

# Teacher



Magazine of the  
BC Teachers' Federation

Volume 29, Number 4  
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## In this issue

Restoration stories

AGM highlights

Teachers' voices

Jessie in  
2017

The  
Class  
of  
2021  
thanks  
teachers!

Jessie in  
2005

THE  
CLASS of  
2021  
SUPPORTS  
TEACHER



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# Time to lead on EQUITY and INCLUSION

I am very proud that our union took an important step at this Annual General Meeting toward enhancing representation within our leadership by adding positions on the BCTF Executive Committee for teachers who identify as Aboriginal or racialized. As a social justice union, and as an influential voice in British Columbia, we are leaders in equity and inclusion. That means we must also work internally within our own union to enhance fairness and representation.

WHILE WE HAVE still more to do in our Federation to advance equity and inclusion, acknowledging the gaps and identifying what we can do about inequality are good first steps. If we're going to use our collective strength and voice to advocate for a more tolerant, inclusive, and caring world, we need to make sure our own internal structures make space for those who have traditionally been marginalized.

Turn on any news channel or open your Facebook account, and you'll see that there's a lot going on around the world that needs our attention.

The wave of anti-immigrant and nationalist sentiments, and the petty populism that is being fed by reckless political rhetoric globally have given people an opening to be racist, sexist, and xenophobic.

Teachers here in BC and around the world must work with their national and international counterparts to push back. We can't let the kind of white nationalist anger that led to a mass shooting in a Quebec mosque become the norm.

We must call out, name, and fight back against such hate. Whether it's Islamophobia, white supremacy, misogyny, or xenophobia, we must push back against the rise of populist hate here in Canada and abroad.



BCTF President  
Glen Hansman

# Il est temps d'être leaders dans L'ÉQUITÉ et L'INCLUSION

Je suis très fier que notre syndicat ait franchi une étape importante lors de cette assemblée générale annuelle afin d'améliorer la représentation au sein de nos postes de leadership en ajoutant des postes au Comité exécutif de la FECB pour les enseignants qui s'identifient comme Autochtones ou personnes racialisées. En tant que syndicat de justice sociale, et en tant que voix influente en Colombie-Britannique, nous sommes leaders en matière d'équité et d'inclusion. Cela signifie que nous devons aussi travailler dur au sein de notre propre syndicat pour améliorer l'équité et la représentation.

BIEN QU'IL Y AIT encore beaucoup à faire dans notre fédération autour de l'équité et de l'inclusion, reconnaître les lacunes et identifier ce que nous pouvons faire au sujet de l'inégalité sont de premières étapes positives. Si nous voulons utiliser notre force et notre voix collective pour défendre un monde plus tolérant, plus inclusif et plus bienveillant, nous devons veiller à ce que nos structures internes fassent place à ceux qui ont été traditionnellement marginalisés.

Regarder à la télévision n'importe quelle chaîne d'information ou ouvrez votre compte Facebook, et vous verrez qu'il y a beaucoup de choses dans le monde qui ont besoin que nous y prêtions attention.

La vague de populisme mesquine, anti-immigrante et nationaliste alimentée par une rhétorique politique irresponsable à l'échelle mondiale, a donné aux gens la permission d'être racistes, sexistes et xénophobes.

Ce sont les professeurs, ici, en Colombie-Britannique et dans le monde entier qui doivent travailler avec leurs homologues nationaux et internationaux pour contrer cette tendance. Nous ne pouvons pas laisser ce genre de colère blanche nationaliste qui a conduit à une tuerie de masse dans une mosquée québécoise, devenir la norme.

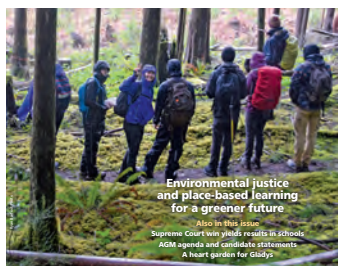
Nous devons interpeller, nommer et lutter contre cette haine. Que ce soit l'islamophobie, la suprématie blanche ou la xénophobie, nous devons repousser cette montée de la haine populiste ici au Canada et à l'étranger.







Rick Mercer Report/CBC Licensing



## A greener future

THANK YOU for your last issue of *Teacher*. As we collectively imagine BC's renewed curriculum, with its focus on nature-based experiential education, as well as active citizenship, it was so inspiring to see stories from teachers across the province who are tackling complicated ecological and social issues with their students.

On behalf of EEPsA, I'd also like to thank you for the opportunity to showcase some of our members' stories and the work of our PSA in general. We'll definitely use this issue in our professional development in the future to connect teachers to inquiry opportunities, workshops, resources, and events.

—Selina Metcalfe, Surrey teacher, president, Environmental Educators' Provincial Specialist Association (EEPSA).

## Rick Mercer Report visits winning Prince George school

CONGRATULATIONS to Beverly Elementary on winning first place for elementary schools across Canada in Rick Mercer's Spread the Net contest. Students, PAC members, staff, and parents showed fantastic teamwork in raising \$26,900! Our donation of 2,690 life-saving bed nets will directly improve the lives of families in Africa. Mosquito nets prevent the spread of malaria, the leading cause of death for children under five in African countries.

Our fundraisers included bake sales, art and silent auctions, hot lunches, raffles, a carnival, talent show, and a pie in the face event. We even taped our principal to

the wall! An exciting conclusion to our fundraising came when Rick Mercer and his staff spent a day with us, taping for the final Rick Mercer Report this March. Students had a blast with Rick joining them in snow-hill sliding and dancing. We taped Rick to the gym wall too! Our students are very proud of their accomplishment and will remember it for the rest of their lives. Watch the show: <http://bit.ly/2oK48WX>. Learn more about Spread the Net: [plancanada.ca/spread-the-net](http://plancanada.ca/spread-the-net).

—Cheryl Davidson, Grade 4/5, Beverly Elementary, Prince George.



## From Scotland to BC

(*Teacher*, Jan/Feb 2017, p. 12)

I OFTEN THOUGHT the old time teachers were a lot like the early explorers. Pick a school, go find it, wherever it might be, and make the best of your choice—amazing.

Dunster community started making a museum in the old CN Station two years ago so we hope to put your article in there.

—Charlie McNaughton, Dunster.

## More than potable water missing



I WAS CONFUSED by the photo of the sign indicating non-potable water on p. 7 (*Teacher* Special Edition, April 2017). There was paper towel, soap, and two spare rolls of toilet paper, which could be used to dry hands. Perhaps it was a private loo for a principal? Student washrooms have not had paper towels in years, and toilet paper is occasionally completely out for four stalls. Hand soap in our nearest girls' washroom

looks full but does not have a spigot, and the second one is generally out of soap.

—Val Grimes, Vancouver teacher.

**Editor:** This shot was taken in the women's loo beside the staff room at a Surrey school during the filming of our election TV ad. It's likely that the supplies were provided by the production company, not the school district.



freie-kreation/iStock

## Climate change science

WE KNOW what happens in the Arctic doesn't stay in the Arctic and greenhouse gas emissions from China or Canada have no known boundaries. I'm writing to alert *Teacher* readers to the newest revision of my book *Climate Change Science: An Updated Resource with Canadian and Global Impacts, Mitigation & Adaptation*, now available as a free download on the BCTF TeachBC site at <http://bit.ly/2nQ11eT>.

Information on climate change science and technology has been updated from the extensive research base. This edition continues to support curriculum concepts in Social Studies 8–11, Geography 12, Earth Science 11, Biology 11, Environmental Science and Science 8–10.

Canada's contribution at the UN Climate Conferences from Kyoto to Paris is given extensive coverage; updates on conditions in the Arctic and Antarctic, the oil sands in Alberta, transport of bitumen by pipeline and tankers, and extreme weather events including El Niño and its impact, are provided, along with climate change projections in this century.

A section on deniers of climate change addresses misinformation on climate science. The Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change document is included. It outlines a proposed federal carbon tax and what provinces and territories have agreed upon. Each chapter ends with questions to stimulate interactive class discussions.

Our children and grandchildren will experience the consequences of climate change in coming decades. They need to be empowered to make wise decisions about their future. This resource provides some necessary tools to guide them in making decisions about their future.

—Harold Gopaul, retired Coquitlam biology and earth science teacher.





### Your BCTF Executive Committee (as of July 1, 2017)

*Top, L to R:* Rae Figursky, Shawn Gough, Jody Polukoshko, Robin Toszczak, Carole Gordon. *Bottom, L to R:* Kip Wood, Rory Brown, Carolyn Pena, President Glen Hansman, First Vice-President Teri Mooring, Second Vice-President Clint Johnston.



# BCTF 2017 AGM

Elected delegates from locals across BC met March 18–21, 2017 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Vancouver to set policy and priorities for the BCTF.



# Now is a great time to be a TEACHER in BC!

By *Marian Dodds*, 2017 Editor, Teacher

Seconds after the call went out at the AGM, six enthusiastic teachers rushed over to see me, keen to share their stories about how the initial restoration funds released this winter were already making a difference in their working lives. What a delight, after 15 years of discouraging tales of woe, to see such happy faces and to share in their good news!



Vancouver elementary school teacher **ELISHA BONNIS** was first in line with a big smile on her face. "Last September I felt overwhelmed with my workload. Now, with an extra hour for team teaching and an additional hour of resource teacher support I no longer feel so alone." She's relishing the chance to get more done for kids who were being left behind, noting how "it is amazing the difference that even two hours with another teacher in the classroom can make." She's excited about seeing their restored language fully implemented next year, noting that "It has been many years since I have felt this hopeful."



A Planning 10 teacher at Salmon Arm Secondary, **GEORGE RICHARD** works online and in bricks and mortar classes. Because Bill 22 exempted Planning 10 from any limits at all, he would often have classes exceeding 30 students, resulting in a huge marking load, averaging 120–125 students. "With the restored class-size provisions, my maximum Planning 10 class is now 30 and I am down to a total of 94 students this semester. This allows me time to work with special needs and grey-area kids who need extra help, especially since when we work in a computer lab, kids no longer share computers." He recalls being a third-year teacher in 2002 when the contract was stripped, exclaiming that "these past few months have been the best in my career and I can see success ahead for students who were falling behind."



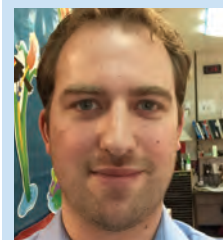
Replacing a teacher on medical leave last semester, **KELSEY LEUNG** of North Delta Secondary was a TTOC with a .125 teaching load. "It's amazing!" she says about how dramatically her work life changed this winter, "with the \$50 million funding, a position of .86 was created and now I teach three blocks." It's something she never expected when she moved back to BC from Ontario after completing her teacher education, saying "I remember being told in a seminar that we'd have to wait four to seven years to see a contract." Extremely grateful for this opportunity she added, "never in my wildest dreams did I think, when I came back to BC, that I'd have a job like this" adding, "now I can pay my rent, insurance, tuition for my masters, buy food and gas!"



**CARLA LOWTHER** from Fort St. John in Peace River North thinks her district has done a great job with the restoration funding, noting that "every school got something." For her, the greatest bonus was a decrease in stress. She feels "having a .2 mental health counsellor has made a world of difference for our staff at the ELC, adding, "There is an extra .6 LA teacher for math and science at the main campus now and my stress level has gone down immensely having him in the room."



"It's a great time to be teaching in New Westminster!" exclaimed **SARAH WETHERED**, saying that "because of the restored language, we are back to two full-time librarians and, after four years without one, we have a budget again." Sarah explained that for five years their school library was closed 25% of the time since the two teacher-librarians had each been assigned a teaching block. Libraries throughout the district had been suffering, she said, "In the elementary schools, the cuts meant teacher-librarians were covering for preparation time" adding "there was no one at all at the middle school." Now she's pleased to have more time to collaborate, work with teachers on new curricula, run anti-bullying programs, and focus on new initiatives in coding and 3D printing.



When **SEAN KITTS** graduated from UBC's Education Faculty in 2011, he knew his job prospects were slim. He considered himself lucky to land teaching positions in the private school sector. But Sean had always wanted to teach in the public education system. Last fall he was hired as a TTOC in Burnaby and Coquitlam. Only a couple of weeks after the \$50 million interim funding was announced, he landed a 1.0 FTE contract with Coquitlam School District. "I came in really excited and motivated" Kitts said. "Here at the AGM I talked to Jim Iker and told him how much I appreciated the BCTF holding out against E80 during the last strike." With a toddler in the family and a new baby on the way, Sean is delighted to be working full time. "Now's a great time to be in public education." ■

# Being part of “something bigger”

First-time AGM delegates share their impressions



“Walking into a ballroom full of 700-plus delegates, I was energized by the buzz.”

**IRENE HOLY** loves living and teaching in Golden, BC. She left her teaching position at a Toronto private school in 2015, pulled by stories she'd heard at her local ski and snowboard shop. She moved north and west to the outdoors, mountains, hunting and fishing. Working first at Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories where she met her partner, she's now happily settled in Golden, having bought a home there.

Her BC teaching career accelerated from a TTOC position from October to January, to a temporary Grade 5/6/7 half-time position, with the remainder of the week taken up with K–12 literacy support, K–4 music, and K–1 math at Nicholson Elementary.

Attracted by a new, exciting, and progressive curriculum, Irene feels this is the perfect time to be in BC. Having done her final practicum in Yellowknife, she's passionate about Aboriginal education and is impressed by the BCTF *Project of Heart*.

Irene's journey to AGM delegate was as serendipitous as her travels. Feeling like a fish out of water, she agreed to be the Staff Representative for her small school. Before she knew

it, she found herself as the Local Representative, anticipating her first RA this spring. Her principal Bob Wilson, having had a positive past life as a BCTF activist, encouraged her to jump in, telling her that she could be part of something bigger than herself.

The pre-AGM new delegates training helped her feel confident about how things worked, demystifying BCTF terminology and explaining the rules of order. Walking into a ballroom full of 700-plus delegates, she felt energized by the buzz. She noted how supportive people were, applauding when “first time at the mic” delegates spoke.

Irene's first AGM helped her feel connected to the whole province and she is especially

pleased with the BCTF emphasis on social justice. Sensing the equity and inclusion motions represent a big change for the BCTF, she learned a lot from the debates, moved by the passion of the speakers, especially when racialized teachers shared their experiences. As a former TTOC, the debate on TTOC matters was of great interest to her. She discovered that things were more complicated than she initially thought. As a result, she changed her vote.

Irene has returned to Golden feeling that her first AGM was more accessible than she expected and, while she had planned to just dip her toe in the water, she now realizes that she has “dived in head first” and is feeling very comfortable right in the swim of things.



“We've got a lot of work to do!”

**DANIEL BARTON** bubbles with enthusiasm for his job and his first AGM experience. After receiving his B.ED. from UBC in 2015, he is thrilled to have a continuing contract as a full-time learning support teacher in Surrey. After only one semester working as a TTOC this year, he said “suddenly, loads more opportunities opened to me, thanks to the restoration funds that began to flow.” Daniel spent eight and a half years teaching English in Korea after completing his BA and MA in England. He met a lot of Canadians teaching in Korea, finding himself agreeing with them when they self-described as “too polite.” He also noticed they always returned home, so he decided to follow their lead and see Canada for himself. He feels he couldn't have chosen a better time, with the Supreme Court decision improving teaching opportunities in BC. His aunt had advised him against ever teaching in the UK, saying teachers did not get enough respect and that standardized testing every two years was disheartening.

Elected as a delegate at a Surrey Teachers' Association general meeting, Daniel felt immediately welcomed into their 67-person AGM delegation. He attended three rookie training sessions that were “incredibly helpful.” He's been overwhelmed by how

supportive his colleagues have been and feels he's achieved a life goal of speaking, moving motions, and feeling included in something he describes as “feeling much bigger than myself, part of a siblinghood with a sense of solidarity.” Daniel expects to be very

involved in his local; he's already a Staff Representative and is on the local Political Action Committee. He thinks we are entering a new era, where we have more power as teachers. He plans to be very productive noting “we've got a lot of work to do!” ■





## Picket line baby a born ACTIVIST

For Nanaimo delegates Victoria Walsh and Shannon Busby, it was an extra special time. Sitting across from each other at the Nanaimo table, mother and daughter were together, experiencing their first AGM.

VICTORIA, TEACHING for just one month as a Nanaimo TTOC tells her story: "A colleague said 'I know you want to get involved, so come to the union meeting.' And before I knew it, I'd given a speech and been elected as a delegate!" "Day one of the AGM was a blur," she says, "but now I've been once, I want to be back next year and am crossing my fingers I get a contract position in an elementary school."

Victoria credits her mom with her enthusiasm for the union, saying, "She is a strong role model." Mom Shannon has taught in Nanaimo since 1985. In 1991, pregnant with Victoria, she walked the picket line, hoping for three more days to qualify for maternity benefits. She got her benefits and her new baby, two weeks overdue!

“Day one of the AGM was a blur, but now I’ve been once, I want to be back next year.”

Shannon started her career in Topley, BC as a full-time special education teacher and recalls hearing the phrase "restraint budget" from government back in 1981. Finally, the future looks brighter, "I am so excited by the restored collective agreement!"

Victoria speaks of her challenges "I am a student affected by the cuts. My Mom knew I had a reading disability but, due to cuts, it was never fully diagnosed. I did well in school but was very stressed. Finally, in second year university when funds became available for testing, I was diagnosed and given the help I needed. Grants allowed me to cut back from my full-time job and spend more time studying." Looking ahead to her teaching career, she feels she couldn't have come into the profession at a better time.

Mom says she always knew Victoria was perfect for teaching but the politics have been discouraging. "Now, at last, she can do what she loves." ■



## Pictures tell the STORY

By Antonella Garcia, Burnaby teacher

The moment our Supreme Court of Canada victory was announced, I thought back to walking the picket line with my two-and-a-half-year-old daughter. It was 2005, and Jessie wore a homemade picket sign that read, "The Class of 2021 Supports Teachers." Almost twelve years ago, then Minister of Education, Christy Clark, had declared our strike action illegal.

DESPITE THE GOVERNMENT'S threatening tactics, teachers stood in solidarity, raising concerns about the state of education that, since 2002,

had deteriorated due to the Liberal government's stripping of our collective agreement provisions on class size, composition, and specialist-teaching ratios. This illegal and unconstitutional act paved the way for years of chronic underfunding of public education.

Consequently, my daughter and her peers went through an elementary school experience that was far less than adequate. The workload of specialist teachers increased drastically, teacher-librarians decreased and English language learner (ELL) students suffered in larger classes. Growing numbers of students with special needs didn't get proper supports and services. I can't remember how many times, as parents, we were asked to donate money to help buy classroom supplies, playground equipment, technology resources, and other items that should have been provided by a properly funded public education system.

Fast forward to 2017, Jessie is now in Grade 8, and we can celebrate the recent ruling that restores working and learning conditions in BC's public schools.

Thank you BCTF for enduring the fight against a government that bit by bit, chomped away at public education services, until there was nothing left but the core. How appropriate that Jessie's apple in 2005 has a bite taken out of it. That was just the beginning of Christy Clark's funding cuts to public education, as though they were "low-hanging fruit!" Finally, as a teacher and parent, I am optimistic that Jessie and her peers stand a chance at a decent high school education, and it is thanks to our determination and solidarity. Our 15-year struggle was worth it! ■



# FORUM Members' voices

## Reflections on Recommendation 33

The 2017 AGM passed a recommendation to add two new positions to the Executive Committee; this will come into effect at the 2018 AGM.

*One Member-at-Large position shall be designated to be held by a racialized member and one shall be designated to be held by an Aboriginal member. The designated positions shall have the same term and role as the non-designated positions.*



### Discomfort doesn't end with the debate

*By Lizanne Foster, Langley teacher*

DURING THE FIRST YEAR of my teaching contract in Canada, I decided to stop teaching about affirmative action after a white student said that I made her feel uncomfortable when we discussed the difference between equality and equity. At the time, I didn't know how to ease her discomfort as I wondered how I could sugar-coat racism's legacy. Seventeen years later, at the recent BCTF AGM, I found myself once again being met by the discomfort of those more comfortable with discussions around equality rather than those around equity. This time, my response was to

extend an invitation to my peers to consider sitting in that discomfort with me. For them, the discomfort is temporary but for those of us who have been racialized, the discomfort doesn't end when the debate does. Having a seat set aside for people like me on the Executive Committee is bittersweet because there will always be a question about whether the candidate was chosen for their skills or for their skin colour. But how else does one unscramble the scrambled egg legacy of 400 years of inequity and exclusion?



### A conscious effort to decolonize

*By Carol Arnold, Saltspring Island teacher*

I WAS PROUD to witness the 2017 AGM delegates give overwhelming support to a Member-at-Large position that holds a "space" for a teacher of Aboriginal ancestry on the Executive Committee. The BCTF began reconciliation work as early as 1999 when a task force was struck to address conditions of Aboriginal members and students in BC's public education system. A 2005–06 survey revealed that Aboriginal teachers were still being treated as second-class teachers, enduring isolation, and repeatedly being referred to as EAs or having their education and credentials questioned. Since then, we have lost as many teachers with Aboriginal ancestry as we have retained.

It takes leadership and commitment to take concrete steps to truly ensure equity for Aboriginal teachers by making their presence and contributions visible to the entire membership. We are living up to the words of our protocols when we acknowledge that Canada is the unceded, shared, traditional territories of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Now we are being raised up to fully participate in all levels of governance. History teaches us that decolonization and equity require the conscious efforts of large numbers of people. I am thrilled to witness the sea change in attitudes that has been carefully nurtured within the BCTF over nearly two decades. I extend my gratitude to my fellow BCTF members. ■



#### NEW BCTF Social Justice resources Equity and inclusion

[bctf.ca/EquityAndInclusion.aspx](http://bctf.ca/EquityAndInclusion.aspx).

#### Raising awareness

[bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=44338](http://bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=44338) has short videos and articles.

#### Tools

[bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=44328](http://bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=44328) offers way to support inclusion.

#### Delving deeper

[bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=44339](http://bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=44339) provides further analysis.

Bold and progressive measures are required to address racist attitudes that remain entrenched in Canadian society.



# Progress report on trans INCLUSION

By Glen Hansman, BCTF President

**We have students in BC schools who are transitioning in their teens, and even preteens. The BCTF advocates for supports and services that create safe and inclusive environments for people from all equity-seeking groups, including trans members, whether they are out or not. All teachers have the responsibility to respect the self-identification and privacy of colleagues and students, and work pro-actively to ensure their safety and inclusion.**

IN 2016 THE BCTF was active in the lobby that succeeded in getting the *BC Human Rights Code* updated to include gender identity and gender expression and we are now working to support implementation in the public sector, including in schools.

The Representative Assembly and the Annual General Meeting have set policies and procedures to address harassment, discrimination, and hate directed at trans members of our school communities, within our union, and in the broader society. Existing BCTF policies and procedures have been updated to guide our actions forward on equity, diversity, and inclusion. Violence against women, sexism, and misogyny all need to be eradicated. The 2017 AGM passed a motion in support of gender-neutral language and gender-neutral washrooms, and adopted a statement of principles on transgender rights.

Asserting that we cannot advance inclusion of our trans students, while at the same time donate to organizations that would exclude them as adults, the Representative Assembly adopted a resolution in January:

*That the BCTF publicize to its members the November 2016 BCFED convention decisions to encourage organizations who are trans-exclusionary to change their practices, and to encourage affiliates to donate their dollars to trans-inclusive organizations.*

## **Teacher education for all —safe, included, and empowered**

Progressive changes to the *BC Human Rights Code*, and new Ministry of Education standards on codes of conduct mean that school districts are striving to be more inclusive, yet many teachers have limited personal experience with sexual and gender diversity. The 2015 Every Teacher Project found that while 85% of Canadian teachers approve of LGBTQ-inclusive education, 59% of teachers in their first five years of teaching reported that their preservice education had not prepared them for the sexual and gender diversity they encountered in schools.

This year the UBC Faculty of Education seconded teacher Steve Mulligan to co-ordinate the Teacher Education for All (TEFA) project, to build teachers' capacity to provide an inclusive culture, workplace, and learning environment with a focus on sexual orientation and gender identity. Candidates had opportunities to learn from the stories, experiences, and ideas of youth, parents, other educators, and community members. ■



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## **R Resources**

TEFA [teach.educ.ubc.ca/teacher-education-for-all/](http://teach.educ.ubc.ca/teacher-education-for-all/)



July 4–5 SOGI Summer Institute, Safe is Not Enough:

<http://bit.ly/2qaGvqN>.

SOGI 1 2 3 is a joint initiative between the Ministry of Education, the BCTF, and the ARC Foundation. Successes include SOGI in the *BC Human Rights Code* and improvements to the Ministry's standards for codes of conduct. The current SOGI focus is on LGBTQ professional

development and support for a network of district co-ordinator positions dedicated to increasing support and inclusion for LGBTQ members in schools.

Find LGBTQ-inclusive teaching resources at [www.sogieducation.org/](http://www.sogieducation.org/).



# Library lights up

Dark days have ended!

By Susan Telfer, *Sunshine Coast author and teacher*

Susan Telfer photo

Laura Clarke knew she wanted to be a teacher-librarian before she knew she wanted to be a teacher, but she's had a long wait to fulfill her dream. In the 1980s as a University of Calgary student, Laura volunteered as a docent at Glenbow Museum and discovered how much she loved finding resources and topical books for kids. After her first degree, she considered both the Masters of Library Science at UBC and their teacher education program, in the end choosing the less expensive education program.

I MET LAURA at Chatelech Secondary in Sechelt in 1993 in her second year of teaching social studies. Laura was as dynamic and full of fun then as she is today. We both worked with teacher-librarian Lou Guest, who liked to collaborate with teachers and became a mentor for Laura. She says, "I loved that the library was the hub of the school, not quiet, but a real working library. Lou's approach was 'what do you want to do and how do you want to do it and how can I help you?'" Inspired, Laura eventually took the UBC Diploma Program in Teacher Librarianship, graduating in 2009.

In January 2010, a full-time teacher-librarian position was posted at Elphinstone Secondary

in Gibsons and Laura was thrilled to be offered the job. Sadly, by the following September, chronic long-term underfunding by the government meant her library blocks had been reduced to four, and the rest of her contract was filled with classroom blocks. For half the day, the library was dark.

Working half-time in the library and half-time in the classroom changed Laura's vision of how she wanted her library to work. She found it difficult to emulate her role model. Having less time to collaborate with teachers, Laura decided to focus on literacy, collecting Literature Circle books, starting Coast Reads (see sidebar) and hosting a reading series of authors at school. Because she was in the classroom so much, she

talked to her students about what they wanted to read, and their choices informed her purchases.

She also tried not to be insular, by working with all teacher-librarians in SD46 as well as the public librarians. "My way of being a teacher-librarian ended up being different than what I had planned," Laura muses. She can't imagine what it must have been like in districts like Coquitlam, where all teacher-librarians were cut.

Finally, after seven years as a part-time teacher-librarian and thanks to the Supreme Court of Canada decision that resulted in restoration of the collective agreement, Laura is now fulfilling her dream. Since January 2017 she's been a full-time teacher-librarian, and coincidentally, has a brand new renovated library. She is delighted to have time to organize research with students, collaborate with teachers, assist them with new curriculum implementation, and continue her literacy projects. I can't wait to work with her. ■

## Coast Reads

**A school/community model of collaboration**

By *Jen Goerzen, Sunshine Coast teacher-librarian*

Reading is fundamental to an educated and informed society and Coast Reads was designed to encourage readers of all ages.

Coast Reads launches each October on Drop Everything and Read Day (DEAR) and features nine books: three for elementary, one crossover title, and five secondary titles. Novel sets are provided to all participating schools and libraries. Public libraries feature both the junior and senior books. Our goal is to get people engaged in reading through book discussions and activities. Ultimately, readers vote to select "a book every student should read before they graduate."

Developed by local teacher-librarians, Coast Reads is funded by Sunshine Coast Festival of the Written Arts, School District 46, Sunshine Coast Literary Council, Sechelt Public Library, and Gibsons Public Library. Learn more at [www.coastreads.org/](http://www.coastreads.org/) ■





# Stories behind the NUMBERS

By Dr. Sherri Brown, BCTF Senior Research Analyst

**“We won! They ruled from the bench and we won!” It was November 10, 2016 and my colleague and I had just walked into the BCTF building. A teacher for over 20 years, my colleague started to beam and then burst into tears. Her emotion in that moment captured the collective exultation felt around the province. British Columbia’s public school teachers, after 15 years of anguish and advocacy, had been vindicated by the Supreme Court of Canada. The process of restoration could finally begin.**

AS A RESEARCHER, I was curious. My colleague had taught in the era prior to the stripping of collective agreement language in 2002. I wondered about the nearly half (44%) of current public school teachers in BC who entered the profession after 2002. These teachers have taught exclusively in working conditions that have been stripped of collective agreement provisions on class size, composition, and specialist teaching ratios. What experiences and lessons could teachers who worked under pre-2002 collective agreements impart? To answer this question, I interviewed multiple teachers this past March, tapping into their critical insights.

They told me that, while there has never been a cornucopia of funding and supports for education in BC, the last 15 years have been devastating, and have resulted in severe declines in what was already a struggling baseline. That baseline, however, affirmed by all teachers, had included the essential right to bargain class-size and composition limits, non-enrolling specialist teaching ratios, and other ancillary language. This language, said one teacher “offered recourses and remedies in our relationship with the employer. When that was taken away, an adequate system began to seriously unravel.” Another teacher detailed significant cuts to their inner-city

school programs, including once ample support staff, hot lunch programs, after school program funds, and “a slush fund” of additional support for field trips and experiences for inner city students. Another relayed how they previously collaborated on lesson plans with teacher-librarians who she described as “the backbone of our school” and then watched as these positions became progressively undermined and reduced. Teachers described more extensive supports offered by clerical and support staff. Many teachers spoke about the key classroom roles played by learning assistance teachers, particularly for students who were undesignated but required additional support.

With the stripping of the language, teachers experienced declining supports and services in their classrooms and schools, and faced increasingly complex class composition, and this resulted in a dramatic rise in teacher stress. The impact of having multiple undesignated and designated students with special needs in their classrooms was compounded by their frustration at growing waitlists for psychoeducational assessments. One teacher underscored that while “the province has always underfunded inclusion” the stripping of the language in 2002 meant that “special education services became



*The Supreme Court of Canada*

drive-by; I couldn’t actively work with children at this increased caseload.”

Teachers also worried about cuts to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, noting growing poverty in their classrooms (one in five children in BC now live in poverty). They have also observed increasing reliance on charities and parent advisory councils to fill the gaps—a situation that one teacher described as exacerbating socio-economic inequities by “creating a system of have and have-not schools.” Beyond the impacts on the education system, concerns were expressed about a broader government agenda of defunding public and social services.

Clearly teachers have paid a heavy personal price over the last 15 years. The teachers I interviewed spoke about the toll of emotional exhaustion, escalating out-of-pocket expenses, and of losing colleagues to early retirement.

Now, with restored class-size and composition provisions and a major influx of new teachers this fall, the teachers I interviewed expressed hope for a transformation in working and learning conditions in BC schools. While acknowledging that this will take time and continued advocacy to reverse the legacy of the past 15 years, positive changes are coming. ■



# Dead but not buried

## Unlearning the lessons of Bill 28

By Kip Wood, Nanaimo, Member-at-Large, BCTF Executive Committee

On January 26, 2002, Minister of Education Christy Clark was “delighted” to introduce Bill 28 to cut class size and composition and non-enrolling positions from our collective agreements. Astonishingly, on November 15, 2017, Premier Clark found herself “excited” about the possibility of making sure “classes are the right size for kids.” Let’s not forget that it was only when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in the BCTF’s favour that Clark got “excited” about class sizes.

Bill 28 may be dead but its not yet buried. Unless those of us working in the public education system “unlearn” what was normalized for the past 15 school years, we risk seeing it rise again.

We learned after 2002	The impact: 2002–2016	We need to unlearn	Opportunities 2017 onward
To navigate a system with a scarcity of resources.  How vulnerable teachers were to “budget strategies” of school boards.	Struggles for resources pitted people and programs against each other at budget time.	Discouragement, divisiveness, and competition.  Feeling powerless.	To be caretakers of democratic structures at school, local, and provincial levels.
Staff committees, stripped from the contract, had little power or influence.  To defer to management.	Staff committees without “teeth” became normalized.  Teachers became frustrated with the reduction in their professional autonomy.	Deferring to management on significant workplace decisions.  Dysfunctional ways teachers interact with employers.	To assert our professional autonomy over teaching and learning through democratic, effective staff committees and teacher-led professional development.
To accept programs like Response to Intervention (RTI) that filled the void left by the 24% reduction in special education teachers.	RTI increased class sizes, and worsened conditions. It was nothing more than a political attempt to legitimize defunding of special education.	Acceptance of corporate-sponsored special education initiatives such as RTI.	Use school-based team structures to ensure students with special needs have access to timely and effective support.
What it is like to work under a government that does not support teachers.	Nearly half the teachers today were not teaching before 2002—they’ve missed experiencing how it was to be true partners in the employment relationship.	Acceptance of conditions that stop teachers from having real influence over working conditions.	All generations of teachers can move forward together to build a better system.
Persistent teachers practising solidarity can win.	Advocacy works!		Advocate for an improved collective agreement in 2019!

Dismantling the legacy of Bill 28 is now up to us. We must be vigilant. Rights embedded in collective agreements only exist if those rights are asserted. Teachers must push management to honour negotiated terms of our agreements. We can relearn

ways to reach collective solutions and rebuild a system where all participants are valued and respected members of the school community. Only then can our public education system become the equitable, inclusive, and democratic institution it should be. ■





# The EMOTIONAL TOLL of living in a war zone

By Susan Ruzic, BCTF Social Justice staff

Several planes roared overhead, terrifyingly close to the house that night. I woke drained and apprehensive. I could only imagine the impact of this, night after night. Spending 24 hours in a refugee camp with a Palestinian family, while a wonderfully warm and welcoming experience by day, became very stressful and sleep-depriving overnight.

LAST NOVEMBER, as part of an 11-person delegation to the Middle East, I began to understand the toll of living in a war zone. Our compassionate listening delegation to Israel/Palestine met people from all walks of life and political perspectives.

One non-governmental group we met, Combatants for Peace, involved former Israeli soldiers and former Palestinian combatants collaborating to break the cycle of violence and put an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.

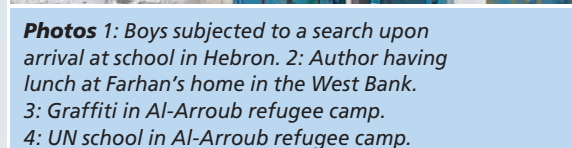
We met teacher Micah Avni, whose father had been killed by Palestinian assailants—horribly mutilated, shot in the head and stabbed in the face and chest while on a public bus in Jerusalem. He told us of his work with social media organizations to have hateful incitement removed and banned from all media platforms.

We were inspired by the Jerusalem Peacebuilders who bring together Israeli and Palestinian youth of all religions to talk about the conflict. They spoke of the life-changing experience of talking, sharing, and listening that has shown them that there is no “other,” they are all kids who share the experience of living under conflict. I wondered how often this understanding of our common humanity occurs for

students from diverse backgrounds in our BC classrooms.

Young people are not immune from the trauma of living in a conflict zone. We watched elementary kids in Hebron getting their backpacks checked on the way in to school. We witnessed Palestinians walled in or out of their lands enduring long lineups at checkpoints, being randomly searched, detained, or jailed, and met Palestinians who have had their homes bulldozed and rebuilt several times. Israelis wonder when the next bomb will explode in a market, on a bus, or on the street where they live. In Israel, everyone who is eligible serves in the military at age 18. It was unnerving to see young people with machine guns strung over their shoulders as we walked the streets or drove through checkpoints. We learned that many soldiers go to India or elsewhere on year-long retreats after their military service to deal with their post-traumatic stress.

Most of the grassroots Israelis and Palestinians we spoke to just want to get along with their neighbours and live in peace, spending time with family, shopping, and doing daily chores. They are ready for a solution to be negotiated so they can create their own “new normal,” one free from trauma and stress.



**Photos 1:** Boys subjected to a search upon arrival at school in Hebron. **2:** Author having lunch at Farhan's home in the West Bank. **3:** Graffiti in Al-Arroub refugee camp. **4:** UN school in Al-Arroub refugee camp.

My experience made me think about our students who have come as refugees from places like Syria, Ukraine, Latin America, or African countries where civil wars, political unrest and international conflicts affect soldiers and civilians alike. As teachers, we need to be aware of the emotional and psychological environments our students have experienced so we can create caring spaces for them in our schools. Their “new normal” must be one of safety, possibility, and freedom from fear. Perhaps initiating listening circles in our schools could help create that emotional safety. Professional development utilizing community resources and those found on TeachBC and the BCTF website can be helpful. I know that for me, doing nothing is not an option. ■

For resources on refugees, antiracism, Islamophobia, and more, go to [www.bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=21354](http://www.bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=21354).



Photo left: The Western Wall in Jerusalem.



Susan Ruzic photos



# Imagining a WOMEN'S PARLIAMENT

By Susan Fonseca, Assistant Director,  
BCTF Field Service Division

This March 8, for the first time in "herstory," every seat in the House of Commons was filled by a woman, a truly remarkable celebration of International Women's Day.

Resource: Daughters of the Vote is an initiative of Equal Voice, a non-partisan organization dedicated to electing more women in politics. Profiles of the 30 BC delegates can be viewed at [www.equalvoice.ca/](http://www.equalvoice.ca/).



Winona Waldron photos

WHEN I GRADUATED from high school in 1971, NDP Member of Parliament Grace McGinnis from Vancouver-Kingsway was the lone woman in the House of Commons. Today 81 women sit as MPs, representing 27% of Canada's total MPs. We are a long way from gender equality. Over the past 150 years only 319 women have been elected to the Canadian parliament. That's why, witnessing 338 young women from 18 to 23 years of age walk together up Parliament Hill to replace sitting MPs and take their "seats" as Daughters of the Vote, was so incredibly moving for me.

Five of us from BC joined colleagues from other provinces to co-facilitate pre-event workshops co-ordinated by the Canadian Teachers' Federation, one of the event's sponsors. Victoria teacher Winona Waldron felt honoured to represent the BCTF, noting that, "although there were many inspiring moments, seeing 338 women take their seats in the House of Commons—more women than have been elected to that house in its entire history—brought me to tears. This event reinforced the importance of encouraging more women to take on leadership roles, and of exposing and removing the systematic barriers that keep them from those roles."

Joining displaced MPs in the public gallery that morning, we heard former Prime Minister Kim Campbell challenge the young women to follow in her footsteps. Party leaders Thomas Mulcair, Elizabeth May, Rona Ambrose, and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau welcomed and encouraged the young women to remain politically engaged. And when Prime Minister Trudeau opened the door to an informal Question Period, thirty young women marched right through it, challenging government policies and calling for action on climate change, electoral reform, Indigenous rights, the rights for people with disabilities, trans people's rights, energy policy, and Islamophobia.

That afternoon, several representatives addressed the bi-partisan Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women,

raising concerns about the lack of initiatives for women starting their own businesses, rape culture on post-secondary campuses, and systemic barriers preventing women from becoming politically active. Colleague Debbie Morran observed, "These young women were extremely well-spoken. Committee members listened intently and asked follow-up questions of each speaker. It was a wonderful experience to see a parliamentary committee in action, and the value that the committee placed on being able to hear directly from the daughters."

“When Prime Minister Trudeau opened the door to an informal Question Period, thirty young women marched right through it.”

Surrey teacher Sonja Van Der Putten was struck by the young women's passion for social issues: "The experience reinforced the importance of women supporting women in active civic participation. It also conveyed the shared values and beliefs that women across the country feel about societal issues that impact all Canadians, from the unacceptably high rates of Indigenous youth suicide, to violence against women, to Islamophobia. It was an inspiring event."

Notably, this diverse group of young women, representing ridings held by all political parties, were universally supportive and respectful of each other, even when they held differing views. Most memorable for me was hearing a young woman speak emotionally about the anti-Muslim prejudice she has experienced and declaring, "This is my Canada, and there is no seat for hate here." She received a standing ovation.

Taking a global perspective, colleague Susan Ruzic reflected, "Attending Daughters of the Vote provided me with hope and inspiration for the future of Canada. These young women were intelligent, prepared, creative, and strong. They were not afraid to deal with all the difficult yet important topics that must be addressed if we are to have a better country and world."

I only wish Grace McGinnis could have been there to witness a day beyond her wildest dreams. ■

Susan Fonseca photo



L to R: Winona Waldron, Susan Ruzic, Sonja Van Der Putten, Sylvie Liechtele, Debbie Morran, and Susan Fonseca



# Spotlight on HEALTH AND SAFETY

By Karen Langenmaier, retired teacher

## WHAT started the BCTF Health and Safety Program?

It was 1994, and our sons were in Grade 3 and 5 when my husband and I learned how bad the air quality was in their school and portables. Condensation dripped down windows, and when you opened the door, you were hit by the wall of stale air. An air quality investigation showed that ventilation units provided inadequate fresh air, resulting in students and teachers constantly suffering from headaches, lethargy, runny noses, and chronic colds. As parents, we raised the issue at the school and as teachers, we went to the Local President. Back then all the local could do was refer me to the BCTF Working and Learning Conditions staff, who were unable to assist. Eventually, our persistent parent group got an audience with the Minister of Education, and funding was released for a new ventilation system.



Karen Langenmaier, 2017 recipient of the \*Stewart Schon Award for Health and Safety.\*

*\*Stewart Schon was a dedicated leader in the health and safety movement in the BCTF. Since his untimely death in 2006, the Stewart Schon Award has been given annually, at the AGM, to a member who has made an outstanding and sustained contribution to the health and safety of BCTF members.*

I WAS FRUSTRATED as a BCTF member that there was nothing teachers could do but use their sick leave to take breaks from the awful conditions. I volunteered to sit on the District Health and Safety Committee, realizing I knew little of the issues, our rights, or remedies.

Fortunately, in 1997 BCTF staff member Lynne Sinclair was tasked with creating and implementing a provincial health and safety program for members. In 1998, she published an outstanding Health and Safety Manual adapting the industrial Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) language to teachers' work environments. It remains in use today.

That year a meeting was initiated by the WCB with representatives from the BCTF, CUPE, BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA), and BC School Trustees Association (BCSTA). At this meeting the WCB provided statistics on the number of claims in the education "industry" and suggested school districts could save money by following their regulations. As a result, regular joint meetings began, and workshops were

designed with tripartite representation (CUPE, BCTF, and employers) to ensure school districts were in compliance with WCB regulations.

In 2000, the AGM voted to appoint a Health and Safety Advisory Committee (HSAC) and create a cadre of health and safety trainers. A forum for members to discuss health and safety issues at the local and provincial levels emerged and workshops facilitated by teachers who understood working conditions began. Eventually the BCTF Health and Safety Program was established.

## So, what difference has the BCTF Health and Safety Program made?

Through our tripartite training and the workshops we do as part of the Staff Union Representative Training Program, members have an increased knowledge of their health and safety rights. They know how to report

“We must encourage our members to report all violent behaviour and all health and safety issues in general.”

“When violent incidents go unreported, unacceptable behaviour can continue, teacher morale is eroded, and students don’t get the help they need. In the worst-case scenario, someone is injured.”

unsafe conditions and the processes to use to rectify them. They also know how to file WCB claims if they are injured or get sick at work. We have won some major claims.

One of our successes has been with voice dysfunction, a major debilitating illness for teachers who use their voices in loud situations every day. Teachers can now access voice amplification systems, sound dampening in their classrooms, and workplace accommodations to protect their voices.

We’ve also won claims for teachers injured during extra-curricular activities. Hard fought appeals have resulted in WCB recognizing the unique work that teachers do outside their classrooms.

A significant area where we are gaining protection is in cases of psychological trauma. It is recognized that teachers can suffer from psychological trauma when they are threatened by violence or experience a violent attack.

Every time the BCTF wins a claim or appeal and lost wages are paid by WCB, it saves money for the BCTF Salary Indemnity Plan (SIP) fund. Over 20 years, the SIP fund has saved hundreds of thousands of dollars because teachers file and win claims. Also, every time a member reports an incident, the employer is obligated to put measures in place to prevent further incidents, making it safer for everyone.

In 2012, after joint meetings with BCTF, CUPE, and BCPSEA, WorkSafeBC created an industrial sector specific to education, recognizing that schools and educational worksites have unique conditions. Posters, videos, information packages, and training modules were created specific to education. This was a huge step forward in the

prevention and compensation divisions of WCB since it increased the awareness of those officers making decisions.

### Now what?

When it comes to health and safety, challenges remain and BCTF staff, local leaders, and teachers must be vigilant. The greatest challenge is the lack of reporting, investigation, and safety plans for workers who teach students with violent behaviours. As teachers, particularly those in the primary grades, we may feel that we should be the ones in control, that these are “just children.” But when violent incidents go unreported, unacceptable behaviour continues, teacher morale is eroded, and students don’t get the help they need. In the worst-case scenario, someone is injured.

As the BCTF Health and Safety officer, I had more calls and emails about violence than any other issue. We must encourage our members to report all violent behaviour and all health and safety issues in general.

In most other workplaces, workers are given time off to do committee work. Teachers, however, do not get time off for joint health and safety meetings. This restricts their participation in committee work. Schools, for the most part are quite safe, but that doesn’t mean that they always are. We need the skills and time to prevent injuries and illness.

The BCTF Health and Safety Program is alive and thriving. Our HSAC and facilitators have more knowledge now than the original 10 members who started the program in the late 1990s. We all continue to benefit from the dedicated work of our health and safety members and staff, and I thank them all.

As a proud member of the BCTF since 1989, I will say, as long as I have breath, the BCTF is the best union second to none. We care about and look after our members. We adapt and reflect their changing demographics and needs. We support, encourage, and educate. It’s no exaggeration to say that most BCTF members know something of their health and safety rights and know where to go for more information and assistance. In less than 20 years, this program has helped thousands of members. I applaud all the new and current members carrying the health and safety work forward, for the benefit of all. ■

## What’s new?

*By Mike Wisla,  
BCTF Health and Safety Officer*

BCTF health and safety staff, facilitators, and local contacts work diligently to address protection and prevention. Across BC, we raise awareness on the issues, educate members, and advocate for safer and healthier schools. Thanks to our advocacy, schools have better air quality, lead is being addressed, and regulations have more teeth. Here’s a summary of what we’re working on right now.

### Seismic safety

- School must be safe for everyone, yet dozens of schools remain at risk in the event of an earthquake, and rolled back timelines for upgrading are unacceptable. The BCTF is pushing for funding to ensure all seismic upgrading is completed expeditiously.
- We are engaged in developing teaching resources on emergency preparedness, to ensure that staff and students can act and react effectively in a natural disaster.

### Asbestos

- Asbestos-related diseases are the number one cause of worker fatalities in Canada, including in BC schools. BCTF is lobbying both federal and provincial levels of government for a total ban on asbestos. We are engaged with Worksafe to ensure compliance with asbestos regulations in BC, and we continue to educate members on the issue.

### Radon

- Radon is the number two cause of lung cancer, second only to smoking. It is a naturally occurring element that binds with dust, and can have terminal consequences. The BCTF has collaborated with CAREX Canada, Health Canada, and the Interior Health Authority to educate members. Our advocacy for testing and remediation of radon in schools has resulted in programs in a growing number of school districts.

**Health and safety is everyone’s business!**

See [bctf.ca/healthandsafety.aspx](http://bctf.ca/healthandsafety.aspx).





**CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS**

# Domestic violence

Could it affect your school?

By **Debbie Morran**, Assistant Director, BCTF Field Service Division

© adamkaz/iStock

**Last month, a man walked into his estranged wife's classroom in an elementary school in San Bernadino, California and opened fire without saying a word, killing her and one of her eight-year-old students before killing himself. In 2007, a teacher was stalked, ambushed and shot to death by her estranged husband in the parking lot of her Brampton, Ontario high school. Domestic violence is a crime that spans all occupations and incomes, and teachers are not immune. In 2014, the first-ever survey done in Canada on domestic violence and its impact on workers and the workplace found that a shocking one-third of respondents reported that they had experienced domestic violence.**

PEOPLE MAY ASSUME that once an abused partner is at work, they are safe from the violence going on at home. However, the violence often follows them to work. Of those Canadian women surveyed who indicated that they had experienced domestic violence, over half reported the violence continued at or near their workplaces. While such violence often occurs in the form of threatening calls, texts, or other threats to the victim while they are at work, it can also escalate to acts of physical violence by their abuser.

“Domestic violence is a crime that spans all occupations and incomes, and teachers are not immune from its impact.”

Domestic violence is the number one killer of women in the workplace. In Canada, a woman is killed by her current or former partner at least once a week, and many of these attacks happen at work. Domestic violence not only includes physical or sexual abuse, it is also emotional or verbal abuse, financial manipulation or control, spiritual abuse, and criminal harassment or stalking. Speaking about these forms of violence remains taboo in many workplaces and the stigma and shame victims feel can make them reluctant to speak up and seek help. Coworkers are often unaware of what is going on since they don't know how to recognize warning signs, nor do they know how to help once they do know. It is critical that the silence that surrounds domestic violence be broken. Workers must be educated about its impact on the workplace. There is an urgent need for specific workplace interventions to support victims of domestic violence and to protect workers from workplace incidents.

Unions have lobbied governments for legislation requiring employers to develop policies and programs to prevent workplace violence. Only Saskatchewan and Manitoba currently have legislation, but theirs only provides supports for the victim and do not address prevention. The Yukon Teachers' Association recently negotiated a provision that allows teachers access to paid leave if they are victims of domestic violence. BC only has an Integrated Provincial Domestic Violence Plan, created in 2015 by the provincial government. There is no legislation.

A hopeful sign for BC is our BCTF Woman in Negotiations (WIN) Initiative, where members will become more aware of the issue and have opportunities to suggest actions. When bargaining resumes in 2019, the BCTF will have an opportunity to negotiate paid leave to support members dealing with domestic violence.

If we are to prevent workers from the deadly impact of domestic violence in the workplace we must break the silence. Only then can we educate ourselves, develop strategies to support victims, and develop preventative policies to protect others from harm.

## Read the survey

*Can Work Be Safe When Home Isn't?—Initial Findings of a Pan-Canadian Survey on Domestic Violence and the Workplace.*  
<http://bit.ly/1B5IUKR>. ■



Today, Katy Weicker is a Camosun College student. Below, she writes about her teenage experience of self-harming. Her story explores how a chance exchange with a student-teacher changed both of their lives.

# DROWNING on dry land

By Katy Weicker

**My breath comes too rapidly to absorb oxygen. As I pull my pencil case from my bag, tiny pricks of numbness battle waves of heat crashing over my cheeks. An unidentifiable tornado of terror rips through my guts. Pens and highlighters cascade to the bathroom floor as I rummage for a push pin. Success!**

I ROLL UP my sleeve, placing my forearm in my lap. Commencing my ritual allows me to inhale. Only it seems to catch, expanding my lungs until they ache. I place the pin to my arm. The sharp, scraping sensation turns into a penetrating burn as I push harder. My skin pops, releasing the pressure riddling my sixteen-year-old body. I bite my lip to keep from crying out.

**“The next day, I’m hauled to the counsellor’s office; a teacher has voiced concern.”**

My breath comes in long gulps as I remove the pin, tug down my sleeve, and scramble to collect my possessions.

I shake as I walk the abandoned high school hallways. By the time I get to class, the door is closed. I take a wobbly breath and knock. The door opens and Mr. C leans against its frame with the cool, cocky air of a student-teacher. “You’re late.” I want to offer him a gold star for his ability to tell time. “Sorry,” I mutter. He gestures me in. “See me after class. I’ll give you your last assignment.”

I slink past him to my desk, digging my thumb into my latest war wound. The aching, pulsing pain causes my breathing to slow as I stare at the stark white page in my binder. When the bell rings forty minutes later, the paper is wrinkled from my sweaty palm.

I remain seated as the other students drone past me. When they’re gone, I stand and shuffle toward Mr. C’s desk. He smiles at my discomfort. “Bad day?” “You could say that,” I scoff as I adjust my backpack, catching my sleeve on the strap, exposing my forearm. I don’t even realize it’s happened. Or maybe my subconscious has decided I need to be saved from myself. Either way, I leave it as I reach for my assignment. In that action, my secret is revealed.

The next day, I’m hauled to the counsellor’s office; a teacher has voiced concern. A pit of panic festers in my stomach. I want to deny it, but in my exhaustion, my toxic truth fills the room. When I’m done, she promises we can fix this. I’m desperate enough to not roll my eyes.

After the interrogation, I’m forced to face my traitorous teacher. When he talks to me, I glower back. Lucky for him, his practicum comes to an end, and he’s able to forget all about this dramatic teenager.

My journey isn’t as simple. I’m transferred from the counsellor’s office to a leather couch. Tag-teamed in a world of self-exploration. A handful of years after graduation, I’m diagnosed with generalized anxiety. This knowledge, much like the many pills I’m prescribed, is tough to swallow. But I do the work, and learn techniques to increase the calms between my storms. By twenty-four, I’m no longer afraid of drowning.

And I know who to thank for pushing me to get the help I so desperately needed. I find Mr. C easily on social media. My heart thuds as I stare at his picture. Inhale; exhale. I write feverishly:

**“You may not remember me...you told the counsellor.... Thank you... You made a huge difference...”**

I tell myself it doesn’t matter if he replies. But he does. His words are generous and humble. By the end, it hurts to breathe; the kind of breathlessness that comes from making peace with my past. I wish I could take credit for my recovery. But only a piece of it belongs to me; albeit, a large piece. A cornerstone of the puzzle belongs to him, the man who helped save me from drowning. ■







# Meeting at the mosque

## Reaching out in solidarity

By *Gordon Randall, Surrey teacher*

**Plunked on my couch, elbow deep in final semester report cards the evening of January 29, I took a break to check Twitter to see what was new in the world. I was horrified to read of the mosque shootings in Quebec. My fear that the political climate in the United States would leak across the border had come true, much sooner, and much more violently than what I expected. The level of anti-Muslim rhetoric, escalating for the past year, had peaked with the US Muslim ban. Like many Canadians, I believed we were immune from the violence, racism, and domestic strife that plagued the US.**

FEELING ANGRY and profoundly sad, and needing to reach out, I began to write. My outpouring quickly took the shape of a raw, emotional, open letter to anyone of the Muslim faith who would listen. I said, "My Canada includes all people who want to be here. I grew up in the Lower Mainland, surrounded by people of all colours, creeds, religious affiliations. To blame a group of people for something they haven't done, based on something they happen to have in common with awful people, is incomprehensible to me." I never pictured my letter having the impact it did.

I discovered that a Muslim Association Mosque was five blocks from my school, Sullivan Heights Secondary in Surrey. That Monday I made a card with a simple message, "We Support You," and invited my colleagues to sign it. After school, I took the card and my letter to the Mosque. Pulling up with butterflies in my stomach, I worried about approaching perfect strangers at their

place of worship, a day after someone looking much like me had approached a similar place of worship and murdered six people. What if I frightened them? What if they were angry? I was startled to see an RCMP constable consulting with members of the congregation; it turned out he was also there to extend support. I approached some men, "I have written a letter to your community to show my support for you. I can't believe what has happened recently, and I thought you might need some positive vibes. This country includes you, and you are welcome in our neighborhood." The reaction was one of genuine, overwhelming gratitude, and relief. As I headed out, one man handed me a single rose, with glassy eyes. That profound encounter was just the beginning.

I'd left my phone number on my letter, inviting anyone to call. That evening, a man called to tell me the Imam had read my letter after evening prayers, and there wasn't a dry eye in the house. He stressed how powerful the message was, coming from

me, and specifically for him, a Canadian-born Muslim. It brought tears to my eyes. I had underestimated the impact of my simple message.

The gratitude continued with text messages of thanks from the chair of the mosque and individual members. On Thursday, a friend showed me a tweet from one member's nephew in the UK. It had about 100 shares. On Friday, inspired by the outpouring of support they had received, the Muslim Association announced their first-ever community open house for the next day.

Saturday, I dug my car out of the snow and drove to the Mosque. I walked in as the men were finishing their prayers, an awesome sight to behold. It was spectacular! The men lined up to shake my hand, smiling broadly, and thanking me deeply. The women arrived from their prayer room, and also thanked me. It turned out I was the guest of honour, along with local community leaders and politicians. The Mosque leaders credited me with inspiring the event and I was invited to walk into the Mosque any time, assured I'd be greeted as a friend. Since then, I've enjoyed dinner at a member's home. As a teacher, I feel more connected now to the Muslim students in my classes.

This profound, life-enhancing experience has taught me that, by letting my instincts guide my actions, kindness begets kindness. Showing basic humanity in a trying time, was what was needed. I am grateful that we're on the same team, that we all love this country and love being here. I am thankful to the members of my local Muslim community, here in Surrey. While they treated me like a king, their strength and generosity made them the real royalty. ■

*The Surrey Jamea Masjid, located near Sullivan Heights Secondary, where Gordon Randall teaches.*

Photo by Flickr user judy and ed/CC BY-NC 2.0





# Professional development as patchwork quilt

By Anne Hales,  
BCTF research staff

“We become teachers, together, through a messy patchwork of lived experience and intentional professional development.”

The oft quoted assertion “teachers are born, not made” surfaced recently in my Twitter feed, linked to a website suggesting no amount of initial teacher education or subsequent professional development can produce “quality” teachers. It told me that you either have it or you don’t as far as knowing how to work with kids, adding that all you need is a bit of innovative technical preparation and curricular front-end loading. How complicated can teaching kids really be? It’s school, not heart surgery, after all.

BEING AN EFFECTIVE TEACHER is not easy, however. Effective teachers are neither born nor made. Teaching is about more than who you are as a person, how you “naturally” get along with kids, and your passion for a subject. Even a caring, knowledgeable adult can still have a difficult time in the classroom. We become teachers, together, through a messy patchwork of lived experience and intentional professional development.

Too often, “professional learning” can be like buying a machine-stitched designer quilt, a one-size-fits-all online purchase from a brand-name warehouse designed to someone else’s specs. Teachers’ professional development is more like a quilting circle, with a group of fellow artisans working together over time. Quality quilts take time, care, and collaboration at regular intervals to complete a beautiful design, piece by piece. Individuals contribute unique skills or ideas. Modifications to the original pattern occur as inspiration arises and resources become available. When someone is absent, the quilt continues taking shape as other hands carry on. Some members of the circle may have made dozens of quilts, while others are there for the first time. As the quilt takes shape, people talk about their work, and this conversation becomes its own layer. Each quilt takes on the unique qualities of the place and the people who collaborated to fashion it. Maybe it will inspire future designs. Regardless, it becomes a tangible representation and legacy of its makers.

These days, when so much educational real estate is being colonized by competing priorities, we must fiercely and energetically occupy our professional development spaces. Dangerous implications lurk within claims that teacher knowledge is innate or easily acquired. If we accept that teacher knowledge is not complex, it follows that it can be mandated, packaged, transmitted, harnessed, and evaluated for effectiveness. With less space for teacher-driven learning, there is less reason to uphold teacher judgment and choice. When teacher learning is linked to specific competencies and approaches, teachers may lose opportunities to assert themselves as professional practitioners, capable of creating their own learning opportunities and shaping curricular conversations.

Engaging in a critically-reflective process such as a professional development day, a provincial specialist association (PSA) conference, teacher-led inquiry, or a lesson or book study, teachers honour the diversity and complexity of their work. Teaching practice needs to be deliberately crafted over time. In a crowded public education landscape, we must preserve and celebrate these hard-won spaces, from which we generate profound and sustained effects in ourselves and in our classrooms. ■



## Blanket Exercise

# Heartfelt lessons of truth and reconciliation

By Marian Dodds, 2017 Editor, Teacher

**Above the Upper Levels Highway in North Vancouver, a school is nestled like a flexible bentwood box in a rainforest of tall cedars; the air is fragrant with nature's spring perfumes on this overcast April morning. Inside, Braemar Elementary School's staff of 40 teachers, support staff, and administrators are about to embark on a journey to know truth and glimpse possibilities for reconciliation.**

ON THIS MORNING, this school will become a safe container for us to explore historical relationships between Indigenous and nonIndigenous peoples through participation in the Blanket Exercise, an experiential learning process originally developed by KAIROS and adapted in partnership with the BCTF to reflect the BC context.

After acknowledging the unceded territory of the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, teacher Valerie Bernier, representing the school's Aboriginal education committee, follows protocol, presenting sweet-grass and tobacco to our facilitators. Facilitator Davita Marsden shares her Aboriginal background and tells us her traditional name that translates as "to see like a golden eagle." Warmly, she encourages us to move forward in a good way with courage. Her co-facilitator Lael Sleep, who is not Aboriginal, is an ally committed to this work; she reassures us that it is okay to ask clumsy or difficult questions that call into question stereotypes and assumptions about Aboriginal people and our shared colonial history. Sitting in our large circle we pass the talking rock and share our origins. Not surprisingly, most of us trace our roots to England, Ireland, and Scotland. Others have ancestry in France, Germany, Ukraine, Hungary, Greece, Korea, and China. A few have Métis heritage.

Our "stage" is the large open space inside the circle of chairs, fully covered in overlapping blankets brought by the participants. Scrolls, quotes, and coloured cards are distributed. Two volunteers put on their hats; the person representing European settlers dons a felted beaver top hat and the other wears a royal crown, velvety red and glittering with fake jewels.

We begin: "You now embody the Aboriginal peoples who inhabited this land before the Europeans arrived." We wander freely over the blankets, sensing our vast land. Directed by our narrators, each of us reads our part as we collectively participate in the telling of our history. As the story unfolds, our blankets are gradually and often abruptly folded in by the European settler to symbolize the theft of our land, our traditional territories. Proclamations come from the crown. Some people must sit out when they succumb to diseases like smallpox, and those banished to residential schools huddle together on a small blanket away from the rest of us. Some of us shed tears as the realizations deepen. By the end, those of us left standing or sitting can barely fit on our small folded blankets, remnants of our lost lands.

At the break, Grade 5/6 French immersion teacher Jessamine Herbert-Wong shares how she felt playing the role of the European settler. "I was getting teary-eyed by the end, seeing other people's emotions when I was making people get up off their blankets. I felt bad and I'm just acting for 40 minutes." She wonders aloud "how were those colonizers able to do those things?"

At our closing circle, we pass an eagle feather representing love and respect in our left hands and speak with open hearts. Acknowledging the deep learning embodied in this experience, some express shock at what happened; someone suggests "we need to hear this again and again." There is gratitude for the learning and sadness too that we did not learn this earlier on. Another person says: "This dropped the

knowledge that I had down into my heart." Someone comments on the pain, confusion and scattered emotions that result when good intentions are sporadic and promises broken. "What would I have done if I had been a teacher at a residential school?" another asks. The tactile experience on the blankets is felt as an "enlightening and overwhelming way to learn." As we sit facing the powerful image of fragmentation left by the folded blankets, one teacher shares that "the physical act of folding the blanket moved me; I realized how sacred land is." Another adds "we have lost our deep connection to the earth."

Others recognize the challenge of keeping culture and language, expressing admiration for "the courage of Aboriginal people to take their culture back, embrace it, and be proud." An immersion teacher mentions the French word for heart, *la coeur*, is rooted in the word courage, while another says, "it opened my eyes and heart to the wounds of the history and gave me the courage to continue celebrating Canada's First Nations culture."

“It is precisely because education was the primary tool of oppression of Aboriginal people, and mis-education of all Canadians that we have concluded that education holds the key to reconciliation.”

— *The Honourable Senator Murray Sinclair, former chair, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.*







Many express gratitude for this opportunity to understand history in a new way, and hope that “we are moving in the right direction” saying that “as teachers I think we have a heartfelt desire to make a difference.” Teacher Kelly Munro hopes that “the learning that occurred will have a lasting effect.”

“What next?” is raised. One teacher responds, “in the past I felt responsible for what I teach and was hesitant because this wasn’t mine, now I have increased in confidence.” Another affirms her commitment to “continue the conversation with courage, hope, and optimism.” Others question and plan. “I felt sad but hopeful. I don’t have any friends who live on reserves, how can I learn more about First Nation reserves and cultures? I will teach the blanket workshop to my students and think about my character and intention.” We continue around the circle and powerful words from Justice Murray Sinclair are paraphrased, “Education got us into this, it can get us out.”



Some, like Rosie Dyer, choose to write comments after we end, saying “this blanket exercise has opened up the necessary space to have the type of conversations we need to achieve this. It reinforced that First Nations people will embrace us with peace.”

I leave the school with an open heart, and take a deep breath of the sweet mountain air, feeling thankful to this welcoming staff for allowing me to experience, witness, and share their process. Listening, learning, and acting with heartfelt courage, all of us have a role to play. I raise my two hands in gratitude to the strong, courageous, and kind BCTF Aboriginal education facilitators who open themselves to sharing their own stories and our collective Canadian story through workshops like this, leading us forward on the path to reconciliation. ■

## Resources



### Tools for teaching

- *The Blanket Exercise, 2016 British Columbia edition for Grades 4–12*
- *Gladys We Never Knew*—eBook module
- *Indigenous ways of knowing and being*

### Deepening our understanding

- Take the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reading challenge [trcreadingchallenge.com/reader/](http://trcreadingchallenge.com/reader/)
- *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* <http://bit.ly/2p04zP2>
- Project of Heart e-book [www.bctf.ca/HiddenHistory/](http://www.bctf.ca/HiddenHistory/)

### BCTF Aboriginal workshops

- Deconstructing Myths
- Infusing Aboriginal Content and Perspectives
- Project of Heart
- The Legacy of Indian Residential Schools <http://bit.ly/2pWKx57>



Marian Dodds photos





# A teacher's legacy

Margie Willers' scholarship

By Marian Dodds, 2017 Editor, Teacher

Luis Isidoro photo

“This decision speaks to Margie’s incredible dedication to the teaching profession, her strong desire to support students who will be equally dedicated to the profession, and who bring their very best to their students. It also shows her involvement in acting on issues that matter to teachers through her local and the BCTF.”

—BCTF President Glen Hansman, introducing Margie Willers to the BCTF Executive Committee this spring to speak about her legacy scholarship.

AN EXCELLENT TEACHER, loved and appreciated by students and colleagues, Margie Willers has always recognized the strong link between the classroom, the profession, and her union. It was this strong commitment that led Margie to decide to create her education scholarship fund.

## A dedicated union activist

At the local level, Margie served in many leadership positions in the Surrey Teachers' Association, including as local president, local representative, and grievance officer. Friend Karen Kilbride recalls “Margie was a great president for the STA; she taught me bargaining. I loved the Roberta’s Rules of Order workshops she used to teach with the stacked boxes.” Margie concurs, “I especially loved doing workshops, empowering women teachers and enabling them to stand up for themselves and speak out, confident in knowing how things worked.” Margie has seen many changes over her years of union work, likening them to a spiral going in a tilt around a core, moving up and down, at times flattening out. She used this image when things were tough, knowing that despite losses, perseverance does pay off. She was pleased to learn of the latest Women in Negotiations (WIN) initiative by the BCTF to involve more women in bargaining.

“I especially loved doing workshops, empowering women teachers and enabling them to stand up for themselves and speak out.”

At the BCTF level, Margie served on the Ad Hoc Committee on Bargaining Structures, Finance Committee, Policy and Procedures Committee (precursor to the RA Agenda and AGM Resolutions committees), and the Status of Women Committee. Teachers from across BC, attending the many RAs and AGMs she chaired, will remember Margie for her rich southern drawl, quick wit, and expertise in parliamentary procedure.

## Early years in the deep south

Growing up in a Florida home where every available surface was stacked high with her teacher mother’s marking, Margie played teacher to her younger siblings, choosing to play school instead of house. By 15 she’d decided teaching would be her career, and was honing her skills teaching Sunday school and at summer day camps for preschoolers.

Margie won a Florida state scholarship to study education after Grade 12, based on

test results and her GPA. She wouldn't have become a teacher without this assistance. Her scholarship required she pay it back by teaching in the state, year for year and, if she left, she had to return the money. After only a year teaching Grades 3 and 4 in Florida, she had to move to Alabama to help her parents, both facing serious health challenges. She ended up teaching two years at Fort Binning while paying back the Florida scholarship money.

Margie's father had been a nurse who went into hospital administration. She remembers him asking her advice about staffing; a less qualified and capable man was squeezing out a woman for an administrative position. Margie encouraged him to support hiring the woman, saying it was only fair. And she still smarts when recalling a woman professor taking her aside while she was studying for her Master's degree at Livingston University in 1971, suggesting she speak less in class because "you're answering too many of the questions and it's embarrassing for the men principals."



Luis Isidoro photo

Asked about classroom memories, Margie remembered Clay, a boy with learning disabilities in her Grade 4 class, who always wrote his name with the C backwards. His Dad, a pediatrician, wouldn't accept his son's learning challenges. One day after school, when Margie was patiently coaching him, Clay's father came by and said "Keep him as long as you want until he gets it right." Clay refused to pick up his

pencil. Frustrated, Dad invited her to their home for dinner where Clay happily showed Margie his impressive library and toy train collection. She concluded he was very bright and very stubborn. Clay never corrected his name that year. On the last day of school, he handed her a note "You were the best teacher I ever had," signing it Clay with the C facing forward!

### Move to Canada

In the early seventies, Margie was friends with a Canadian woman working at Alabama Mental Health who was moving home to Canada. She decided to come along and ended up in Surrey, teaching special education in a re-entry program for eight years at Princess Margaret Secondary. Her introduction to the BCTF was almost immediate, through the 1974 Surrey strike. Coming from the United States she was initially suspicious of the union, "In the agrarian south, we didn't believe in unions." All she recalls of the American National Education Association (NEA) was that it was a professional organization and she got a magazine a few times a year. "You were pretty much on your own, with no support." When she was invited to the Surrey new teachers' induction, she read the history of the BCTF in the *Members' Guide* thoroughly to find out what she was getting into. Soon after, she found herself on her school's staff committee, being "radicalized" at what was known then as "Ho Chi Min High." Despite this radical reputation, she noted how the five men on the staff committee often adjourned to the washroom and, upon return, informed the two women on the committee of their decisions.

Her next school was Senator Reid where she taught Grade 6 for eight years and continued with her union volunteer work, eventually leaving the school to work in the Surrey Teachers' Association (STA) office for four years.



Marian Dodds photo

Margie then moved to Brookside Elementary, teaching Grade 6 and at times split 5/6 or 6/7 classes. A voracious reader, Margie joined the Brookside Book Club 25 years ago and she remains active to this day, attending club brunches to swap murder mystery novels and keep up with former colleagues. The final year of her career, Margie returned to the STA office as the grievance officer. Post retirement, in 2005, she became a TTOC for library and resource room, exclaiming, "It took me 35 years to find the job I loved the most!"

### The scholarship

Asked why she decided to turn her estate into a scholarship, Margie says she wanted to pay it forward. Her vision is to provide undergraduate scholarships for several of the best and brightest BC education students. The scholarships, meant to cover tuition and anything else needed for their studies, will be awarded by the BCTF, with the Vancouver Foundation managing the finances. She wants her scholarship to be as flexible as possible, so gaps for good reasons would be acceptable. Paid in yearly installments until graduation, the scholarship is intended to enable students to graduate as free from debt as possible. Like her own scholarship, she expects graduates would have to pay it back if they didn't go into teaching.

### Hopes for scholarship winners

Asked what she wishes for her future scholarship winners she says, "I hope they will make a long-term commitment to education and teaching and do all they can to raise the profile of teaching as a worthy career, to increase the esteem of teachers in society, and to contribute to excellence in education. And I hope they get involved in their local and provincial unions."

Margie hesitated when recalling her proudest moment, unable to narrow things down, finally concluding, "Teaching itself. I really believe I did a good job and made a difference." ■

*Margie Willers's square is part of the Status of Women quilt that hangs at the BCTF building. She chose to highlight the Roberta's Rules of Order workshop that she often facilitated for the Status of Women program in the 1980s. This popular workshop encouraged women to become more active in their locals and the BCTF by teaching them Robert's Rules and public speaking.*



# Art imitates life

## All fun and games until the police showed up

By Robin Ottevanger, retired Trail teacher

**In the late 1970s I got my first full-time teaching job in a small community south of Winnipeg. Qualifications aside, I got the job primarily because I was female. The year I started I was one of three women on a staff of about 30.**

FOR ALL THE THEORY and practice of a Bachelor of Education, I soon discovered the reality of teaching is learned on the job. Early on I was so nervous in front of a class that I used index cards to prompt me on even the most basic lesson. "The primary colours are..." (check notes) "blue..." (check notes) "red..." (check notes)....

One class was all boys. When I had to use my stern teacher voice, I was totally ineffective. They would all look at me with sweet innocent smiles, knowing I would be incapable of not breaking into a smile. When I did, they'd all laugh! Generally, we just moved on from there. When I left the classroom and was just outside the door, they would bark like seals. I had no idea why, but I would race back inside. They had me totally trained.

One time I took a Grade 9 boy into the hall to speak to him about his behaviour. He stood in front of me, head down, looking quite repentant. When I finished speaking I waited for him to respond. Silence. Then he said, "Do those go all the way up?" He looked up at me, mortified. I looked down—he was referring to my stockings! I looked up, he looked down. He didn't make eye contact with me for several days...

One of the most memorable projects I did with my students was the creation of life-sized mixed-media figure sculptures. The results ranged from an assemblage of stuffed clothing arranged into a pose to chicken wire constructions. Measuring tape and calipers in hand, a team of boys created a likeness of one of the science teachers. It was so accurate that when they borrowed some of his clothes, they fit perfectly! They even persuaded him to let them make a plaster cast of his face. A wig cut and

styled like his mad scientist hair completed the transformation. When finished, the lab-coated facsimile of Mr. Isaac, looking up through binoculars, was planted (big spikes on the bottom of the shoes) in the middle of the expanse of lawn in front of the school—a perfect viewing spot from the art room. People walking past the school would glance up at the sky to see what he was looking at and some would try to engage him in conversation. Students inside the school could be heard calling out, "Hey Mr. Isaac, what are you looking at?" One student got quite close to the figure before realizing that it wasn't the real Mr. Isaac!

The principal agreed to display one of the sculptures in his office. It looked like a student sitting and leaning, head on hands, onto a desk. He put the figure in a chair in front of his desk. It was convincing enough that when the Superintendent knocked and then entered the office, he quickly retreated saying, "Oh, I see you're with a student, I'll come back another time." The principal kept that figure in his office for months!

The sculptures were a lot of fun to have around, but eventually they were taken home. Apparently, the fun with these sculptures continued in the community at large. The RCMP visited our principal and then me. The police were getting calls about "people" sitting on the roofs of buildings... hanging by their hands out of windows... strapped to the top of a car cruising Main Street. There were even reports of one being repeatedly run over by cars. The officers politely but firmly suggested that I not repeat this assignment.

And I didn't—until the final year of my teaching career in Trail, BC. There was a satisfying symmetry in repeating that memorable assignment. However, this time we created animals and more fanciful figures. ■

“The officers politely but firmly suggested that I not repeat this assignment.”

*Below: a fanciful mixed-media figure sculpture by student Liisa Piva*

Robin Ottevanger photo





# Tinkering 101

## Woodworking in the elementary classroom

By Peter Farkas, retired Vancouver Island technology education teacher



As a boy I loved to tinker, taking things apart and rebuilding them, just because I could. I feel fortunate that I had a pre-digital childhood, my hands on actual toys, not virtual ones. I played outside almost every day. I'd ride to my friend's house, we'd have an adventure or two and I'd ride home. If my bike was misbehaving, out to the garage I'd go. I'd grab my Dad's tools and start to tap here and turn there until a light bulb went on in my head. No Googling or YouTubeing for tinkerers of my generation! I could bounce ideas off my like-minded friends and my Dad, who seemed born to fix things.

Photo submitted by author

THESE EARLY TINKERING experiments, both failures and successes, led me to working on engines. I would take them apart just to look inside and figure out how the parts relied on each other to make the whole thing work. When I grew up, I became a journeyman automotive mechanic and, since I liked to teach others to fix things, I went on to teach woodwork, drafting, and automotive mechanics in high school.

I encouraged my own children to tinker too. My woodshop was their woodshop. They started handling screwdrivers at a very young age and were soon enough swinging hammers, developing the confidence to keep on trying, despite a few bruised fingers.

When my youngest son wanted to make a birthday gift for his friend we created a woodworking kit, cutting wooden pieces for a little truck and wrapping them in a brown paper lunch bag with nails, wood glue, and sandpaper. The success of that little kit started me thinking; my kids

had access to a workspace with tools, they had my guidance, and they had the freedom to tinker. Many of their friends did not.

I took my first woodworking kits into my boys' classrooms, volunteering to teach the teachers. With their feedback, I learned what worked for both teachers and students, fine-tuned the classroom kits, and created workbooks. Eventually the parent advisory councils supported the purchase of the kits, the teachers (many had no experience with woodworking) were grateful for my guidance, and the kids were the big winners, taking home successful projects they built using their new skills.

When kids work with wood in a classroom setting, the atmosphere is electric; they explore tools, they touch the wood, they smell the wood, they anticipate what they can do and then they get down to business.

Because I still want to see all kids tinker, to hold tools and feel materials, to wonder how they go together and learn that they too can create, I developed a creative woodworking program, The Elementary Woodshop, that supports elementary

“When kids work with wood in a classroom setting, the atmosphere is electric.

teachers to deliver successful applied design, skills and technologies (ADST) experiences. I presented at the 2016 Provincial Intermediate and Middle Years Teachers' Association (MyPITA) and Career Education Society Conference conferences, sharing hands-on projects and a cross-curricular workbook with lessons in design, math, science, drafting, and drawing. The materials include an introduction to trade careers and Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge relating to the woodworking project.

I believe our job as teachers is to provide meaningful and successful experiences that just may alter the course of our students' future. About a year ago, I received a Facebook message from a young man who recognized me as one of his past teachers and went on to say, “well sir, it's because of that class that I ended up becoming a jet engine mechanic for Air Canada!”

Learn about The Elementary Woodshop at [www.theelementarywoodshop.ca](http://www.theelementarywoodshop.ca). ■





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## Find Fulfilling Teaching Careers in BC Schools

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[www.makeafuture.ca](http://www.makeafuture.ca)

## TRAVEL/VACATION

**BELIZE** Available for August. 2 bedroom, 2 bath beach condo on Ambergris Caye. \$250/night or \$200/night if you book for more than 7 nights. Video tour here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtOMZxtFP4o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtOMZxtFP4o) or e-mail [rayjill@telus.net](mailto:rayjill@telus.net).

**FRANCE** Alsace and Vosges Mountains—3-bedroom heritage house on wine route, furnished, modern kitchen—close to Germany and Switzerland. CA\$600/week. [mano936@gmail.com](mailto:mano936@gmail.com).

**LANGUEDOC FRANCE** 2017/2018 Cut this out—put it on the fridge and dream! Have you ever dreamt of living/having 2–20+ weeks holiday in a French village, walking in the vineyards, getting the family/friends together, visiting markets, buying antiques or using it as a base to explore Europe? Here is your chance to make it happen—C\$782/C\$1173/week. Couple or family/children under 18.

Email: [mjcapper@hotmail.com](mailto:mjcapper@hotmail.com).

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**LANGUEDOC FRANCE** Self-catering village house sleeps 8. 4 bedrooms, 3.5 baths, hidden courtyard with private pool. Contact Dannielle [info@athosdumidi.com](mailto:info@athosdumidi.com).

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**Beautiful CHRISTINA LAKE** Boat access cabin on the western shore of the warmest tree-lined lake in BC. \$1200/week, mid-June to end of July. Full weeks only. Contact Paul; [bosco30@telus.net](mailto:bosco30@telus.net).

**CULTUS LAKE** Weekly summer rental @ beach. Adults only—sleeps 2 persons. For details email [fay\\_at\\_cultus@shaw.ca](mailto:fay_at_cultus@shaw.ca).

**GULF ISLAND GETAWAY** Pender Island B.C. Website: [ainsliepointcottage.com](http://ainsliepointcottage.com). Contact Alma at 250-629-3008.

**HAIDA GWAI** House exchange! Family friendly 3 room, 1.5 bathroom, rec room, living room, deck, cable TV, bonfire pit, private yard, etc close to beaches, wilderness, etc for surfing, hiking, walking, fishing, gathering food, biking, exploring, etc in exchange for a place in the Okanagan or Eastern Vancouver Island, Victoria during July and/or August. Interested? [tgates2053@gmail.com](mailto:tgates2053@gmail.com).

**PENTICTON** Spring break/summer. Two bedroom, two bath home. Excellent location. Short term rentals. [bandjsnider@gmail.com](mailto:bandjsnider@gmail.com).

**Historic NELSON** Family home in beautiful Nelson, short walk to historic Baker St. \$1000/week, mid-June to end of July. Full weeks only. Contact Paul; [bosco30@telus.net](mailto:bosco30@telus.net).

## MISCELLANEOUS

**APARTMENT TO LET.** 1 bedroom suite, kitchen/living room, study, 1½ bathrooms, ground floor, own entrance. Vicinity Argyle Drive, Vancouver. Walking distance to 49 bus, UBC to Metrotown via Langara. Services included, semi-furnished. Quiet. Previously let to an educator. \$1250 per month. Tel 604 327 7694.

**HAMLET: THE COMEDY** A fun novel that provides new and original insights into the play that you'll get nowhere else—in an easy-to-absorb format. [www.smashwords.com/books/view/707338](http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/707338). Lenny Everson [cnu46.me@gmail.com](mailto:cnu46.me@gmail.com).



## BCTF Salary Indemnity Fund

### Are you 65 or have you reached Factor 90?

### Withdraw from the long-term portion of the SIP

You can save the long-term fee (approximately 1.2%) from the date you reach age 64 or "Factor 88." Members are no longer entitled to long-term benefits under the Salary Indemnity Plan (SIP) once they hit "Factor 90" (age plus contributory service) or age 65. It is up to you to apply to withdraw from long-term disability.

### How and when to apply

A member who has attained age 64, or has reached "Factor 88," or is in receipt of a retirement pension under a registered pension plan, may voluntarily withdraw from the long-term portion of the SIP. Ensure that in the event of serious illness or accident you have sufficient accumulated sick leave, which, when combined with 120 days of benefit from SIP short-term, will protect your salary to the end of the month in which you reach "Factor 90" or the end of the month you attain age 65, whichever comes first.

To get an application, go to [tinyurl.com/7qrrnxx](http://tinyurl.com/7qrrnxx) or call the BCTF Income Security Division at 604-871-1921.

**HOUSEBOAT** Classic 45' X 12' Twin Anchors. Located on beautiful Lake Kootenay. Completely redesigned and refurbished in 2007. All new interior with custom furniture and upholstery. Recent Marine survey. Comes with a custom 2001 Malibu 17.5' runabout. \$69,900. Contact Pat Robertson; Email: [pat@robertsonestate.com](mailto:pat@robertsonestate.com) for more details and pictures, or call: 250-432-0572.

**PENSION QUESTIONS?** When do I retire? Which option to choose? How much will I get? CPP and OAS? Net income? Arnie provides personal, one-to-one consultation. Detailed report, and reasonable rates. Call 604-354-5624, or email [arnielambert@shaw.ca](mailto:arnielambert@shaw.ca).

**SCHOOL LIBRARY BOOK** wholesale business for sale. Great opportunity for retired teacher(s) or library staff member(s). See our website—[www.canlitforkids.com](http://www.canlitforkids.com). Email for more information—[books@canlitforkids.ca](mailto:books@canlitforkids.ca).

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**THINKING OF BUYING** or selling in Victoria? Contact Anny Schaefer: Former research analyst at the BCTF, now a REALTOR® in Victoria with DFH Real Estate. Charitable donation with each purchase/sale. [anny@annyschaefer.ca](mailto:anny@annyschaefer.ca). 250-891-2445.



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### **The Pain Paradox: The "Third Wave" of Mindfulness-Compassion Based Approaches for PTSD and Complex Trauma**

May 29–30, Vancouver

This workshop presents the Pain Paradox, an East-West theory of trauma-related suffering that suggests that the solution to unwanted states is not to avoid, suppress, or intellectualize, but rather to carefully engage, accept, process, and even use painful material in the context of a compassionate therapeutic environment. Find more information at: <http://bit.ly/2oopcVZ>.

### **Introduction to JUMP Math**

May 29, Surrey

JUMP Math is an innovative, research-based math resource and teaching approach now widely used in schools across Canada and the USA. JUMP's mission is to foster a deep understanding and love of math in all students. Our approach is based on the belief that all children can learn math. In this workshop, you will learn about the JUMP Math philosophy, our materials, how to implement the program, and how to access free resources. <http://bit.ly/2oYfCrG>. Email Rebekah Stenner at [rebekah.stenner@jumpmath.org](mailto:rebekah.stenner@jumpmath.org) or visit <http://bit.ly/2pt2iwl>.

### **JUNE 2017**

#### **Proven Strategies to De-Escalate Anger and Violent Episodes**

June 5, Vancouver <http://bit.ly/2oEORpp>

June 6, Kelowna <http://bit.ly/2oEKvyB>

This workshop is relevant to all mental health professionals, correctional staff, nurses, social workers, care workers, youth workers, group home workers, crisis counsellors and more. Based on over 40 years of experience, Dr. Nuckols has worked with major corporations and various systems including the military, criminal justice, mental health, and substance abuse. His background includes over 35 years of direct clinical practice and his educational background includes advance work in pharmacology, psychology, and neurobiology.

#### **Depression Practical Intervention Strategies**

June 12, Vancouver

<http://ca.ctrinstitute.com/workshops/depression-vancouver-6-12-17/>.

Email: [info@ctrinstitute.com](mailto:info@ctrinstitute.com). Phone 204-452-9199.

### **Heart-Mind Well-Being Workshop The Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education**

June 13, Vancouver

Join the Dalai Lama Center for a three-hour workshop (10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.) dedicated to learning how to promote heart-mind well-being in children and youth! Heart-mind well-being refers to the

balance between educating the mind and educating the heart. The workshop helps adults explore ways to help children feel secure and calm in their lives, approach situations with curiosity and confidence, solve problems peacefully, and get along with others. <http://goo.gl/7CXzCr>.

### **PD Online Calendar**

[bctf.ca/PDcalendar](http://bctf.ca/PDcalendar)

Changes/additions: [msteele@bctf.ca](mailto:msteele@bctf.ca)



**THIS PRODUCT HAS BEEN EVALUATED AND APPROVED BY ERAC**

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**FROM CELEBRATING** our 100th anniversary year and the Supreme Court win last fall, to the hard negotiations that followed to restore our collective agreements, it's been a big year for the BCTF. As we look forward to welcoming thousands of new teachers in September, we wish every BCTF member a relaxing and restorative summer!

