communities that allows them to protect and recover the sense of belonging inherent in the connection to one's culture and identity. It does not discount the second bullet, to provide the necessary training for making a good living in modern society, but the limited nature of the statistics analyzed do not allow for a proper evaluation of what a school is doing or failing to do in preparing

students for our modern society.

2. I cannot speak to the FSA statistics as I am not a specialist in that area, either as a teacher or advocate, however, I can speak to the provincial exam analysis. I have had the opportunity to teach four different courses that require a provincial exam as a mandatory part of their final mark—BC First Nations Studies 12, Social Studies 11, English 10, and English 12. I have not placed very much value in the exams as reflective evaluations of student achievement, as they have relied far too heavily on multiple-choice questions as a means of determining student learning in the course. This reliance does not allow for an accurate measure of applied skills development or critical thinking, instead boiling down the curriculum learning outcomes to choosing between four possible answers to

Our students face many challenges and we need to address this by creating a safe environment where a sense of belonging can be developed. This needs to be built on a relationship of trust and respect that dignifies the voice of the student in the classroom.

knowledge-based questions. The questions assess factoid memorization and not whether the student understands the concepts being explored in the curriculum. I can use the exam to test whether you know when the *Calder Case* took place and what the *Sparrow Case* was about, but multiple-choice questions do not let you determine if the student understands the implications of those two cases on the development of Aboriginal self-advocacy and the applications of that to their understanding of the lived experiences of Aboriginal people in Canadian society.

3. Having said that, I need to address the issue of relationships in the education system. Parents do care about the education of their children, despite what many non-Aboriginal people believe. They are, however, balancing that desire with the aforementioned challenges and the foundation of mistrust in the institution that has been the result of many decades of abuse at the hands of the education system in Canada. I have had to challenge the assumption of lack of caring many times and I reiterate here that, sometimes we have to be willing to set aside our own assumptions and reach out with a little bit of humility to the parents. We do this by being the advocates our Aboriginal children need in the education system, and being willing to advocate on behalf of their parents if they need us to do so.

While the language in the report purports to do this, it does so from the paternalistic perspective that we are giving you all the information you need, now make the right choice. It is also not the best way to approach parents to build a relationship. As I have already stated, we need to set aside our assumptions and ask them what they need, what they want and how they would like to see us work together in creating a successful environment for their children.

In addition, we need to understand that for many of our students, education is not the most important thing in their lives. Our students face many challenges and we need to address this by creating a safe environment where a sense of belonging can be developed. This needs to be built on a relationship of trust and respect that dignifies the voice of the student in the classroom. I know teachers are doing this around the province. It is an aspect that requires time and patience. It is something that cannot be measured by analyzing test and exam results.

4. I am opposed to the arbitrary measurement of six years as the required time to achieve graduation success. I have asked about whether grad rates beyond the six year cut-off is tracked, but have received no answer. To be fair, I have probably not found the right people to ask. My experience shows some students graduate in year seven or year eight, or through adult education, GED completion. Sometimes life gets in the way and arbitrary completion deadlines are not the most important things in the world of the student.

Where is the commentary that acknowledges the integration of indigenous pedagogies into the classroom? Where are the celebrations of the relationship-building between schools and communities in collaborative efforts? Why aren't we talking about the improvements that are going on, or the fact we are teaching ALL students about the indigenous lived experience so that the acceptance of our Aboriginal students into the modern Canadian society will be much less painful than it was for my generation or that of my parents? Where is the commentary that acknowledges the loss of sleep we suffer worrying about suicides and whether our kids have something to eat in the morning, or the fact that our attempts to build positive relationships have shown some progress attendance-wise? Our efforts to build a safe environment and a sense of belonging are starting to show results, though I have no way to quantify that.

Where is the commentary about the province's abandonment of support for the First Nations Kindergarten programs?

Robert Genaille is a TIOC, Fraser-Cascade District 78.

Personalized learning

Is there anything new in the Ministry of Education Service Plan for 2011–12?

By Larry Kuehn

Each time a provincial budget is released, along with it comes a service plan for each of the ministries. It is supposed to be the minister's accountability report. So what's new this year?

Unlike some previous service plans where teachers were not even mentioned, this time teachers are referred to several times in the report.

The purpose for education is repeatedly put in economic terms, preparing students for the world of work. Some examples: "Increased competition in the global economy," "...improving the productivity of BC's workforce, employers are looking for..." "...skill shortages in its labour market..." "...lifelong learning so that every adult in the province has the 21st-century skills they need to succeed."

Not surprisingly, given the talk in education circles in the past few months, the recurrent theme in the service plan involves personalization, technology, and skills for the 21st Century. Just what do these terms mean?

The one concrete thing is distributed learning. The report touts that, "Nearly one-third of all graduating students have participated in a distributed learning course...that reflects the ministry's commitment to personalized learning and the principles of supporting the individual needs and interests of each learner."

"Online and distributed learning, offering more personalized schooling choices, more than doubled in demand between 2006–07 and 2009–10 to over 71,000 students." Note that this does not say that 71,000 students were successful in distributed learning courses. In fact, the ministry has acknowledged elsewhere that it does not really know what the level of completion is in these courses.

Is anything else concrete in defining "personalized learning?" Not really.

One strategy for personalized learning is to "Develop new forms of schooling to support the unique needs and interests of students." Another is to explore "other assessment processes that would provide developmental information at the individual learner level."

The ministry will "Revise and streamline curriculum to better accommodate the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the 21st century, and to offer more

personalized programming and instruction tailored to students' interests."

Included in the ways of providing personalized learning is, "Continue to support family choice through independent schools and home schooling options." A quick check of funding increases shows that once again the private schools get a larger percentage increase in funding than do the public schools.

The ministry also promises to "Support the development of networks among school districts, schools, and teachers to build capacity in teaching and share practices throughout the province." No sign of the money for these in the budget, though.

Perhaps most significant among announced plans is to publish "a new and improved suite of goals, objectives, strategies, and performance measures tied to personalized and 21st-century learning." Is that how we will find out what "personalization" means?

The service plan also addresses the FSA results. It identifies the percentage of students who "meet expectations." This percentage is based on the total number of students in Grades 4 and 7. That means a student who does not take the test is reported as not meeting expectations.

The ministry acknowledges that if they reported the percentage of those who took the test, not including those whose parents withdrew them, the results would be nearly 10% higher than those reported.

A significant portion of the service plan is dedicated to Aboriginal students. The report indicates that 51 of 60 school districts have signed an Aboriginal enhancement agreement that involves "shared decision-making and specific goal-setting to meet the educational needs and interests of Aboriginal students." The minister's statement claims, "These agreements ensure that Aboriginal culture is integrated into public schools, and Aboriginal communities are involved in the design of programs, services, and curriculum delivery for our Aboriginal students."

The service plan ends with information about major capital projects. Most of them have included space for a neighbourhood learning centre in the new school design, but no new funding is announced for operating these centres.

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

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Building connections, competencies, and resiliency through the informal or unwritten curriculum

By Cindy Andrews

An informal or unwritten curriculum encompasses the many activities that go on in the school setting—or as part of the school community—that are not related to classroom lessons. These “extra-curricular activities” include structured or semi-structured programs, such as sports, clubs, and special events. They also include simple day-to-day interactions in hallways, at lunch time, or in community settings.

Informal activities can have as much educational validity—and can communicate as powerful a message—as any formal lesson...

Informal activities can have as much educational validity—and can communicate as powerful a message—as any formal lesson, provided that they:

- give school staff opportunities to share their interests with students.
- build relationships with students and colleagues.
- nurture skills that complement classroom activities.

Students with strong connections with their school and positive relationships with staff tend to:

- attend school more regularly.
- show less involvement with risky behaviours, including substance use.
- have a strong sense of belonging and higher self-esteem.
- perform better academically.

How can we implement it?

Schools are busy places, so it's best to maximize existing opportunities to both build connections with students and strengthen the potential for co-ordinating social, emotional, and academic learning. Here are some practical considerations to keep in mind as you reflect on what you can do to help make the most of valuable, informal opportunities.

- *Engage, engage, engage to optimize opportunities.* Informal education programs must draw and keep students' interest and attention. They should not look or feel like “more school.” Youth engage more meaningfully and learn new skills more readily if

activities are hands-on, fun, and facilitated by caring adults. Experiential programs, such as adventure activities, community service, mentoring and arts programs, have a common emphasis on learning through experience, reflection and skill building. The most important feature of effective informal programs is the nurturing environment that is created to foster positive relationships between staff and students.

- *Foster community partnerships.* Many community-based youth-serving agencies (e.g., municipal recreational programs) are interested in working with schools to enhance opportunities for young people to play and learn during and beyond regular school hours.

- *Focus on the positives including students' strengths, interests, and potential.* Young people thrive when they feel safe to explore areas of strength, interest, and potential. Schools can help by creating opportunities for students to showcase and share their knowledge and skills with other students through informal, peer-assisted or structured mentorship initiatives. Be sure to recognize students' contributions, achievements, and accomplishments, including special-interest areas and efforts dedicated to improving the lives of others.

- *Make the most of your space.* Creating comfortable, accessible, and safe places to meet or hang out is one way to encourage interaction and foster connectedness. Providing access to equipment to encourage physical activity can add another element of fun.

It's the little things that count. A friendly Hello in the hallway between classes, a brief chat, or just a smiling face can go a long way toward nurturing that sense of belonging we all benefit from.

Connections and positive relationships matter, and making the most from the informal/unwritten curriculum can make a difference.

To learn more about promising practices for promoting health in schools see: carbc.ca/HelpingSchools/PromisingPractices.aspx. While there, take a look at *iMinds*, a related constructivist-based learning resource for Grades 6–10, also from the Centre for Addictions Research of BC.

Cindy Andrews is a program consultant, Helping Schools, Uvic Centre for Addictions Research of BC.

Learning through play in the primary years

By Marjorie Brewer

My goal as a Grade 1 teacher is to create a learning community that is safe, caring, and inclusive; where students have access to a variety of materials that allow them to explore, investigate, challenge themselves, question, research, and leave with the skills and curiosity that will make them embrace lifelong learning. My approach is to use themes, integration, music, movement, and real world connections to make learning meaningful, exciting, and fun!

There is a wealth of information and research on the value of play for Kindergarten students. Why should that end in Grade 1? We need to capitalize on our students' innate curiosity and continuous desire to make sense of the world around them. Children don't often dramatically change during the summer months between Kindergarten and Grade 1. Grade 1 students are still egocentric, requiring hands-on learning experiences. They are working toward self-regulation and learn through play! Teachers are always differentiating their instruction to create an environment that meets the needs of individual students in their classrooms. All students need engaging, meaningful activities that foster a love of learning.

In September, our Grade 1 class engaged in a Rock Unit with the prescribed learning outcomes in mind. A copper mine was starting up in our community that gave me the initial focus. During the fall we collected rocks, described them (orally and in written form), created a rock-word-wall, sorted rocks, made rock pattern walls, counted rocks (in groups of 10s, 5s, and 2s).

We visited our local museum that has a wonderful collection of fossils and rocks from around the world. We discovered some very colourful rocks that glow under an ultraviolet light. A local geologist brought some interesting rocks to our classroom. We polished rocks, made a crystal garden, rock candy, and observed salt crystals form on a string. A paleontologist showed us how to make arrowheads from obsidian; we made fossils and painted pictographs on rocks. We visited a concrete plant and discovered how concrete is made. We played with sand, made magic mud, coloured sand, and completed sand and rock art projects. We sang about rocks, wrote about our experiences and learning, and this led to the creation of a class book on rocks.

Our enthusiasm for rocks exuded beyond the classroom walls. I had a student from a Grade 3 classroom come to share the wonderful rock he had found. One day a parent arrived to share how excited their child was about school and what they were learning. “I am learning a lot too!” she said. One student said,

“I don't want to miss any school because I might miss out on some fun!”

Our discussions led us very naturally into learning about soil, then worms, living and non-living things. The possibilities are endless—stone soup, volcanoes, erosion, dinosaurs, etc. Did I cover many of the prescribed learning outcomes? For sure! We definitely engaged in a lot of oral language, we read a variety of text, wrote about our experiences and knowledge—we counted, sorted, created patterns, learned about living and non-living things, gathered information, engaged in a variety of art media and more. But I had the best outcome of all—students who are excited about learning!

I hope to keep the joy of playful learning alive in not just Kindergarten classes but in all primary grades. So make a connection to your community and make learning engaging, exciting, and meaningful. Think about it. What makes you want to learn?

Marjorie Brewer is a Grade 1 teacher, John Allison Elementary School, Princeton, and a facilitator of full-day K workshops for the BCTF.



BC's adult education is best in Canada

By Ray Steigvilas

What great news we read from the BC Progress Board, Dec. 2010 Report, <http://tinyurl.com/6c5qxun>.

This board happily reported that our secondary graduation rates for young adults aged up to 24 years were superior to all other provinces.

The BC Progress Board was established in 2001, and is made up of 18 business executives and academic leaders. Their purpose is to advise the premier on strategies, policies, and actions that could enhance BC's economic and social well-being. They do this by measuring and benchmarking BC's performance over time. According to their literature, their work is considered the most comprehensive review available. One of their objectives is to help make BC a leader in education in Canada.

According to BC's Ministry of Education statistics, more than half of secondary school graduates enrol directly into a college or university right out of Grade 12, while 25% register within the following six years. This gives BC one of the highest secondary school-to-post secondary transition rates in the country.

Not surprisingly, university enrolment is up. University of the Fraser Valley's Vice-president of External Relations Robert Buchan, reported a 107% over capacity for the September 2010 enrolment count. This is just one example of the growth at BC's 25 post-secondary institutions that experienced a record enrolment of over 440,000 last year.

Back to secondary education—as a measure of graduation, the BC Progress Board referred to the labour market. In 2009, the percentage of 19- to 24-year-olds in the labour force with a secondary

school certificate in BC was 91.5% and the overall average in Canada was 87.6%. BC was the highest!

This is wonderful news especially to the adult education teachers, because the Grade 12 graduation rate in BC was 70.9% in 2009. So where did these other students go to graduate? They went to a large extent to adult education centres. These government figures illuminate the great job that our adult education teachers are doing. There is however, a problem.

Instead of promoting this achievement, the Ministry of Education seems bent on gouging funding for adult education by developing a new funding model for this 2011–12 school year. This model is neither educationally sound nor logistically appropriate.

This new funding model is riddled with red tape procedures that will handcuff our adult education teachers to a never-ending paper trail. Adult learners will also be subjected to intense time-based procedures that they are likely to miss.

It will cause significant negative impact on adult students and adult education programs. The decision to implement this model needs to be reconsidered, and a more appropriate model, based on realistic and educationally sound principles, should be developed with proper consultation.

Many adult students are returning to school after leaving the K–12 system for a variety of reasons. These reasons are now passed on to the adult education teachers to deal with. There are diagnosed and undiagnosed Learning Disorders (LD) through neurological conditions such as ADHD/ADD, Dyslexia, Autism Spectrum Disorders, etc. LD conditions do not disappear upon entering the adult education programs. Other sociological

conditions such as divorce, pregnancy, unemployment, shift work, English language difficulties, etc. present other difficulties that adults bring to the educational setting.

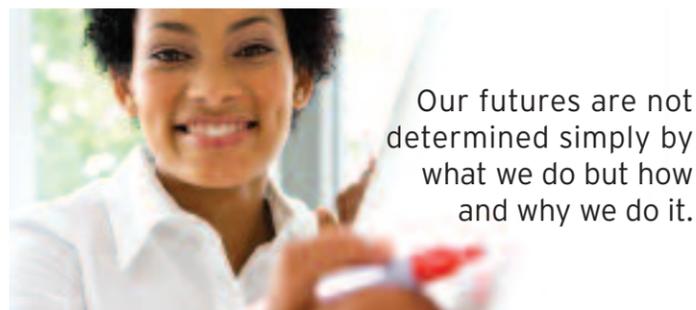
These new requirements compound existing problems and are particularly problematic for structured, classroom-based programs. The majority of adult education students are in the Lower Mainland, with the largest numbers in Vancouver, Burnaby, Surrey, and Coquitlam. The majority of students are enrolled in semester or quarterly classroom-based programs, as compared to continuous enrolment, or Distributed Learning models that are more predominant in smaller and outlying regions.

Adult learners are often apprehensive and lacking in self-confidence with relation to school and learning. It is not reasonable to expect adult learners to complete course elements within restrictive time frames. Adult learners bring a myriad set of circumstances to the educational setting and the added pressure of fulfilling these new requirements is likely to force them out of the system again.

Education is fundamentally linked to individual success and financial independence, and more to the point—it is the potential to survive above the poverty level. This increases the likelihood that adult students will drop out of the system and this is not in anyone's best interests.

BC has the highest rate of graduation completion across Canada for adults aged up to 24 years. Let's work to raise this rate and not include red tape measures that will decrease it.

Ray Steigvilas is an adult educator and member of the BCTF Adult Education Advisory Committee.



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Bangkok to BC: Victimization goes viral on social networks

By Nancy Knickerbocker

Billed as “Another Night in Bangkok,” the rave was slated to take place on Friday, September 10, 2010, behind a farmhouse on Harris Road. News of the event generated a buzz among local teens as the 2010–11 school year started in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows.

Tickets were available in schools across the district and, at \$10, sales were brisk. The rave organizers were adults, but they got students to sell the tickets and the kids did a pretty good job of keeping it quiet. Ultimately, several hundred teens showed up ready to rave on into the night, fuelled by ample supplies of liquor and drugs.

According to police, a 16-year-old girl I’ll call Janie was sexually assaulted by a group of five to seven young men at the rave. Multiple witnesses failed to come to her defence, even though she suffered “significant injuries” during the attacks. Adding grave insult to injury, at least two witnesses used their mobile phones to photograph and videotape the assaults. Overnight, dozens of explicit images were posted on Facebook and rapidly went viral across the Internet worldwide.

Bangkok, notorious for its atrocious child sexual exploitation, had indeed come to British Columbia.

Ridge-Meadows RCMP learned about the assault on the following Sunday from a conscientious teen who printed out the photos and took them to the police station. Meanwhile, hurt and frightened, Janie went to the hospital emergency room to undergo a rape kit examination.

On Monday morning, Garibaldi Secondary’s vice-principal gently escorted Janie into counsellor Suzanne Davies’ office. It was the beginning of the most challenging personal and professional crisis she had ever faced in 24 years experience, one in which both conventional and social media would play key roles.

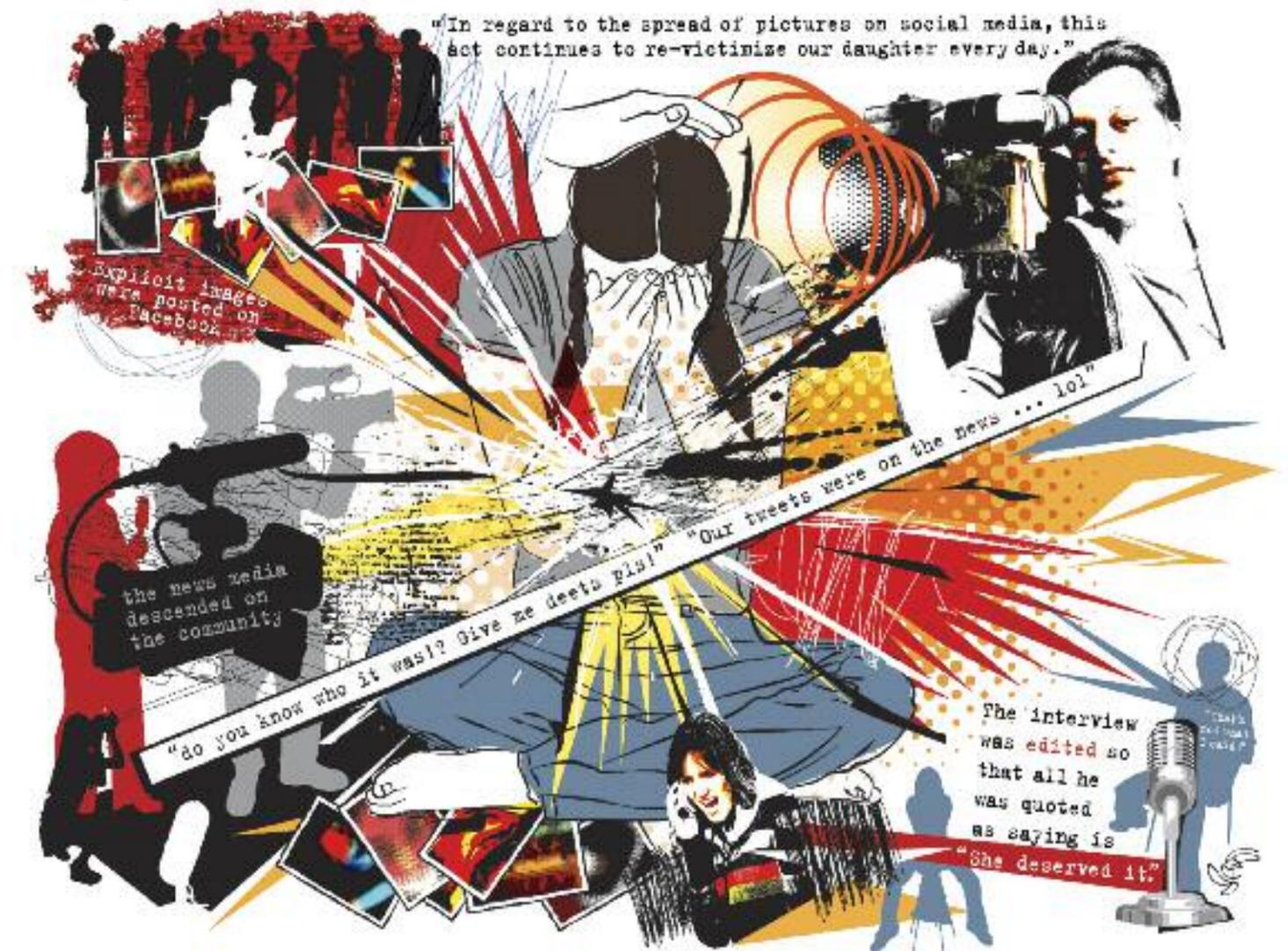
“She [Janie] was very withdrawn, in shock,” Davies recalled. “She felt a strong sense of guilt.”

They talked for hours. Even though Janie was traumatized, Davies observed that “she was right with me, happy to get help.” She reassured Janie: “None of this is your fault. Don’t blame yourself. You’re a survivor.” She made the referral to a trauma specialist and informed provincial victims’ services.

At midday, Davies called Janie’s father and told him that “school is not a place for her to be this week.” Her dad picked her up right away. Throughout the ordeal, Janie had solid support from her parents and older brother. It was a good thing, too, because she needed it.

Soon misinformation and gossip began flying around local secondary schools. Kelly Gould, a career counsellor at Garibaldi, said the student body became divided. “We worked with Janie and her friends, but we also had her not-so-friends to deal with.”

On hearing the news, Superintendent Jan Unwin said she “first reacted like any mother would” — with a flood of compassion for Janie and anger about all she had endured. Then Unwin asked herself: “Where are the crisis points?” She put Critical Incident Response Teams in place, but nothing in CIRT training manuals could prepare staff for the ensuing crisis.



“How do you turn this terrible event into a teachable moment?”

— George Serra, President, Maple Ridge Teachers’ Association

“There’s no script for the magnitude of how far it reached,” Davies said.

On Thursday, September 16, the RCMP held a news conference to report that charges of distributing child pornography had been laid against one young male, and to urge witnesses to come forward. RCMP Sgt. Jennifer Hyland was visibly furious as she said:

“These photos are child pornography. They have been viewed, shared, saved, and re-posted numerous times. This is an offence, and is so socially corrupt it is actually sickening. The posting and viewing of the photos is continuing to victimize this young girl and her family, and it needs to stop.”

Immediately the news media descended on the community. TV cameras captured images of the tawdry rave scene: a muddy field littered with Molson Canadian beer cans, Trojan condom wrappers, a prescription drug container, a soggy sleeping bag, potato chip packets, cigarette butts, and more.

In media interviews, some students were empathetic, others were judgmental; all who saw the photos online were shocked. One boy said he expected the images to be dark and vague, but they weren’t. “Whoa!” he said, recoiling from the memory. “I didn’t expect anything so graphic.”

Some students later regretted speaking to the media. One boy told reporters: “I think it’s terrible, but some kids are saying she deserved it.” However, the interview was edited so that all he was quoted saying was “...she deserved it.”

After social media exposed Janie to such humiliation, student Carolyn Anderson had a different idea. “So much harm has been done from the viral spreading of the pictures, why not harness the power of the

Internet to do something good?” she asked. Anderson launched a Facebook page called “Support for 16-year-old victim in Pitt Meadows,” which was soon swamped with expressions of solidarity and sympathy. By the end of the year it had more than 18,000 supporters.

Meanwhile a rival page called “Reasonable Doubt in Pitt Meadows” sprang up to urge people not to rush to judgment against the young man who had been charged with distribution of child pornography. It garnered few supporters and was shut down within a matter of days.

The micro-blogging site Twitter also offered unusual glimpses into how local teens were reacting to the controversy. CBC Radio reporter Lisa Johnson often uses Twitter as a research tool. She began by searching for kids who had attended “Another Night in Bangkok” and soon found someone tweeting about it. Johnson soon had a list of teens who seemed to be friends of the young man facing charges.

“This surprised me. It was morbidly fascinating to watch,” Johnson said, adding that although teens may be “digital natives,” most put far too much personal information online and didn’t even realize their tweets were public. Here are a few she captured:

do you know who it was!? Give me deets pls!

Holy shit, the media is making this so much worse.

Our tweets were on the news ... lol omg frick how did they get these

Janie’s dad issued a statement thanking those who supported her: “Our daughter is a very beautiful and brave individual. She is strong. She has returned to school and is trying to get some normalcy back to her life.... And we’re extremely thankful for the school and the expert support they have shown for our daughter. It is reassuring to us that she is safe in that environment.”

Unfortunately, despite their best efforts, teachers and counsellors were not able to keep the school environment safe for Janie. Ongoing bullying and gossip made it

impossible for her to attend classes. Davies arranged for her to continue Grade 11 via distance education.

Throughout the investigation, police were hampered by a powerful teen code of silence. Two courageous witnesses had come forward, but as many as 12 others remained silent. Thus teachers and counsellors confronted a complex and disturbing situation with little guidance from authorities, but they all faced a critical question. As Maple Ridge Teachers’ Association President George Serra asked: “How do you turn this terrible event into a teachable moment?”

Reviewing the Planning 10 curriculum, as well as special events and speakers they’d brought in to the schools, it’s clear that Davies and other counsellors had already covered an impressive range of related issues: alcohol and drugs, addictions, anti-bullying, libel, safe dating, healthy relationships, date rape, sexual violence, pornography, cyber-safety, social media, social responsibility, respectful schools, and more. One can’t help but wonder what else teachers could possibly be expected to do.

“Thank you to everyone who has been there to help me through this terrible ordeal. But to the people who did not support me, who called me names, who spread lies about me—Thank you, because you made me much stronger than I’ve ever been before.”

“This rape had a very profound effect on many people. It touched everybody,” said Susan Croll, vice-president of the MRTA. The counsellors at the heart of the crisis and some teachers were deeply impacted, and they talked to the union about providing release time. Croll also suggested they could access funds for additional professional development on the crises in play.

On January 4, 2011, Colton Ashton McMorris was charged with sexual assault and Dennis John Allen Warrington was charged with offences related to making, publishing, and distributing child pornography. RCMP Corporal Peter Thiessen read a statement from Janie.

“Thank you to everyone who has been there to help me through this terrible ordeal. But to the people who did not support me, who called me names, who spread lies about me—Thank you, because you made me much stronger than I’ve ever been before.”

As this difficult school year comes to a close, Janie has been attending school one block per week, helping with a younger social studies class. Her goal is to come back to school full time for her Grade 12 year. There are still challenges ahead, especially going through the court trials.

“But she is one courageous young lady,” Davies said, adding that Janie has been heartened by letters she received from women across Canada who also survived rape.

Looking back, Davies credited the mutual support of a strong team of skilled professionals—teachers, counsellors, administrators, and senior management—all working together. “We were all very much trying to navigate these crises, but this was uncharted territory and none of us had ever taken this journey before.”

She said that as they struggled to see the way forward, the question that guided them was: “Through our educational lenses, what would be best for our kids?”

The answer to that question will not be resolved any time soon, certainly not before the case is concluded in court. What is certain, however, is that teachers, counsellors, parents, and police need a deeper understanding of social media and its revolutionary role in the lives of students and in society at large.

Nancy Knickerbocker is the BCTF media relations officer.

Mayan Families Canada

By Kathy Silver

In 2005, Robin Pawliuk, a middle school teacher in Parksville, BC, and her daughter, Leigh, a high school student, visited the Lake Atitlan area of Guatemala. While touring several of the Mayan villages, which cling to the hillsides above the lake, the pair was struck by the unimaginable poverty the Mayans live in.

Soon, Robin and Leigh were talking about what they could do to help these people. Robin felt overwhelmed by their needs but Leigh calmly stated that if they concentrated on just one village they could make a difference in these peoples' lives. And so they founded Mayan Families Canada. From this relatively unassuming beginning it has become a registered Canadian charity that provides approximately \$50,000 worth of assistance to numerous needy Mayan families in Guatemala every year.

Robin has successfully combined her teaching career with her passion for humanitarian activities and strives to teach the students in her school and district both social awareness and activism. In this regard, her goal at school is three-fold: to increase social awareness in her students, to provide them with a real platform for social activism, and finally, to show them concrete evidence of the results of their endeavours.

"It's amazing," states Pawliuk, "how many of our students are naturally empathetic and interested in making a difference in the world. They just don't know how. I provide them with ways to help. Their response is astonishing."

However, in every classroom there are always one or two students who don't want to "get it." They sit with arms folded, gazing uninterestingly out the window while she speaks of her experiences in Guatemala. Patience and persistence on her part and the excitement of their peers often convinces

many of these students to get involved and they can become her biggest supporters. "You can just see the light bulb suddenly turn on and that's really magical," states Pawliuk. "That makes it all worthwhile!"

To date, students in Pawliuk's middle school and in other schools right across Canada have been involved in a wide range of fundraisers.

"It's amazing," states Pawliuk, "how many of our students are naturally empathetic and interested in making a difference in the world. They just don't know how. I provide them with ways to help. Their response is astonishing."

One of the most successful and well-received fundraisers is called *The Wall of Hope*. After teachers have given a short lesson on the difference between *Wants* and *Needs*, a large banner is attached to a wall in the school foyer. Students can decide if they'd like to give up something they want—like a dinner at McDonalds, or a DVD rental, or a new app for their iPhone, and donate the money they would have spent instead. They write their name and what they've given up on a piece of paper and attach it to the Wall of Hope.

Pawliuk feels that this particular fundraiser is so successful because it works on two levels. It gets students thinking about how incredibly fortunate they are, as well as letting them donate money in a way that is truly meaningful to them.

"They're not just asking for a few dollars from Mom and Dad," explains Pawliuk. "Instead they're giving up something that's important to them in order to help

someone else. They feel like they've really contributed."

In the years that Mayan Families Canada has been working in Guatemala, they have sponsored the education of over 28 students, built five houses and repaired many more, assisted in the building of a community centre, installed dozens of fuel-efficient and ventilated stoves, given out hundreds of chickens for egg laying, distributed packs of school supplies, provided food and medical supplies in emergency situations, and distributed suitcase upon suitcase of shoes, clothes, toys, and other items donated by people at home.

Robin and Leigh travel to Guatemala every summer and visit each and every one of the children and families that Mayan Families Canada provides assistance to. According to them, this is one of the keys to their organization's success because they are able to keep people up-to-date on what's happening with their sponsored child and with projects the organization is undertaking. They deliver letters and small gifts to children who are sponsored and bring back stories and photos. Pawliuk feels that this is especially important for her students, who are then able to see the direct effect of their fundraising efforts. For instance, they are able to see a photo of a young Mayan boy sporting a huge smile and a brand new pair of running shoes—shoes that they donated.

Added to their already full plate (Robin is presently finishing up her Masters degree and Leigh is now a full-time university student) Robin and Leigh also conduct Humanitarian Holidays to Guatemala. They take up to 15 people to Guatemala with them each summer and involve them in projects such as installing stoves, handing out chickens, and visiting village schools to distribute supplies. Many of those joining them on these trips have been Pawliuk's teaching colleagues and former students, and everyone agrees that it is the trip of a lifetime.

Sophie Ward, who joined the 2010 trip to Guatemala, is a teacher from the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island. She states that, "I went down thinking it would be a chance to see Guatemala, experience the culture and help some people who are less fortunate. What



Robin Pawliuk with a family who has just received new school supplies and a baby blanket sewn by one of Robin's students.

I experienced was a depth of humanity that I couldn't even have imagined. The Mayan people were the most kind, appreciative, and hospitable people I have ever met." This seems to be the reaction of most people who are involved with a Mayan Families Canada humanitarian trip. What inspires them is not only the humanitarian projects they are working on but the graciousness of the Mayans themselves.

They take up to 15 people to Guatemala with them each summer and involve them in projects such as installing stoves, handing out chickens, and visiting village schools to distribute supplies.

After six years of operation, Mayan Families Canada and Robin Pawliuk have become well known in the schools in and around Parksville. Many of these schools sponsor the education of children in Guatemala and Pawliuk often visits

and speaks to the students about Mayan Families Canada projects and shows slides from her trips to Guatemala. As well, other schools across Canada; in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario have come on board and are helping with fundraising. Many of the students are motivated by their ability to make such a difference in the lives of others and continue with social activism throughout their student careers and after graduation.

Although Robin and Leigh began with the simple wish to help just one or two villages in Guatemala, with so many students coming of age with a desire to be involved in humanitarian endeavours, one must conclude that there will actually be many villages around the world affected by these individuals and Mayan Families Canada.

For more information about Mayan Families Canada projects and humanitarian holidays, visit their website www.mayanfamiliescanada.org

Kathy Silver, a retired physiotherapist, helps out with fundraising for Mayan Families Canada and volunteered in Guatemala in 2008.

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Volunteers (including five of Robin's former students) visit a house that Mayan Families Canada has recently built for one of their sponsored families. Leigh Pawliuk is fourth from the left (back row) and Robin Pawliuk is fourth from the left (front row).

The Peru Project: Year three and going strong

By Janet Nicol

Working from the ground up could well be the motto of the BCTF teaching brigade comprised of myself and four other BC teachers travelling to South America to teach English language workshops to Peruvian teachers in July 2010.

This was the third summer the BCTF and the Peruvian teacher's union, the Unified Trade Union of Education Workers of Peru, (SUTEP) have worked together in a country rich in minerals, agriculture, and tourism, but with almost half its 29 million citizens living in poverty. Peru is a democracy but struggles against a long history of authoritarian governments resistant to social reform.

After teaching workshops for a week in Lima, alongside four Peruvian teachers whom we mentored, our BCTF brigade divided forces to teach a second week outside the capital. Four of us travelled to Arequipa, Peru's second-largest city, and five others travelled to Iquitos, a city in the Amazon jungle. Travelling by airplane for some of the Peruvian teachers was a luxury—and a first-time experience.

Social and environmental problems were observed by the BC teachers while they were in Iquitos presenting the workshops, which were attended by 100 teachers. But they also saw lots of positives among local residents. "People are rooted in the environment," says Paula Naylor, a Vancouver elementary school teacher. "They feel connected to nature." Naylor was also impressed with her Peruvian colleagues' professionalism in this remote jungle region. "They use humanistic learning," she says. "The people I talked to indicated that their students' needs were more important than the textbooks."

"Workshop participants were enthusiastic learners," adds Carol Jakanovich, a secondary school Spanish teacher on Vancouver Island. "They have an excellent modern languages department in

Iquitos, so we had many fluent English speakers in our workshops," she says.

The team slept under mosquito nets at night and good-naturedly endured the heat, taking at least two showers a day. Staying cool sometimes also meant jumping into the mud-coloured Amazon, despite thoughts of what might lurk below the river's surface.

In Arequipa, I worked alongside Yom Shamash, an adult education teacher in Surrey. Blue skies and sunshine greeted us each morning in this popular tourist destination with its many Spanish colonial buildings, 2,500 metres above sea level.

"People are rooted in the environment," says Paula Naylor, a Vancouver elementary school teacher. "They feel connected to nature." Naylor was also impressed with her Peruvian colleagues' professionalism in this remote jungle region. "They use humanistic learning," she says. "The people I talked to indicated that their students' needs were more important than the textbooks."

Teachers were on one-week holidays and so more than 100 were able to enroll in our morning workshops. A few even travelled in from Cusco, a city near the Inca ruins of Machu Picchu. Some workshop participants also spoke Quechua, the dominant indigenous language of the Andes.

Shamash brought a guitar to the classroom and taught English-language songs and storytelling skills. Participants were asked to share the name of someone they are very close to, and then all sang, "You are My Sunshine." Shamash also gave teachers a DVD of song lyrics, stories, and grammar exercises, compiled during his many

years of teaching in Canada and with BCTF projects in Cuba and Africa.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for Peruvian teachers not only to learn teaching methodology, but also to practice their skills and develop closer relationships with both Canadian and Peruvian colleagues," Shamash says.

In my workshops, I recommended award-winning Vancouver instructor Joan Acosta's materials, available online (at no cost) at www.bestofthereader.ca. Included are tongue twisters, word puzzles, and amazing true stories. I also highlighted positive social struggles around the world—from Ghandi's salt march to the sea to Colombia's children's peace movement. A Peruvian teacher commented later, on a feedback form: "I learned you can teach a language and have students think, too."

Heli Alejo Ocana, secretary of International Relations for SUTEP, has a long wish list for educational reform. It includes improving the infrastructure of schools with more libraries, laboratories, computers, furniture, and recreational centers. "This will create a warm environment," he says in an interview in the union headquarters in Lima.

"We also need to improve the curriculum," Ocana says. "Peru has four main cultures—Spanish, Quechua, Aymara, and the Amazon culture with 64 language groups. We need to have intercultural themes. Schools should make learning meaningful and take into account the culture and people."

Barbara Ryeburn, team leader of the BCTF group and an elementary school teacher in Cranbrook, sees the political lessons Canadians can draw from Peru. "We have identified common problems," Ryeburn says. "We see that privatization has been widespread; governments spend less on education; children have many deficiencies in health and nutrition."

The BCTF plans to train more Peruvian teachers to lead English-language workshops this upcoming summer, according to Ryeburn, and

to run workshops in more than two locations. "The ideal goal is for the teachers of Peru to feel confident to develop strategies on their own," Ryeburn says. "This is so enriching for Canadian teachers, too. We are very inspired by our colleagues, who have so much working against

them but are still motivated to teach."

Janet Nicol teaches at Killarney Secondary School, Vancouver.

For more information about the BCTF's International Solidarity Committee, visit bctf.ca and click on "Social Justice."



Building effective justice systems in Ethiopia

By Robyn Trask

When people ask about the project that I work on in Ethiopia, the most commonly understood explanation is "CSI—Ethiopia." Of course, the project is actually much more than that, but the first phase of the project does involve crime scene examination training for Ethiopian police and prosecutors.

The Justice Education Society of British Columbia (JES) is currently implementing a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) funded project "Building Effective Justice Systems" in Ethiopia, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. The Central America component of the project is well established and has had great success. The Ethiopia component is at an earlier stage of its development, but is steadily moving forward, with the first training of Ethiopian police and prosecutors scheduled to take place in late May 2011.

JES is a non-profit organization that was established more than 20 years ago as the Law Courts Education Society. JES creates programs and resources that improve access to BC's justice system. To date, JES has produced over 50 legal publications, 28 web -

sites, more than 50 instructional videos, and has introduced over one million British Columbians to their province's justice system. While most of JES's work is in Canada, it is also a leader in justice reform programs abroad and has been involved in projects related to good governance and institution building in Central America, Mexico, Asia, and Africa.

The goal of the JES project in Ethiopia is to develop the capacity of the Ethiopian police, prosecutors, and judges to respond to crimes of violence against women. The project includes training in crime scene investigation skills and major case management skills for police and prosecutors, and oral trial skills for prosecutors and the judiciary. Some of these skills are transferable between different types of investigations and prosecutions and some are more specific to addressing crimes of violence against women. Through training in skills such as interviewing vulnerable victims and conducting risk assessments for women victims of violence, JES hopes to see a measurable improvement in the justice system response to addressing crimes of violence against women.

Violence against women in Ethiopia has received increasing

attention since the publication of a World Health Organization report in 2005 that found that in one region in the country, 71% of women surveyed had experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner over their lifetime. The JES needs assessment found that there is often no collection of physical evidence with regard to various types of crimes in Ethiopia, including crimes of violence against women.

Violence against women in Ethiopia has received increasing attention since the publication of a World Health Organization report in 2005 that found that in one region in the country, 71% of women surveyed had experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner over their lifetime.

The last few years have been a time of change for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in Ethiopia. New legislation imposing restrictions on the amount of foreign funding local NGOs may receive if they work in the areas of justice reform, human rights, gender, and children's rights has made it challenging for some local organizations to meet their mandates.

In addition, the Business Plan Re-engineering (BPR) undertaken by all government ministries has implemented considerable changes in the responsibilities and working relationships of many members of these ministries, including police and prosecutors. Under the BPR, police and prosecutors are working together in new and different ways. In some regions, prosecutors are attending crime scenes with police and assisting with the preparation of reports that were previously completed exclusively by police. With the introduction of the BPR, the government's goal is to improve the efficiency and integrity of the justice system, but these new roles have produced some challenges. For example, the law school curriculum does not include crime scene examination training, and prosecutors who are now attending crime scenes do not have training in this area.

During this time of change, JES has travelled to Ethiopia to establish a working relationship in the country and conduct a needs assessment with police and prosecutors. JES has now established a partnership with a local organization that has authorization to work in the areas identified in the new legislation. Over the next 10 months, with the assistance of our local partner organization and Canadian police instructors, JES will deliver three crime scene examination training sessions to police and prosecutors in Ethiopia.

The training will utilize a train-

the-trainer (TOT) model. The first training will be delivered to Ethiopian police and prosecutors by Canadian police officers. These trainees will then deliver the subsequent trainings with the assistance of the Canadian police officers (who can provide coaching and mentoring as needed). Through this approach, local capacity will be strengthened and the Ethiopian trainers will be able to deliver this training in subsequent years through their respective ministries.

Once the crime scene examination training is completed in 2011, JES will implement the major case management and oral trial skills components of the project. All three phases of the project also involve follow-up by Canadian experts to ensure that practices are being implemented on the ground and any outstanding questions by trainees are addressed.

While the totality of this project is much more than "CSI—Ethiopia," in my view it is certainly as interesting and complex as the picture brought to mind by such a title. I look forward to reporting on the subsequent stages of the project as it is implemented.

You can learn more about JES and find classroom learning resources at: www.justiceeducation.ca

Robyn Trask is legal counsel with the BCTF and works as an Ethiopia project consultant with the JES during her vacation.

Health and Safety

Bills 27 and 28: What do we get back in health and safety?

There will be a number of health and safety implications when our class-size and composition provisions are given back and in particular when funding is restored.

The “changes” proposed in the stripping of collective agreements in 2002 were removal of class size, class composition, and staffing ratios for “non-enrolling” teachers including school counselors, teacher-librarians, ESL, learning assistance, and others who support students with special needs. A ministry document from December 8, 2001, states: “It is assumed that the largest opportunity for savings will come from school boards taking advantage of the opportunity to increase class sizes and reduce non-enrolling teacher positions.”

The outfall of these changes also resulted in the closure of schools, the compacting of students into existing schools and the cutting of support services. This meant fewer supports for students, overcrowded classes and schools, and reductions in maintenance services to keep schools clean.

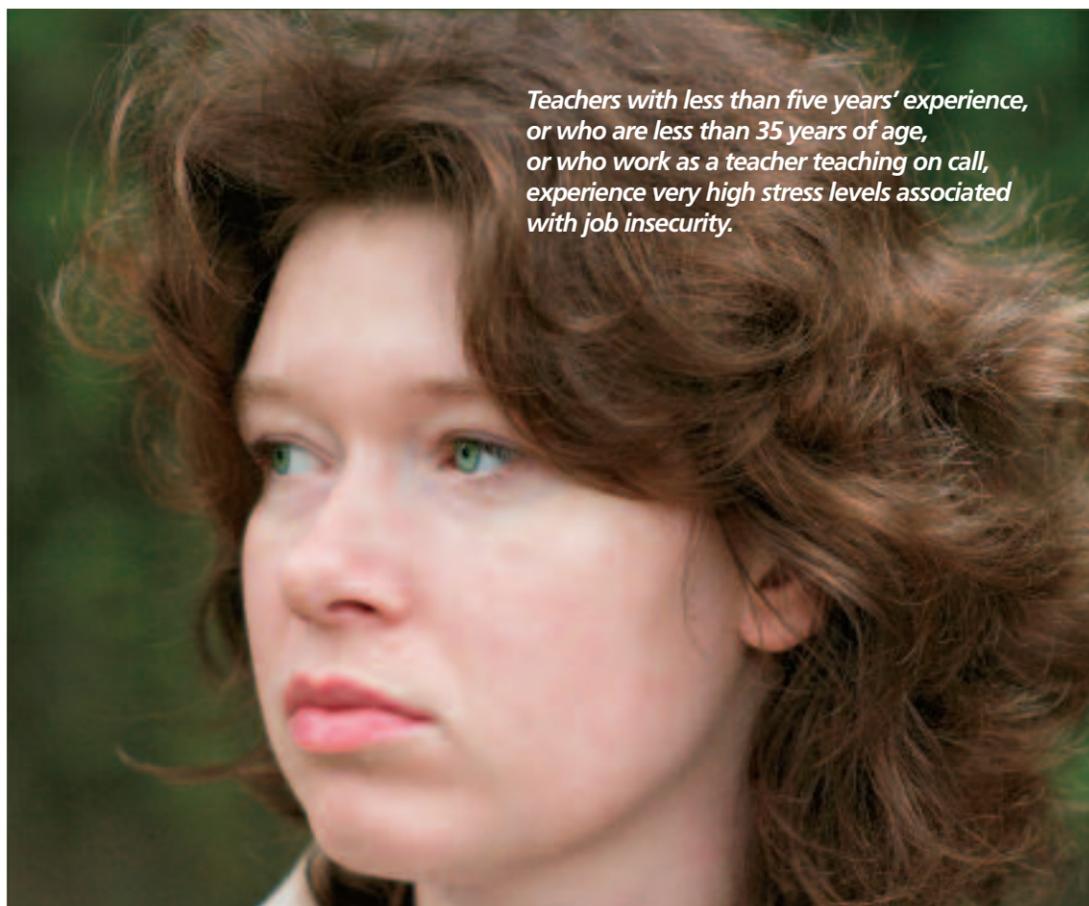
The recent win will mean healthier teachers for the following reasons:

- Members will experience less stress as they will have manageable class sizes and caseloads so that students receive the attention and support they need.

- Incidents of violent behaviour will decrease as supports will be in place to address students’ needs.
- Voice problems will be reduced as the noise levels decrease due to fewer bodies in the classroom.
- Allergy symptoms will diminish as custodial services are replaced to adequate levels.
- Indoor air quality will improve as the maintenance staff will be able to clean rooms and ventilation systems more regularly.
- There will be less wear and tear on facilities with fewer people.
- Repairs will be done more expeditiously with restored budgets.
- Musculoskeletal injuries will decrease as old furniture will be replaced.
- Joint health and safety committees will meet more frequently with release time provided to workers.
- Inspections will take place during work times.
- Construction and renovations will take place outside of instructional time.

Members will be able to identify other benefits relative to improved health and safety as a result of the Bill 27 and 28 win. Bringing these to the attention of the local leaders will ensure that the health of our members will improve.

— Karen Langenmaier
Income Security Division



Teachers with less than five years’ experience, or who are less than 35 years of age, or who work as a teacher teaching on call, experience very high stress levels associated with job insecurity.

The Worklife of BC teachers’ study: Conclusions and implications

By Charlie Naylor and Margaret White

New teachers

Job instability was an issue for less-experienced teachers who encounter frequent changes in teaching assignments and/or schools, making it difficult to plan in the face of uncertainty. Teachers with less than five years’ experience, or who are less than 35 years of age, or who work as a teacher teaching on call (TTOC), experience very high stress levels associated with job insecurity. Much work remains to be done to document the needs of new teachers, and it may be important for the BCTF to find ways to better understand newer teachers’ perspectives on their work.

Gender differences

Gender differences are apparent in a number of areas, including female teachers’ over-representation in part-time employment, and in possible financial and family commitment barriers to graduate studies. Most of the part-time teachers in the survey are female, and over half work part-time for personal reasons. One in five part-time teachers chose to work in part-time employment as a way to cope with workload, effectively using their own unpaid time for marking and preparation. If the BCTF membership is increasingly female, then issues affecting women teachers’ work is an appropriate focus for the union, but arguably one which is minimally addressed at this time.

Professional development

There are clear issues and implications in terms of teachers’ professional development, with minimal PD funding available to many teachers, evidence of both positive and negative influences at school and district administrative levels, and a difference in values between those who see PD as consumers, looking through and choosing from a list of options, and those teachers who are exercising autonomy in ways that create professional development, often in collaboration with peers. The data from this survey may be useful in generating more debate among teachers and within the union in terms of what forms of professional development might be developed

and how they might be supported by the union.

Job satisfaction and stress

Many teachers clearly love teaching and gain immense satisfaction from a vocation that they see as instrumental in developing children’s learning and development. The study’s findings confirm that teacher-student relationships and interactions are the primary causes of satisfaction; yet other positive interactions with peers and parents, and some level of autonomy are also important factors that contribute to teacher satisfaction. On the converse side, it almost always appears that it is a combination of factors that stress teachers, such as multitasking with limited time to manage all the tasks,

If the BCTF membership is increasingly female, then issues affecting women teachers’ work is an appropriate focus for the union, but arguably one which is minimally addressed at this time.

complex classrooms, lack of support for problematic student behaviour, and stress in professional relationships. Perhaps it is time for some new approaches to recognizing where and why satisfaction occurs in order to build more of it for the benefit of teachers and students. For individuals, schools, unions, and districts, an awareness of the negative impact of these combinations may also be of utility in addressing individual issues or combinations of factors that cause stress. Opening up more conversations on the positive and the problematic in teachers’ work may engage teachers, employers, and unions in better and more collaborative ways to take positive control, and to better manage professional relationships and work.

Of a possible 47 sources of stress, teachers rated the level of support for students with disruptive behaviour; class composition issues; lack of support for non-designated, “grey area” students; and the unmet needs of students as the four most significant sources of stress. The data suggest that teachers view their working conditions as fundamentally linked

to the conditions, which support student learning, and that they want to see improvements to working conditions that give students better chances of success.

The study also outlines some of the systemic factors creating problematic teacher workloads, with budget shortfalls forcing districts to reduce teaching positions and thereby increase teachers’ workload. While student enrolment declined across Canada between 2001–02 and 2007–08, most provinces increased the number of educators in public education with an overall increase of 9.8% for Canada. BC did the opposite, decreasing the number of educators by 7.8%, many of whom were teachers. In some specialist teacher areas (special education/learning assistance, library services, English as a second language, etc.), the cuts in such positions have been even more severe.

While data from this study shows that teachers have clearly welcomed work/life balance initiatives to address stress and coping issues, the evidence from a range of provincial data indicates that the causes of workload increases are systemic, with provincial policies and funding drastically reducing teaching positions, thereby both increasing workload and reducing support from specialist teachers.

Increased workload and stress, and loss of job satisfaction not only have implications for students in the classroom and for teachers’ work-life quality, but will likely affect teacher retention in future years. This survey found that one in five teachers is considering leaving the profession, with mid-career teachers the most likely to do so.

The findings from this survey clearly indicate significant areas of high workload and stress that are systemic in nature and that have been exacerbated by 10 years of government cuts exposed by the recent court decision of Madam Justice Griffin.

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

To access the study and other Canadian and international research, go to the Worklife page on the BCTF website at: bctf.ca/TeacherWorklife.aspx

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Filling (not closing) the gap

Connecting Canadian rural education by listening and responding to local community

By Catherine Neumann-Boxer

In 2011, educators and administrators are still focusing attention and resources on closing the gap in rural education. This article is a shorter version of the larger paper exploring documents from the BC Ministry of Education and the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), from which I proposed that the gap be filled rather than closed. By complementing and adding to the current discussion, this article attempts to communicate the need for a profound paradigm shift in Canadian rural education. There is a need to take a closer look at who we are serving in our classrooms, what values we are transmitting, and who these values serve.

In the past few years the BC Ministry of Education and the CCL have been reporting on the "rural-urban gap." These reports explore the fact that rural students do not perform as well as urban students in testing environments, such as the Foundation Skills Assessments; "Student-level scores in reading and numeracy...[are] significantly lower in rural settings" (BC Rural Task Force Report, Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 3). The CCL, in the Lessons in Learning report (2006), state that "Students in rural Canada are falling behind their urban counterparts... Achievement is lower in rural areas...[and according to] the 2003 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) urban students outperformed rural students in math, reading, and science" (p. 2). These organizations offer reasons for this gap in achievement and try to provide recommendations for closing this gap. I propose that rather than creating policies (thereby affecting practice) that attempt to close this rural-urban gap in achievement (with assimilative cultural processes), we fill this gap with knowledge gained from listening and responding to local community and culture.

In order to do something about this rural-urban gap, we need to consider and allow culture in community to change our systems. Many existing arguments complement this view (Adams, 1997; Barter, 2008; Berry, 2008; Durkhiem, 1956; Earl, 2003; Elmore, 2003; Kaser, 2007; Starr & White, 2008),

We can further this paradigm shift by filling rather than closing the rural-urban gap.

The achievement gap is reasoned to be created by three factors in rural education: Aboriginal status, community satisfaction, and school satisfaction. The report highlights the values and challenges in and of rural education. Through the 2002 Foundation Skills Assessment test results the authors found this discrepancy in achievement and focused an entire report on one method of data collection. The report assumes that the Foundations Skills Assessment standardized test scores actually reflect either good/quality/poor/bad teaching. I am convinced, along with many others (BCTF included), that the FSA's are not a true reflection of what our students can do: "FSA's shift the focus to a very narrow test score. Using a single test score in this way devalues and undermines the important work that teachers, parents, and students do." (bctf.ca).

One of the factors the task force report puts forth as a reason for the achievement gap in rural education is "Aboriginal status" (p. 7). Are the authors admitting that there is a fundamental discord between the way we structure our education

I propose that rather than creating policies (thereby affecting practice) that attempt to close this rural-urban gap in achievement (with assimilative cultural processes), we fill this gap with knowledge gained from listening and responding to local community and culture.

systems and traditional Aboriginal knowledge systems?

Both reports are missing something vital because "the work of the rural school is no longer to emulate the urban...school, but to attend to its own place (Theobald and Nachtigal, 1995, p. 132). In order to get at the real issue, we need to inform policy/practice with cultural/attitudinal data. We need to take a very close look at how this data affects achievement. We also need to take a very close look at the values we are using to define "achievement." From these conclusions, one could find the real reasons for a possible

achievement gap and perhaps, with different measures and methods producing the data, we could find that the "achievement gap" is actually the other way around and that rural schools have better "quality" education and achieve at a higher rate than their urban peers.

We could fill this achievement gap with knowledge gained from listening and responding to local Aboriginal/rural community and culture. As Elmore (2003) says in, *A Plea for Strong Practice*, "When you know less than you need to know to make intelligent policy, the most sensible strategy is to encourage experimentation and variability and to try to learn what works and what doesn't." (p. 8). Filling this gap would take a paradigm shift; a fundamental change in the way we run our schools; a "second-order change...designed to change the very fabric of what schools are for" (Earl, 2003, p.16). We need, as Barter states, "alternative epistemological and pedagogical approaches in teaching, leading and learning...that would benefit rural education and rural educators" (p. 1). This change would need much research, school-based inquiry, policy change and a total release of (a liberation from) deeply ingrained colonialistic, socially violent, behaviours and systems.

As Berry (2008) argues, in *Schooling as Pathogenic: Exploring the Destructive Implications of Globalist Educational Reform*, schools "socially condition students into particular identity configurations and value sets...indoctrinating students into ethical and political identities that perpetuate, and even catalyze, destructive, inequitable, and exploitive global economics and politics" (p. 2). I agree with Berry when he "insists, schools are indictably linked to the ongoing pain and suffering of marginalized and exploited people." (p. 2).

I have spent my entire career in rural schools. I know that amazing teaching and learning are happening in these schools. To measure and proclaim an achievement gap, as has been done through these reports, does not adequately reflect rural schools. Furthermore, basing recommendations on one method of data collection is just bad research. My intention is that we, as Linda Kaser (2007) states, once we are informed by the research, have no way to continue to do things in the same ways. The gap needs to be filled not closed—filled with listening and responding to local community. Studies about the achievement gap need to be based on more than just one method of data collection (test scores). Closing the gap implies a continuing assimilative process with the main question for consideration being: How do we make the students fit into the context?, rather than the question we should be asking: How do we fit the context to the students without denying students what they need to be successful in the world? Taking a closer look at who we are serving in our classrooms, what values we are transmitting, and who these values serve, is the first step in filling the gap.

Catherine Neumann-Boxer, PhD candidate, University of Saskatchewan.

Strategies to support LGBTQ members who choose to be "out" at work

By James Chamberlain

Our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, and questioning (LGBTQ) colleagues sometimes face isolation within our schools and are silenced inadvertently by our inaction. How can we help to create more accepting workplaces where our LGBTQ colleagues can be open about their lives? What can we do individually or collectively to make a positive difference?

Here is a short list of some concrete actions you can take:

1. Talk positively about LGBTQ people and their contributions to society. This will show our out colleagues that you are someone they can trust.
2. Make sure staff social functions include invitations that are inclusive of same-gender families. Include gender neutral terms on invites and posters like "Partners and significant others are most welcome!"
3. Model what you believe. Talk positively about same-gender families and/or LGBTQ issues within your classroom during teachable moments as well as via the existing curriculum. Share stories about student responses to these issues in the staffroom. This will encourage your straight colleagues to do the same. It will also show support for an LGBTQ staff member who may not be out at work yet.
4. Talk to your LGBTQ colleague about their partner/spouse and family. Get to know your colleague as a friend and educate yourself more about LGBTQ issues along the way.
5. Support your LGBTQ colleague like you would any other. This includes both verbally and non-verbally.
6. Encourage your LGBTQ colleague to be open about their life with students at all grade levels. Support her or him if you hear concerns

expressed from parents or colleagues. As a straight ally you have a lot of power to make your school and workplace more inclusive and accepting!

7. Help organize and celebrate events in your school like Pride Day, the Day of Pink, and the International Day Against Homophobia. These are tangible ways to show you care about your LGBTQ students and colleagues.
 8. Listen, listen, listen! Be empathic and show you are willing to take the time for your LGBTQ colleague.
 9. Model acceptance of differences in everything you do. Become a safe contact person for LGBTQ youth or a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) sponsor teacher within your secondary school. This will show out colleagues how much you care.
 10. Post rainbow stickers or anti-homophobia and transphobia posters in your classroom. Educate your students about the harm that homophobia and transphobia cause the school culture and society as a whole. The stickers are a symbol of pride for LGBTQ people. Sometimes, they are the opener for great conversations that you might not otherwise have!
 11. Challenge homophobia and transphobia in the school through the direct education of your peers and students. The BCTF and Pride Education Network have many useful resources for you at: www.pridenet.ca.
- These are just a few simple ways in which you can make a positive difference. Pick one or two and take action now!

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



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Is an \$18,000 pension gold-plated?

By Paul Moist

Try as they might, those attacking public sector unions can't seem to figure out why exactly they are so bad for Canada.

For whatever the reason—it doesn't seem to matter much—many from Canada's corporate classes insist public sector unions are a blight, and spend much time and energy mounting their hyperbolic attacks in these pages on an almost daily basis.

The threadbare nature of these arguments is best exemplified in opposition to the labour movement's efforts to expand the Canada Pension Plan as the best way to help Canadians save more for their retirements.

By gradually increasing CPP contributions made by both

employees and employers, we could greatly improve retirement security of all Canadians, and help the millions who cannot afford a private retirement savings plan.

Of course, under this approach, Canada's banks and finance industry will lose out on opportunities to charge their exorbitant investment management fees. So in their logic, if it doesn't result in profits for them it must be bad for Canadians, regardless of how many Canadians will be better off with expanded CPP benefits.

Instead of offering solutions for low-income Canadians, it is much easier to falsely portray CPP contributions as a payroll tax. CPP contributions help fund a deferred salary for Canadian workers and supply no revenue to the federal government. Any genuine commentator would be obliged to admit it is not a tax.

When it comes to debating pensions, however, disingenuous arguments are commonplace. Such as corporate Canada's insistence on

pointing to public sector pensions as prime examples of union-led extravagance.

The typical public sector pension—for someone who has worked for 30 years—is \$18,000 per year. It is beyond any reasonable and objective person on how this can be termed as excessive. Most Canadians sure don't.

An Environics poll conducted in August 2010 shows that 80% of Canadians thought public sector pensions were at an appropriate level or too low. No matter how often the mantra is repeated, few Canadians genuinely believe \$18,000 per year is a "gold-plated" pension.

The weak foundation of these pension arguments is little different than the falsities offered in favour of privatizing public services. The Canadian right's new hero of privatization, Toronto Mayor Rob Ford, is similarly trying to cover an ideological position with the façade of protecting taxpayers.

Ford's promises to save untold millions by contracting out services, such as waste and recycling collection, are missing one key element: any conclusive proof it will save Toronto taxpayers one dollar. In fact, a detailed analysis of available data on costs of private waste collection in neighbouring municipalities shows Toronto stands to pay substantially more if waste collection is contracted out.

This, however, is only a footnote in the real agenda of Ford and other attackers of public sector unions, which has nothing to do with saving taxpayers any money at all. It has everything to do with wresting away the modest power of workers.

The large majority of public sector workers are in healthcare, schools, social services, and local government. They are mostly women and are far from highly

By gradually increasing CPP contributions made by both employees and employers, we could greatly improve retirement security of all Canadians, and help the millions who cannot afford a private retirement savings plan.

paid. The average annual pay of CUPE members is less than \$40,000. To portray these workers as privileged stretches even the most inventive imaginations.

No position, however, is too outlandish for those looking to cast public sector workers as a plague on the taxpayer. Instead of tackling the economic policies, which caused the global recession, they take up this diversionary strategy in attacking public sector workers in order to protect economic policies which are great for profits, but bad for working Canadians.

While crying out against the so-called extravagances of public sector worker salaries, benefits, and

pensions, they continue to promote extending even more irresponsible and reckless corporate tax cuts to Canada's banks and the oil industry without any proof these cuts provide any of the new jobs or investments they're supposed to generate.

While claiming to be looking out for the best interests of taxpayers, those who attack public sector workers are also taking unjustified aim at our communities—large and small. Canadians are being asked to not only shoulder the deficits, but also to sacrifice the high quality public services we have developed over generations.

It is undeniable that Canada is facing fiscal challenges after weathering the global economic meltdown. Stimulus spending that kept the economy afloat during a crisis created by speculation and fraud has left a public debt.

Canadian governments have a responsibility to ensure all Canadians contribute their fair share to the ongoing recovery. Public sector workers are prepared to do their part, but the responsibility should not fall on their shoulders alone.

High-quality public services are crucial to our economic recovery and help make Canada a great place to live. They are reliable, accountable, and are there for all people when they need them most. Public sector workers across the country are dedicated to these principles, and are focused on making our communities stronger for all Canadians.

Paul Moist is national president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Reprinted from the *Financial Post*, March 12, 2011.

Can you plan for your future on a teacher's salary?

By Patricia Douglas

For many teachers, it feels like it is harder and harder to make ends meet. Past salary increases have not always kept up with the rate of inflation and it still takes 10 full years of teaching to reach the maximum salary rate.

With contract negotiations in the beginning stages and a salary increase as one of the main bargaining goals, let's look at some of the key economic issues faced by BC teachers:

Student loans

Many young people do not have the personal resources to be out of the full-time work force for five years while they earn their education degrees and they look to student loans to get them through. The rise in tuition fees has also had an impact on the number of students applying for student loans and the debt level.

- Well over one-half (57%) of the graduating class of 2005 had student loans, up from 49%, 10 years earlier. Average student debt on graduation rose from \$15,200 to \$18,800 during the same decade. Source: Stats Canada.
- The proportion of borrowers who graduated with debt loads of at least \$25,000 increased to 27% in 2005 from 17% in 1995. Source: Stats Canada.

Debt management

Student loans, along with other forms of borrowing for education and loss of potential income while in school, mean many teachers start out their careers with some level of debt. Statistics on student loans are readily available and indicate:

- Only two out of five graduates from the class of 2000 who had left school owing money to government student loans had completely repaid their debt five

years after graduation. Source: Stats Canada.

Many young people, including teachers, have never had the opportunity to learn about debt management. They are often unaware of the help that is available to them and with low income levels in their first years in the profession become further mired in debt.

- An Angus Reid survey conducted for *Mint.com* in December 2010 suggests that only 13% of Canadians have a plan to get out of debt.

Budgeting

Effective budgeting is one of the keystones to managing debt and saving for the future. However, our school system to date has relied on parents and families to teach young people these skills with the following result:

- 94% of Canadians think budgeting is important but just 13% have a formal plan and only half of those stick to it.
- 69% of household financial plans are rough or informal and 64% try to manage without a plan at all. Source: Angus Reid survey, Dec. 2010

Spending

Setting up a plan to decide on spending priorities is another method of allocating financial resources to go further. However, extremely low interest rates, a consumer-oriented society and a need to keep up with the Joneses have lead Canadians to increase their spending and their debt levels. Teachers are also well-known for the thousands of dollars they spend annually for extra resources for their students and their classrooms.

- What we are spending compared to our affordability has hit an all time high—the ratio of household credit market debt to disposable income is at 148.1%, a 65% increase from the early 1990s and

puts us above the US for the first time in nearly 20 years. Source: Stats Canada, Dec. 2010.

- Department store credit cards are charging up to 19.75% per year and other credit cards may charge up to 28% per year on outstanding amounts not paid off within the 30 day grace period.

Saving

Although there are now many saving instruments available with tax benefits, such as RRSPs and TFSA as well as RESPs and RDSPs, it is difficult for most young teachers to put money away for a rainy day, their child's education or their retirement. If there is extra money available, do they have the expertise to put it into the right type of investment to meet their short and long-term goals? Should they play the market? Put money into CSBs or GICs or use the tax savings instruments mentioned above?

- Research shows that 8 in 10 people who withdraw money from Registered Retirement Savings Plans are 60 years of age or younger. Source: Stats Canada
- Only 39% of Canadians made an RRSP contribution in 2010 and very few Canadians contribute the maximum amount for which they are eligible, resulting in about \$500 billion in unused RRSP contribution room. Source: BMO Retirement Institute
- 23% of Canadians said they owned a TFSA as of January 2010. Source: Consumer Council of Canada

Your credit score

There are two companies in Canada that maintain records on an individual's or family's ability to handle credit wisely—Equifax and Trans Union. Your credit score determines your ability to get credit as well as the interest rate you will have to pay for that credit.

- A credit score of 680 seems to be

the cut off for buying a home with a mortgage.

- Below 600 you are going to a 'B' lender, which means the interest rate you pay may be 3% or more above what people with good credit scores pay.
- Also lenders charge 1% of the value of the mortgage for people with bad credit and the broker will also demand 1% more. Source: *Vancouver Sun*, Jan 19/11

What things can teachers do to get their finances in order while they await the outcome of our salary negotiations?

- Have a plan with short-term and long-term goals.
- Start a budget.
- Talk to the professionals at a bank or credit union, credit counseling service or a reputable investment firm.
- Get advice early in your career—much of the earning potential of investments comes from long-term growth.
- Find out what your credit score is and what you could do to improve it.
- Attend the one-day seminar for all teachers on October 21, 2011, at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Richmond. Experts in a variety of financial areas will speak on topics including:
 - How to choose an investment advisor

- Debt management strategies
- Protecting yourself and your financial information online
- Strategies and financial resources for the care of aging parents
- How to invest to meet long and short-term goals
- Affording real estate in BC
- Financial planning for a comfortable retirement
- How to survive a home renovation
- Protecting your family and financial assets during emergencies
- Wills, estate planning, and executor responsibilities

Patricia Douglas teaches at David Thompson Secondary School and is newsletter editor of the BC Business Educators' Association.

For more information, go to bcf.ca/bcea/, click on conferences.



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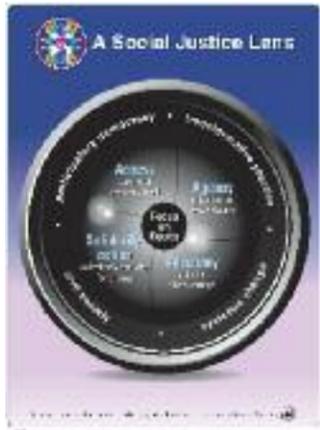
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Teachers' Pension Plan

Dignity in retirement: A social justice issue for BCTF members

Advocacy = deliberate process of influencing outcomes so that change can occur

How have teachers developed the skills and knowledge to create positive change in pension matters? With this question in mind and using the Social Justice Lens dealing with Advocacy, the BCTF Pensions Committee concludes its four-part series of articles by highlighting the deliberate and methodical work of teachers in providing oversight of the financial and responsible investing aspects of the Teachers' Pension Plan.



Advocacy = Awareness, knowing what's happening

Being aware of current issues and practices in pension matters is important for both the governing bodies and the membership.

How do the BCTF governing bodies and the Teachers' Pension Plan trustees stay informed?

The Pensions Committee includes appointed BCTF members, BCTF appointed trustees, and representatives from the BC Retired Teachers' Association (BCRTA). The Teachers' Pension Plan Advisory Committee (TPPAC) includes the Pensions Committee and representatives from the BC Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association (BCPVPA) and BC School Superintendents' Association (BCSSA).

The members of the Pensions Committee and Teachers' Pension Plan Advisory Committee have a variety of education opportunities within a limited budget. These may include, but are not limited to:

- two training days per year with workshops and presentations built into the Teachers' Pension Plan Advisory Committee's meeting schedule.
- two pension courses (Pension Investment and Governance, Levels I and II) facilitated by SHARE (Shareholder Association for Research and Education) and offered at the Canadian Labour Congress Winter School.
- BC Public Sector Pension Conference sponsored by the College, Municipal, Public Service, and Teachers' Pension Plans.
- BC Pension Forum, hosted by SHARE in conjunction with the BC Federation of Labour conference.
- Canadian Public Sector Pensions and Benefits Conference.
- Canadian Responsible Investment Conference, hosted by the Social Investment Organization.

The BCTF provides limited training funds for its active members while other representative groups must cover costs for their respective members. In the 2010-11 school year, one BCTF member was funded to attend a pension workshop at the CLC Winter School.

In addition to the above events, the Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees has trustee education as a

part of its board budget provided from the plan's assets. Each trustee is expected to stay up-to-date with regards to trustee responsibilities including basic pension law, trust law, fiduciary duty, and the ins-and-outs of pension actuarial valuations.

The Pensions Committee and Teachers' Pension Plan Advisory Committee each meet four times per year to receive, review, discuss, and make recommendations on pension matters. In addition, the Pensions Committee reviews and makes recommendations on the BCTF Registered Retirement Savings Plan.

The TPP Board of Trustees also meets four times a year. It also has an established committee structure in place to review issues and make recommendations to the board on such items as communications, audits of the plan's assets and amendments to the board's Statement of Investment Policies and Procedures.

How do members stay informed about important pension issues?

Communiqués are sent out to the plan partners with copies to all BCTF union offices and other associations, thus informing both active and retired members of any news about or changes to the plan. In addition, the plan reports to all members with the *Annual Report*, to each active member with the *annual Report to Members*, which accompanies the personalized *Member Benefit Statement*, and to each retired member with the bi-annual *After Class* publication. (Note: The Joint Trust Agreement, SIPP, and other documents referenced in this paragraph are available on the Teachers' Pension Plan website, as well as the personalized pension estimator.)

The Teachers' Pension Plan delivers two seminars throughout the province: "Your Pension, Your Future" and "Thinking About Retiring." Members can register for these seminars at the Teachers' Pension Plan website or by calling the TPP office toll-free in Victoria. Finally, a pension plan report is given by a BCTF-appointed trustee at every BCTF AGM and representative assembly and delegates are invited to ask questions.

Pension sessions are offered to local union officers with 50% or more release time, during the Federation Leadership Institute (FLI) each fall as well as at the BCTF Summer Conference. BCTF staff will also conduct pensions seminars for members upon request of the local throughout the year. Further, a BCTF staffperson is available to help BCTF members with their pension questions before and after retirement.

The 2009 BCTF Consultation on Pensions provided all members of the Teachers' Pension Plan with information on the future of indexing pensions and gave both active and retired members the opportunity for input. All members recognized the importance of equity in terms of indexing for those who have retired and those who will retire in the future.

Advocacy = Analysis, seeing the different parts, their impact, and the importance to the whole

How does the BCTF Pensions Committee provide oversight for the Teachers' Pension Plan?

The Pensions Committee receives, reviews, and discusses the following documents:

- Annual Reports from the Teachers' Pension Plan, as well

as from the Plan's two agents, bcIMC and the Pensions Corporation

- Quarterly Responsible Investing Highlights from bcIMC
- Tri-annual Actuarial Reports of the Teachers' Pension Plan's Basic Account
- Quarterly Economic and Market Reports from bcIMC

The Pensions Committee makes recommendations to the BCTF Executive Committee when appropriate.

What is the Joint Trust Agreement?

The purpose of the Joint Trust Agreement is "to provide for the prudent management of the pension plan and the pension fund in a framework where the plan members and the employers share the responsibility of plan governance and share the risks and rewards of plan sponsorship." It is a prescriptive outline of the duties of the Board of Trustees and how the two parties must work together to manage the Teachers' Pension Plan.

This year (2011), marks the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Joint Trust Agreement by the BCTF as the Plan Member Partner and the BC Government as the Plan Employer Partner. Ten years ago, the Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees (with five appointees from each partner) became responsible for managing the pension plan and the pension fund.

What is responsible investing?

The TPP board's investment agent, bcIMC, makes investment decisions according to the board's *Statement of Investment Policies and Procedures* (SIPP). Section 11: Responsible Investing and Voting Rights, speaks to the need to conduct responsible investing (RI) practices within the framework of fiduciary responsibility; RI must be implemented so as not to interfere with the fund's achievement of "investment return objectives that are in the best interests of the plan's current and future beneficiaries." Pursuant to the above, it requires bcIMC to give "favourable consideration" to "investments in corporations which maintain high ethical standards, comply with environmental regulations, have a track record of progressive labour relations, do not have business dealings with countries where human rights are violated, and do not have the production of armaments as their primary activity." It includes a statement on environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) and supports the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment, introduced in April 2006—www.unpri.org/principles. Finally, the SIPP delegates the board's shareholder voting rights to bcIMC and instructs bcIMC to act in the best financial interests of the fund with the goal to influence corporate behaviour to match the fund's standards of responsible investing.

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, 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 (College, Municipal, Public Service, and Teachers) meet regularly with bcIMC 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. Discussions of the four public sector pension plans resulted in the creation of US Social Index Fund benchmarked to the Domini KLD 400 index in 2008 for the College, Public Service, and the Teachers' Pension Plan funds. The Municipal Pension Plan joined the pool in 2009.

Advocacy = Action plan, knowing what to do and how to do it with a purpose, a message, a medium, an audience

How does the BCTF help individuals with pension concerns?

The Pensions Committee and Teachers' Pension Plan Advisory Committee discuss pension issues that arise at the BCTF and/or Teachers' Pension Plan levels. This allows all member groups and trustees to develop plans to address major concerns for individuals and groups of members. For example, the BCTF has advocated for both active and retired members in those areas where omissions or errors have been made in terms of their enrollment dates, pension service, payments, etc. People who were TLOC's prior to 1992 were able to purchase that TLOC service if they submitted an application to do so by March 31, 2007. As of July 1, 2005, TLOC service was fully recognized with enrolment in the plan compulsory on the first day of service.

The Board of Trustees is continually working to maintain (and revise, when necessary) the plan rules, resolve concerns, and develop effective communications. Most recently, the board has negotiated the new Voluntary Extended Health Care Plan available to retirees as of January 1, 2012.

How do we achieve full indexing in the Teachers' Pension Plan?

The 2009 Pension Consultation Report was formally presented at the 2010 BCTF AGM and resulted in numerous recommendations and local resolutions on which the member representatives debated and voted. These decisions directed the BCTF Executive to enter into discussions with government on changes to the Joint Trust Agreement, employee contributions, and retiree benefits that would see some sustainable benefit to the IAA.

How does the BCTF work for the improvement of pensions to all Canadians?

The BCTF supports the Canadian Labour Congress' campaign to improve the Canada Pension Plan benefits for all Canadians and to increase the amount of Guaranteed Income Supplement (means tested), and Old Age Security to all recipients. The BCTF submitted briefs to the Canadian Labour Congress, all the Provincial Ministers of Finance, as well as the Federal Minister of Finance. Additionally, briefs were submitted by the BCTF to the Alberta/British Columbia Pension Standards Review supporting a defined benefit pension plan model and encouraging the expansion throughout the private sector.

How does the BCTF advocate for more responsible investment of the assets of the Teachers' Pension Plan?

The BCTF Representative Assemblies and AGMs provide opportunities for recommendations and local resolutions to be debated and give direction to the BCTF as the TPP Plan Member Partner. In 2009, the following motion was passed at the BCTF AGM: "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 was passed to request the creation of a new pooled fund, screened on specific criteria and with a targeted earning threshold.

When executed within the framework of the Joint Trust Agreement and other governing documents, real change may occur in the responsible investing of the Teachers' Pension Plan funds.

What about the future of the Pension Fund?

A defined benefit plan means that current members and the employer must provide enough contributions that the "pension promise" can be met, now and into the future. Actuarial evaluations of the TPP Basic Account are legally required every three years to determine the sustainability of the plan at current contribution rates. The next valuation will be done as at December 31, 2011, with the report likely available by June 2012. The previous three valuations resulted in consecutive contribution increases by active members and employers. The Board of Trustees sets the contribution rate for the Basic Account based on the advice of the plan's actuary.

Contribution levels for the Inflation Adjustment Account (IAA) can only be set by the plan partners through amendment to the Joint Trust Agreement. Currently full indexing of pensions is not guaranteed.

In conclusion, Advocacy—awareness, analysis, and action—as seen through the Social Justice Lens, will always be an important role of those responsible for management and oversight of the Teachers' Pension Plan.

The Pensions Committee advocates for current and retired BCTF members so that they can exit the profession knowing they have a secure income for the remainder of their lives.

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 or call the BCTF Income Security Division at 604-871-1921.

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HOUSE/DOG SITTING Vancouver Island, between Campbell River and Courtenay. 3 bdrm house, kid oriented. Dog is 10, kid-friendly, needs company. Within walking distance of Oyster River and a 3-5 min. drive to Saratoga Beach. July 13 to August 9. Contact info: cable@telus.net, 250-923-9126.

VANCOUVER Sunny, fully furnished 1 bdrm. basement suite near UBC Campus. All utilities & Internet provided. \$700/mo. N/S, N/P. E-mail dawnarndt48@hotmail.com.

DEEP COVE, North Vancouver. Spacious 3 bdrm. house with a view of Indian Arm available for summer rental. Access to kayaks and canoe. Short drive to downtown Vancouver. \$800/wk. or \$2400/mo. Contact Peter 604-986-7873 or pwilliams@nvsd44.bc.ca

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MISCELLANEOUS

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TEACH IN CHINA A top language school in Guangzhou, www.wisdom-school.com, is recruiting full-time and temporary summer English teachers. Contact: Principal Steven, Wisdomsteven@foxmail.com, Cell: 778-986-8001.

EDUTALKS presents: Oct. 21, 2011 at Hycroft, Vancouver. Marianne Kaplan, creator of the award-winning film, *The Boy Inside* will discuss the challenges faced by her son, Adam, who has Asperger's Syndrome. Adam, now 19, will also be speaking. Contact us: www.edutalksminars.com

COQUITLAM OUTDOOR Educators' LSA, Bowron Lakes Canoe Chain Professional Development, July 6 to 13. For more information, email: lcastonguay@sd43.bc.ca

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New online course offerings at UBC

Classroom support for high ability

The Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education has worked with External Programs and Learning Technology in Education to develop online versions of two courses focused on supporting highly able learners, beginning in September of 2011. The courses have been developed to support teachers throughout the province who wish to increase their expertise and upgrade their qualifications but prefer the flexibility of an online learning environment.

EPSE 303 Teaching Highly Able Learners (3 credits) starts in September 2011. It introduces conceptions of intelligence and giftedness and includes a range of topics that help teachers recognize and support learners with a variety of gifts and talents, for example, assessment strategies; giftedness that co-occurs with learning disabilities, ADHD, sensory impairments, or autism spectrum disorders; social and emotional developmental issues such as perfectionism and underachievement; and cultural views of intelligence.

EPSE 408 Educational Programming for Highly Able Learners (3 credits) builds on EPSE 303 to consider educational strategies in depth. It starts in January 2012. The course includes topics such as curriculum design, curriculum models, critical thinking, mentorship, design of rubrics appropriate for advanced learners, and evaluation of curriculum units.

Throughout the two courses, participants will work on projects to be incorporated into a culminating project—a digital portfolio created to reflect a topic or theme of their choice that will be useful in their own practice. Participants will be supported in developing the form and content for this portfolio.

These two courses can help teachers achieve their TQS 5+ and build their expertise in supporting highly able learners in the inclusive classroom. Teachers may combine these courses with other courses in Special Education (e.g., Family-Centred Practice for Children with Special Needs, Assistive Technologies in Special Education) and other related courses (e.g., Supporting Learning in the Kindergarten Year, The Education of Immigrant Students) to meet the TQS requirement for coherence in courses taken towards a TQS 5+). These two courses also contribute to the coursework needed to meet BC Ministry of Education guidelines for competencies for learning support teachers.

Who should take these courses?

- classroom teachers wishing to strengthen their expertise in meeting the exceptional learning needs of students with high ability
- classroom teachers who wish to assume the role of a learning support teacher
- learning support teachers who wish to extend and deepen their expertise
- teachers who wish to transfer credits to a Masters program (maximum 6 credits)
- teachers who wish to combine these courses with eight other courses to upgrade their certification.

Visit eplt.educ.ubc.ca/courses/csha for further information.

Dr. Marion Porath, Professor, ECPS, University of BC and Lynn Chartres, District Gifted Learning Resource Teacher, West Vancouver/Sessional Instructor, University of BC.

PD Calendar

JUNE

18 Duncan, BC. The Virtues Project—The Art of Companionship—Deep Listening: a one-day intensive on the fifth strategy of The Virtues Project—Listening. A hands-on experiential workshop that will help you improve your relationships with students, colleagues, friends, and family members. For more information: katemarsh@shaw.ca, 250-246-9705, www.virtuesproject.com (under “calendar”).

JULY

4–8 Vancouver. UBC Campus. A two-day, non-credit Summer Institute designed for beginning through advanced users of Interactive White Boards (SMART Boards). Teachers will work on developing literacies, lessons, and learning strategies that can be used in the first weeks of school. Your experiences will focus on teaching lessons that engage students in active learning in many curriculum areas. For more information or to sign up, go to: eplt.educ.ubc.ca/programs/institutes-and-workshops.

4–9 Vancouver. UBC Campus. Benchmarks of Historical Thinking Summer Institute will provide the methodological core of the institute's work on curriculum, lesson, and exhibit design and development. The “Benchmarks” approach opens up the interpretive nature of history by making explicit and central such fundamental concepts as primary source evidence, historical significance, and continuity and change. For more information or to sign up, go to: eplt.educ.ubc.ca/programs/institutes-and-workshops.

4–22 Quebec City. Institut de Français, UBC à Québec, French Bursary Program for Teachers. This French immersion program is intended for all teachers and administrators interested in learning or improving their French language skills. Visit www.frenchcentre.ubc.ca/quebec or call toll-free 1-866-528-7485.

11–15 Castlegar. Selkirk College Global Education and Curriculum Summer Institute is a five-day course offered at the Mir Centre for Peace. This program will deepen your understanding of peace theory and extend your knowledge of creative and meaningful ways to bring peace studies into the classroom at all grade levels. For more information or to sign up, go to: eplt.educ.ubc.ca/programs/institutes-and-workshops.

AUGUST

15–17 Parksville, BC. The three-day Achieving Excellence in Writing workshop, presented by Susan Augustyn, offers an exciting and effective method of teaching writing. The workshop demonstrates the teaching of various structures and stylistic techniques that are easy for students to learn. Students are motivated to write, given the tools to write well, and led to take ownership of their writing. Teachers will leave the workshop ready to teach a repertoire of writing skills that will greatly improve their students writing within a few months. The workshop is practical, offering an extensive set of skills to take back to the classroom to use immediately. Applicable for Grades 2–11. For information or to register contact: saugustyn@shaw.ca or phone 250-248-6434.

22–24 Port Moody. The Coquitlam Teachers' Association is pleased to present the Creating Effective Groups (Social Theory) three-day summer learning session featuring Barrie Bennett. The key

focus is to shift effective group work beyond the idea of co-operative learning. Session \$300 (breakfast and lunch provided all three days). Hosted by Heritage Woods Secondary School, 1300 David Avenue, Port Moody. Register at www.cta43.org or phone 604-936-9971 (CTA) for info.

26 Richmond. “Playful Learning” FDK & FDK/1 Conference. Dixon Elementary in Richmond. Co-sponsored by Richmond SD, BCPTA, and Richmond Primary LSA. Fee \$90. For details & application form go to bcpta.ca. Contact Jean Adshead: jadshead@sd38.bc.ca

29–30 Vancouver. UBC Campus. Repeat of July 4–8 listing.

OCTOBER

20–21 Vancouver, BC. BCSCA (BC School Counsellors' Assn.) “Youth In Mind: Child and Youth Mental Health.” Keynote speaker is Dr. Bill MacEwan, founder of Early Psychosis Intervention initiative; “He is a psychiatrist with a difference—he doesn't wait for his patients to come to him”—he goes to them in the Downtown East Side of Vancouver. Coast Plaza Hotel and Suites in English Bay. www.bcscaconference.ca/index.php.

20–22 New Westminster (campus), BC. PE-BC PSA (Physical Education BC) 25th Annual Quality Daily Physical Education Conference. Join us for a very special celebration—this is the 25th conference hosted by Douglas College, the 50th birthday of PE BC, and the unveiling of the History of PE in BC project (in progress). Check out www.douglas.bc.ca/qdpe for more information. Contact Debbie Keel, PE BC president, dkeel@shaw.ca or David Munro, conference chair, munrod@douglas.bc.ca.

20–22 Richmond, BC. APPIPC (Association provinciale des professeurs d'immersion et du programme francophone) Annual Conference “L'APPIPC célèbre en grand ses 25 ans!”. Executive Airport Plaza. Contact information at: congresappipc.ca.

20–22 Richmond, BC. BCMEA (BC Music Educators' Assn.) Annual Professional Development Conference “Forte 2011” with Honour Ensembles Concerts on October 21 and 22, and all-members reception on October 20. River Rock Casino Resort. Contact information at: www.bcmeaconference.com.

21 Coquitlam, BC. CUEBC (Computer Using Educators of British Columbia) Annual fall conference “Embracing Emerging Technology.” Keynote: David Warlick, and over 40 technology focused sessions. Location: Terry Fox Secondary School. Contact information at: <http://CUEBC.CA>.

21 Richmond, BC. BCPTA (BC Primary Teachers' Assn.) Annual Primary Leadership Conference at the Sheraton Vancouver Airport Hotel. New one-day program “Play and Learning.” Keynote speaker—Gary Anaka: “How Play Engages the Student Brain.” Three breakout sessions with a choice of workshops: How to and what works in full-day K/K-1/ Grades 1-3/ French Immersion; Toolkit for teachers new to teaching Primary; and more. For more information on presenters see the BCPTA website: www.bcpta.ca. Online registration in June: www.bcpta.ca. BCPTA registrar: Joy Silver at odetojoy@telus.net.

21 Richmond, BC. BCBEA (British Columbia Business Education Assn.) Annual fall conference “Achieving Financial Success” for ALL teachers at ALL teaching levels in ALL teaching areas on topics such as investing, mortgages, credit counselling, budgeting, pensions, wills and estate planning, and identity theft protection from bankers, investment counsellors, and Better Business Bureau. Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Richmond Campus. Contact information: Ken Kuhn at KenSKuhn@gmail.com or Pat Douglas at pdouglas@vsb.bc.ca.

21 Surrey, BC. LATA (Learning Assistance Teachers' Assn.) Dealing with Anxiety Disorders in School Settings. Dr. Lynn Miller. Conference location TBA, Surrey, BC. For further information contact Alan Peterson, lataconference@hotmail.com.

21 Vancouver, BC. ESL PSA (English As A Second Language Professional Specialist Assn.) Annual fall conference: “Teaching the Multilingual Brain” Keynote speaker, Jim Cummins. All day workshops at Eric Hamber Secondary, 5025 Willow Street, Vancouver, BC V5Z 3S1. Contact information: jobson@vsb.bc.ca or bctf.ca/eslpsa.

21 Victoria, BC. THESA (Teachers of Home Economics Specialist Assn.) “Making A Splash.” Location: John Stubbs Middle School (301 Zealows Crescent, Victoria, BC V9C 1H6). School District #62 (Sooke). The workshop is on Friday with a wine and cheese the night before! Those interested in proposing workshops or being an exhibitor, or to check out the great offerings of the conference, visit the website www.thesaconference.ca/.

21 Burnaby, BC. BCATML (British Columbia Association of Teachers of Modern Languages) Annual Fall Conference - Steps to the Future. Keynote: Etienne! Delta Burnaby Hotel and Conference Center. www.bcatml.org

21–22 Burnaby, BC. BCTLA (BC Teacher-Librarians' Assn.) Annual fall conference “Reaching Out.” Featuring keynote Doug Johnson (Director of Media and Technology for the Mankato Area Public Schools, Minnesota), a Thursday night social event, vendor displays, and over 50 sessions on inquiry, technology, media, library, authors, and more. Burnaby Mountain Secondary School. For more information, visit <http://sites.google.com/site/btla2011/>.

Future October PSA days (BCTF procedure statement 30.A.14) 30.A. 14 That for the purposes of a province-wide PSA day, the BCTF supports the third Fri. in October as the day on which all districts hold a professional day, except in years in which Thanksgiving Monday falls in the same week, in which case the fourth Fri. would be the designated day.

2011–12: October 21, 2011
2012–13: October 19, 2012
2013–14: October 25, 2013
2014–15: October 24, 2014
2015–16: October 23, 2015

PSA PD Day October 21, 2011

PD Calendar website: bctf.ca/uploadedfiles/PublicProD/PSA-Calendar.cfm
Additions/changes—contact Betty Goto at bgoto@bctf.ca

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Cirque Surrey

By Jude Campbell

A clown in a crinoline shouts from the door, "Ms. Brazzill wants everyone on stage. Now." The 35 performers interrupt their excited banter. They thread their way through the cluttered green room, piled high with stilts and hoops, costumes, and makeup mirrors. Cirque Surrey disappears to rehearse.

Cirque Surrey is a new youth circus troupe, the product of a mentorship program begun this past fall. The initiative is the result of an inspired collaboration between Marnie Perrin, artistic director of the Surrey Children's Festival and Laurie Brazzill, Kwantlen Park Secondary School's drama specialist.

The seed of the project was sown during Marnie Perrin's experience growing up in Surrey. As a youngster she found her sport and academic interests supported but found few opportunities to develop arts interests. To find arts education for herself she had to head to Vancouver, where she trained as an actor and professional stilt walker. She wanted to see that change.

As current artistic director of the Surrey festival, Perrin envisions offering a continuum of experiences encouraging students' artistic and leadership development. At the site, they can first attend professional shows as elementary students and participate in arts activities. Later, many continue exposure to performances through volunteering, mentored by professionals. Still later, some develop artistically and come back as performers.

Laurie Brazzill, a former colleague of Perrin's, runs an ambitious after-school theatre program at Kwantlen Park Secondary School. Students audition for places and are a dedicated, professional bunch. Theatre Company was committed to a heavy schedule for the year and had enlisted Perrin's professional expertise to construct stilts for characters in their first play.

All this changed in November, when Perrin called the school to say she'd received funding to support training students in circus skills. The timeline was very tight. Training would have to begin

immediately, with two sessions each week and an expectation that students practise skills at home. Their first public performance would be at the City of Surrey's Winterfest event in February. "Would your students like to do it?" she asked Brazzill.

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Brazzill jumped at the opportunity and her kids ate it up, pledging total commitment. Skills sessions with professionals began immediately. With Simon Jukes, a juggler and stilt-walker, an intense work rhythm was established. First came juggling, then plate spinning and diablos (Chinese yoyos). Mike Battie and David C. Jones joined Jukes and Brazzill and work proceeded on improv skills and individual character development. The process moved swiftly.

"With only three weeks to go," said Brazzill, "the kids were getting revved up about Winterfest. It was time to construct stilts."

One performer recalled this period, "We went into the wood shop and just started. We had our own little production line. All I remember is a lot of woodcutting, gluing, tons of padding and duct tape, some bicycle tire, and a pile of drilling and hard labour." The work paid off. With only two weeks to go performers were finally up on stilts and doing well. Even the "artsy" students, some of whom had never shown any interest in sports, demonstrated a newfound sense of athleticism and physical confidence.

Allison Roy, a costume and character designer, came on board next and helped students shape ideas for their developing characters. One morning she marched 30 students to the local Value Village where they troled the aisles for costume treasures. Considerable nipping, tucking, and chopping later, the troupe looked sharp and performance ready.

Winterfest afternoon arrived, icy and snowing, but Cirque Surrey's first performance went ahead to an estimated crowd of 6,000 people. "We were wearing about seven layers," said one performer. "It didn't look like it but we were."

Students were amazed by the response from the public. "It was really fun meeting little kids as a character. They really thought I was a clown. It was cool because all the parents would take pictures and you could look online and see yourself," said one. Another performer was wowed by how willing kids were to interact and try things. "They'd look at us with fascinated eyes and when we asked if they wanted to try they'd come running up to us," she recounted.

"Winterfest, went off like hot - cakes," said Brazzill. "The kids were totally jazzed. It's exciting performing with an audience that's so close. You gain tremendous confidence and instant appreciation, especially with children. You come off on a real high. There's also a lot of pride for students in being Surrey's representatives as a youth circus."

Brazzill went further, "This program has had enormous benefits for our school and the community. We are an inner-city school. A great number of our students couldn't afford to do this outside. The fact that the kids are involved and committed; it's a good fit. Students do things here that are far healthier than other things that might happen out on the street. It's also fine to offer them additional skills they can use when they leave school."

Asked for her thoughts on the group, Perrin related how impressed

she was by the diversity of the group. "They ranged from the stunningly beautiful, fashionable kids to the tall and gangly, some well-spoken and others shy, hailing from many ethnic backgrounds. It was wonderful to see them come alive at Winterfest to create work together."

"I see great potential for this group," she continued. "The buzz is out there in the community. They've already been asked to perform at other events. Those students who excelled in the program this year will be approached by the City of Surrey and invited to perform as junior professionals at future events. Next year we plan to find a home at an arts centre and open the troupe up to all students in the city.

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Some of the current troupe will come back as junior instructors."

Students I spoke to were unflinching in their enthusiasm for the program.

"It's really exciting," said one. "Being up on stilts is so cool. It's not something you get to do everyday, learn to spin plates or juggle. You slowly become ambidextrous and our juggling teacher tells us it makes you smarter." One Grade 12 student said it would tear her heart to leave behind the first material that she developed on her own, and seeing those kids' faces, the lighting up of the eyes, the smiles. "The best thing we are going to get out of here are the memories. It's a once in a lifetime chance."

Asked if they'd take part if they could next year, one young man summed up the general response, "If I have the opportunity to do it again, I'm 99.9% sure I would."

As *Teacher* goes forward to performing over three days at the Surrey Children's Festival from May 26-28. They'll work with their teacher, Simon Jukes, teaching juggling and stilt-walking to students attending the festival and will join professional performers roving on site. For now it's back to the dressing room to prepare.

The youth skills mentorship program is made possible by a partnership with the Arts Council of Surrey, the Surrey Children's Festival and Winterfest, with a grant received through the BC Spirit Festivals. They are currently seeking funding to make Cirque Surrey a sustainable program.

Jude Campbell is a Surrey retired teacher.

For more information, contact Marnie Perrin at LPerrin@surrey.ca.



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