

Ministry and BCTF move ahead with curriculum revision



BCTF President-Elect Jim Iker addresses BCTF forum for members who will be working with ministry staff and other ministry appointees on a complete revision of the BC Kindergarten to Grade 10 curriculum.

By David Denyer, Ellen Ellis, and Jenny Garrels

A recent BCTF forum brought together members who will be working with ministry staff and other ministry appointees on a complete revision of the BC Kindergarten to Grade 10 curriculum in eight areas that include arts education, English language arts, French as a first language, French immersion, health and PE, math, science, and social studies.

This process will be markedly different to the process followed during previous curriculum revisions as the timeline set by the ministry is very short. The intent nevertheless is to make the process more accessible to teachers as the work done by these committees will be shared as widely as possible.

The forum was interactive and informative enabling participants to work within and across their curriculum teams to discuss hopes, possibilities, and concerns with peers while also gaining some awareness of contexts such as bargaining and the larger provincial political environment.

First Vice-President Jim Iker addressed curriculum development in the light of the current state of bargaining and the collective agreement. Joanna Larson, BCTF Executive Committee member and representative to the Standing Committee on Provincial Curriculum, addressed the social justice/political issues surrounding curriculum development, so that in addition to some awareness of the bargaining context, participants would also consider issues of autonomy, diversity, and social justice.

Participants were asked to discuss their hopes for the curriculum development process. Comments from each group were keyed into documents that were then combined to create a wordle. A wordle reflects the discussion by creating larger fonts for the more commonly used words, thus learning, students, resources, skills, and assessment were prominent themes. Some of the key needs and concerns identified by participants were funding for resources for students and teachers, opportunities for professional learning and collaboration time, Pro D, and in-service.

There was also a concern that curriculum documents should embed Aboriginal understanding, and that content not marginalize Aboriginal voices.

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President's message



Our voice must be a critical and primary component of the discourse on public education policy—the politics of education.

I am at a loss when a government tries to stifle this voice. In my view teachers have a professional responsibility to speak out on education issues. Our voices can only strengthen the system. In BC our voice has been ignored too long. Recently we have been invited to advise government on a large-scale curriculum revision they are undertaking. This is a very positive sign. I hope that no matter what the outcome of this election, government in BC welcomes and invites representative teachers to inform government policy.

This is my last president's column. I have been extremely proud to represent teachers in BC these past three years. My term of office has been a privilege for which I am very, very grateful. I believe our social justice union of professionals displays great courage, dignity, and commitment often under intense fire, as we advocate for a system that has the capacity to both meet the needs of students and build a better world.

I wish everyone a great summer and yet another energizing experience in teaching next school year.

Susan Lambert

I am writing this column shortly after the drop of the writ. You will be reading it after the election results are in. This week I was asked to comment on a proposal by the Yukon government to require teachers to seek permission before speaking out on education policy. And so I am reflecting on the "political" nature of public education and our role as teachers within that system. By "political" in this context I refer not to partisan politics but to the politics of public policy in shaping the goals and implementation of educational programs and practices. In this sense, teaching is deeply political.

The purpose of public education is simultaneously child-centered and undertaken to benefit society, the human condition, as a whole. Teachers in BC have articulated this purpose; we

aim to provide students the skills, attitudes, knowledge, and self-confidence to act both individually and collaboratively to build a better, more just, equitable, and sustainable world.

And we know what conditions are necessary to pursue these purposes. We are on the front line of the system. The conditions in which we teach are the conditions in which children learn. As practitioners we are the experts. For us the how, the why, and the conditions of the practice of our profession—the art and craft of teaching—are of critical importance. When government policy neglects or conflicts with those values, purposes, and methods of practice, we are professionally compelled to articulate our concerns.

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CEPA Canadian Educational Press Association
CALM Canadian Association of Labour Media

Readers write

Privatization and privilege

How appropriate to read this article right now ("Privatization and privilege come at a price," *Teacher*, March 2013). I have been a public school teacher for 16 years. My husband and I have a 10-year-old son, who I have particularly worried about since discovering he had learning disabilities (I suspected as much when he was five).

We have just sold our house and are moving to pay for our son's education at a private school that we have just put him in for his Grade 4 year, and will likely have to keep him there until Grade 12.

When our son was struggling particularly badly near the end of his Grade 3 year, knowing too much about how much has been stripped out of the public school system, and how large class size goes up in Grade 4, I saw no other alternative.

It is not just the privileged who send their children to private school. It is also the desperate. We send our son to the same school where the Moore family sent their son, who recently won a court case against the North Vancouver School District. I would like to sue the province for not properly funding school districts to provide special needs services for children with learning disabilities.

I am certainly not the only one at my son's private school who have sold their house, or who send their child there at a great financial burden to them. Many parents see no other alternative. It breaks my heart every day that I go to my school to teach, and see teachers working very hard on behalf of many students, and resource rooms being closed down.

Lori Drysdale, Delta

Persuasive writing, well said! So many quotables in Ryan Cho's submission—the whole thing will be highlighted and circled as I reread it a few times to truly savour it. "...inequity is bad for you, and bad for where you live." It occurred to me to frame quotes and put them up in the staffroom, or in public, or in front of

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Looking back

70 years ago

Every indication is that the shortage of teachers will be more acute than ever next September. Even now school boards are advertising in anticipation of vacancies next term. Now, according to newspaper reports, preparations are being made to call to active military service before mid-summer married men in the 26-30 age group. As a patriotic duty many teachers are intending to continue in their positions as long as their services are not directly called upon by the Government.

– May-June, 1943, *The BC Teacher*

50 years ago

Hurled perennially at working mothers are a number of charges that need to be revised in the light of scientific fact and others to be assessed with more thought. Such charges lightly bandied about are: Children of working mothers suffer emotionally, socially, and economically. Much delinquency is the result of mothers working outside the home. Working mothers desire only the pay cheque and are not really interested in the work involved. Working mothers are not professional in their outlook. In view of the increasing number of women who are making teaching a lifetime career irrespective of their marital status and family ties, it is imperative that all women teachers become interested in the formulation of a BCTF maternity leave policy which is fair and just to the teacher and pupils, and which is based on liberal, unprejudiced, progressive, and enlightened thought.

– May-June, 1963, *The BC Teacher*

30 years ago

Public education has been in the news for the last several months. More precisely, the funding of public education has been in the news. This is not surprising, of course, since we are in a very severe recession—depression, if you wish—and money has become a central concern. The media are full of stories about how bad the economy is. The conditions are ripe for demagoguery and unscrupulous appeals to baser human emotions. When people are hurting, when they are frightened or when they feel helpless, they can become selfish and mean. The disorientation that comes from chaos in the economy creates a demand for action. This demand that somebody do something provides an opening for change. Those in power can use this opening to make the system better or to make it worse.

– March-April, 1983, *The BC Teacher*

10 years ago

As *Teacher* magazine goes to press, Education Minister Christy Clark is on her feet in the Legislative Assembly cheerfully tabling her latest attack on teachers. With Bill 51, the *Teaching Profession Amendment Act*, she is attempting to eliminate teachers' ability to govern our own profession. The College of Teachers will no longer be a democratic self-regulating body. Instead, it will become a political instrument of the education minister herself. This legislation is a transparent attempt to neutralize teachers, who after all are Clark's most cogent critics, and to divert attention from the disastrous impact Liberal policies are having throughout the province. With almost 100 schools closed, almost 3,000 fewer teachers, and almost \$300 million in funding shortfalls, the Liberals are desperate for a diversionary tactic.

- May/June, 2003, *Teacher* newsmagazine

Chris Bocking, Keating Elementary School, Saanich

Readers write continued...

the faces of people who tut-tut about costs and (their) priorities. Man, oh man, this whole article is delicious!

VJ Grimes, Vancouver

A legacy that must change

There is a photograph of a little boy with his head on a lap-top computer, and the computer screen says "Good Morning Class" at the bottom of page 3 in the Special Election Issue of *Teacher*, Volume 25, No. 6, April 2013. This photograph follows Glen Hansman's featured article "A legacy that must change."

As a public school teacher in the province of British Columbia since 1993, and an online teacher working for Ebus Academy, School District # 91, Nechako Lakes since 2007, I would like to point out that this photograph does not reflect the reality for many of today's students. My own children are home learners in a public school DL program in SD #91, and we are very happy with the learning decisions we have made for our family.

If you could only see what I see: A sparkle in our children's eyes, a love and enjoyment of learning, strong teacher support and individual academic attention, strong, healthy family relationships with siblings and parents,

healthy nutritious lunches, and not being bullied. We strive for the 2 R's, respect and resourcefulness. Our children have a healthy respect for others, for authority, and for themselves. They are resourceful in real life situations. They are "life ready" kids! There remains, always has, a focus on the 3 R's, reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Current statistics will show that there are thousands of DL and home learners in the province of British Columbia. Your photograph on page 3 of *Teacher* is not representative of most.

Michael Thompson, Nechako Lakes

Teachers' Pension Plan announces contribution increase

In October of 2012, the Teachers' Pension Plan Board of Trustees released the results of the 2011 actuarial valuation of the Teachers' Pension Plan basic account. All pension plans in British Columbia are required by legislation to perform an actuarial valuation every three years in order to determine their financial position. This is a complex process that requires the actuary to calculate the present value of all liabilities and assets to determine the funded status of the plan based on economic and demographic assumptions. The Teachers' Pension Plan Board of Trustees is required by the Joint Trust Agreement to increase contributions if the liabilities exceed the assets in the basic account. This ensures the plan's financial health and stability for the approximately 46,000 active members of the plan.

As of December 31, 2011, the actuary determined that the value of the assets was \$19.8 billion and the value of the liabilities was \$20.7 billion. As a result the plan is 96% funded and has an unfunded liability of \$855 million. In 2008, the actuarial valuation determined

the plan was 98% funded and had unfunded liability of 477 billion dollars. The board identified three key factors that contributed to the unfunded status of the plan. Underperformance in Canadian and global markets limited investment gains that were lower than the 6.5% assumed rate of return. The life expectancy of plan members is increasing. As a result the plan is expecting to pay pensions to retirees longer than predicted in the 2008 actuarial valuation. In addition, fewer plan members than anticipated has decreased contributions, which can be invested and earn returns. This is an important source of revenue to the plan as 80% of pension benefits paid to retirees result from returns on investment.

Due to these factors, the Joint Trust Agreement requires a 2.6% increase in the contribution rate to be shared equally between plan members and the employer. These rate increases will come into effect as of July 1, 2013. At that time, plan members will contribute 11% of salary to the basic account and 3% to the Inflation Adjustment Account for a total of 14% for earnings above the

YMPE (Yearly Maximum Pensionable Earnings). The total employer contribution rate to the IAA and the Basic Account will rise to 16.13% of salary (above the YMPE).

Additional information, including a copy of the 2011 Actuarial Valuation Report and the Teachers' Pension Plan Board of Trustees communiqué on the contribution increase, can be found on the Teachers' Pension Plan website under the news section.

Please note: If you are considering purchasing service for a leave of absence that ended within the past five years, you can save money by submitting your application to your employer before June 30, 2013. All applications received before this date will be based on the current contribution rates.

For more information, visit the Teachers' Pension Plan website: tpp.pensionsbc.ca or contact the plan by e-mail: tpp@pensionsbc.ca or by phone 1-800-665-6770 (toll-free in Canada and US).

AGM 2013

By *Glen Hansman*

The 2013 BCTF Annual General Meeting was held in Vancouver, March 16–19. Elected delegates from every local in the province attended on behalf of the membership in their locals in order to set the membership fee, elect a new provincial executive committee, make major policy decisions, and set the priorities for the Federation for the coming year. As always, the AGM was also an amazing opportunity for members to connect with colleagues across the province, to better understand how issues can play out quite differently in communities around the province, to receive reports about important initiatives being carried out by the Federation in the present year, and to situate our activism and professional lives within the broader context facing education, public services, unions in BC, and more broadly.

For the coming year, the AGM set the following as the Federation's leadership priorities:

1. Support teachers in democratizing schools.
2. Support and enhance teacher influence over education policy.
3. Seek improvements in working and learning conditions and work/life balance for teachers, and enhance the status of the profession.
4. Support and engage new teachers.
5. Organize members to resist corporatization and privatization of public education and community services.
6. Work for the return to full, free, collective bargaining.
7. Enhance support for teacher-directed professional development.

A fee of 1.69% was set for the 2013–2014 school year, which is the same overall percentage as the current year, with different allocations within that percentage. Prior to doing so, delegates at the AGM reviewed financial

BCTF Executive Committee 2013-14



(Back row L-R): Members-at-Large: Teresa Grandinetti (Coquitlam); Joanna Larson (Prince Rupert); Mike Ball (Nanaimo); David Komljenovic (Kamloops); Janine Fraser (Boundary); Paul Steer (Delta). (Front row L-R): Member-at-Large Gail Chaddock-Costello (Langley); First Vice-president Glen Hansman (Vancouver); President Jim Iker (Burns Lake); Second Vice-president Teri Mooring; Past-president Susan Lambert.

information that had previously been viewed by the representative assembly, along with updates, and considered several plans related to the fee and projections based on those plans for the long-term financial stability of the Federation's funds over the next several years. (With the priorities and the fee now set, the Executive Committee is presently preparing a budget, as is the usual practice, to be brought to the spring representative assembly for deliberation and approval.)

For the second year in a row, there was considerable interaction from within and outside the AGM on social media, especially on Twitter, which recorded over 6,000 tweets on the official AGM hashtag. A lot of the external social

media discussion focused on a set of local resolutions pertaining to wi-fi in schools (only one of which was actually moved at the AGM). In terms of getting the word out, social media was especially useful during the delegates' "Waiting" demonstration during the noon hour on one of the days of the AGM. Hundreds of delegates stretched out from the Vancouver Hyatt to the Convention Centre, which is near the BC Liberal caucus office. Members wore or held a variety of signs expressing what they were "waiting" for: restoration of teacher-librarian positions, smaller classes, more support for students with special needs, a curriculum that reflects the lives of Aboriginal students, more

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prep time, a fair salary increase, restoration of stripped language, action on homophobia in schools, better staffing levels for specialist teachers. Some photos from the demonstration are featured on these pages.

Honorary Life membership in the BCTF (which recognizes service by members or former members of the BCTF) was conferred upon the following individuals: Bill Fite, George Taylor (posthumously), Jacquie Worboys, and Neil Worboys.



Honorary Life membership recipients Neil Worboys, Jackie Worboys, Bill Fite, and George Taylor (posthumously)

The G.A. Fergusson Memorial Award (which is presented to members who made an outstanding contribution to public education and exemplary service to colleagues through activism in the BCTF) was presented to Alice McQuade, former president of the BCTF and long-time activist from the Delta Teachers' Association. Honorary membership in the BCTF (which is presented to non-members for their contribution to public education) was conferred upon Dr. Clyde Hertzman, posthumously, for the work he has done to raise issues about the needs of early learners. Honorary membership in the BCTF was also conferred upon Rick Moore, Michelle Moore, Jeffery Moore—the family whose special needs human rights case against the North Vancouver School District was recently won at the Supreme Court of Canada. As well, the Stewart Schon Health and Safety Award was presented to Chris Johns, in recognition of his work on behalf of teachers in Cranbrook.



**Chris Johns
Stewart Schon Health & Safety Award**



Here are some of the other key resolutions that were carried by the AGM.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission report

That the BCTF support the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Interim Report by calling on the federal government to acknowledge and act on the report by addressing the recommendations made by the commission including:

- providing the commission with resources to complete its mandated work.
- acknowledging the need for comprehensive teachings from K–12 on the legacy of residential schools in Canada.
- providing ongoing support for survivors, including early childhood and parenting programs and the restoration of funding to the Aboriginal Health Foundation.
- involving all levels of government and all parties involved in the reconciliation process in a meeting to explore the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as a framework for working towards ongoing reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.
- involving governments, educational institutions and the churches in the participation and unveiling of the commemoration projects to honour the survivors as well as the children who never returned from residential schools.

Socially responsible investing

That the BCTF request that the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation (bcIMC), through which the BCTF members invest their pensions, reinvest its current Lockheed-Martin holdings in enterprises that meet the BCTF's Salary Indemnity Plan guidelines for socially responsible investing.

That the BCTF request that the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation (bcIMC), through which the BCTF members invest their pensions, reinvest its current Pearson plc holdings in enterprises that meet the BCTF's Salary Indemnity Plan guidelines for socially responsible investing.

Conflict of interest

That the Federation call upon the provincial government to enact legislation that would establish conflict of interest regulations for school districts and which would require school secretary treasurers, superintendents and deputy superintendents, on an annual basis in a public report made to school boards, to make the following disclosures on:

1. affiliations with other education-related organizations.
2. affiliations with any corporations or business that do business with or intend to do business with a BC school district.
3. any and all income, honorariums, or payment for service.
4. any in-kind services or gifts from other organizations or corporations.
5. participation in or attendance at activities organized by corporations.

Subsidizing public education

That the BCTF:

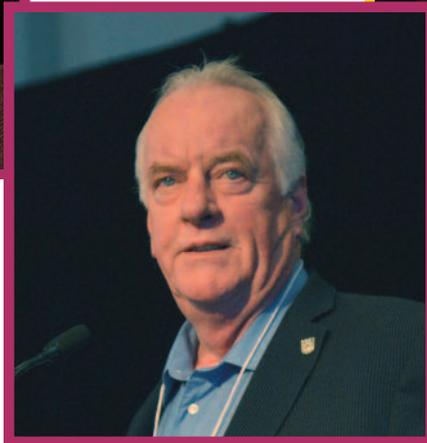
1. gather information to determine how much money is provided per district and per school through corporate sponsorships, corporate partnerships, and corporate donations to subsidize public education.
2. gather information through its locals to determine how much money is provided per district and per school via PAC funds, private donations, and teachers to subsidize public education.
3. report annually to the public and to the AGM regarding the extent to which these contributions subsidize each district thus highlighting the underfunding of the public education system.

Minutes from the AGM can be found in the myBCTF.ca portal here:

<https://bctf.ca/myBCTF/aggm.aspx>

Glen Hansman, first vice-president elect





Speakers to the 2013 AGM

Clockwise from top left: Chief Dr. Robert Joseph (Aboriginal traditional welcome and recognition); Guest speaker Candy Palmater (Canadian comedian, international speaker, and the educator of Aboriginal perceptions training about the Mi'kmaq people); Michael Schratter (Ride, don't hide); Terry Berting (president, BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils); Teresa Rezansoff (vice-president, BC School Trustees Association); Barry O'Neill (president, CUPE BC); Cliff Boldt (president, BC Retired Teachers' Association); Jim Sinclair (president, BC Federation of Labour).

First-time AGM delegates' impressions

We asked several first-time delegates to describe their AGM experience, and did they feel this experience encouraged them to become more involved with the union both provincially and locally, and if so, how?



Jessica Bernhardt, Prince Rupert

I have attended a number of RAs over the years but this is my first AGM. I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I am amazed at how democratically all decisions are made. The emotion in the room shows how dedicated all teachers attending are. Everyone involved is here to improve conditions for members and the students we teach. I love the debate that happens and the persuasive passion shown by many. My mind has been changed many times by poignant thinkers and speakers. The chance to meet members from other districts; to consider the problems and successes that their members and students face is also a great experience. Being able to see that we are all in this together is a very unifying feeling.

I have been very involved in my local union since I started my career. Attending the AGM has definitely encouraged me to stay involved and continue learning more. I would love the opportunity to attend again, to be involved in improving working and learning conditions for all.



Joanne Duran, Abbotsford

The knowledge, the passion, the integrity. I am most impressed by our colleagues. Their willingness to increase our fees, when wages have not increased in years, begs me to wonder why. Contemplating complex issues, matters of finance and expenditures during spring break, whilst many others are lying on a sunny beach, helps me to realize the hundreds of hours that have been volunteered to making our union (our job) worthwhile. The experience has been eye-opening and engaging and I'd definitely do it again!

Yes, I would give up another spring break to understand the issues and decisions that are crucial to our jobs, our lives, and to the lives of our students.



Colleen Dureski, Cranbrook

At first I found the volume of noise, people, and activity awe inspiring, but as the meeting progressed, I was impressed by the strong voice of our members. The predominant theme of this meeting for me is one of respect for each member's voice.

For me the experience of attending this AGM has made me think that I have an obligation to my profession to have my voice heard as a voice for education. I feel one of the best ways to have this happen is through the voice of the union. For me, at this time, it is by working at a local level and continuing to support those at the provincial level.



Allison Jambor, Vancouver Elementary

Coming to the AGM has been an inspiring and invigorating experience. I have always been proud to be a teacher and attending the AGM has deepened my appreciation of my role. It is wonderful that we are leaders in social issues, addressing concerns from pension investments to ensuring that democracy within and outside the union is strengthened and encouraged. It is intellectually stimulating, listening to delegates who make you consider and reconsider issues with wide-ranging points of view. The quest speaker, Candy Palmater, was riveting as she told her emotionally charged stories (both positive and negative) with the education system. I used to wonder why people would give up part of March break to come to this event. Now I get it!

Yes, I hope to return and will encourage others to come and experience the thrill of participation.



Paul Klein, Campbell River

I was overwhelmed at the sheer size of the event. It is wonderful to see the process of Federation business take place and be part of it.

Yes, it has really helped me understand better how decisions are made and will make it easier to relay this information to others.



Shauna Martin, Cranbrook

It has been really exciting, a bit overwhelming, but overall very, very, interesting and informative. I am learning a great deal. Others in my local have been really helpful in explaining the rules of order and sessions. I am very interested in working for the union. I am currently a TTOC staff rep in my local. Other teachers have been really friendly and it is great to network and interact with like-minded professionals. I love hearing points of view on the issues. I would definitely love to experience another AGM in the future. I really appreciated all the helpful info I received previous to coming from my union rep and online on the BCTF website. The blue booklet "Information for delegates" info package was also very helpful.

Yes, I will become involved—networking and speaking opportunities, learning and experiencing rules of order, in-committee, etc. I am already interested and passionate about this work. I plan to continue to be involved locally and hope to be involved provincially in the future.



Chloe McKnight, Vancouver Secondary

I feel extremely lucky to have been invited to be a delegate. As a TTOC and a teacher at the beginning of my career, it has been incredibly inspiring and exciting to see the democratic process of the BCTF at work and to hear the passion from all my colleagues. While at times overwhelming, I also feel very supported by members and feel completely welcome to ask for clarification or advice on issues. My only criticism would be that it does seem like so much is squished into so little time—a little more time to discuss issues (and socialize with members!) would be great.

Absolutely, I will become involved! Attending this AGM marks the end to my first year of union involvement. I have learned so much in this past year and am fully aware of how much more I have to learn.



Debbie Paige, Prince George/McBride Valemount

Having sat in some AGMs for brief periods informally as a UBC student, I was not unprepared for the process. As my previous experience was 30+ years ago, it was interesting to see that some traditions endure. I have enjoyed having the opportunity to be a member of my local “team” and get to know my colleagues better. I have also enjoyed having the opportunity to renew some acquaintances from other locals. I have been surprised to see the power of the political parties within the union and I am concerned that politics and the peer pressure of it can cloud better judgment.

I will continue to be involved with the union both provincially and locally. Attending the AGM has helped to deepen my understanding of some of the issues.



Robyn Wharram, Vancouver Elementary

Thanks to the amazing support, education, and preparation from my local, I have felt engaged and interested in the topics that have arisen at the meeting. I feel so lucky to be a part of this meeting, and of this group of people. I was dismayed, however, at the amount of paper on our tables from candidates, especially since so much did not help me actually make a decision about who to vote for.

I am as involved as I can handle right now—TTOC chair, executive, TTOC meetings, staff rep support at my school, and local grievance committee! Amendments to amendments, bring it on!



Continued from page 1

The process of curriculum development gave rise to many questions:

- How to create curriculum accessible to both new and experienced teachers?
- How to get more depth and fewer outcomes?
- How to achieve cross-curricular connections?

- How to offer curriculum content and approaches while respecting teacher autonomy?
- How to meet the needs of those students who will not be going on to post-secondary education?

Teachers expressed their excitement about the work they are undertaking and are looking forward to the work ahead. There was discussion on the need to balance the political and professional

aspects of curriculum development. Curriculums embody values and philosophies of pedagogy that bear critical scrutiny. The discussion in small groups continued to grapple with these concepts and will no doubt continue as the teams tackle the task of developing draft documents for piloting this coming September.

BCTF staff: David Denyer, Ellen Ellis, and Jenny Garrels

What kind of citizen do we hope to graduate from our K–12 public schools?

By Joanna Larson

As we race from planning and teaching, to marking and reporting in our classrooms, it is not often we take the time to stop and think about the kind of citizens we want our students to become.

We may do so in a general sense, hoping they acquire good jobs, graduate from university, and perhaps vote. But, it is rare we really take the time to consider the above question critically, or engage in a debate with our peers about the qualities we believe we should be developing in our students as citizens.

The Ministry of Education is hoping we are turning out an “Educated Citizen.” Their definition of this has existed in a Statement of Education Policy Order, since 1989.

The ministry aspires us to graduate educated people who have the ability to think clearly and critically, and to adapt to change. They will be citizens who accept the tolerant and multifaceted nature of Canadian society and who are motivated to participate actively in our democratic institutions.

In order to achieve this goal the Ministry of Education believe schools should be focused on the development of citizens who are:

- thoughtful, and able to learn and to think critically, and who can communicate information from a broad knowledge base.
- creative, flexible, self-motivated, and who have a positive self image.
- capable of making independent decisions.
- skilled and who can contribute to society generally, including the world of work.
- productive, who gain satisfaction through achievement and who strive for physical well being.
- co-operative, principled, and respectful of others regardless of differences.
- aware of the rights and prepared to exercise the responsibilities of an individual within the family, the community, Canada, and the world.

It's hard to disagree with such a statement. On the surface, the ministry presents us with goals that most of us agree with, but what if anything is missing?

The ministry's view of an educated citizen fits with an amenable, compliant, and generally positive thinker. What it doesn't do though, is give us a glimpse of the society we want this educated citizen to fit into, and how the educated citizen should participate to shape society.

Essentially, the Ministry of Education has a vision of a citizen who will maintain the status quo, not rock the boat, and participate on a superficial level in aspects of politics and societal change. It doesn't challenge individuals to take direct action against exploitation, marginalization, and violence. It does not challenge the status quo of an existing society with far too much inequality, intolerance, and hostility.

It is my belief, that we should be nurturing citizens who believe in a more socially and environmentally just world. Educated citizens should work toward social change, and greater equity in broader society.

As teachers we should be encouraging this through practice in our schools. We should be teaching and practicing democratic principles, collective responsibility, and social and economic justice. Educated citizens as I see them,

must be willing to struggle against inequality and oppression. The stories of Rehtaeh Parsons, and Amanda Todd, are not just devastating in their loss, but they illustrate the growing need for direct action in preventing such tragedies in the future. The educated citizens we graduate from our schools cannot just be content to wear a pink t-shirt once a year, or share meme's on Facebook. Educated, engaged citizens must be willing to take direct action to change and shape our society for the better.

Social and environmental justice-oriented citizenship, requires people, individually and collectively, to make decisions and take on actions that are often uncomfortable, and can be dangerous. They require courage and perseverance.

Recently, the BCTF selected 62 teacher representatives from across the province to be involved in eight different Ministry of Education Provincial Curriculum Development Teams.

The purpose is to update and revise curriculum to meet current government policy and the needs of today's students.

What is different in this round of curriculum development is the ministry's expectation that the teams will be communicating and seeking feedback from their colleagues throughout the process. In the past, teams have been required to sign non-disclosure agreements.

Our representatives have an enormous responsibility in their roles on the ministry teams, and we do too as classroom and specialist teachers, and public education advocates. This is an opportunity for us all to be involved in the process of revising curriculum in BC, and shaping the future of our province.

Since they came to be, schools have been designed to shape the societies in which they were situated, and all societies have used education as a means of social control.

The question for us is what kind of society is it that we desire? And how



Arts education
English language arts
French as a first language
French immersion
Health and PE
Math
Science
Social studies



Recently, the BCTF selected and held a forum for 62 teacher representatives from across the province to be involved in eight different Ministry of Education Provincial Curriculum Development Teams.

do we best achieve that through what we teach?

It is my hope, teachers will take every opportunity in the coming months to reflect, debate, and participate in this discussion. John Dewey believed, education as a social process and

function has no definite meaning or purpose until we define the kind of society we have in mind. Are we content with the status quo? Or do we desire something better?

Joanna Larson, president, Prince Rupert Teachers' Association

Central American teachers tackle “machismo”

By Nancy Knickerbocker

April 14, 2013

San Julian, EL SALVADOR—Using puppets they’ve made from paper bags, groups of Grade 5 students enact the daily drama of family members getting ready for their work in fields, kitchens, and classrooms. Papa, Mama, and children’s puppets chop wood, haul water, cook, eat breakfast, do dishes, help grandparents, pack up their school supplies, and say farewell for the day.

“What differences do you see between the two families?” asks teacher María Eugenia Morelos de Ária. The children pipe up eagerly. In one family the children help both parents, but in another the father gives orders while

the mother and daughters do the chores, and the sons eat or play. “The Diaz family is not democratic,” the students agree.

As an activist within the Salvadoran teachers’ union ANDES, Morelos is one of the founders of a transformative new program in Non-Sexist and Inclusive Pedagogy supported by the BCTF and CoDevelopment Canada. “I believe we need change in our country,” she said. “We want a democratic El Salvador and as teachers we want to contribute. The only answer is to dare to try to make a difference.”

Ensuring equal rights to education for girls and boys, both rich and poor, is fundamental. Soon after the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front was elected in 2009, they passed a law to ensure that no child will ever again be

denied access to education because their parents cannot afford pencils or paper, uniforms or shoes. All school supplies now are provided by the state.

Teresa Pérez Nolasco says the ANDES Women’s Secretariat are challenging the sexist content in textbooks and are creating a new gender-equitable, values-based history of El Salvador, one which does not shy away from the painful period of the 1979–1992 civil war and women’s central role in the struggle to end long years of dictatorship.

“No one really wants us to talk about sexism but it’s everywhere—in the streets, in our homes, in our classrooms, in our unions. It has to be a permanent topic of conversation,” Pérez said, adding that the schools chosen for the Non-Sexist and Inclusive Pedagogy program are all located in areas with a high incidence of violence against women.

The teachers hope that small changes at school will pave the way for bigger changes in society. Now, rather than seating girls on one side and boys on the other side of the classroom, they have both genders work together in small groups. Instead of allowing the boys out on the playground while the girls do dishes after snack time and sweep the classroom at the end of the day, now all students take turns at these tasks.

Students made puppets to portray a typical day in family life, and then discussed whether division of labour within families was democratic and gender-equitable or not.



In a culture steeped in machismo, these changes have sparked a backlash. Most of Morelos' students are from campesino families, re-settled in San Julian after their homes were devastated by the 2001 earthquake. Few have had much education, and most adhere to strict gender roles.

"You are going to make my son sweep the classroom? It would be better that I come and do it for him because my son is NOT a girl!" one mother told the teacher.

A girl asked: "Teacher, how can I tell my papa to clear his plate from the table? If I do, he'll hit me!"

A boy told her: "If I help my mama do the dishes, my father will say I'm gay."

Morelos emphasizes that greater equity benefits both genders. "For years and years we've been putting boys and girls into boxes. Now we teach them they can be part of a big change," she said. "We explain the project and we involve them in the methodology. Sometimes they help me teach the parents."



NANCY KNICKERBOCKER PHOTOS

Francisca Melara, a Grade 4 teacher, was proud to share her achievement with her children Jefferson, 14, Ingrid, 11, and Kevin, 7. "It was difficult, but the Non-Sexist and Inclusive Pedagogy program is the best professional development I have ever experienced," she said.

Graduation day: Pride in professional development

Despite parental resistance, the Ministry of Education has officially recognized the ANDES Non-Sexist Pedagogy program and granted a diploma for teachers who completed the 118 hours of course work and practicum.

ANDES General Secretary Israel Montano noted that in all its 46 years of existence, ANDES and the Ministry of Education had never reached agreement on anything. During the war, they were sworn enemies. But democracy and human rights have come to El Salvador, and now it's time for fundamental change.

"It costs us to admit that we are machistas," Montano said, "but it will mean a huge leap forward in terms of the quality of education in El Salvador. The theme of gender is going to be one of the fundamentals of the new curriculum."

There were lots of smiles, and a few tears, as 92 teachers from throughout El Salvador crossed the stage at the Superior Teacher Training School to receive their diplomas.

BCTF President Susan Lambert praised the ANDES activists. "You have shown such courage and unflinching determination. I want to applaud you. This is true professional development, and it is so encouraging to see the Ministry of Education recognize and support this diploma program. It is through this vital work that teachers in El Salvador will help to build a better world."

Teacher: "What would happen if your papa found a condom in your school bag?"

Boy: "He'd praise me for being well prepared."

Girl: "He'd kill me!"

...continued on page 16



Pictured here with BCTF President Susan Lambert, this young participant chose the pink "Proud to be a teacher" button.

Honduran teachers advocate, even in perilous times

By contrast to the co-operative relations between ANDES and the Salvadoran government, BCTF's union partners in Honduras operate in a dangerous political landscape. Teachers and others who oppose the policies of the de-facto government of Pepe Lobo have endured severe repression and rights abuses since the military coup of 2009. (See story opposite page.)

Nonetheless, they courageously continue their advocacy on behalf of their students and themselves. Women from COPEMH, the Middle School Teachers' Union of Honduras, have been working with support from the BCTF and CoDevelopment Canada to develop a curricular module on Gender Equity and Human Sexuality. They have gone through an extensive process of consultation, training, and development of the module, which they aim to get incorporated into the national curriculum.

Daysi Márquez, a chemistry teacher and COPEMH activist, acknowledged the difficulties of trying to work with a government that is attacking teachers' rights, jobs, and lives. "We have to build strategic alliances in support of our children, no matter what else is going on," she said. "We have to build our hopes for the children of this country to have a better future."

On the same day as teachers were staging demonstrations and rotating strikes in eight of the 18 departments of Honduras, Márquez presented the draft module to education ministry officials in Tegucigalpa. Both unionists and bureaucrats agreed that with spiraling rates of sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy among girls as young as 12, adolescents need practical information to keep themselves safe and healthy.



NANCY KNICKERBOCKER PHOTOS

When teenagers get pregnant, who gets to stay in school? This student said that debating from Maria's point of view really made him think.

Beyond that, though, we want our girls to have a life plan, to dream of becoming somebody, not just a mother," Márquez said.

Curriculum director Nellie Piñeda said: "I didn't know you [the union] had this wonderful project reaching out to the most marginalized children. Approaching the ministry is the best thing you could do, bringing it through the process. I congratulate COPEMH, and the excellent work of your compañeras." The BCTF's Susan Lambert acknowledged that gender-equity work is critical, and not only in Latin American schools but in Canadian ones as well. "Systemic sexism cripples the life chances of more than 50% of the population," she said. "Every teacher should take non-sexist pedagogy as a driving principle in their work."

Elsa Villeda, the only woman on the executive committee of COPEMH, said the workshops had multi-dimensional impacts on the teachers. She asked, "What changes have you seen in yourself and your teaching as a result of the non-sexist pedagogy training?" Here are some of their comments:

There was opposition at home from my husband, but now I'm a new person. I don't have the fears I used to feel. I feel stronger as a mother and more confident as a teacher. It's given me a whole new set of teaching tools to erase and unlearn mistaken concepts about sexuality and gender.

My classes are more dynamic, more participatory, more open to the opinions of others.

I can talk about sexual themes in class without fear or embarrassment. I learned to respect gay and lesbian people for who they are.

It's been a very profound experience in my life. I've learned to be more courageous.

"COPEMH women are moving forward," Villeda said. "Without doubt there will be many obstacles ahead, but our collaboration and sharing strengthen us. As a team of women, we are ready to contribute to our union."

"And to lead it!" Márquez chimed in, to hearty laughter all around.

Honduran teachers struggle to defend human and labour rights



The families of the disappeared never stop seeking justice for their lost loved ones, an end to impunity and respect for human rights.

By contrast to the situation in El Salvador, where teacher unions and government are working together to transform their society, in Honduras teachers and their unions are the targets of all-out attacks by the regime which came to power after the 2009 military coup.

In a classic case of Naomi Klein's "Shock Doctrine" in action, de-facto President Pepe Lobo swiftly moved to crush the teachers, who form the backbone of the opposition. He seized \$100 million in teachers' pension funds, cut their wages, suspended their labor rights, and passed a law to allow wholesale privatization of public education.

Resistance has been met with harsh repression. Teachers risk being suspended or fired. They have been beaten, tear gassed, jailed, and at least 18 have been killed. In March 2010, Jose Manuel Flores Arguijo, a secondary school teacher and a member of the executive of COPEMH, was dragged from his classroom and shot several times in the back. His death sent a serious message to the opposition. We can kill you in broad daylight, and we will get away with it. The perpetrators enjoy virtually assured impunity.

According to COFADEH (Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras), the leading independent human rights group, to this day no one has been prosecuted or convicted for any of the politically motivated killings of 34 members of the opposition and 10 journalists since Lobo took office, let alone for the over 300 killings by state security forces since the coup.

Bertha Oliva, general co-ordinator of COFADEH, told BCTF representatives that "Honduras has devolved into a state of violence worse than in the 1930s." Levels of corruption, repression, and impunity are higher than ever, and she fears things will only get worse in advance of elections slated for November 2013.

*Nancy Knickerbocker,
BCTF media relations officer*



Teacher stress in British Columbia: Tipping the balance

By Heather Palis

Health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being. While many of the physical aspects are well understood, others have only recently come into focus. In the context of workplace health, greater work demands often mean higher output and resulting employee satisfaction. There is a certain point however, where high demands have the opposite impact, lowering efficiency, job satisfaction, performance, and mental well-being.

This theme is becoming all too common, with 60% of Canadian workers suffering from high levels of stress when trying to balance workplace demands and family commitments. This poses serious health risks to individuals, and yields high societal costs in the provision of treatment and care.

While the statistics point to work related stress as faced by many Canadians, it is the unique situation British Columbia's (BC) teachers find themselves in that puts them at particularly high risk. The work of teachers is closely connected to a range of social, economic, and political forces, all of which directly influence working environments. Particularly relevant is

the process of building and stripping of contracts, leaving teachers with little control or choice in relation to their working conditions.

While much literature shows that workplace stress is on the rise, and that teaching is stressful work, the provincial government refuses to recognize stress as an allowable WorkSafe BC claim, leaving teachers to deal with stress and its consequences on their own. The costs are incredibly high, with great effects on productivity, and psychological and psychiatric disorders representing nearly half of the total claims and total costs of the BCTF's Rehabilitation Program.

I have conducted interviews with five teachers and members of the larger BCTF community. Participants have worked across the province, offering diverse perspectives based on differences in school district size, resources available, and rural versus urban settings. In interviews, themes surrounding limitations of the current system, balancing of demands, and struggles with lack of autonomy were

consistently represented as sources of stress, and as having impacts on workplace health.

The current Kindergarten to Grade 12 system in BC is focused on streamlined learning, with rigid examinations working to measure all students at the same standards. Whether this is the system they feel most productive working in, teachers are left to fit these molds. In BC, unlike many other provinces, collective agreements and teacher contracts vary from district to district, yielding inconsistent working conditions for teachers across the province. Along with inconsistency comes limited job security, cuts to special education supports, increased workloads, and inevitably, impacts on stress.

Ken Clarkson, Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows School Board trustee and long-time teacher, notes the changes that have impacted the teaching profession over time: "While society has changed dramatically over the past 50 years, the school system has remained the same. The system is out of sync with what society expects and needs. This creates an awful lot of stress." He suggests a shift in the way we think of schools and advocates for a community-based school system, where the focus would be on providing teachers and students with more autonomy in designing their educational experience.

The lack of autonomy plays into decision-making in the classroom. "As a teacher you begin to see things quickly, but the system doesn't always recognize these things. It's a Catch 22, if the system doesn't recognize it, then it doesn't exist," said Stacey Robinsmith, a secondary school teacher, in reference to students in the "grey area." These students do not fit the criteria for designation, and thus do not receive support from special education assistants. Teachers often stretch themselves thin, and are unable to provide the adequate supports to ensure student success. This produces a sense of dissatisfaction and stress, tied closely to feelings of failure, which in actuality belong at a systemic rather than individual level.

Meeting the needs of all of the students in a class is a major source of

stress for teachers. The new mantra is to cater to the diversity of students, however we tend to paint everyone with the same brush, "Teachers are painted beige, when just like students; they each have colorful, unique styles," said Karen Langenmaier, assistant director, BCTF Health and Safety Department.

In considering stress and mental health, it is important to recognize that teachers work under different classroom conditions, with a different set of stresses, different home lives, different strengths and weaknesses, and resulting different thresholds for stress and methods of managing such stresses. "For me, the number one stress is wondering whether what I am teaching is reaching the kids. I worry about making the material more interesting or more accessible," said Robinsmith. This is particularly challenging when teachers are tasked with trying to balance the material to meet multiple levels of student need.

Despite diversity among teachers, they are all expected to balance a range of requests to meet the needs of students, parents, administrators, co-workers, and the union, while maintaining a certain level of work-life balance. It comes as no surprise that a lack of work-life balance is one of the major sources of stress for teachers.

With diverse sources of stress, and an archaic system that is slow to change, teachers are left to struggle on their own in challenging working conditions. The increasing presence of stress and other mental health issues have significant effects, not just on individuals, but at a broader societal level. This must be recognized, and altered to ensure the health of teachers, and the delivery of quality education to students in BC.

The provincial government must take the first step, in recognizing stress as a designated health issue, compensable by WorkSafe BC. The evidence is clear and the topic is well researched, it is time for funding to come forth to support such practices that will effectively address the issue of teacher stress.

Heather Palis, undergraduate student, SFU Diagloue program

Teachers build a better world

By Marie-Claude Tremblay

Once again over 400 of our newest and future members from all over BC converged on the Radisson Hotel in Richmond for the annual BCTF Conference for New Teachers, New TTOCs, and Student-teachers at the beginning of March.

Fifty facilitators, new teachers to retired, offered workshops over the next two days on a wide variety of subjects such as poverty and LGBTQ issues, employment insurance, health and safety, and collective agreements, enhancing critical thinking, assessment, mental health for teachers and students, working with Aboriginal youth, French immersion and FSL, and the list goes on.

New friendships were made and old ones renewed. Ideas, stories, concerns and resources shared by all. From the feedback forms and the survey, everyone walked away with something to use Monday morning, be it a resource, lesson plan, technique, or a new way of looking at teaching and students. See you next year!

Marie-Claude Tremblay, co-ordinator, Conference for new teachers, new TTOCs, and student-teachers



Les enseignant(e) travaillent pour un monde meilleur

Encore une fois, début mars, l'hôtel Radisson de Richmond fut envahi par nos plus jeunes membres. Pendant 2 jours, plus de 400 nouveaux enseignants, nouveaux suppléants et maîtres-stagiaires ont créé ou renouvelé des amitiés, partagé idées, ressources et adresses électroniques, discuté de la réalité dans leurs salles de classe, posé mille questions et ri des aventures de leurs élèves et de leurs collègues. Ils ont grandement apprécié la diversité des ateliers offerts dans les 2 langues et surtout le dévouement des facilitateurs. Des enseignants d'horizons divers : certains tout nouveau dans la profession, d'autres à la retraite, ont offert des ateliers sur la justice sociale, la santé et la sécurité, notre convention collective, l'évaluation, la pensée

critique, la santé mentale des enseignants et de leurs étudiants, sur les façons de travailler avec les jeunes Autochtones, sans oublier les langues, les arts, les sciences, l'éducation physique et la gestion de classe. D'après les commentaires dans les évaluations, tout le monde est rentré à la maison, rapportant avec soi, une nouvelle ressource, leçon ou technique mais surtout un nouveau regard sur notre profession et nos élèves.

*À l'année prochaine,
Marie-Claude Tremblay
Coordonnatrice, Conférence pour nouveaux enseignants, suppléants et maîtres-stagiaires Bureau des programmes et services en français*

A tale of two books

By Robert Christofle

When Robert Joseph Greene set out to write a realistic Canadian view of gay teenage boys in high school, he wasn't prepared to face a review panel of teachers, parents, and librarians.

His young adult novel, *This High School Has Closets*, is a story about two teenage boys who meet, fall in love during a tumultuous time in Canadian gay history. In 2002, gay marriage was not recognized countrywide. Canadian gay activist Marc Hall sued the Durham School Board in order to be able to take his boyfriend to the prom. In his story, Greene set out to portray the struggles of his two gay characters as realistically as possible. A lot of educators grapple with how much reality about gay and lesbian youth issues is allowable before they incur the backlash of administrators, school boards, communities, and parents.

Icon Empire Press wanted the book to be eligible for “young adult book” status, which was a stretch, because the book included profanity, teenage drinking, and a detailed description of the main

character's first gay sexual experience. So, Icon Empire Press put together a volunteer panel of parents, librarians, and school teachers to review and sanction the books portrayal of gay youth and their very real struggles and issues.

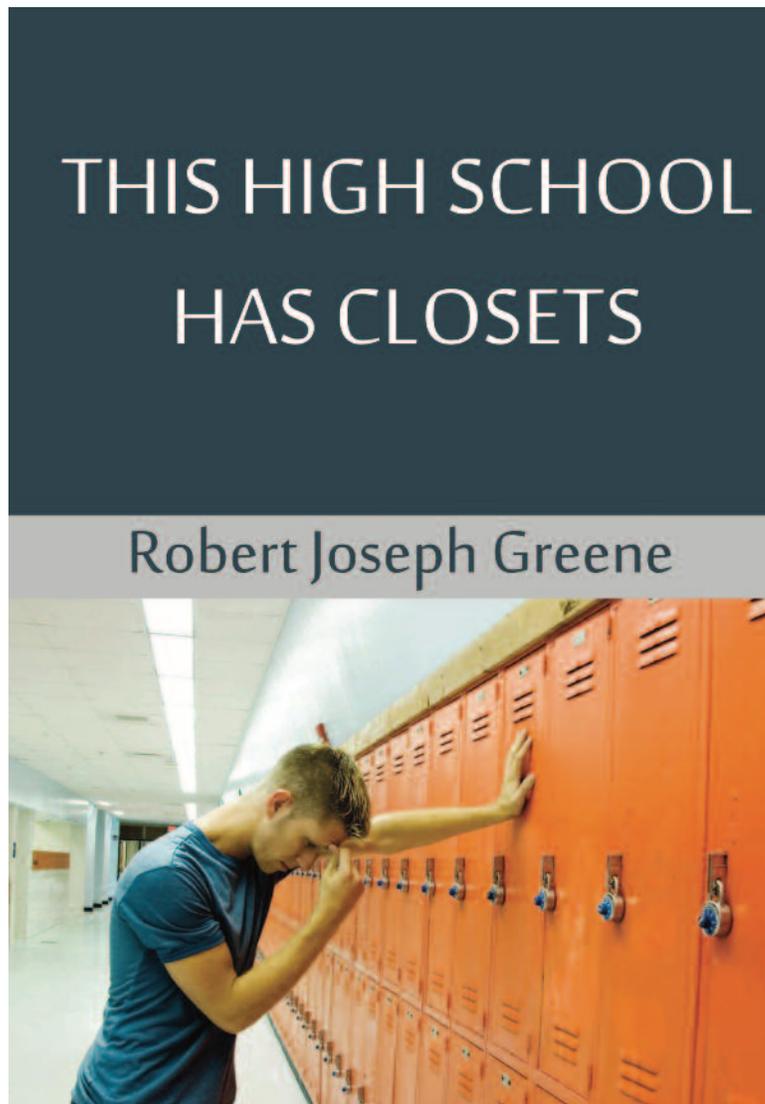
Another challenge *This High School Has Closets* faced in order to qualify for the school-approved reading list was that in some instances it included topics that would be deemed too controversial to support a “classroom discussion.” The threshold for HS is higher. As school boards adopt policies that are more LGBT inclusive, teachers have more freedom to address the issues dealing with human sexuality, profanity, and teenage drinking in class.

For example, when Icon Empire Press put together an in-house volunteer panel of teachers, librarians, and parents, there were very minimal recommended changes in the sections of the novel containing profanity and sections that addressed teenage drinking. The original story had 10 words of profanity that was reduced to 3 words. Surprisingly, teenage drinking was not an issue. It was discussed and Greene made a very poignant observation—the drinking situation was used as a “moment of clarity” for the protagonist Marc Thomas where his boyfriend's excessive drinking resulted in Thomas's diminished view of his partner. So, the drinking episode was decided by the review panel to be acceptable.

Where the panelists struggled with censorship was the explicit sexual detail about the first sexual gay experience between the two main characters. No high school book, with the exception of human sexuality material, would give such details even for heterosexuals. So, a change was needed and compromise proved to be difficult.

The politics of teaching is a constant struggle to help teens deal with life issues without morally offending any majority. Because of this, teachers are sometimes forced to present what is practical instead of what is realistic.

Most private schools and all but one public school board in British Columbia rely on the Educational Resource Acquisition Consortium (ERAC) to evaluate books for classroom reading. ERAC is a co-operative member-



based organization working in partnership with participating BC public school districts and independent schools. ERAC's goal is to support quality educational resources for all its member schools. ERAC provides a range of services to its members, but most importantly provides an evaluation, licensing and acquisition program consisting of print, software, and digital learning resources to its member schools. However, there are other resources available to teachers too.

"Some school districts have their own internal review panel in which panelists are trained based upon specific key review objectives," says Julie Rousseau, Director of Curriculum for the Abbotsford School District. "Teachers have autonomy in the classroom but provisions are in place to help teachers deal with these decisions."

Author Robert Joseph Greene has presented before all schools two books about human sexuality development that are similar in structure and storyline. However, though *This High School Has Closets* takes a more direct approach to what teens face and is a watered down version, which is now published, it is still deemed controversial. *This High School Has Closets* had an entire chapter detailing the main character's first sexual experience, but it was removed and replaced by a simple sentence with the words "mutual masturbation."

The replacement sentence was so difficult to cope with that at one point the author promised a more "neutral" book if they allowed the compromised sentence to revert to its original form.

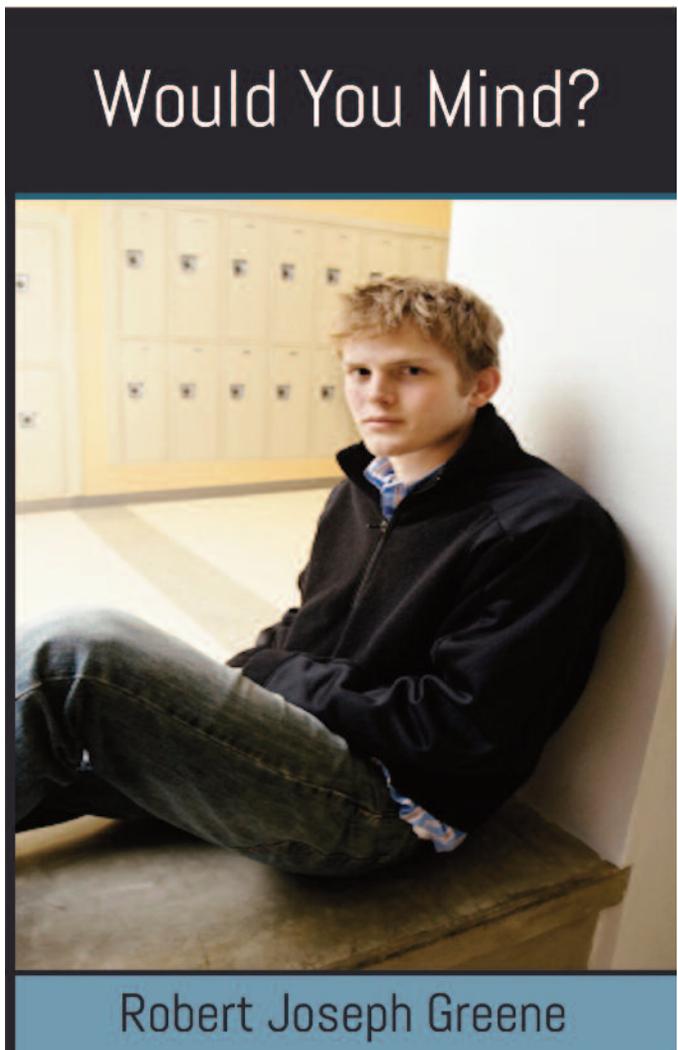
"In the 1950s and early 1960s, a lot of innuendo was used in movies to suggest this person was gay in a story," says Greene. "I don't want us to fall back into this standard."

Greene was happy to appease the more conservative panelist with his new book to meet their needs. "I did learn what teachers struggle with on a day-to-day basis," says Greene. In keeping with his promise, Greene wrote the book *Would You Mind?*

Would You Mind? is void of profanity and any sexual detail, but is still entertaining and informative to young adults.

Author Robert Greene felt that *Would You Mind?* would appeal to a schools' need for neutrality in sexuality without compromising the essence of the story.

However, the greater question lies within the objectives of teachers. Teachers are given a certain amount of autonomy in their classrooms. In many cases, they need materials specific to a particular project or program that are also unique to their coursework or curriculum. As we know, teachers are trained to evaluate certain materials independently.



"Most teachers have full autonomy in deciding what they can bring into the classroom," says Alan Stel, principal at Penticton Secondary School, "but they also know to consult with either departmental peers or their principal."

But again, this challenges many teachers to make internal assessments of their own "comfort" zones when it comes to controversial topics. Some schools have clear guidelines when addressing controversial topics like gender issues, LGBT issues and teen pregnancy/abortion. It is here that we see clearly the issue of reality versus neutrality.

"Teachers must weigh the literary merit versus value to the student from a pedagogical point of view," says Stel.

This brings us back to the choice in presenting materials. Internal school evaluation programs tend to be more conservatively skewed; whereas external materials portray a more direct view on most subject matters.

Does the teacher feel that it is important to portray a realistic storyline to bring about a greater understanding of human development? Or, is it better to be more neutral and trust a student to formulate their own opinions? Herein lies the choice in a tale of two books.

Robert Christofle, Icon Empire Press

BC's educators and artists build momentum

Teachers and artists across BC take part in the launch of Infusion Studio, a new professional learning initiative presented by ArtStarts in Schools

February 27, 2013, teachers, principals, community arts specialists, and visual and performing artists from BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario participated in the first Infusion Studio, a professional learning series presented by ArtStarts in Schools.

Infusion Studio is an extension of the Infusion: Arts in Education cohort program already under way at six schools in BC and is designed to support those interested in integrating the arts in education. The launch event—Momentum!—featured a full day of interaction between artists and educators, designed to encourage dialogue on what can be done before, during, and after arts-based experiences in classrooms and schools to maximize their effect and meaning.

Participants explored various purposes, audiences, and processes for documentation that can position educators, students, and artists to make significant connections and derive greater meaning from arts-based classroom experiences. Many of the participants submitted examples of documented evidence of arts-infused learning in an array of different formats. These were showcased in a special exhibition called Momentum: Documenting Artistic Learning in the Classroom. One example came from Ian DeLong from Garibaldi Annex, who submitted a recording of the creation and recording of *The Lorax Opera*. Students in Kindergarten to Grade 4 participated in the project, creating a libretto, setting the words to music, creating costumes and props, and then orchestrating their compositions using Orff instruments. Artist Phyllis Schwartz displayed notes and an impressive mosaic photo collage that tracked the progress of all the students at MacDonald Elementary School, who participated on a clay project that she co-ordinated as an artist in residence.

This project celebrated community while giving each student artist the chance to create a piece of great personal meaning. Schwartz's submission documented all stages of the process as well as a celebration tea held at an exhibition of the work, demonstrating both exceptional levels

of student engagement and the ways in which documentation can function as the heart of assessment in arts-based learning.

In addition to this special exhibition, a technology museum featured interactive activities and displays tracing documentation practices and tools through the ages, from cave painting to film cameras to digital devices and more. These models offered samples of ways different technologies and mediums can capture students' imaginations and lend themselves to the documentation process.

Speakers, artists, and educators shared their work and experience, as well as their strategies for transforming classrooms and hallways into art galleries. There were also afternoon breakout sessions that encouraged lively discussion and presentations around how to make the most of arts-based encounters in schools.

"I met so many inspiring creators, and felt motivated to document future artistic processes," said professional artist Megan Carty. "It was very special to have so many ideas pooled together."

Teacher Charity Peal expressed that she felt thoroughly enthused and re-energized by all the learning she did. "I really appreciated the format of the day, as well as the atmosphere and momentum that was created."

The team at ArtStarts was thrilled to host this opportunity for artists and teachers to come together to exchange ideas and build their skills. "These types of initiatives are important to us, because they activate our mission," says Navida Nuraney, executive director of ArtStarts. "We see ourselves as an increasingly integral resource for professional learning in arts-in-education in BC."

ArtStarts is currently designing the content and selecting possible locations for future Infusion Studio sessions and is interested in hearing what topics readers are interested in exploring around arts-infused education. Visit Infusion's online Community of Practice at artsinfusion.ca to share your ideas or check out a highlight reel of Momentum! For queries related to Infusion, contact Terri Anne Wilson, arts integration manager at ArtStarts in Schools at terrianne@artstarts.com



Artists Brent Clowater and Phyllis Schwartz examine and discuss her documentation of a recent school wide project at MacDonald Elementary School in Vancouver.



L-R: Local SUTEP executive member, Karen Andrews (Terrace teacher), Elias Guerrero Bravo (local SUTEP general secretary of the Ancash region), Nelly (National SUTEP executive member), Carina Soderlund (Vancouver secondary teacher), local SUTEP executive member.

To Peru, in solidarity

By Karen Andrews

During the summer of 2012, I spent two and a half weeks participating in the BCTF Peru Project. Our main purpose was to provide professional development for Peruvian teachers of English as an additional language. A portion of that time was spent working in the city of Huaraz with the regional Peruvian teachers' union of Ancash, a local of the country's union, SUTEP.

On our final evening of teaching with the regional Peruvian teachers' union of Ancash, Carina Soderlund (Vancouver secondary teacher) and I were invited to visit the recently opened local union office, a stand-alone building that the local had just rented. With my own local back in BC having recently moved offices, I was excited for the local SUTEP membership and also curious to see what their office would be like.

Arriving at the building, my enthusiasm was dampened to see bars on the windows. Inside was a bare concrete room with only an empty teacher's desk and a few plastic deck chairs. The union executive explained that they were afraid of being broken

into so they didn't leave anything in the office. This reality brought me to think of my own local's office with its computers, printers, and various other furnishings and sundry objects left in plain sight. Granted, we do have an alarm system, but we have never had to consider keeping our office essentially bare.

Shortly after our arrival at the office, local general secretary of the Ancash region (the equivalent of a BCTF local president), Elias Guerrero Bravo, announced that he was going to run down to the local corner store to buy some wine to help celebrate the opening of their office. After about 10 minutes, the SUTEP executive began to wonder what had happened to him. I could see that they were getting increasingly worried as time passed. They began to wonder out loud if he had been kidnapped or, worse yet, shot by the politically radical group, Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso). A faction of the Shining Path has slowly infiltrated the Peruvian teachers' union, so their worries weren't far-fetched. As the executive frantically called his cell phone to no avail, I thought to myself how

fortunate I was to be a union activist in BC, where I didn't have to worry about risking my life for my political beliefs. As past president of my local, it never crossed my mind that someone or some organization would want to harm me for standing up for public education. Fortunately, Elias arrived shortly thereafter and laughed off his colleagues' concern; he simply had to go further than he thought to find a bottle of wine.

That night, many thanks were given to the BCTF for supporting their local through the offering of professional development for its membership. It was also that night that I truly understood the importance of the BCTF's international solidarity program. It offers not only professional development, but also connection and moral support to teachers who are defending public education and workers' rights against daunting odds. That night, we raised our glasses in solidarity.

*Karen Andrews
French immersion teacher, Terrace*

Pollie awards

NOW Communications, the PR agency the BCTF engages, recently informed us that our advertising campaign this year won awards at the Pollies. These are awards sponsored by the *Campaign and Election* magazine and are the premiere international political advertising awards. This is not the first time that BCTF ad campaigns undertaken by NOW have won awards. We can be very proud of the work that our staff does with the staff of NOW Communications. This year, our ads won:

Bronze

- Back to School Awareness Campaign
- Radio Ad—Quiet Now

Silver

- Television Ad—Waiting, Special Needs.

BCTF solidarity supports teacher colleagues in South Africa

By Larry Kuehn

When I opened my e-mail one day, I wondered why I had a message from South Africa's Ambassador to Burundi. I barely knew where Burundi was (land-locked in the middle of Africa, next to better-known Rwanda and facing similar ethnic tensions).

The message was from Membathisi Mdladlana telling me that he soon would be South Africa's High Commissioner to Canada—the title commonwealth countries call ambassadors to other commonwealth countries.

His message indicated that he would like to visit, re-establish old friendships, and express appreciation to the BCTF.

The high commissioner came to the BCTF in the fall of 1990, just weeks after the creation of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU). The apartheid system in South Africa had about 20 different education systems, each racial group having a separate school system in each province and teacher unions were separated by racial category. The creation of SADTU was an effort to bring together all these unions into a single, non-racial teachers' union.

It was a very uncertain time in South Africa. Mandela had just been released months earlier and negotiations were taking place on what the future of the



Membathisi Mdladlana, South Africa's High Commissioner to Canada

country would look like. Many feared that the transition could come about only with a lot of bloodshed because the inequalities and the social wounds were so great.

Success in eliminating apartheid (although many rue that it has not been a more fundamental transformation), did not just depend on the negotiations for a new constitution and the first democratic elections. New social institutions had to be built based on different principles than those of the apartheid system. A non-racial union that everyone could join was one of those.

However, just announcing that you had a new union everyone could join was

not enough. There had to be an organization that could reach the 250,000 teachers in South Africa and convince them that this non-racial union was necessary for building the "New South Africa." Those who had some success in the old system would put up resistance in the hope of maintaining the separate union structures and limit the shifts in the future.

So where did the BCTF fit into this picture?

At the end of the 1980s, the Social Credit government of Bill Vander Zalm passed legislation that eliminated the basis of membership in the BCTF. As a result, the BCTF had to reorganize and go out and sign up every teacher as a

member again. Over 30,000 people had to sign a card to be a member of the new form of the BCTF.

The Canadian Teachers' Federation felt that the BCTF experience with signing up members might be of value to the South Africans and arranged for the newly elected president and general secretary to spend a week at the BCTF. That president was Membathisi Mdladlana, now the South African high commissioner.

The BCTF International Solidarity Fund contributed a significant amount of funding to support the organizing work of signing up members for the new union. For over a decade, the BCTF sent members with experience in our activist training programs to work with SADTU as it developed its own expertise in union training.

The organizing work was a success and by the time of the first elections where everyone, regardless of racial group, could vote, SADTU was by far the largest teacher union in the country. Mdladlana left the leadership of the union when he

was elected to parliament in 1994. For over a decade he was the labour minister in the ANC government. When he didn't run in the most recent election, he was appointed Ambassador to Burundi and then High Commissioner to Canada.

Mdladlana visited Vancouver in mid-April in conjunction with the Vancouver South African Film Festival. He opened the festival and took part in a panel discussion on the issues of indigenous peoples after the showing of "Tracks Across Sands" about the San people—a film showing sponsored by the BCTF.

The high commissioner met with the BCTF Executive Committee and had an opportunity to bring both personal and formal greetings and thanks to the BCTF for its contribution to the opposition to apartheid in the 1980s and the development of the non-racial teachers' union in the 1990s.

After the meeting, Executive member-elect, Teresa Grandinetti, told colleagues, "My personal highlight was meeting and listening to the South

African High Commissioner to Canada and first president of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union, Membathisi Mdladlana, address the BCTF Executive.

The bond between the BCTF and SADTU is very strong. BCTF members should be very proud of their involvement in the creation of SADTU. Mdladlana spoke of how a BCTF donation to SADTU allowed him to keep his house and his car after the South African government had stopped paying his teacher salary due to his activism in creating the union. It was an extremely moving and up-lifting experience. I am very proud to be a teacher and proud of the BCTF's activism with international social justice."

The City of Vancouver declared a South Africa Cultural Week for the film festival and Mayor Gregor Robertson hosted a reception for High Commissioner Mdladlana. The declaration by the city recognizes the positive role that the BCTF played in building positive relationships with South Africa.

*Larry Kuehn, director,
BCTF Research and Technology Division*

Truth and reconciliation events, September 2013

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada is hosting seven national events in different regions across Canada.

The national events will engage the Canadian public and provide education about the history of the residential schools system, the experience of former students and their families, and the ongoing legacies of the institutions within communities. The national events will also be opportunities to celebrate regional diversity and honour those touched by residential schools.

One of the national events is being held in Vancouver on September 18–21, 2013.

More details will be available soon. The Executive Committee has set its September meeting dates so that the Federation will have representation at this event. Locals may want to also consider participating in this reconciliation process that is crucial for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

More information is available on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission website: www.trc.ca

Reconciliation Canada is also organizing several events leading up to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's national event. Established as a collaboration between the Indian Residential School Survivor's Society and Tides Canada Initiatives Society, Reconciliation Canada has planned an All Nations Canoe Gathering on September 17, 2013 a large event at BC Place on September 21, 2013 and a Walk for Reconciliation on September 22, 2013. More information can be found at www.reconciliationcanada.ca

The voice of youth in the BC election

By Janet Nicol

Fewer young people participate in Canadian elections than in the previous generation according to statistics, yet many in British Columbia value the democratic process and are volunteering in the provincial election.

Recent interviews with young people (ages 16 to 24) volunteering for three of the four major political parties (the Conservative Party did not respond to an interview request) show an enthusiasm and interest in politics. Here's what these six young men and women have to say.

Adrian She is a Grade 12 student at David Thompson Secondary School on Vancouver's south side. Even though he is a year shy of qualifying to vote in the BC election, he is volunteering for NDP incumbent Gabriel Yiu in the Fraserview riding. "The NDP are pragmatic," he says. "They are benefitting real people." He rattles off an impressive list of policy proposals the NDP stand for—from investing in skills training to support of mental health initiatives. "They will enforce employment standards," he says, "and extend medical benefits to include insulin pump coverage. The NDP is a positive party and doesn't get involved in attack ads. It's fiscal plan is open and transparent."

Many of She's friends support either the Green Party, because of its environmental policies, or the Liberals, because they are "business-inclined." His classmates may not be volunteering, but She says they are "informing themselves" about the election through newspapers, the internet, and facebook pages.

She describes his riding as diverse and says MLA Gabriel Yiu, "works well with different organizations." The NDP candidates represent many approaches, from "the lesbian and queer community to the medical community." These people will "bring their best to the legislature."

Kelly Weleschuk, a 24-year-old political science student at Simon Fraser University is volunteering for the first time. She says she was attracted to the Green Party's long-term policies. "They think seven generations—and even seven years down the road," she says. Weleschuk also likes the party's comprehensive policy on childcare. "They are inclusive of all types of people and promote an anti-bullying program in schools. This includes cyber bullying," she says. "Everyone has to respect one another."

During the televised leadership debate Green Party leader Jane Sterk stated BC turned down a company offering wind energy. Weleschuk said she was "astounded" by this fact. "When my friends and I watched the debates," Weleschuk says, "we started counting the number of times the Liberal and NDP leaders said the word *economy*."

"We have to think about a sustainable future. If we don't look at this, we won't have a planet Earth. The environment is tied to the economy. Attitudes are changing," Weleschuk says. "Young people are tired of the Liberals and NDP and will look at the Green Party."

The Green Party allows young people to give their opinions. You can contribute to policy. It's open to debate and open to community discussion.

Sebastian Zein, age 18, is attending University of BC and is volunteering in the Port Moody-Coquitlam campaign for Liberal candidate Linda Reimer. "I was always the type of person who asked why?" he says about his interest in politics. "Many of the answers led to government policies."

He thinks many youth may not be as interested because they don't have a long-term view. But he also says youth are actively engaged at all levels. "The Liberal Party is the only serious party regarding the need for a robust private sector to fund public service," he says. "They get that balance correct."

As for education policies, Zein believes the Liberals have shown their competency. "In the past 12 years, they have done well with public schools. I come from an ordinary suburban working class school and had first-rate teachers and equality of opportunity."

He says under the Liberals, schools have enjoyed the highest funding per student in BC's history. "The seismic upgrade of schools has been important too," he says. "The government is considering the safety of youth."

Zein likes the fact the Liberals are guiding students toward skilled trades and notes they have partially unfrozen post-secondary tuition fees.

Should the pipeline project affecting BC's north and tanker traffic move ahead? "The premier is consistent," Sebastian says, "there are five conditions. It strikes a balance. We will not compromise and will demand the highest standards and that First Nations groups be consulted."

Sandra Alarcon is a 21-year-old international student from Venezuela, studying political science at SFU. She is ineligible to vote but this hasn't stopped her from volunteering for the Green Party. "I'm more of a *green* person," she says about her choice of parties. "I'm not impressed with the other parties."

She notices other university students may not be volunteering but they are listening and will be voting.

"The Green party is helping post-secondary education to be more affordable," she also says. "Lots of youth are struggling."

As for the environment, Alarcon believes in sustainability. "We need alternative forms of fossil fuels," she says. Alarcon campaigns door-to-door in Vancouver neighborhoods. "When a person says thank you for trying to make Canada a green place, it's rewarding, she says, "even if you've been rejected a hundred times."

Alarcon says volunteering can be stressful but is fun too. "I plan to continue volunteering for the Green Party after the election."

Rittu Sharma is 16 and attends Fleetwood Park Secondary School in Surrey. She is volunteering for the first time in the Surrey-Fleetwood riding for Liberal Party candidate Peter Fassbender.

"My dad is a business man and the Liberals support business," she says about her choice of party. "It's important to get involved because what happens now affects you later," Sharma adds.

Sharma says she tells her friends about her volunteer work, which includes going door-to-door with the candidate—hoping to get them to become involved. "Most students are busy with their own schedules—academic and sports," she says, "but a few have gotten involved." Sharma says the Liberals have a record

of highest funding of BC students, have increased technology in schools and offer accessible and affordable post-secondary education. "The Liberals have a strong platform, cutting down spending and having a debt-free BC."

Sharma also supports the conditions the Liberals have placed on the pipeline project so it will be less risky and says the project will be a boom to the economy.

"Volunteering is so much fun," Sharma says. "I'm already looking forward to the next campaign."

Kimberly Ho won't be voting in the Vancouver–Fraserview riding this election—she's in Grade 12 at Killarney Secondary School and just a year under the voting age. Volunteering on the phones and door-to-door on Gabriel Yiu's campaign is a first-time and "fun" experience, Ho says.

"I have always wanted to be involved with politics in some way," she says.

"Volunteering for an election campaign is an excellent opportunity to grow your network and meet people from a variety of sectors in a short, intense amount of time. There are tons of volunteers and people from all different sectors who get involved during elections."

Ho thinks it's important young people are aware of what's going on in the community. "I would say there is a good handful of my classmates who care about local politics," she says, "and quite frankly, I believe some may be even more informed than some eligible voters out there."

Ho says the NDP platform attracted her because it was "practical, in comparison to the Liberals."

"Their platform shows exactly how they will pay for those changes," she says. "They have been careful not to make too many promises, proposing changes that are practical and will make a difference. In uncertain economic times, we need a government to make

responsible choices about spending."

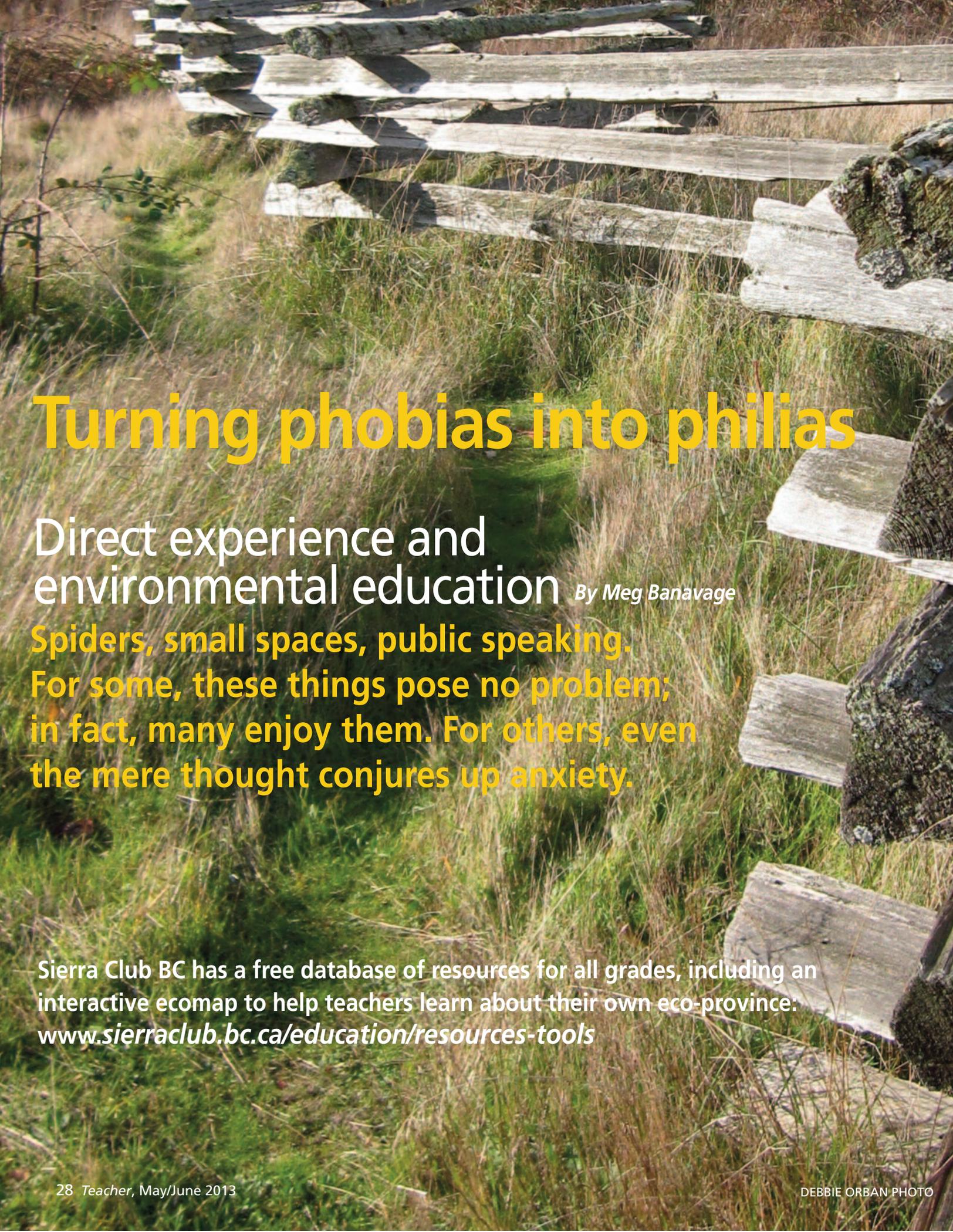
Ho also has a few choice words for the BC Teachers' Federation too: "While officially non-partisan, the BC Teachers' Federation is clearly campaigning on behalf of the New Democratic Party," she has observed. "I have noticed an increase of expensive television ads sponsored by the union, urging voters in this year's election to end a government it insists has wreaked havoc on public education. It seems that the teachers' union believes that a government led by Adrian Dix represents the pathway to free collective bargaining and more money to improve class size and composition. If the teachers' union honestly believes that the NDP is going to open the vault to give it everything it wants after the election, it's incredibly naive."

Ho has lots to say about education policy—especially as someone who came through public schools during the liberal regime.

"Over the last 12 years, the BC Liberals have failed to protect public education in our province and have often taken steps backwards," she says. "As a result, too many students go to school in overcrowded classrooms to learn from teachers who have too few resources. Cuts to special needs programs are making it harder for many students to succeed, and I say this as a student who has witnessed this first-hand. It is about time that a BC NDP government step in to improve the learning conditions for young British Columbians, by means of hiring new employees in the education system, and putting more focus on students with special needs, ESL, and Aboriginal students."

Make no mistake, young people are listening. It's all about motivating more of them to participate—and if we succeeded, surely the province would be a better place.

Janet Nicol, Killarney Secondary School, Vancouver



Turning phobias into philiias

Direct experience and environmental education *By Meg Banavage*

Spiders, small spaces, public speaking.
For some, these things pose no problem;
in fact, many enjoy them. For others, even
the mere thought conjures up anxiety.

Sierra Club BC has a free database of resources for all grades, including an interactive ecomap to help teachers learn about their own eco-province:
www.sierraclub.bc.ca/education/resources-tools

Phobias come in all different shapes and sizes. But what happens when there is a generation who fear they are living on a planet so full of destruction and threats, they can't see beyond the gloom?

Ecophobia is "a fear of ecological problems and the natural world" (Sobel, 1998, n.p.). It is no surprise many students (and adults) feel this in some way. Glaciers are melting. Species are going extinct—over 1,900 at-risk species in BC alone—and the core of environmental studies focuses on how to reduce your carbon footprint so the planet doesn't keep on cooking and the next generation might get a glimpse at what a forest looks like.

People are willing to protect what they love. It sounds simple. The question is, then, how do educators turn ecophobia into ecophilia?

Sounds hopeful, doesn't it? Within environmental education, people are concerned about the growing disconnect between children and nature—take Richard Luov's writings on "nature-deficit-disorder." But there is another, quite literally, scary phenomenon. Children aren't just separated from nature; they are being asked to bear the entirety of its reality. A generation is learning that they need to fix some big problems immediately, or else. Diane M. McKnight writes about her daughter crying after learning about Galapagos tortoises: she learned that there was only one left and if it died, that was it (McKnight, 2010: e10). Educators must communicate the urgency surrounding environmental issues while maintaining hope for the future. It is time to meet ecophobia with a match equally as powerful—ecophilia.

Sobel calls ecophilia a "biological tendency to bond with the natural world" (Sobel, 1998, n.p.) building on

E.O. Wilson and Stephen Kellert's biophilia. People are willing to protect what they love. It sounds simple. The question is, then, how do educators turn ecophobia into ecophilia?

We've heard the old saying that people fear the unknown. Learning about the Amazon rainforest in a BC classroom can be exciting, but it is an abstract concept. Abstract concepts are difficult to understand and often we fixate on a tangible fact that can be easily comprehended. For example, trees are being cut down in the rainforest. Or, for McKnight's daughter, the Galapagos tortoises are doomed.

Does this mean we shouldn't discuss deforestation? No. In fact, coastal BC has one of the greatest advantages for doing so—it boasts 25% of the world's remaining intact temperate rainforest. This unique ecosystem covers only 0.1% of the planet, and just like the Amazon, there are fascinating animals (humpbacks that sing!) and communities who rely on coastal resources for survival. For many BC classrooms, rainforests exist in the schoolyard—banana slugs breaking down twigs, bracket fungus growing along the trunks of old-growth cedars. A quick afternoon walk and students are exposed to ecosystem relationships at work.

Direct experience helps students see beauty in nature. Suddenly, the word rainforest isn't synonymous with clearcuts and homeless monkeys. It becomes a place where vibrant life is constantly adapting and thriving. A place where we have to watch where we step because we know there is much beneath our feet.

For non-coastal communities, students can look out their windows and see alpine mountains, grasslands, valleys, boreal forests, and plains. BC has nine eco-provinces—an area with similar weather, landscapes, animals and plants—all bursting with unique biodiversity.

Direct experience helps students see beauty in nature. Suddenly, the word rainforest isn't synonymous with clearcuts and homeless monkeys. It becomes a place where vibrant life is constantly adapting and thriving. A place where we have to watch where we step because we know there is much beneath our feet.

Creating a learning environment where students bond with nature is pivotal. We cannot continue to dump the weight of the world on our students' shoulders, reminding them that they alone are the future. We need to do our part and present issues to young minds who have the skills and passion to live in a healthy planet. We cannot motivate out of fear.

Am I struck by pangs of sadness when I think that my grandchildren might ask me what a glacier looked like? Absolutely. But if I don't stand on a mountain, squinting my eyes to see icy peaks reflecting sunshine, I won't be able to answer.

Meg Banavage, education program co-ordinator, Sierra Club BC

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Families need neighbourhood schools

By Tara Ehrcke

This spring two school boards are wrestling with decisions about school closures—Kootenay Columbia and Port Alberni. In Kootenay Columbia, the decision was made that the Board would no longer support a full K–12 program in the town of Rossland. In Alberni, the board is considering a school closure and relocation of students to other schools. Both communities saw an outpouring of public interest and concern. In Rossland, a community group called Vision for Small Schools has been advocating to maintain K–12 services within Rossland. A survey of parents found that 85% wanted to maintain K–12 in Rossland even if that meant having a single K–12 school. The vast majority of parents who responded to the survey were Rossland residents—487 of 500.

The last decade has seen hundreds of school closures across British Columbia. Always, parents and community members are distraught to lose their neighbourhood school. Not only are children displaced out of their community, but the school often serves other functions for local residents. They have playgrounds used in the evenings, rooms booked for community functions, theatre and sports facilities rented to community groups.

Although there has been declining enrolment, as the Rossland group points out, many of these communities will see a rebound in the coming decade. In Rossland, the district has projected enrolment back at 2003 levels by 2026. To close schools now, at the bottom of the enrolment dip, is rather short-sighted. If funding were provided by the province, community schools, with all their benefits to local residents, could be maintained to ensure adequate space for this enrolment rebound.

The irony of school closures is that parents and community members have consistently shown through their actions that this is one of the most important school “choices.” It is very important to parents to be able to send their child to a school within the local community, and it is important to communities to have school spaces and facilities to act as neighbourhood hubs.

But for every school that gets a new student, some other school loses one. And when enough are gone, the effects can be ghetto-izing or closure. The trend is for students (or parents) with enough social capital to be the ones actively picking their schools.

The “choice” movement advocated by the BC Liberals for the past decade has eroded access to community schools and led directly to these hundreds of school closures. Opening of catchments and allowing children (or their parents) to “choose” a school has skewed the enrolments in many districts. In Vancouver, students have fled east-end schools only to fill west-end schools with portables. Turf wars have broken out, particularly at the secondary level, to recruit students to “our” school. Schools, districts, and teachers are spending scarce resources advertising their schools, hosting open-house nights, putting up signs and creating ever more specialized academies and programs in an attempt to have the highest enrolment. Sadly, this only takes children from one school to another, and will end up as a race to nowhere. As the inter-school competition increases, schools are looking even further afield for more children to attract. A recent board meeting in Victoria claimed the Lacrosse

Academy would attract students from “the Lower Island.” A new school proposal for Saanich specializing in earth and ocean science will aim to attract students from all over British Columbia.

But for every school that gets a new student, some other school loses one. And when enough are gone, the effects can be ghetto-izing or closure. The trend is for students (or parents) with enough social capital to be the ones actively picking their schools. When this happens, schools in lower-income neighbourhoods experience a “flight” of middle-class kids. The net effect is a ghetto-ization of schools into “haves” and “have nots.” This “choice” is great for the haves—they get a school of their choice, a program of their choice. But it is a disaster for the “have nots” and it is unfair and inequitable. For a particular child, choice may seem attractive, but for society as a whole, choice leads to stratification and inequity.

Families and communities have shown again and again that the neighbourhood school is of paramount importance. Chronic underfunding and inter-school competition have led to overcrowded schools combined with under-utilized schools. The end result is school closures of neighbourhood schools and a loss of the most important choice for parents—the choice of the neighbourhood school.

*Tara Ehrcke, president, Greater Victoria Teachers' Association
Check out my blog and subscribe:
www.staffroomconfidential.com
Follow me on twitter: @taraehrcke*

TTOC Advisory Committee

The Teachers Teaching On Call Advisory Committee (TTOCAC) consists of nine members that hail from various parts of the province.

The TTOCAC meets three times a year to advise the Executive Committee on the various policies, procedures, and activities regarding TTOCs as well as to encourage and support the participation of TTOCs and improve their quality of life and professional recognition.

Among other things, our committee works on the New Teachers' Conference, planning workshops for TTOCs, improving communication, drafting TTOC alerts, and planning zone meetings.

BCTF members who work as TTOCs, can apply to become a committee member through committee postings on the Opportunities for Members at: bctf.ca/opportunitiesformembers.aspx For updates and discussions regarding TTOC issues, join the TTOC Listserve: <http://members.bctf.ca> or at <http://bit.ly/14iimkH>.



Front (l-r): Kelly Shields (BCTF Staff), Shelley Murr, Alex Peters (Vice Chair). Back (l-r): Brenda Stewart (Vice-Chair), Carole Berube, Susan Heuman, Amanda Long, Lynn Patterson, Hayley Waring, Terri Mooring (Executive Committee representative), and Eva Wicha. Missing from photo: Jim Iker (BCTF table officer).

Check out the TTOC web pages:
bctf.ca/TeachersOnCall.aspx

for a discussion forum regarding TTOC issues. The advisory committee would love to hear ideas and make connections with TTOCs throughout the province.

BCTF Health and Wellness program

The BCTF Health and Wellness Program sponsors an annual conference for its rehabilitation consultants. The purpose of the conference is to provide training and updates on the latest programs and practices in helping members who are struggling with health issues. This year the focus was on mental health and building teacher resilience. Presentations and information about new online resources was provided as a way to provide access for members who may find online resources to be more useful. With the growing focus on psychologically healthy workplaces the BCTF, under the guidance of Assistant Director Drusilla Wilson, has embarked on the development of programs aimed at increasing personal awareness and developing effective intervention strategies.



Workplace bullying

By Patrick Parkes

Bullying hardly needs an introduction, but at essence it's a process of dehumanization. Bullies see their targets as unworthy of empathy, and victims feel humiliated, in addition to having their work and personal lives hindered in concrete ways.

Most of us will not, thankfully, be involved in bullying scenarios but teachers are not immune to bullying, and can be both victims and perpetrators. Because of the public nature of our work, we are vulnerable to bullying not only by administrators and teacher colleagues, but also by students, parents, and sometimes the greater community, extending into cyberspace. If you are the victim of such work-related bullying, or want to help a colleague, where can you go for assistance?

Your union as a resource

When dealing with workplace bullying or workplace conflict generally perhaps your first contact should be a staff rep. Your staff rep can help you think through solutions and may enlist the assistance of a local table officer (for example, the president of your teachers' local) to intervene through discussions with school and district administrators, if such discussions apply. Union representatives may also invoke or guide you to a number of resources.

Collective agreement

Obviously, your union can't unilaterally resolve disputes, but your union's collective agreement (CA) with the district, guides both parties in resolving conflict, and opens the door for possible arbitration when a resolution can't be agreed after a three-step grievance process. In the event of alleged bullying, more than one CA clause may apply, including the provincial CA clause on harassment. This clause defines harassment as "improper behaviour that is directed at or offensive to any person, is unwelcome, and for which the person knows or ought reasonably to know would be unwelcome," and "the exercise of power or authority in a manner which serves no legitimate work purpose and which a person ought reasonably to know is inappropriate," among other things.

District code of conduct

Your school districts' code of conduct may also provide guidance in the prevention of workplace bullying, invoking the *BC Human Rights Code*, which addresses discrimination based on immutable characteristics of being—a topic you might want to raise with those around you who are prone to

making complaints such as, "There sure are a lot of [insert age][insert ethnic group][insert gender] around here."

BCTF's Internal Mediation Service

Especially in cases of chronic conflict, which may include alleged bullying, the BCTF's Internal Mediation Service is available "to mediate disputes that threaten good relationships among active members and others as appropriate." The service can be engaged not only among BCTF members, but also between BCTF members and administrators or district CUPE workers, for example. Through this service, conflicting parties are assigned a trained mediator from outside the district if both parties agree to take part in the mediation.

Respectful environment policies

Your teachers' association may have a respectful environment policy, such as we have at the Burnaby Teachers' Association, which assists us in events of conflict arising through union business (meetings, committees, etc.). This policy (based on a policy for BCTF head office), encourages "behaviours which promote respect and mutual understanding," and contains a protocol for resolving disputes. The policy is meant to assist all our members, including Executive members who have occasionally been the target of aggressive behaviour.

Committee of ombudspersons

At provincial BCTF meetings, such as the AGM or representative assemblies, the BCTF provides an ombudservice. If you feel you have been harassed by another member at a provincial meeting (for example, if you feel someone has slandered you at a meeting, or you have been the target of negative discrimination), an ombudsperson may be able to help you address the problem with the other member.

Staff committee

To address school-based issues of a general, systemic nature (such as strategy to combat negative student behaviour) staff committees are an under-utilized resource. Please look for a staff committee clause in your CA.

Workers' Compensation Act

Last year, amendments were made to BC's *Workers' Compensation Act* to address workplace harassment and bullying. WorkSafe BC has developed an harassment and bullying "prevention manual" for workers and employers, effective November 1, 2013.

Through Workers' Compensation Act provisions, claims can be made for wage loss and benefits resulting from mental distress caused by workplace bullying. The act also contains a provision for refusal of unsafe work that may have application in cases of harassment and bullying. However, because there is a high standard to establish bullying as the predominant cause of mental distress, the CA grievance process (outlined above) may be preferable.

Criminal Code

The *Criminal Code* contains provisions against stalking, harassing, and cyberbullying, which can be invoked in extreme cases, privately, at personal cost. The BCTF does not provide assistance for civil litigation aside from rare cases in which "in the opinion of staff the member has suffered significant and wrongful damages," and in such cases "settlement shall be used to offset legal aid paid by the Federation." It is obviously preferable to use the tools mentioned above before moving to litigation.

Employee assistance program

Although there are a number of venues through which bullying may be remedied, nothing can make up for the stress one undergoes as a victim. Please ask your teachers' association about access to counseling through your benefit plan.

Let's deal with workplace bullying

Bullying is unlikely to disappear anytime soon, although there are actions we can take to reduce the amount and impact of bullying in the workplace. If you are unfortunate enough to experience bullying yourself, hopefully the information in this article can be of assistance.

*Patrick Parkes, vice-president,
Burnaby Teachers' Association*



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Justice, not charity: The necessary antidote to inequality

By Marcy Toms

In August 2009, as a new retiree, I began volunteering at the Strathcona Community School breakfast program that was founded 17 years ago by a parent activist. The program is run by the community centre, not the school board or the province—it still survives on donations.

This is so with all breakfast services in elementary schools. Despite research supporting the long-term value for all nutritional breakfast programs, BC limps along randomly, dependent upon the kindness of strangers. My experiences at Strathcona enrich my life, alerting me to the untapped potential of such programs to educate kids both about food and helping themselves and others. But, I have also grown keenly aware of the hazards of using charity to fund public programs.

Fundraising, particularly by parents, has emerged as a hot topic. Some folks want schools to refuse donations and end the fundraising that consumes much of parent advisory committees' volunteer time. Parents are exhausted and exasperated. They feel taken-for-granted. Meanwhile, teachers desperate for books, computers, theatre and gym equipment, and items both necessary and extra, jump on the bandwagon, overseeing chocolate sales; each June they fill out requests for money, some of it from casino funds that school PACs vet and allot. Always, the demand overwhelms the supply. There are winners, losers, resentment, and growing frustration. The issue, delicate and difficult, will not disappear.

In September 2011, the reality of poor kids, deprived schools and desperate teachers exploded into public consciousness. A Vancouver inner-city school elementary teacher's letter made headlines. She wrote that the children she taught often arrived at school hungry, ill clad, tired, and too poorly prepared to learn. Extra help for the many students with learning problems and special needs was either too slow in coming or non-existent. She wished for funds to finance field trips and provide extras.

This teacher's plea struck charity gold. The community descended on the small school with food, clothes, toys, and hard cash. Local businesses and recreational facilities offered equipment and tobogganing trips up mountains. The small gym soon filled with stuff. *The Vancouver Sun* launched an Adopt-a-School program, sending a veteran reporter from needy public school to needy public school, detailing the depths of poverty and sparing neither adjective nor adverb describing the general terribleness of things, thus encouraging readers to contribute.

Few teachers and administrators interviewed by the *Sun* questioned the wisdom of propping up the finances of public schools with private donations. The community's response was surely evidence that all would be fine. But this drama played out against the rapid deterioration of the Vancouver School Board's Inner-city Project. In the early 1990s, this initiative proved highly successful in meeting students' and families' needs at 14 elementary and 7 secondary schools in the city's poorest neighbourhoods. As education activist Noel Herron says, the project "brought hope and joy into countless classrooms." Yet, by late 2011, it was close to collapse. In Herron's words, its 25th anniversary in 2013 would be "More like a wake than a celebration."

Also in 2011, Gwen Giesbrecht, Vancouver's district PAC chair and a

Coalition of Progressive Electors' (COPE) candidate for school board, sparked public discussion about the thorny fundraising topic. A veteran of fundraising wrangles, she coined the term, "parent supplemental funding," to describe donations and fundraising as an established system that fills gaps created by chronically inadequate government financing. Starting from occasional hot-dog sales for trips to Stanley Park, fundraising now demanded thousands of dollars for playgrounds, computer labs, current maps, and other educational necessities. Some schools were flush, benefiting from parents' \$200 cheques, while others celebrated if they could raise \$60 per event.

By November 2012, Vancouver education activists in COPE were ready to hold a conference about what kids really need: justice not charity.

Before the conference, CBC radio's Rick Cluff interviewed me. I suggested that charity was admirable, but arbitrary, random and unfair, and no way to fund a public school system or to improve the lives of poor children. His laconic, dispiriting response was typical. "Who," he asked, "should pay? Surely not the taxpayer! Is it really the public's responsibility to try to reduce poverty? And besides, the collective 'we' can't afford it." I said: "Look around, look at the obvious wealth, the new high rises, the half billion dollar roof on a football stadium, the luxury vehicles tooling in hoards around town. We can afford it, but that requires political will, just as implementing a public school system was a matter of political will." He was unconvinced.

COPE's conference was well attended and lively. We combined speakers with workshops to create practical and achievable responses and solutions to the problem of pulling justice from the jaws of charity. Attendees' enthusiasm begged a follow-up.

So, in January 2013, education researcher-writer Heather-jane Robertson spoke about growing privatization. Canadian public institutions, including schools, increasingly suffer underfunding, planned deterioration and concomitant privatization. Help for the poor ought not to be society's collective responsibility and "over-taxed" citizens should be freed from the burden of public costs. Therefore, we let parents sell cookies, welcome rich benefactors bringing dollars, and court corporations offering logos and exclusive contracts, just so schools can function.

Robertson's term—privatarianism—describes the ideology that insists privatization is consistent with the public interest. Current wisdom allows the market place to intrude aggressively into and alter public institutions. In mainstream publications, on radio and television, pundits, politicians, and promoters slavishly glorify "The Economy" (understood simplistically as the 'free' market), reduced to a singular entity, separated from and superior to all other social and cultural institutions. From the reverence accorded 'trickle-down' economics (despite its trickle up reality) to the rarely questioned (albeit

undocumented) superiority of private schools—what is private, exclusive, branded, and elite is good. The public interest, expressed in carefully crafted social policy, is not.

As one consequence of such a world view, tolerance for inequality grows. So does the defeatist sentiment that poverty is inevitable. Public services and initiatives are dismissed as ineffective and inefficient. Not surprisingly, the conviction that private interests can most effectively manage inequality seems pervasive. After all, why should governments be responsible when we have foundations, faith communities, generous billionaires, and corporations? No matter that this method is archaic, random, arbitrary, and unfair or that, potentially, it divides the poor into deserving and undeserving.

This iteration of charity is feudal. The very wealthy are free to act out their social obligations as they choose, based on what they favour. A truly progressive tax schedule where all pay a fair share for governments to redistribute equitably, creating coherent social programs based on solid research, does not fit. Instead, we witness a new *Noblesse Oblige*. Last spring, for

example, the *Vancouver Sun* published a large, front-page photo of one of Vancouver's well-meaning "power couples" delivering \$20,000 to a worthy cause, a breakfast program. A smaller, later article, notes that this same couple will soon move to their new, \$21 million home.

As the 21st century begins, the post-World War II project of creating social cohesion has eroded, replaced by social solitudes. The very rich assume the prerogative to help the poor. Or not. After all, obligation is entirely subjective and unenforceable. Publicly funded, universally available institutions and services—education, healthcare, and social welfare, for instance—that have had scant time to mature, are threatened by the relentless pursuit of commodification. This ideology, touted for years by the likes of the once-ridiculed Fraser Institute, has gained both political respectability and moral ascendancy at tremendous human cost. It is long past time to confront it and reclaim the moral high ground for co-operation, civility, equity, and justice.

Marcy Toms
retired Vancouver teacher

Verena Klose Scholarship

A trust fund has been set up in memory of popular Richmond secondary school English teacher Verena Klose, who tragically died in her sleep in late March 2013.

The account has been set up to establish the Verena Klose Scholarship at McMath Secondary School, set-up RESP accounts for Klose's daughters Keira and Lauren, and to help with immediate concerns for her husband Ramon and his daughters.

Donations (cash/cheques) can be dropped off at Richmond schools MacNeill or McMath, or dropped off at any Coast Capital Savings branch. The account is named: Klose Family "In Trust." Any Coast Capital Savings branch will be aware of this account.

Lena Wilson Endicott Poetry Award Contest



Our Times is sponsoring a poetry contest for poets in Canada in honour of Lena Wilson Endicott (1928-2012), an artist and poet, born in North Burnaby, B.C., who cared deeply for the world and social justice, and loved *Our Times*, reading every issue from cover to cover.

Send us your poems about work, working people and social justice (unpublished only).



You may send your poems by email or your letter carrier. Include up to five poems as an attachment, with no identifying info on the poetry pages (to ensure impartial judging).

Put your name, address, email address and union affiliation, if any, in the body of your email or in your cover letter.

Email your submission to poetry@ourtimes.ca, or mail it to: *Our Times*, Poetry Editor, Suite 407 – 15 Gervais Drive, Toronto Ontario M3C 1Y8.

Deadline: June 30, 2013

Grand Prize: \$400 • Two Runners-up: \$100 each

Winner and runners-up will have their poem published in *Our Times*, and will receive a two-year subscription to the magazine.

Winners will be announced in our Fall issue, October 2013.

Poetry Judges: **Marilyn Dumont**, poet; **Valerie Endicott**, family member; **Adriane Paavo**, labour educator (Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union, and member of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada).

Contest Coordinator: **Maureen Hynes**, poet, and *Our Times* poetry editor.

ILLUSTRATION: LENA WILSON ENDICOTT

The Labour History Project

Why it matters

By Ken Novakowski

Why is it important for today's students who live in a world of instant communication, facebook, tweets, and google to know something about the history of working people and their struggles?

Most of the students in today's classrooms come from families where one or both of their parents are employees of one sort or another, who we generally refer to as working people. While there is no question that the world of work and the nature of the workforce in Canada and other parts of the world has changed and continues to change, the fact remains that most people will make their living working for someone else, be it in a small business, a huge corporation, or the public sector. The important thing for anyone working into today's workplaces is to understand that the rights they enjoy, from the length of their work day and week to a harassment free environment to benefits like pensions or sick leave, exist because some time in the past working people acted collectively to win such rights through collective bargaining or through political action. Students, who will soon be entering the world of work, if they haven't done so already, should have an awareness of how many factors that shape our current world were the product and result of struggles by working people over the past century and more. One thing I learned in my many years as a teacher and a union activist is that what working people gained over time, they gained by acting together; nothing of benefit to workers was ever simply "given" by employers or government without the influence and pressure of those workers, organized into unions or broader social movements.

Today, employers and governments seek to erode the capacity of working people to enjoy their fair share of the wealth our country produces. As a result, many working people find themselves in

struggles to defend and maintain the standard of living and basic rights that were achieved by their parents and grandparents over the past century. That's why teachers, retired teachers and others have come together to constitute the Labour History Project (LHP). This group has been working on developing teaching ideas, materials, lessons and resources appropriate for use by teachers and consistent with current curriculum requirements. The LHP is a joint undertaking of the B.C. Labour Heritage Centre and the B.C. Teachers' Federation and is supported by the B.C. Federation of Labour and the SFU Labour Studies program. The LHP has been operational for a few years now and has undertaken a number of specific projects consistent with their mandate. They have been working on updating and extending the lessons in Youth, Unions and You a 2000 publication of the BCTF, the BCFed and government. The rich and comprehensive resource guide provides course specific ideas and materials on labour history, labour standards and employee rights to augment textbook and other materials. The LHP has also been developing lesson ideas to accompany *These Were the Reasons*, a DVD which lightly covers many issues in BC's past, providing real people understandings of the issues that led people to form unions. The Knowledge Network, in collaboration with the Labour Heritage Centre, is in the final stages of producing a series of thirty vignettes of the historical experiences of B.C.'s working people and the LHP plans to produce teaching ideas for each of these three minutes stories. All this and more will be available to teachers and others when the LHP goes on-line sometime this fall. Another major initiative of the LHP has been to develop a unit on labour history and labour studies for the Social Justice 12 course. A group of six teachers have been working to develop the unit and hope to have it available for field testing, again early this fall. This unit with all supporting resources and links will also be available to all teachers on-line.

There are other exciting things happening on the Labour History/Studies front.

1. Simon Fraser University is in the process of hiring a tenure track professor for the Labour Studies program which is now on track to offer a degree in Labour Studies within a few years.
2. The History Department at Simon Fraser University is offering a course (History 327) taught by well-known SFU professor and labour historian Mark Leier as part of the summer school program for teachers in July, 2014. The course, on BC and Canadian labour history, will focus on the development of teaching ideas and curriculum.
3. A group of organizations is working together to update the Vancouver Labour History Walking Tour, including new sites on the tour and also adapting the walk to include resources and links that can be accessed electronically by walk participants. The LHP is planning to develop a guide for teachers to assist teachers wanting to take their students on the walk.
4. Several organizations, including the BC Labour Heritage Centre, the BC Federation of Labour, and the SFU Labour Studies program are in the early stages of planning the publication of a book on the history of working people in BC with a focus on their many struggles and the emergence and development of the union movement.

Ken Novakowski, retired teacher, former BCTF executive director, BCTF past president, currently on the board of the Labour Heritage Centre.

Join the Labour History Network

The Labour History Project has initiated the creation of the Labour History Network—an e-mail list of anyone interested in getting three or four e-mail updates a year—on the work of the Labour History Project and related events and initiatives. If you would like to join the Labour History Network just send your e-mail address to knova@telus.net

New Teacher Mentoring Project secures ongoing funding

By Alison Davies

The New Teacher Mentoring Project, co-sponsored by the BCTF, UBC, and BCSSA, has successfully secured ongoing funding from the Ministry of Education. Moving forward, the project will build on the momentum of the pilot launched this school year within the three school districts of Kamloops Thompson, Kootenay Columbia, and Haida Gwaii.

Participants in the pilot year have provided valuable affirmation of the benefits of mentorship, and important feedback on what makes a powerful and effective mentoring program. "The knowledge gained from someone else's years of experience is priceless," claims one participant just beginning her career.

The benefits of mentorship can be seen in the growth of each individual teacher's practice, in the development of collegiality and collaborative work within school communities, and in more engaged teacher leadership within the culture of a district. Teachers in this year's program have expressed that "it is integral for growth to have an opportunity where you feel you are permitted to ask questions without judgment." They have valued "the chance to go into other classrooms and see other teachers in action. You never get that chance normally." Developing processes of formative non-evaluative feedback for teachers has encouraged them to open up their classrooms to one another, and to consider and discuss different perspectives and teaching strategies. Project feedback has also revealed the powerful reciprocity of mentoring partnerships, and confirmed that everyone can improve his or her practice in some way. "When both new and experienced teachers are open to learning new things, everyone benefits." The benefit for our students is most important, and through collaborative partnerships, project participants have noted that, "mentoring has resulted in less work in lesson planning, with more results in student learning."

Participant feedback also reflects that

an effective mentoring program can have both structure and flexibility. Structure makes clear the purposes, principles, and guidelines for the mentoring partnerships, and flexibility allows teachers to make mentoring meaningful to their specific context and needs. The abiding value of mentoring practice is that it is personalized and formative. It respects and builds upon the goals of the mentee, as she or he develops greater coherence between teaching decisions and student learning. Building an effective program with the right balance of structure and flexibility demands dedicated time and resources, which are both stretched conditions in BC's current educational climate. This will continue to be a major challenge for the NTMP as it moves forward.

What do we hope to accomplish? The aim is to develop and strengthen the quality and sustainability of mentoring programs and processes, responsive to the differing contexts and cultures of schooling throughout the province. Working collaboratively with different school districts, project facilitators will focus on developing capacity and understanding for effective mentorship, and networking across districts to learn what is workable and sustainable. Important to this process is providing opportunities for teachers committed to becoming mentorship teacher-leaders to work side-by-side with a facilitator from the project. These mentor leaders will guide the continuing growth of mentoring practice within their respective districts. Ongoing goals of the project include:

- providing workshops on learning-focused mentoring and developing tools to encourage focused observation and reflective conversation on classroom practice.
- exploring the potential for technology to support e-mentoring in those districts challenged by geographic barriers.
- developing training videos using BC teachers to model effective mentoring practices in different provincial contexts.

- a series of webinars and a summer institute offered by UBC, tailored to the professional learning interests of the teachers engaged in mentoring.
- development of district mentoring steering committees.
- building an online provincial mentoring resource to support the development of quality mentoring programs.
- continued advocacy for government policy that recognizes the importance of mentoring to the continuum of teachers' professional learning.

For those districts interested in the NTMP over the next two years, the project plan is comprised of two different components.

The first component of the project will offer each of three districts (representing different urban, suburban, and rural districts) over a three-year period the opportunity to develop and implement a new mentoring program for their teachers. Support from the project will lay the foundation for a mentoring program that the district/local can self-sustain through organization and funding in the long term. Project funding provides release time for mentors and mentees to work together on their individual professional development goals and provides workshops for effective mentoring practice. Expansion of the project to include three new districts will happen in 2014–15. Applications for this component will be available on the NTMP website bctf.ca/NewTeachers.aspx?id=28711 no later than January 2014.

The second component of the project offers districts the skills and tools to strengthen their current mentoring programs. There is much to learn from the 32 districts in BC that currently have some form of mentorship program. An NTMP facilitator will collaboratively plan with interested district/union/teacher leaders to provide workshops to increase mentor effectiveness within their program. This component will begin in 2013–14. Applications for this component are currently available on the NTMP website.

For more information about the project, please visit our website or contact the New Teacher Mentoring Project coordinator Alison Davies, adavies@bctf.ca 604-871-1823, (toll free 1-800-663-9163, local 1823).

Ride don't hide

By Michael Schratter

What kind of person would bicycle around the world yelling that he is crazy? A crazy person. Obviously. My name is Michael Schratter and I am bipolar. I also happen to be a Canadian Jew, a teacher, a part-time journalist, husband, a brother, and a son. But it is the label of mental illness that carries the most weight.

In my opinion, there is no other human affliction still so misunderstood, feared, and ultimately stigmatized. And it is this stigma, along with the prejudice so often encountered by those who are dealing with a mental health challenge, which is perhaps the greatest issue when it comes to recovery.

Imagine returning to work after a sick leave with a cast on your broken arm. You can expect sympathy, humorous get-well cards, and support from your colleagues. Now imagine yourself returning to work and telling them you were away because of a schizophrenic episode, or a debilitating anxiety attack, or some other onset of acute mental illness. I'm sure you'll agree that the same social support needed to expedite your healing might not be so readily present. There is also a serious possibility that such forthrightness has jeopardized your future social and professional opportunities, and you are more likely to be ostracized.

As the hyper-social animals we are, it is essential to feel support and empathy when we are hurt. Whether dealing with a physical or psychiatric setback, study after study shows that when we feel support and empathy from those around us during our period of healing we tend to recover faster and to a fuller extent. And yet as mentioned earlier, regrettably, there is an argument to be made that when suffering with mental illness you might be better off keeping your mouth shut about it, or at least be very selective in choosing who to tell.

A few months before I started the science degree program at UBC in 1993 my father was killed in a bicycle accident. I began university dealing with major anxiety and depression. I eventually succumbed to a manic episode that left me hospitalized, but also set me on the long road to recovery and self-awareness.

It was while dealing with the social repercussions of the manic episode that I realized the absurd injustice behind my need for secretive behaviour. This inspired a plan to cycle around the world and draw attention to the damaging effects of the stigma surrounding mental illness. Ride Don't Hide was born.

And the scariest part of the idea of trying to cycle solo around the world? Not the biking, but rather that everyone in my social sphere would know that I was bipolar and that once started, there was no turning back.



Cambodian smiles



Bolivia



China



RDH presentations, Hong Kong

All my fears aside, there was no choice for me. If I was to take my message seriously I had to live it. Live the idea that if enough of us disclose rather than hide, the stigma it will begin to disappear. If we can share the common story of how mental illness affects so many lives, we will see it for what it is—a variation of the human condition.

Many years past with many cycling trips of varying length having been accomplished and enjoyed. And then on August 1, 2010, I set out from Vancouver to cycle the equatorial distance of 40,000 km around the planet, a journey that would take me across six continents and 33 countries, and present me with 31 flat tires.

The Vancouver School Board granted me a leave and the newspaper *Vancouver 24H* published a biweekly mental illness awareness column that I wrote from the road. I also partnered with the Canadian Mental Health Association BC (CMHABC).

So what did I learn from the ride? Perhaps it has something to do with being on a bicycle, but no matter where I went people were friendly and helpful. And outside of a few harrowing incidents with traffic, never did I feel in danger. Ultimately, I learned that the world is a safe and kind place and I think all we want is just a little respect, we all need a little love. And a person dealing with mental illness is no different.

Having a mental illness has nothing to do with being weak of mind, of bad character or a moral failure. It is a biological affliction like any other. I think for me the greatest triumph of completing Ride Don't Hide was to prove that point. If I were a weak person, I wouldn't have had the mental strength it required to cycle 16 months, day in, day out, regardless of the challenges presented by weather, geography, and loneliness.

To adequately describe how I felt cycling into Vancouver on November 12, 2011, on the last day of Ride Don't Hide, 469 days after I'd set off, is beyond me. Some 200 cyclists came out that day to ride the last leg with me. With a police escort leading us, we arrived wet but safe to a cheering crowd of several hundred waiting for us at Rogers Arena stadium.

I was free.

Months later, after many speaking engagements in schools and businesses, and dozens of interviews in newspapers, TV, and on the radio, I am proud to say that Ride Don't Hide has helped to diminish the misunderstanding that surrounds mental illness. The campaign has also raised over \$100,000 in funds towards CMHA BC's youth education programs.

Ride Don't Hide is now an annual mental health awareness community ride across 13 BC communities and out east in North York, Ontario. On Sunday, June 23, 2013, there will be a Ride Don't Hide in a community near you. Consider coming out and joining thousands of other British Columbians to show that there is no health without mental health, and that the days of mental health stigma are over.

Michael Schratte, David Oppenheimer Elementary School, Vancouver

www.ridedonthide.com



Colombian Andes



Final day



RDH annual community ride



Kids out for the ride



Your Union Cares for you

Services in the Income Security Division of the BCTF

John's story

John, a 58-year old counselor was working in his office after school when two angry students came in wanting him to change their grades so they could graduate. When he refused, they blocked his door so that he could not leave the room and said they could make him. The students left soon after. The teacher was shaking and went home. There were no other teachers or staff working in this wing of the school at the time.

When he reported the incident to his administrator the next morning, he was told that the issue would be investigated. At the end of the day he was told that the students had been interviewed and denied the teacher's claim. He was told that there was no need to report it as a violent threat because the principal had "dealt with it."

He began experiencing changes in his sleep pattern and eating habits, and becoming increasingly impatient and aggressive with his colleagues and family. He first took a few days off work but increasingly took more until his doctor told him to take two months off. The doctor said he was displaying signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and stated that he would be re-assessed in two months' time.

While he was off, his colleagues did not contact him and he began to think that quitting would be the only alternative. In the return to work plan the doctor recommended that the teacher not return to this school.

This member had 300 days remaining in his sick bank prior to the "incident."

Health and safety (WCB)

On July 1, 2012, section 5.1 of the *Workers' Compensation Act* was amended to provide that a worker will be compensated for a mental disorder that is a reaction to one or more traumatic events arising out of, and in the course of, the worker's employment or is predominantly caused by a significant work-related stressor, including bullying or harassment, or a cumulative series of significant work-related stressors arising out of, and in the course of, the worker's employment. John probably feels as though he has been bullied or harassed. To deal with this situation, he has a number of options available to him, such as:

- informal resolution at the school level
- support from the employee assistance plan
- WCB claim
- a grievance pursuant to collective agreement article E.2 Harassment/Sexual Harassment
- complaint to the police.

It is important that John choose the options that are appropriate for the nature of the concerns and for the type of remedy needed to resolve the concerns. He should contact his local president for advice. John may also want to contact the BCTF's WCB advocate to discuss the pros and cons of filing a WCB claim.

Health and safety (prevention)

There are a number of health and safety issues in this scenario.

The first is **working alone**. The WCB Occupational Health and Safety Regulation sections 4.20–4.23 set out language on protecting workers who work alone where assistance would not readily be available in the case of an emergency or if the worker is injured or ill. There should be a system that controls who is allowed to enter the building and under what conditions. There should be a system in which the worker can call for help if needed and a system where someone checks on the worker at periodic intervals. The counselor in this scenario should also be aware of how his desk is situated in relation to the door and a quick exit strategy if needed.

The second issue is one of **violence prevention**. The definition of violence includes the attempted or actual exercise by a person...of any physical force so as to cause injury...and includes any threatening statement or behaviour that gives the worker reasonable cause to believe that he or she is at risk of injury. The only person who can determine if an incident is violent or not, and whether it should be reported, is the worker. The principal should not make this judgment and is in danger of report and possible claim suppression by giving this advice.

All incidents that either cause or have the potential to cause physical or mental injury must be reported to the administrator and **joint health and safety committee** so that an investigation can be done to either eliminate or control the hazard and risk.

When John does return to work, the health and safety committee must ensure that a prevention plan is in place to make sure John is safe. This plan should be in place before he returns to work and should be part of the consultation process with the rehabilitation consultant.

Keep in mind, prevention is always better than recovery.

Salary indemnity plan (SIP) (medical leave)

John's sick bank (300 days) is able to provide him access to full pay while on sick leave for up to 120 days in the school year (or more depending on his contract). If John was to use the 120 days he would need to apply for short term benefits to complete the school year. If he was medically unable to return to work the following year he would once again access his sick bank and re-apply for short-term once he had reached his maximum. If medically necessary, this pattern would continue until his sick bank of 300 days was exhausted and John would eventually be able to apply for long-term benefits.

Because the incident happened at work it is important that a claim be made to WorkSafeBC. In the event that the claim was successful John's sick bank would be credited and his WCB benefit would offset his SIP benefit. It is important to note that even if a member's benefit on WCB was greater than SIP they should still apply for SIP so that their pensionable service is registered with the Teachers' Pension Plan.

John does not have to quit teaching to get the help he needs.

Health and wellness program

John would be well advised to self-refer to the Health and Wellness Program. Once on the program, John would be able to discuss his medical needs with a rehabilitation consultant. It is likely that a further psychological assessment would be conducted—an assessment that would include a treatment plan for counseling to effectively deal with the PTSD. Additionally, massage therapy and/or a gym pass might be a part of the plan to address John's medical condition. John would be supported to put the health and wellness plan into

effect, thereby addressing his medical condition. When the time comes for a return to work, the rehabilitation consultant will assist John by accommodating his needs and planning his return, possibly on a gradual or part-time basis until he is ready to fully resume his teaching duties.

There are many services available to John so that he does not have to quit teaching.

Pensions

There are some pension considerations for John since he may be near retirement. While on the BCTF SIP, John would not be deducted monies to pay for his pension, but will continue to accumulate both pensionable service and contributory service. Although the plan rules allow you to retire as early as age 55, if you do not meet the minimum age and service requirements, your pension will be reduced if you retire before age 60. That is, if you work longer and increase your pensionable and contributory service, your pension income will increase.

If John moves public schools or even districts in BC, his pension will remain with the plan and the new employer will automatically enrol him, and his pension benefit will continue to increase. Any member within five years of retirement should contact the Teachers' Pension Plan and enrol in a "Thinking about retiring" seminar. Things discussed at these seminars include: retirement date, pension options, pension payment estimate, and healthcare coverage. Retirement requires careful thinking and additional information can be found at tpp.pensionsbc.ca or 1-800-665-6770. John should not consider quitting before he reaches his first unreduced pension date. The BCTF provides many services to help him.

For more information, please contact:
Mike Kimmis, director, Income Security Division
604-871-1957, mkimmis@bctf.ca

Victory Choy, assistant director, Pensions
604-871-1949, vchoy@bctf.ca

Ritchie Kendrick, assistant director
Program Administrator, 604-871-1935, rkendrick@bctf.ca

Sarb Lalli, assistant director
WCB Advocate, 604-871-1890, slalli@bctf.ca

Karen Langenmaier, assistant director
Health and Safety Officer
604-871-1891, klangenmaier@bctf.ca

Drusilla Wilson, assistant director
Health and Wellness
604-871-1925, dwilson@bctf.ca

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PD Calendar website

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Additions/changes:
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Who you callin' a teacher? Why we love and loathe them

Of course Justin Trudeau's experience as a teacher isn't going to help him run a government. What could he possibly have learned overseeing a group of squabbling, self-absorbed kids who can't see past their own interests that might help him in Ottawa?

By Elizabeth Renzetti

The Globe and Mail, April 26, 2013

"Lack of experience" is the charge levelled at Mr. Trudeau in the Conservatives' attack ads. What, the Tories wondered, had the new Liberal Leader done to deserve his lofty perch? He'd been a camp counsellor, a rafting instructor and, direst of all, "a drama teacher" (this was said in a tone reserved for "known typhoid carrier").

The Canadian Teachers' Federation protested, with its president telling the Ottawa Citizen that "people were very insulted that their profession was targeted in that way."

Interestingly, instead of running away from the "teacher" slur in his rebuttal ad, Mr. Trudeau slyly embraced it. There he was, sitting on a desk, in front of a calculation-filled blackboard, like a particularly butch Anne Shirley. All we needed was a winsome tot handing him a red apple to complete the picture.

Could there have been a clearer demonstration of our ambivalent—a fancy word for "deeply messed up"—relationship to teachers? Is there another profession that's so loved in theory and so loathed in practice?

The love is everywhere to see, so long as it doesn't cost us anything: Countless books, films, and documentaries take a scrappy teacher as a hero. Sometimes, he's battling a misguided establishment and a mistrustful student body. Or she's trying to take the hormonal clay of adolescence and shape it into something that won't horrify the world. They're underpaid, sarcastic and spunky, and we root for them.

Every year, the USA celebrates National Teacher Day, and celebrities take to Twitter to praise the Sir or Miss who helped them muddle through calculus, saved them from bullies or perhaps just looked at a D on a spelling test and said, "Have you ever thought about acting?" "A great teacher is a key to success," said Jon Hamm in a video of gratitude, and it's hard not to tear up a little.

But these are easy sentiments that cost nothing. In real life, teachers get scant thanks from a public that expects them to perform ever greater miracles with ever fewer loaves and fishes. Parents simmer in fury when teachers withdraw their voluntary extracurricular support to fight for their bargaining rights, as they did recently in Ontario, or when they walk off the job, as they did in B.C. last year.

There's a particular store of resentment directed at teachers, perhaps because so much of their work is invisible to the outside world, but more likely out of numbing jealousy that they get summers off. "In America," Frank McCourt wrote in *Teacher Man*, his memoir of three decades in New York high schools, "doctors, lawyers, generals, actors, television people, and politicians are admired and rewarded. Not teachers. Teacher is the downstairs maid of professions. Teachers are told to use the service door or go around the back. They are congratulated on having ATTO (All That Time Off). They are spoken of patronizingly and patted, retroactively, on their silvery locks."

It's not any different in Canada. Consider the Conservatives' animosity toward teachers, which perhaps springs out of the party's natural suspicion of any profession that's in the business of spreading knowledge, not hiding it.

Now is not the time to "commit sociology," Prime Minister Stephen Harper said this week. It seemed odd, considering that the Oxford English Dictionary tells us that sociology is "the study of the development, structure and functioning of human societies," which seems relevant at any time of the year.

I think what he might have meant is "Now is not the time for asking questions." I wondered what my most inspiring teacher, Mrs. Allen, who taught high-school sociology, would have said. Probably, "I'd rather commit sociology than ignorance," and then would have screamed, "Tony and Maria, sit down," which was her way of ensuring that half the class took their seats. Lots of Italians in my high school.

Instead of scoffing at teachers, politicians might take a leaf from David Miliband's exercise book and try doing it themselves. Two years ago, the former British foreign secretary went back to his North London high school to teach a course in politics. The kids told him about their disdain for politicians, so he tried to explain how the system worked. He brought his students to Parliament to show them the meat-grinder of democracy and introduced them to the legendary 81-year-old Labour MP Dennis Skinner, known fondly as the Beast of Bolsover. The kids must have been at least grudgingly impressed.

Not surprisingly, Mr. Miliband found that teaching was a humbling gig. "The UN General Assembly felt like a tough audience for a 15-minute speech when I spoke there," he wrote. "This was much tougher." He might have put it another way: Those who can, teach; those who can't, make fun of them.

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