BC Teachers' Federation Nov/Dec 2026

Teacher



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Sunjum Jhaj photo

BCTF
Kids Matter
Teachers Care

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THIS IS YOUR MAGAZINE



Do you enjoy writing? Have a story to tell? Know of a project at your school or in your local you want to share with colleagues? Then consider writing for *Teacher*, the flagship publication of the BCTF! Submission guidelines are available at *teachermag.ca*.

We also welcome letters to the editor. Send your letter to *teachermag@bctf.ca*.

Teacher reserves the right to edit or condense any contribution considered for publication. We are unable to publish all submissions we receive.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

THIS ISSUE of *Teacher* brings together stories about the work we do as a union, the challenges facing members and public education, and teachers' ideas and experiences in bringing the curriculum to life in their classrooms. These articles reflect the range of issues that inform, connect, and mobilize our profession.



Right Carole Gordon, BCTF President, at a Power Up Cuba event by CoDev Canada; Sonja Karlson teaches music and more in her classroom.

Our article on solidarity with Cuba speaks to the role unions play within a broader labour movement (pages 20–23). Solidarity means recognizing that workers' struggles cross borders and that unions are stronger when we learn from one another, build lasting relationships, and act collectively. By standing with unions and workers in Cuba, we affirm that the fight for dignity, fairness, and strong public institutions is shared.

Closer to home, the urgent need to make schools safer remains a central union concern. The article on violence in schools addresses a difficult reality for many teachers, support staff, and students (pages 18–19). No one should have to accept violence as simply part of school life. Safer schools require adequate staffing, timely supports, effective prevention, clear procedures, and a commitment to hearing educators when they raise concerns. They also require sustained investment in the conditions that help every student feel supported and ready to learn.

Throughout this issue, you will also find ideas to take into your classroom. Sharing these ideas is one of the strengths of our profession. A lesson, activity, or question offered by a colleague can open a new pathway for learning and remind us that professional knowledge grows when it is exchanged.

Sonja Karlson's article brings these themes together beautifully and highlights how students benefit when teachers can work across the curriculum to reinforce students' learning (pages 14–15). Music is more than just music: it weaves together mathematics and literacy, movement and collaboration, culture and expression. It gives students ways to listen, contribute, and take risks. The accompanying social media video of Sonja talking about music education is part of our beyond the basics campaign, which shows the public the full scope of teachers' work and the many ways we help students build strong foundations.



Together, these stories reflect the breadth of our union's concerns and the depth of our collective responsibility. Whether we are advocating for safer schools, standing with unions and workers internationally, sharing classroom practice, or helping a student find their voice through music, we are strengthening public education, the labour movement, and our communities.

Thank you for all you do, every day, for students, public education, and our communities.

In solidarity,

C. Gordon

Carole Gordon,
BCTF President

MESSAGE DE LA PRÉSIDENCE

CE NUMÉRO de *Teacher* rassemble des récits sur le travail que nous accomplissons en tant que syndicat, sur les défis auxquels font face nos membres et l'éducation publique, ainsi que sur les idées et les expériences des enseignantes et des enseignants qui donnent vie au programme d'études dans leurs classes. Ces articles sont le reflet de l'éventail des enjeux qui éclairent, unissent et mobilisent notre profession.

Notre article sur la solidarité avec Cuba traite du rôle que jouent les syndicats au sein d'un mouvement syndical plus large (pages 20 à 23). La solidarité, c'est reconnaître que les luttes des travailleuses et des travailleurs transcendent les frontières et que les syndicats sont plus forts lorsque nous apprenons les uns des autres, que nous tissons des liens durables et que nous agissons collectivement. En soutenant les syndicats et les travailleuses et les travailleurs de Cuba, nous affirmons que la lutte pour la dignité, l'équité et des institutions publiques solides est commune.

Plus près de chez nous, la nécessité urgente de rendre les écoles plus sécuritaires demeure une préoccupation centrale du syndicat. L'article sur la violence en milieu scolaire aborde une réalité difficile pour un grand nombre d'enseignantes et enseignants, de membres du personnel de soutien et d'élèves (pages 18 et 19). Personne ne devrait avoir à accepter la violence comme faisant simplement partie de la vie scolaire. Pour que les écoles soient plus sécuritaires, il faut un effectif suffisant, un soutien opportun, des mesures de prévention efficaces, des procédures claires et un engagement à écouter les éducatrices et les éducateurs lorsque ces personnes expriment leurs préoccupations. Il faut également un investissement soutenu dans les conditions qui aident chaque élève à ressentir du soutien et à être prêt et prête à apprendre.

Tout au long de ce numéro, vous trouverez également des idées à mettre en pratique dans votre classe. Le partage de ces idées est l'un des atouts de notre profession. Une leçon, une activité ou une question proposée par une ou un collègue peut ouvrir une nouvelle voie d'apprentissage et nous rappeler que les connaissances professionnelles s'enrichissent lorsqu'elles sont partagées.

L'article de Sonja Karlson résume magnifiquement ces thèmes et souligne à quel point les élèves tirent profit du fait que les enseignantes et les enseignants puissent travailler de manière transversale à travers le programme d'études pour renforcer leur apprentissage (pages 14 et 15). La musique est bien plus qu'une simple musique : elle tisse des liens entre les mathématiques et la littératie, le mouvement et la collaboration, la culture et l'expression. Elle offre aux élèves des moyens d'écouter, de contribuer et de prendre des risques. La vidéo diffusée sur les médias sociaux, dans laquelle Sonja parle de l'éducation musicale, s'inscrit dans le cadre de notre campagne intitulée Au-delà des bases, qui montre au public toute l'étendue du travail des enseignantes et des enseignants et les nombreuses façons grâce auxquelles nous aidons les élèves à bâtir des bases solides.

Ensemble, ces récits reflètent l'étendue des préoccupations de notre syndicat et la profondeur de notre responsabilité collective. Que ce soit en plaidant pour des écoles plus sécuritaires, en soutenant les syndicats et les travailleuses et les travailleurs à l'échelle internationale, en partageant des pratiques pédagogiques ou en aidant une ou un élève à trouver sa voix par la musique, nous renforçons l'éducation publique, le mouvement syndical et nos communautés.

Merci pour tout ce que vous faites, chaque jour, pour les élèves, l'éducation publique et nos communautés.

En toute solidarité,



Carole Gordon,
Présidence de la FECB



Left
Robin Abra (left) and Tina Cousins (right).

INSPIRING COLLEAGUES

PART TWO

WE ASKED BCTF members to tell us about a colleague who inspires them for the September/October edition. We received so many submissions that we extended the feature into the November/December edition. Thank you to everyone who shared stories of their colleagues bringing joy and care into their communities.

PAM RUTTEN
nominated by Sydney Cartwright

"I will be forever grateful for the guidance, care, and intention that Pam shares with those around her…"

Pam is an incredible educator making a difference in her school and community year after year. Pam teaches Grade 6 and works hard to embrace each individual's strengths and stretches. She collaborates with colleagues to co-create, co-plan, and co-deliver hands-on lessons and activities that allow students to create, design, draft, move their bodies in intentional ways, build, shop, play, cook, enjoy, and reflect, while building community, resilience, compassion, and allyship. She inspires me every day to be a better educator. I will be forever grateful for the guidance, care, and intention that Pam shares with those around her as she works within this craft of education. Thank you for listening!

TINA COUSINS
nominated by Robin Abra

Tina serves as both a teacher-librarian and Kindergarten teacher, and she is a passionate advocate for literacy and student engagement. Each year, she dedicates countless hours to organizing the Red Cedar Battle of the Books, creating meaningful opportunities for students to develop a love of reading and discover a wide variety of literature.

Tina consistently demonstrates kindness, inclusivity, and creativity in both her library and classroom. She fosters welcoming learning environments where all students feel valued and inspired to learn. In addition, she is a highly supportive colleague who generously shares her knowledge, ideas, and resources, while actively encouraging collaboration among staff.

KRISTINE CHAMBERS
nominated by Melissa Purich

"Her classroom is a place where students feel seen, valued, and successful, and it is clear in the way they thrive under her care and guidance."

I wanted to take a moment to recognize an incredible educator at our school, Kristine Chambers. She consistently goes above and beyond in the way she supports, teaches, and connects with students. Her classroom is a place where students feel seen, valued, and successful, and it is clear in the way they thrive under her care and guidance.

Kristine brings so much creativity and intentionality to her teaching. She thoughtfully incorporates Indigenous knowledge, outdoor learning, and athletic development into meaningful learning experiences that engage students in authentic and exciting ways. She has a natural ability to build strong relationships with students, while maintaining high expectations and creating a sense of belonging in her classroom community.

Beyond her work with students, Kristine also contributes so much to the culture of our staff community. Whether it is baking cookies, leaving thoughtful treats in the staffroom, or sharing small messages of encouragement during busy times of the year, she consistently finds ways to lift the spirits of those around her. Her kindness, generosity, and positivity do not go unnoticed.

Kristine is truly an amazing educator and colleague, and our school community is incredibly fortunate to have her. She is also a huge advocate for sport, specifically triathlons!

ALEX MOORE
nominated by Cherise Wilson

"Mr. Moore has positively shaped the lives of all three of my children, and I will always be grateful for the care, encouragement, and passion he has brought to their education."

Living and working in a small northern community means our professional and personal lives often intersect. While I work as a school psychologist in the school district, I am also the parent of three children who have attended schools within the district. Mr. Moore has had the privilege of teaching all three of my children, and I have had the unique opportunity to witness his impact from both a professional and a parent perspective.

What stands out most is the lasting difference he makes in students' confidence. My daughter previously found math challenging, but something about Mr. Moore's teaching style simply clicked for her.

Throughout Grade 6, I watched her confidence flourish as her understanding of math grew. She no longer doubted her abilities and began approaching learning with excitement and self-belief. That kind of transformation is a testament to an exceptional educator.

Mr. Moore has an incredible ability to create a classroom where every child feels seen, valued, and capable of succeeding. He brings learning to life with kindness, humor, patience, and genuine enthusiasm. His students know they are cared for, and that sense of belonging allows them to take risks, persevere through challenges, and enjoy coming to school each day.

As a school psychologist, I deeply respect the important work teachers do to support children's learning and well-being. As a parent, my appreciation for Mr. Moore is even greater. His dedication extends beyond academics: he builds relationships, encourages confidence, and leaves a lasting impression on the children and families he serves.

The influence of a great teacher reaches far beyond a single school year. Mr. Moore has positively shaped the lives of all three of my children, and I will always be grateful for the care, encouragement, and passion he has brought to their education. He is an extraordinary educator and truly deserving of this recognition.

DEVON LAWRENCE
nominated by Taylor Hellberg

"Devon is the first to volunteer to help with an event, come up with a creative solution to a challenging situation, or lend an ear to someone who has had a hard day."

My teaching partner, Devon Lawrence, is one of the most incredible teachers and human beings I've ever met. His dedication to students and staff is unwavering, and he is always willing to support those who need it. Devon is the first to volunteer to help with an event, come up with a creative solution to a challenging situation, or lend an ear to someone who has had a hard day. He always acts in the best interests of our learners and is a strong advocate for our most complex students and families. Devon is an incredibly skilled, kind, and passionate leader in our school and community.

MELISSA WARREN
nominated by Jessica Kimpton

Melissa Warren is an incredible teacher, not just to students but also to fellow educators. She is a local Prince Georgian who had training experiences in Perth, Australia, that helped drive her ambition to be an instructional coach. She has brought her knowledge and experience back to northern BC. She is extremely generous in sharing her time and energy to support teachers on the ground. She is unfailing in her commitment to help teachers feel successful and supports them to make small changes to their practice that result in big gains for students. She answers questions constantly throughout her day, takes on extra projects and initiatives, and regularly volunteers to lead professional development. She is always available to students when they need her and no one is more proud of their achievements. She does all of this while simultaneously filling the humble role of an ELL and LA teacher. She is equity in action. •



Right
Melissa Warren (left) and Jessica Kimpton (right).

HIGHLIGHTING OUR POWER

Focusing on labour in our union magazine

By Kaitlyn Schafer (she/her), teacher-librarian and First Vice-President, Greater Victoria Teachers' Association

IT HAS ONLY BEEN a little over three years since I began my involvement with the union. Since then, I've learned that union work is so much more than the bread and butter of negotiating salary. Advocating for sick days for teachers teaching on call is important. Ensuring our contract rights are upheld is important. Sharing teaching experiences and successes with the union community is important. I also learned about the labour movement as a whole and the effects of social justice issues on our profession, which is also incredibly important.

I've learned that the only reason I will be able to get paid time-off if I have a child one day is because postal workers went on strike for 42 days in 1981 to fight for it. Their sacrifice has positively affected millions of people, including most of the children who I teach whose mothers were able to stay home with them when they were born.

I saw attacks on sexual orientation and gender identity resources from organizations planning a rally on the lawn of the Legislature a few years ago. Our union fought back so strongly with a counter-protest that the groups were completely overpowered, and they cancelled their next event, creating safety for students and families in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

I learned that the richest people in this province have been gaining unbelievable wealth since 2020, despite the negative effects of inflation on the lives of most British Columbians.

At the BCTF AGM this year, I brought forward a motion "that the *Teacher* magazine include substantive content on class consciousness, labour issues, and the labour movement, as well as issues relating to our contract." The motion was carried, so what does this mean for us?

Well, now we have a job to do. I encourage you to find something you're passionate about surrounding these categories and write an article about it. If you're stuck on ideas, maybe consider one of the following:

- Write something that exposes the drastic inequality of wealth in this province, country, or across the world.
- Find a historical event that is related to the labour movement and share that history.
- Talk to someone from another union who has been on a picket line recently. Write about their experience and how the sacrifices translated into gains.

The options are endless, and I'm really excited to see what teachers share about the labour movement and the power it holds. Visit ***teachermag.ca/submissions*** for guidelines. •

THE PRICE OF (RELATIVE) STABILITY

By Cody Lind (he/him), Local President, Bulkley Valley

WE FOUGHT hard for what we have. The trouble is that "fine" has become its own kind of obstacle.

I grew up being told not to complain: *Cody, be grateful for what you have. Finish your dinner; there are starving children in Africa, you know.* In my family you did not name your own troubles when someone, somewhere, had it worse. You inherited stability and you were grateful for it, or you were guilted into something that looked the same. It took me a long time to see that guilt is not gratitude, and that it keeps you quiet in a way real gratitude never does.

Newer BC teachers work inside a version of this. For those of us that joined the BCTF since the last strike, we inherited something real: a restored contract, a working pension, benefits someone else fought hard to win. And we absorbed the message that came with the inheritance: *Be grateful. Don't squander it. Don't complain.*

So we don't. The rent is too high, the classroom is too full, the IEPs keep multiplying, but the contract exists and someone older than you will always remind you what it looked like before. Things clearly aren't good enough to celebrate. They aren't bad enough to walk off the job. So you file it under "fine," and you get back to work.

That verdict, "fine," is more durable than real satisfaction could ever be. Satisfaction can be broken by a crisis. "Fine" absorbs crises and recalibrates around them. I have come to believe it is the single biggest obstacle between BC teachers and the collective capacity we will need in the next round of bargaining.

I joined the BCTF in 2021. I have seen no job action. My pay is reasonable; my benefits are good. Things are "fine."

“Fine” is not the same as enough.

TWO STORIES MEET AT THE SAME WORD

It would be easy to call this complacency and leave it there, but that is only half of what is happening and the wrong half to lead with.

Two forces hold “fine” in place. The first is the inherited story: be grateful; things used to be worse; someone fought for this so don’t squander it. It tells you not to complain.

The second is simpler and harder to argue with: exhaustion. Teachers are spent by 3:30 p.m. on a Tuesday. The bandwidth it takes to think about bargaining, attend a general meeting, or read a union magazine is consumed first by the 27 kids in the room, the IEPs, the report cards.

Exhaustion is not apathy. Teachers are not disengaged because they don’t care, but because there is nothing left at the end of the day to spend beyond it. Still, it produces the same result as apathy: withdrawal from collective life. A workforce too tired to engage in its union, told all the while to be grateful it has one, ends up accepting the present conditions. The system benefits, even if no one designed it that way.

Here the two forces lock together. The inherited gratitude gives the exhaustion a respectable name. It lets “too tired to fight” pass quietly as “things are basically fine.” One supplies the story, the other the reason you can’t act on it. “Fine” is the word where they meet.

Disengagement is what happens to a teacher. Demobilization is what happens to a union when enough teachers disengage at once.

Meanwhile the working conditions have not stood still. Violence in schools is increasing. LOU 12, the language that restored class-size and composition limits, is not achieving its intended effect. We have not yet built the collective capacity to act on conditions we already know are unacceptable. We could probably keep living with that, the way you live with anything you have filed under “fine,” as long as the next round of bargaining looks like the last one.

I have come to think it will not.

THE PATTERN BEHIND THE STRIKES

The first sign came in my first year as a local president, when job action seemed to be everywhere I looked. Air Canada, Canada Post, Alberta teachers, the BCGEU in our own province, were all on the picket line. I wondered whether I was simply paying closer attention, whether becoming a union person had rewired my news feed.

It wasn’t just me. Plotted over the past decade, Statistics Canada’s count of public-sector days not worked becomes a hockey stick (see table on the next page).[1] Something had shifted.

The harder question was why. A semester of reading across economics, law, and political science turned up three forces: motive, means, and battlefield.

The motive is economic. Multiyear agreements signed before inflation spiked could not absorb what came after 2021. Real wages fell mid-contract, and expired deals sent workers back to the table with years of catch-up to demand and tight labour markets giving them leverage. The cost of staying quiet had become visible.

The means is legal. Between 2007 and 2015, three Supreme Court decisions, the first of them BC Health Services,[2] established that collective bargaining and the right to strike are protected under Section 2(d) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Unions that once had almost no recourse against back-to-work laws now have constitutional standing. The BCTF knows this terrain. We spent more than a decade in it.

The battlefield is strategic: escalation between employers and unions. Governments reach for back-to-work legislation and essential-services designations. These are contestable, but the challenges take years while the orders bite immediately, so unions escalate in turn. When Air Canada flight attendants defied a federal back-to-work order in August 2025, they forced the airline back to the table, though the wage fight still ended in arbitration.

So some governments escalate again, reaching for something nearly incontestable: the notwithstanding clause. Ontario tried it on CUPE education workers in 2022 and retreated only when other unions threatened a general strike. Alberta used it in October 2025 to end the largest teachers’ strike in the province’s history, imposing a rejected contract, barring teachers from striking until 2028, and threatening fines of $500 a day per teacher. Once reserved for emergencies, these tools now define what researchers call permanent exceptionalism: the extraordinary as routine bargaining strategy.[3]

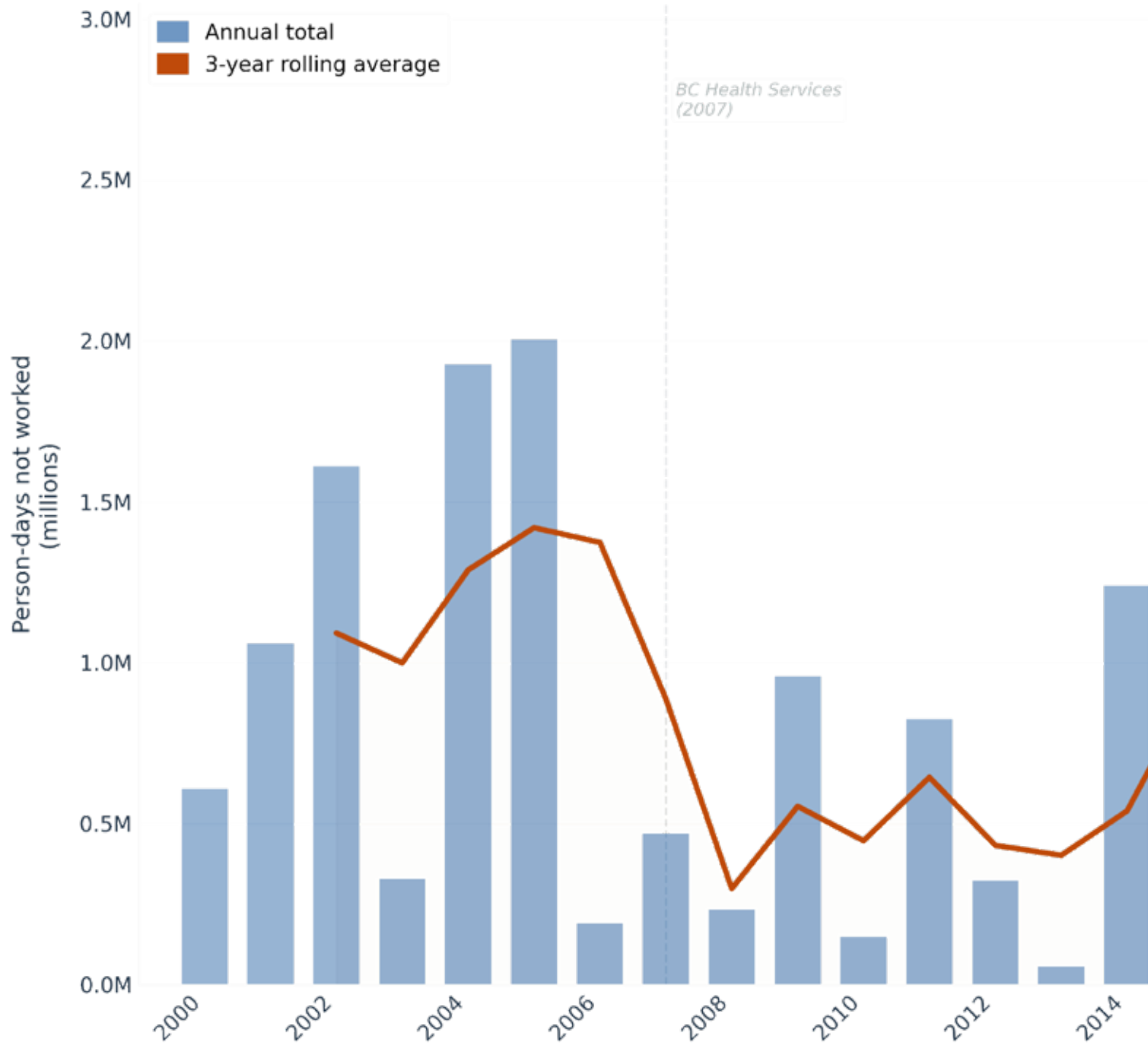
Closer to home, the BCGEU spent eight weeks on the line, the longest public-service strike in BC history, and the deal that ended it barely clears inflation. →

1 Statistics Canada, “Table 14-10-0352-01: Work stoppages in Canada, by jurisdiction and industry based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS)”: *doi.org/10.25318/1410035201-eng*

2 Health Services and Support – Facilities Subsector Bargaining Assn. v. British Columbia, 2007 SCC 27, [2007] 2 S.C.R. 391.

3 L. Panitch & D. Swartz, “Towards permanent exceptionalism: Coercion and consent in Canadian industrial relations,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 13, 133–157, 1984.

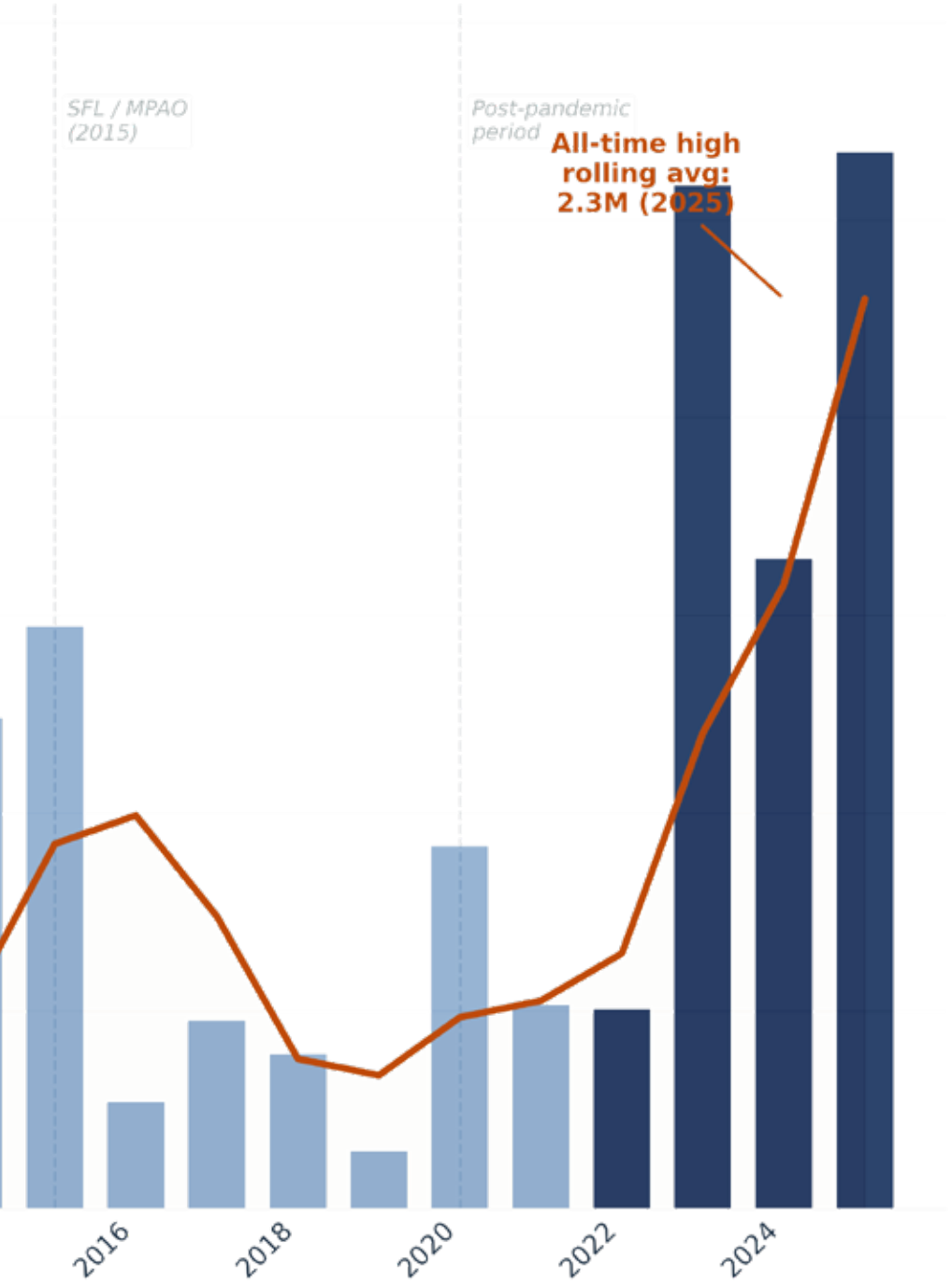
“Building collective capacity does not start with heroics. It starts small, and it starts now. It starts with knowing your local’s priorities for the next round and filling out the bargaining survey instead of letting it sit in your inbox. It starts with showing up to one general meeting this year.... It requires refusing, in small and repeatable ways, to file the unacceptable under ‘fine.’”



It set the pattern the rest of the public sector, teachers included, has now settled into. Even a union willing to walk out for two months landed close to treading water. The rest of us did not walk out at all.

Picture where that leaves teachers: gains inherited rather than won, no job action in over a decade, exhausted by 3:30 p.m., locked in until 2029.

Alberta has shown other governments that bargaining processes can be undermined by legislating first and negotiating later. The capacity to meet that eventuality must be built now, while things are "fine," not when it arrives.



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0352-01 (public sector, all industries, Canada)

SO NOW WHAT?

This evidence is correlative, not predictive. It does not tell us where BC is headed, only that the bargaining environment has shifted, the tools have escalated, and the next round could open in a tougher climate than this one.

So I am not going to ask the most depleted workforce I know to summon some abstract reserve of collective will. That is exactly the ask this whole piece argues people can't meet. Building collective capacity does not start with heroics. It starts small, and it starts now.

It starts with knowing your local's priorities for the next round and filling out the bargaining survey instead of letting it sit in your inbox. It starts with showing up to one general meeting this year. It starts with naming the gaps or the incidents in your classroom, in writing, to your local, instead of absorbing it as the cost of the job. It starts with one conversation with a colleague newer than you about what "fine" is actually costing them. None of that requires anger or spare energy you don't have. It requires refusing, in small and repeatable ways, to file the unacceptable under "fine."

None of this is only about the next round. Standing up for a genuinely equitable public education system is worth doing because it is right, not only because the numbers say a fight is coming. But principle does not bargain a contract. Capacity does.

Maybe you're not tired yet. It is only fall. But you know what the year does to you, that bone-deep exhaustion only teaching produces. The conditions driving it will not improve on their own. They will be bargained.

Our will to act has gone slack over a long stretch of stability. That stability was worth fighting for. But "fine" is not the same as enough. So build the will back now. Before anyone is angry enough to demand it of us. Before the table is already open. Before we are the ones who cannot withstand the fines.

Bargaining does not start at the table. It starts here. •

FROM FEAR TO UNDERSTANDING

A social-emotional approach to teaching climate change



By Amy Liang, teacher, Vancouver

CLIMATE CHANGE is one of the most significant and widely discussed issues facing today's students. Having studied and researched climate change for nearly a decade, I understand it as a complex, long-term environmental process that has been significantly influenced by human activities. However, in my teaching practice, I have noticed that students often approach climate change primarily through the lenses of "climate crisis" and "climate urgency."

As an educator, this concerns me. When fear and anxiety dominate the conversation, meaningful learning can become difficult. Students may feel overwhelmed, disengage from the topic, or struggle to see their own capacity to understand and respond to it.

This lesson plan offers a classroom approach to teaching climate change that begins with students' emotions and builds toward scientific understanding, critical thinking, and a sense of agency. Grounded in social-emotional learning, BC's competency-based curriculum, and Indigenous perspectives, the lesson helps students engage with climate change in a way that is both intellectually rigorous and emotionally supportive. It also includes practical tools and resources that can be readily adapted across grade levels and subject areas.

STEP 1: STARTING WITH EMOTION

Teachers begin the lesson with a question that has nothing to do with scientific content: *What's the first word that comes to mind when you hear the phrase climate change?* For older students, responses can be collected anonymously through a platform such as Mentimeter. For younger students, they can write their thoughts on paper and participate in a snowball activity to share ideas with one another. Common responses include words such as fear, disaster, hot, and unknown. Before discussing data or definitions, teachers take time to acknowledge these initial reactions. Learning does not begin with content; it begins with how students feel.

STEP 2: MAKING SPACE FOR UNCERTAINTY

Rather than correcting misconceptions immediately, teachers invite students to share what they already know, think they know, or wonder about climate change. Responses are often incomplete, contradictory, or influenced by media messages. This uncertainty is not a problem to be fixed right away. Instead, it becomes part of the learning process. When students feel safe to ask questions and admit uncertainty, they are more willing to participate, take intellectual risks, and engage with new ideas.

STEP 3: EXPLORING WITHOUT OVERWHELM

Once students have shared their thoughts and feelings, teachers introduce climate data. Depending on the grade level, students may explore global climate data from NASA or local climate data from the Pacific Climate Impacts Consortium. Rather than focusing immediately on conclusions, students are encouraged to discuss what they notice, what surprises them, and what they find confusing. Through collaborative discussion and inquiry, students begin to distinguish between uncertainty and helplessness.

STEP 4: SEPARATING FACTS FROM FEAR

Teachers then guide students in distinguishing between established facts, future projections, and common misconceptions about climate change. This helps students develop a more nuanced understanding of the topic and encourages critical thinking. As students learn to evaluate information and evidence, climate change becomes less of an overwhelming concept and more of a complex issue that can be examined thoughtfully.

STEP 5: REBUILDING A SENSE OF AGENCY

After building understanding, teachers invite students to consider what individuals, schools, communities, and governments can do in response to climate change. Although these actions may seem small, they help students recognize that they are not powerless. By focusing on achievable actions, students begin to shift from anxiety toward a greater sense of agency and responsibility. BC's Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy and climate action resources are available on the Government of British Columbia website.

STEP 6: LEARNING THROUGH INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING AND BEING

To deepen the conversation, teachers can introduce Indigenous perspectives that emphasize relationships with the land, community, and future generations. Resources such as the Climate Atlas of Canada provide accessible entry points for exploring Indigenous knowledges, perspectives, and experiences related to climate change.

Students are encouraged to consider how learning can occur through relationships and lived experiences, rather than solely through observation and analysis. Discussions may explore ideas such as learning from the land, understanding responsibilities to future generations, and recognizing humans as part of, rather than separate from, the natural world.

Through this lens, climate change becomes more than an environmental or scientific issue. It also becomes a question of relationships, responsibility, and stewardship. Students are invited to reflect on how their actions affect others and how decisions made today may influence future generations.

This broader perspective supports the development of empathy, social awareness, and a deeper understanding of interconnectedness. By engaging with Indigenous ways of knowing and being, students encounter alternative ways of understanding the world and are encouraged to think beyond individual concerns toward collective well-being.

STEP 7: RETURNING TO EMOTION WITH NEW UNDERSTANDING

At the end of the lesson, teachers return to the opening question. The responses are often noticeably different, with words such as action, responsibility, change, and hope emerging. Students reflect on how their thinking has evolved and what contributed to that change.

WHY THIS APPROACH WORKS

This lesson works because it recognizes that emotions are an important part of learning. By acknowledging emotions and gradually building understanding through inquiry, discussion, and reflection, teachers create conditions that support both well-being and academic engagement.

A FINAL REFLECTION

Climate change is often taught as a problem to understand. For many students, however, it is also something to feel. By beginning with emotion and building toward action, climate change education can help students not only understand the world around them but also recognize their capacity to contribute to positive change. •

RESOURCES

You can search for these online or find this article on ***teachermag.ca*** for links.

NASA Climate Change
Global climate data, evidence of climate change, data visualizations, and educational resources.

Pacific Climate Impacts Consortium
British Columbia climate data, regional projections, and local climate resources.

Climate Atlas of Canada: Indigenous Knowledges and Climate Change
Resources exploring Indigenous perspectives on climate change, the land, and environmental stewardship.

Mentimeter
Interactive polling and word-cloud tool that can be used to collect anonymous student responses and support classroom discussion.

CASEL Framework for Social and Emotional Learning
An overview of the core competencies and principles that inform social-emotional learning practices.

Climate Action and Accountability (BC)
Province of British Columbia climate target updates, legislation, and regional strategy framework.



Sonja Karlson
photo by Sunjum Jhaj

MORE THAN MEETS THE EAR

Why music is not "just music"

By Sonja Karlson (she/her), music teacher and
Burnaby Music Educators' Association Vice-President, Burnaby

AS AN ELEMENTARY MUSIC TEACHER, I can tell you that my music class's curriculum goes far beyond "just music." As I watch cuts being made to music education across our province, it is clear that the people who make budget and timetable decisions do not fully understand the breadth of what music teachers do in our programs. I directly teach language arts, math, science, social studies, dance, drama, ADST, social-emotional lessons, as well as English language learning and physical education, as I teach music. Here are some examples of how music supports learning across all aspects of the curriculum.

Learning to read music teaches some fundamental language arts skills. For example, learning to track across the page from left to right and turn symbols into sounds are essential skills to read music or read text. Pitch names are like letters of the alphabet. We sing lyrics, practising reading skills. We talk about vowel sounds, consonants, and even diphthongs to create the best sounds as we sing together.

There are many mathematical skills associated with music as well. Music can be summed up as sound over time, so teaching time is imperative. We also directly teach patterns. Counting beats, grouping beats, and subdividing beats teaches number sense, addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. There are also mathematical formulae used to figure out note values, intervals (the space between two pitches), and chords.

I find myself often incorporating physical education into my music program. One must have good posture to hold an instrument or to sing and produce a pleasant sound. We use dance and movement to enhance lessons and performances and to engage learners. We often combine drama to help tell the stories of our songs, show the meaning behind the songs, or to build community within our classrooms.

Science is another branch of education that we delve into on a regular basis. If teaching a wind instrument or singing, we teach about the biology of breath: how the diaphragm, lungs, and throat work to produce a good breath in order to produce a good sound. When playing percussion, we talk about vibrations and force. We need to strike the instrument with the correct force to get a ringing sound. A science lesson about vibrations makes it clear as to why they need to strike an instrument the way the music teacher has instructed. And, at times, I have even delved into pitch frequencies, sound waves, and decibels.

Now, many of the songs a music teacher chooses are thoughtfully designed to teach curricular content. We can teach children songs from many different eras, countries, cultures, in any language, and with social-emotional goals. We discuss the content of the song. If the song is from another country, from another time, and teaches the children to be a kind person, you have met three social studies goals (history, culture, geography), a social-emotional goal, and citizenship goal all at once.





The ADST curriculum can easily be combined with music lessons. Many music teachers have students create a PowerPoint of something they studied or researched in music class. We also occasionally teach children how to make simple instruments.

The music classroom often creates a level playing field for English language learners (ELL) because all the children are acquiring the ability to read music at the same time, so the language barrier is non-existent. Learning instruments and dances involves physical demonstrations that help ELL students follow the rhythm of the classroom. And music teachers choose music with lyrics from many countries so, at times, the ELL children are the knowledge keepers of the content of the music class repertoire.

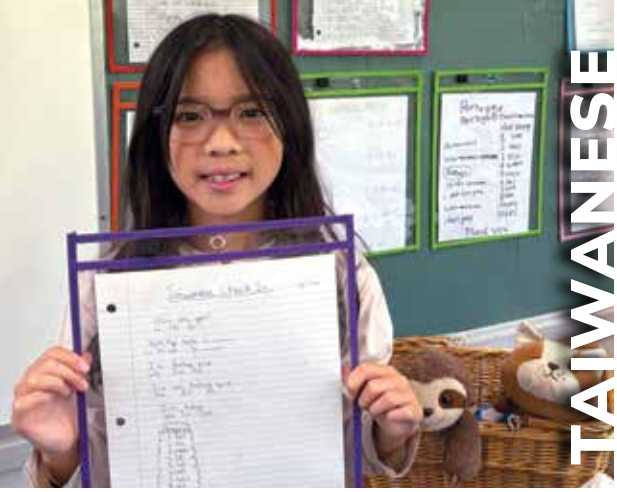
In all these ways, music education is not "just music education." When we cut funding or time to music programs, we are cutting time to learning in all subject areas. Children retain more information when learning through the arts. They also benefit from practising newly learned skills across all different subjects and in different ways throughout the school day. The music program reinforces, enhances, and supports classroom education across all teaching areas.

I hope this article lifts the corner of the veil on what happens in a typical music room, and we can rally to support elementary music programs as a collective. Because all we really want to do is teach the whole child in the most engaging way, and music is a way to do just that. •



Photos this page by Amy Smart

CHECK OUT BCTF social media to watch Sonja talk about why music programs are so important: **@bcteachersfederation on Instagram and Facebook**









ALL LANGUAGES BELONG HERE

By Alexa Bennett Fox, teacher, Burnaby

LAST YEAR, my Grade 4 students taught their home languages to one another and to me. This is their story. This project was built with and by students and reshaped my classroom in a profound and beautiful way.

HOW IT STARTED

When my Grade 4 class started learning French in term one, a student asked, "Why do we even learn French?" This is a question that I always look for at the start of our French learning — it's an important one. When my students asked this, I invited them to consider why this might be. They weren't sure at first, so we looked at the map, and we found France. I asked them to think about how French got all the way across the Atlantic. Students, who had already done a lot of learning on this topic, suggested that the answer was colonization. I asked them if they could tell me more about how colonization would be responsible for changing the languages used in a place. One student then put it all together: Europeans didn't just come to visit, they wanted to take the land and take away Indigenous languages and cultures. Soon my students had connected their initial question to important history, explaining why both of our official languages are one of the many legacies of colonization, and why we don't get to learn hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ or Skwx̱wú7mesh sníchim at school in Burnaby.

Some students also talked about how it was "a bit weird" and "unfair" to only learn in English and French at school, especially when so many members of our class spoke more than one language. I told them it felt extra weird to me, as the only person in the room who spoke French, to insist that French was the one additional language that should be taught. We talked about how it would be interesting to learn each other's languages, but nobody jumped at the opportunity, so we continued our discussion.

A few months later, we were talking about growth mindset and how we use growth mindset for all kinds of things — learning to bake, improving at basketball — not just school subjects. We'd started by thinking about what we were learning on our own and then moved on to thinking about what things we might want to learn together. One of my students asked "Ms. Alexa, can we train our brains to learn each other's languages?" This time the class was immediately excited, so we started to brainstorm what this would look like.

We started by making a list of languages that students were keen to share: Farsi, Mandarin, Korean, Portuguese, Hindi, Japanese, Ukrainian, Spanish, Punjabi, Arabic, Ilocano... the list was long. We decided on a basic ground rule: teaching was voluntary; we would accept if anyone decided not to teach, but we would encourage anyone who did. Then, it was decided that we would add this language learning to our daily check-in.

Left, top down: Mina, Harveer, Josefina, and Laura (with their check-in pages) shared languages with the class.
Right: Isabella learned from her peers. Photos by Sunjum Jhaj.

WHAT WE DID

Every day after recess, we do a check-in. This is a student-led activity, where the general goal is to practise being a community that listens to, understands, and cares for one other. A student leads the check-in, with the following script:

I'm going to start the class check-in. The rules are:

1. *One person talks at a time.*
2. *We listen to the person talking.*
3. *Everyone has the right to pass.*

Today the question(s) is/are: How are you? And … ?

Sometimes we just ask, "How are you?" But often we dream up another question together. It could be something connected to what we're learning (e.g., What biome are you the most interested in?) or to student interests (e.g., What is your favourite imaginary animal?) The goal is always to offer an authentic way for students to share, to learn about each other, and build connections.

Once we decided to work on learning one another's languages, our check-in became multilingual. Students quickly discovered that if you are teaching, it is important to be kind but also a bit bossy. Kind, because it can feel like a risk to try to say something in a new language and you want your classmates to feel good about trying; bossy, because each person's language is precious and deserves to be said with as much attention to correct pronunciation and accent as possible.

For students who decided to share their language, some felt ready to independently make a bilingual teaching guide written in their language and in English. Others wanted some support with writing and worked with the teacher, a parent (or in one case, with a big brother, and in another, with grandparents!) to make sure that we had a clear guide to help them successfully lead.

Over the course of the rest of the year, students taught Farsi, Mandarin, Korean, Hindi, Taiwanese, Punjabi, and Tagalog. And on the very last day of school, one student decided to wrap our project up in the perfect way by offering to teach Vietnamese for the last check-in.

WHAT WE LEARNED

I wasn't sure how long we would work on this project or how many students would want to participate. But as soon as William and Ryan started us off teaching Farsi, the whole class got into it. Soon, students could ask *Chetori?* (How are you?) and respond with how they felt using Farsi. These Grade 4 language teachers were proud, and those who were learning — like me — were excited to learn.

This multilingual learning time became a daily highlight. It stopped feeling hard to try out words in a new language and instead became part of the class routine. Students asked their friends about other words they wanted to learn and would sometimes spend time in class working on their check-in page to guide their teaching.

The check-in also created space for thinking about how we say things in different ways, depending on the language. We learned that languages often have different sounds than the ones we make in English, and we practised using our voices in new ways. Students made connections between languages and also noticed differences. We grew our understanding of English as just one of many written systems, and English pronunciation rules as one of many ways the letters in our alphabet can be used. We observed that languages don't always have words in the same order, that punctuation and reading direction change from language to language, and that in some languages the tone really matters. We grew our confidence in trying new things and celebrated when we were brave together. And it was fun!

Weaving this student-led learning into our daily routine pushed back against the supremacy of English and French in the classroom, affirming that all languages are doors to new places, ways to connect to the world, and something to be celebrated and cherished, both in and out of school. •







A STORY OF DEALING WITH VIOLENCE IN THE CLASSROOM

By an anonymous BC teacher

TWO YEARS AGO, I had just finished my master's degree through SFU. I did many inquiries on inclusion and Universal Design for Learning, First Peoples Principles of Learning and reconciliation in the classroom, and BC's Early Learning Framework. I felt like I was at the pinnacle of my career, ready to prove to myself and everyone around me that I had mastered how to support a diverse, inclusive Kindergarten program. Instead, I was confronted with the hardest group I have ever taught.

I started my school year confidently. I wanted to be a strong leader; I wanted to be the one who could make inclusion successful. I spent the summer reflecting on the mistakes and successes from the past, and I nailed down my routines and expectations. When the students came, I used visuals and gestural language, had predictable routines, adapted and modified learning tasks, wrote individualized and group social stories, engaged and planned with my school-based team and education assistants (EAs). We had challenges, but I felt ready to meet the needs, and encouraged my classroom team that everything would be fine. Sure, we had a near-full class with about a quarter of the students having an IEP or awaiting diagnosis; multiple children requiring toileting; and several worker safety plans by the end of September, after multiple student-to-staff violence reports; but we would be fine. The hardest part was that there were also multiple daily student-to-student violent incidents, and I knew the students weren't fine. Then I had to acknowledge that, actually, I wasn't fine either.

Early in the school year, I declared unsafe work. Since the start of the school year, I had been spat in the face, headbutted, scratched, bitten, slapped, kicked, and more. I had witnessed the same things happen to my students. After a morning of having my classroom destroyed, and witnessing some intense student-to-student violence, I took a break that I was provided due to my worker safety plans. I didn't always take this break: I usually pushed forward instead of constantly interrupting my teaching day. I sat in our staff lounge and cried. I decided to start fresh after recess and try again. As I was counting the students in the line-up, I was attacked by a student. This broke me, and I went inside and declared unsafe work. I tried to return after the long weekend, then ended up taking two weeks off. I thought this would make a difference for me and my students' working and learning conditions. It did not.

"I did not burn out. I was not exhausted — I was excited. I had tackled many complex classes, and I had the skills and mindset to do it again. What changed was the daily level of violence."

I returned, and nothing had changed. I tried to work just mornings because I was so excited about the potential of this school year. Despite being attacked, I cared about the children, I wanted them to succeed, and I valued the relationships I was building with them and their families. Then, when my WorkSafe claim was denied because they couldn't see how my experience "was beyond the normal pressures of teaching Kindergarten" I wasn't just broken, I was shattered. I couldn't believe a provincial institution could say what was happening was okay. I went from hopeful to hopeless. I went from energized to wanting to lay in the dark and cry. It was sudden, and after years of powerful advocacy for my students, I felt powerless.

I went through months of struggling with the guilt, the shame and blame of what happened. All I wanted was to be a good teacher, a teacher who could face anything, and who was respected by my colleagues and district. As many teachers do, I have perfectionist



"I care about my students and their families and know they deserve to have their needs met. I value inclusion and want all students to thrive and succeed … But, I need the proper support to do this."

tendencies. Even though I could remember how confidently I started the year, I was still searching for something I could have done differently, struggling with what my colleagues must be thinking of me. Thinking, "I do self-care, I make sure I have baths, exercise, and spend time in nature — how could this have happened to me? How did I burn out?" I also couldn't get over the anger and disappointment at what had been done to me and my students. With the support of the BCTF's Health and Wellness Program, biweekly therapy sessions, and having a chance to catch up with my own needs, I was able to make progress and could gradually return to the classroom in the spring.

The biggest epiphany I had, and why I have written this article, is to tell all teachers that if you are injured from your working conditions, that is not burn out. I did not burn out. I was not exhausted — I was excited. I had tackled many complex classes, and I had the skills and mindset to do it again. What changed was the daily level of violence. The shock of the lack of support to address this violence added to the injury. That wasn't my fault. I wasn't to blame. I did my job, but I was mentally injured at my workplace because of underfunded social systems.

When a teacher injures themselves physically, it doesn't take much to prove it, a doctor's word is taken. But if we are mentally injured, somehow it falls on us to prove that the injury meets a certain threshold. WorkSafe is clear that workers sustaining violence in the workplace is unacceptable, and if a diagnosable mental disorder occurs from workplace stressors, that a worker's lost wages are compensable. I met these criteria, but somehow my claim was denied. The burden of proving my injury fell on me, and I chose to appeal the decision. After months of doctor's appointments, a WorkSafe psychological evaluation, and various processes with the help of the BCTF's WorkSafe advocacy team, I won my appeal. This was extremely validating, and I once again felt like a warrior. The district was held accountable for creating my working conditions. Unfortunately, I found out the district is appealing it again, and I am currently awaiting the results of this appeal.

What I want to make clear is what I wanted from all of this. I wanted the proper learning and working conditions to be created to support the students and the employees involved. I care about my students and their families and know they deserve to have their needs met. I value inclusion and want all students to thrive and succeed in their neighbourhood school. I love building relationships with my school community. But, I need the proper support to do this. Ideally, we would have more funding, more classrooms, more schools, more teachers, more specialists, more EAs, and I know this is a barrier. I don't know what the answer is at the provincial level. I have ideas, but I've realized that isn't my job.

My job is to be a teacher to the students in my classroom, and a mother to my two children at home. As teachers we care so much, but I've decided to show that care by focusing on the advocacy I can still do. I can be the best teacher I can be with the supports that I do have. And my "best" doesn't have to be an unattainable ideal, but what is actually possible. I thought I knew this, but I really needed the break to know, this is enough. I want all teachers to know it is okay to need a break. We have a hard job, and to do it well we need to make sure we are taken care of too.

The Greater Victoria Teachers' Association (GVTA) just released a report on violence in the classroom, and Minister of Education and Child Care Lisa Beare's response was to encourage teachers to file for WorkSafe. I did that. And it is still being fought and appealed. I have had to radically accept that these conditions aren't changing anytime soon. I had to radically accept that I can't cure poverty, I can't restructure government systems, and I can't make others care about things the way I do.

What I can do is let go of the need for external validation, and trust that I am a good teacher. I can continue to advocate for the needs of the students in my care and find strength and beauty in what we are able to achieve each day. I can take care of myself in meaningful ways instead of performative acts of self-care. I can build a work-life balance. I can do what is possible during my workday. And then, I will go home, cuddle my kids, and know I am raising future citizens that care about this world. This is enough. •

Scan to read the GVTA report or visit ***gvta.net.***



Cuba is not alone

By Andrée Gacoin, BCTF staff

FOR THE PAST 30 YEARS, the BCTF has had an international solidarity partnership with the Cuban National Union of Education, Science, and Sports Workers (SNTECD). Through this relationship, our union has had the opportunity to learn from the experiences of educators from across Cuba who are deeply committed to an inclusive and equitable education system for all children. Amid extreme shortages of basic supplies and materials, our Cuban colleagues demonstrate what it means to be deeply committed to public education.

Throughout this time, we have also witnessed the tangible effects that the ongoing US blockade on Cuba has on the people, denying them of many of the basics of life and work that we in Canada take for granted. These pressures have only intensified under the current administration of the United States. Weaponized executive orders, such as those targeting energy companies and further blocking fuel shipments, seek a complete siege of the Cuban economy and pose serious threats to the well-being and survival of its population. US economic sanctions have also forced Canadian companies to shut down operations in Cuba, demonstrating the broader reach of US economic power in limiting other countries from freely trading with Cuba.

> "...as Canada defends its own sovereignty, rallying for 'elbows up,' we must also defend national sovereignty as a principle that applies to all nations. This includes respecting Cuban sovereignty and the self-determination of its peoples."

As Director of the BCTF's international solidarity program, I have had the privilege to sit in relationship with leaders of SNTECD and other Cuban activists. When I've asked what we can do, their response is two-fold. One is material: there is an urgent need for basic supplies (such as powdered milk, vitamins, and menstrual products). Through the WR Long International Solidarity Fund, the BCTF has sent supplies, in suitcases and shipping containers, and continues to co-ordinate with other labour unions and civil society organizations in Canada to meet this urgent need (see Julia MacRae's piece on page 23).

The second request is for Canadians to witness what is happening in Cuba and to speak out. The history of Cuba is entangled in US imperialism, and it is a stark illustration of what happens when a country chooses self-determination and sovereignty over US intervention. This includes the stories from right-wing media that seek to undermine democratic processes and silence the Cuban people. The use of social media propaganda to silence and control the debate on Cuba must be seen as part of an ongoing colonial project.

Every country has its challenges, and the Cubans who I have spoken to and learned from recognize this. However, as Canada defends its own sovereignty, rallying for "elbows up," we must also defend national sovereignty as a principle that applies to all nations. This includes respecting Cuban sovereignty and the self-determination of its peoples. As a union, we can stand in solidarity with Cuban workers who are dedicated to the well-being of their people within an independent and sovereign country. •

May Day in Cuba and labour movement solidarity



By Rozhin Emadi, BCTF staff

IN MAY 2026, the BCTF sent a small delegation to Cuba to meet with SNTECD and to participate in Cuba's International Workers' Day events. In the current political context of the world, this was an important act of resistance to US imperialism.

Unions play an essential role in Cuba's political system. Every union has representation in Cuba's National Assembly, giving workers a direct role in influencing legislation and governance. As a result, International Workers' Day is a significant occasion in Cuba. It is a day when workers and their unions take to the streets not only to celebrate working people around the world but also to participate in international events focused on global solidarity and discussions about the struggle to build a better world for working people everywhere. On May 1 this year, half a million Cubans and more than 800 international delegates walked past the US Embassy in Havana to both celebrate workers and demand an end to the US-imposed blockade on and ongoing military threats to Cuba.

Despite external pressures harming their economy, Cuba has developed strong public infrastructure, particularly in education and health care. For example, in Havana, there is a school for students with complex medical needs. The level of care provided at the school is striking: 200 students are supported by 100 staff members, including dentists, nurses, doctors, and physiotherapists. Students receive regular health check-ups and medication, class sizes are limited to no more than ten students, and parents meet monthly with educators to monitor their children's progress. Many of the students move on to receive higher education, and some even came back as teachers at the school they graduated from.

Alongside this, students with disabilities are not marginalized; rather, their education is prioritized. When fuel shortages forced the complete shutdown of public transportation, the government continued to provide bus services to ensure these students could still attend school.

This reflects Cuba's long-standing emphasis on providing quality public education, a central tenet of the Cuban Revolution since its early years. Within just three years of the revolution, in 1961, Cuba launched a nation-wide literacy campaign that dramatically expanded access to education and achieved near-universal literacy. Cuba shared its eight-month literacy campaign internationally, where it served as a model for literacy initiatives in other countries. In fact, Cuban literacy methods have also been shared with Indigenous and rural communities in BC through initiatives like the ArrowMight Program. These exchanges have strengthened ties between the BCTF and Cuba's teachers' union, but we are not alone. Cuba's history of internationalism is precisely why solidarity with the country has been important to the labour movement across Canada.

Meanwhile, as the union saying goes, "An injury to one is an injury to all."

This principle is especially relevant when considering the broader history of US efforts to undermine Cuba's sovereignty, including Operation Peter Pan (1960–1962), which separated approximately 14,000 Cuban children from their families under the guise of freedom. Many were placed in US institutions resembling residential schools, where they experienced abuse, cultural disconnection, and in some cases permanent family separation. The ongoing economic blockade reinforces this pattern, setting a dangerous precedent that countries pursuing alternative societal paths — particularly those that prioritize people over profit — may face economic warfare and relentless pressure. Thus, another reason solidarity is important.

This wider commitment to solidarity with Cuba was also reflected at the 2026 Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) Convention, where delegates nearly unanimously passed a resolution in solidarity with Cuba. The CLC committed to strengthening its ties with the Workers' Central Union of Cuba (CTC), making a financial contribution to the Canadian Network on Cuba (CNC), and calling on the broader labour movement to build solidarity with the Cuban people. From the convention floor, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario also pledged an additional $20,000 to the campaigns organized by CNC. Earlier in the year, the BCTF →

cont. from page 21...

also contributed $22,000 toward CNC's solidarity initiatives with Cuba. The CNC has been using these funds over the past year to send energy supplies, including generators and solar panels, to Cuba.

At the same time, Cuba has committed itself to a national renewable energy strategy for more energy independence, thus increasing the share of renewables from 4% in 2014 to approximately 15% this year. The renewed national strategy, approved in 2025, first aims to reduce dependence on imported fuels by using 40% of Cuba's own oil, but ultimately strives to achieve 100% renewable electricity generation by 2050. Together, these initiatives reflect Cuba's efforts not only to navigate its current challenges but also to build a more sustainable future.

During International Workers' Day events this year, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel emphasized that every act of solidarity strengthens Cuba's ability to withstand the blockade and build a more just society. At the same time, he stressed that this solidarity carries a responsibility for Cuba to continue serving as an example of hope and internationalism to the world. •



Above Carole Gordon, BCTF President, with colleagues in Cuba. Photo courtesy of BCTF Information, Research, and International Solidarity Division.

Pages 20–21 Photos courtesy of BCTF Information, Research, and International Solidarity Division.

Reflections on solidarity exchanges

By Carole Gordon, BCTF President

OUR SOLIDARITY EXCHANGES to Cuba were guided by curiosity — both in what we could learn from and what we could offer to the Cuban teachers. Our time together began with introductions in true teacher style. A roll of the dice determined the topic, but after one go around everyone wanted to hear more. From favourite food to personal hero, we learned about each other and found much in common from the outset.

In addition to discussions on our respective priorities and planning, we ensured we had time to visit the Fidel Castro Ruz Centre to learn from Havana's people and culture. For we can't truly stand in solidarity unless we understand the history, the people, and the struggle.

Initial presentations about SNTECD and the BCTF highlighted some key similarities but many differences. While the Cuban education union is national and the BCTF is provincial, the representative structures are similar. A significant difference is that the union is represented at the national government level as part of decision-making, while the BCTF's role is political advocacy, lobbying, and ministerial advice. It is a fundamental difference in the relationship of government to its people and, in particular, its workers.

Visiting the SNTECD's union training centre, a long-time project with the BCTF, was a highlight for me. The centre supports regional training for Cuba's teacher union leadership and one avenue through which our solidarity stands strong. Our 2026 suitcases included power banks that could keep the centre's technology going during the grid disruptions.

In discussing how the BCTF and SNTECD could continue to work together and support union training, the idea of the local president visit came about. While on hold since fall of 2025 due to widespread illness and fuel shortages, the SNTECD leaders remain ever hopeful at the opportunity for BCTF local leaders to visit Cuban teacher union leaders in the regions and schools where they live and work. And a reciprocal, co-ordinated, and comprehensive Cuban visit to the BCTF would also support continued solidarity efforts benefiting both unions.



Right
Julia MacRae at a Power Up Cuba campaign event. Photo by Alexandra Henao Castrillon; courtesy of CoDev Canada.



Action and advocacy

By Julia MacRae, BCTF staff

As we wrapped up the Cuban exchange in 2025, it was clear that there was one final common front for us — joy. Singing and dancing brought joy to each aspect of our exchanges in Cuba, even as part of adjourning a workshop. It's that spirit that keeps Cuban teachers hopeful and strong, and it's that spirit that called us to stand with them in solidarity for May Day 2026.

That opportunity to join with dozens of countries and hundreds of allies from around the world in solidarity with Cuba was incredible. Using our voice to speak directly to the people and unions of Cuba on behalf of BC teachers was more than just a demonstration and statement of solidarity, but a commitment to share the story of Cuba. •

UNIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS in Canada, and across the world, are organizing solidarity actions for Cuba. There are two main ways to respond: sending aid and advocating. I am the volunteer Board President of CoDevelopment Canada (*codev.org*), a small NGO that has facilitated most of the BCTF's solidarity work in Latin America for decades.

In response to the intensified crisis in Cuba brought about by the fuel blockade, CoDevelopment Canada initiated the Power Up Cuba campaign to purchase requested items such as solar panels, batteries, and tons of rice, beans, cooking oil, and other items for SNTECD to distribute to union members. Thus far we have raised more than $80,000, which has been spent and distributed immediately.

As for advocacy, we see advocating for Cuba's sovereignty as also defending Canada's sovereignty. We are saying, "You are not alone!"

How can you participate in action and advocacy for Cuba?

As part of the Power Up Cuba campaign, you can send a letter to Prime Minister Mark Carney (you can find a form at *codev.org* or a link in this article on *teachermag.ca*) calling on the Government of Canada to show solidarity with Cuba and reject US measures that block fuel from reaching Cuba. You can also write to your MP or arrange a constituent meeting with your MP to discuss the situation in Cuba.

The Canadian Network on Cuba (CNC) has launched a No War on Cuba Campaign, encouraging unions and the broader labour movement to get involved. The Vancouver and District Labour Council has passed motions supporting the CNC's solidarity initiatives. You can bring CNC initiatives to your local union meetings to garner support for Cuba. Individuals can also order a No War on Cuba lawn sign by emailing *campaigns@canadiannetworkoncuba.ca*.

If you're travelling to Cuba, there is an organization called Not Just Tourists (*njt.net*) that enables travelers to take a suitcase of medical supplies with them to deliver to health clinics and hospitals. Tourists use their luggage allowance in a concrete way to help with an urgent need. You just notify them a couple of weeks before your trip and they will arrange a suitcase for you to pick up. Although Canadian airlines have stopped flying to Cuba, there are still flights through Mexico or Panama. •

LEARNING TO TEACH AND LEARNING TO LEARN

Introducing teacher education in secondary schools

Dr. Greg Sutherland (he/him), Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University and **Tara Olchowy** (she/her), teacher, Coquitlam

WHAT IF STUDENTS STUDIED EDUCATION BEFORE BECOMING EDUCATORS?

In a 2024 conversation with my co-author, we realized that upon completing our initial undergraduate degrees, a journey that began in Kindergarten and consisted of thousands of hours of schooling, neither of us could recall ever being asked to reflect on the purpose of education itself. In retrospect, it is more than a little embarrassing to have participated in a process for so long without ever considering its ultimate aim, but in our defense, we were busy throughout those years with learning a thousand important lessons about science, art, math, and more. It is perhaps unsurprising that we were so busy thinking about what we were learning that we didn't have a chance to think much about how or why we were learning.

I suspect that we are not alone in this oversight. By Grade 12 graduation, most students in British Columbia have accumulated over 11,000 hours in classroom experiences, interacting with teachers, curricula, assessment systems, and educational policies.[1] Yet despite this extensive experience, almost none of the formal curriculum in BC asks students to purposefully examine education itself. Most students learn within educational systems without necessarily learning about them.

This observation sparked a question for us: what might happen if secondary students were given the opportunity to study teaching and learning as an academic discipline?

In the spring of 2024, that question led us to writing the curriculum for Foundations of Teacher Education 12, a Board Authority Authorized (BAA) course in the Coquitlam School District. Designed for students in Grades 11 and 12, this course introduces learners to educational theory, professional practice, curriculum design, assessment, and the social purposes of schooling. At the same time, it creates opportunities for students to shadow practising educators in local schools.

THE NEED FOR NEW PATHWAYS

Globally, education systems are struggling to attract and retain enough qualified teachers. Simultaneously, attrition rates remain high as many educators report increasing workloads, growing complexity in student needs, and ongoing pressures associated with the profession.[2] Canadian school systems, including those in BC have navigated persistent staffing shortages and difficulties in recruiting teachers in specialized subject areas and in some rural communities.

Although teaching has become increasingly complex, our decades of classroom experience have only strengthened our belief that it remains one of the most meaningful and rewarding professions. With this conviction in mind, we designed this course to create stronger connections between K–12 schooling and careers in education in the hopes of easing some of the persistent teacher shortage in BC.

EDUCATION AS A SUBJECT OF STUDY

Our intention for the course was not limited to encouraging students to become teachers. We know that teaching is not for everyone. We also wanted all students enrolled in the course to feel empowered and curious about the systems in which they had been participating for years. We wanted students to be more aware of the complexity of the experiences unfolding all around them, so they could see the proverbial water in which we all swim. Here we hoped to address the adage made famous by Canadian media theorist, Marshall McLuhan: "One thing about which fish know exactly nothing is water, since they have no anti-environment which would enable them to perceive the element they live in."[3]

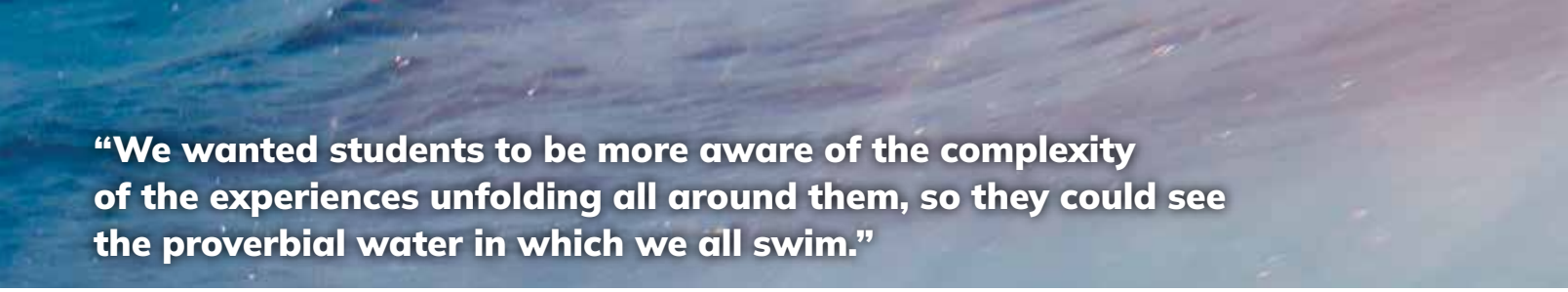
By inviting students to consider the how and the why of what is happening in schools, they would have a chance to explore questions such as:

- Why do schools operate the way they do?
- How do beliefs about learning influence classroom practice?
- What responsibilities do educators carry?
- How do historical and contemporary systems of power shape educational experiences?
- What makes learning meaningful for diverse groups of students?

We believed that studying education might help students better understand their own experiences as learners. Our hope was that this emphasis on reflection, agency, and engagement in educational growth might help students examine the processes that shape schooling while encouraging them to reflect on their own educational journeys.

DESIGNING THE COURSE

The curriculum received board approval in 2024. Initially offered as an independent-study course for a small group of students at one Coquitlam school, it later expanded in spring 2025 into a full-semester course with 22 enrolled students. A central theme throughout the curriculum is the belief that individuals bring unique strengths, experiences, perspectives, and responsibilities into educational spaces. Students are encouraged to recognize these qualities in themselves and others while considering how they might contribute to learning communities.



"We wanted students to be more aware of the complexity of the experiences unfolding all around them, so they could see the proverbial water in which we all swim."

Five overarching ideas guide the course:

- Reflecting on strengths, stretches, biases, and passions helps us to identify the steps needed to achieve a career in education.
- Learning about teaching supports student learning, self-advocacy, self-reflexivity, and ownership of learning.
- Engaging in teaching requires creating meaningful relationships and respectful connections.
- Education has a historical and continued role in colonialism and the oppression of marginalized groups.
- Indigenous models of education foreground ethicality, sustainability, self-discovery, and service to one's community.

Together, these ideas encourage students to view education as both a practical profession and a complex social institution.

CONNECTING THEORY AND EXPERIENCE

One of the defining features of the course is the integration of classroom study with field experience. Approximately 60% of instructional time is devoted to seminars, discussions, and course activities at the secondary school. The remaining 40% is spent in elementary and middle school classrooms alongside mentor teachers.

This arrangement allows participants to connect theoretical concepts with authentic educational practice. Interest from the educational community has been overwhelmingly positive. During the first year of implementation, more educators volunteered than there were students requiring placement opportunities.

Matching students with mentors involved considering factors such as school location and preferred grade level. Beginning the placement process several months before the course started ensured that relationships and schedules were established well in advance.

EXPLORING WHAT TEACHERS DO

The classroom component of Foundations of Teacher Education 12 introduces students to numerous dimensions of educational practice: historical developments in education; the history of colonialism in schooling; philosophies of teaching and learning; professional responsibilities of educators; curriculum development, assessment, and reporting practices; classroom management; inclusive education; educational governance; the role of schools within society.

Rather than discussing these topics only in abstract ways, instruction of the course frequently invited students to analyze the learning experiences they were participating in. For example, after being taught through methods that aligned with Universal Design for Learning, students were introduced to the concept and asked to adapt a lesson for different learners in their mentors' classrooms. They reflected on their adaptations and inclusive goals and how it might affect student learning. This dual perspective encouraged students to think simultaneously as learners and as emerging educators. Over time, students began collecting instructional techniques, questioning pedagogical decisions, and developing their own philosophies of teaching and learning.

LEARNING THROUGH PRACTICE

The mentorship experience provided opportunities for students to move gradually from observation to participation. Initially, students focused on understanding classroom routines, teacher decision-making processes, and interactions among learners. As their confidence grew, they took on increasing responsibilities. Many began by leading short warm-up activities. Later, they designed and taught lessons under the guidance of their mentor teachers. Eventually, students created and facilitated a two-day sequence of learning experiences that included opportunities to assess student work and provide feedback.

Through these experiences, students learned how to do the following: navigate the BC curriculum, design lesson plans, incorporate First Peoples principles of learning into lessons, consider diverse learning needs, anticipate barriers to participation, develop meaningful assessment practices, and use feedback to support growth. The experiences in classrooms often challenged assumptions about teaching. Students quickly discovered the planning, flexibility, responsiveness, and reflection required to facilitate meaningful learning experiences.

LOOKING AHEAD

The long-term impacts of the course are still unfolding. Future research may help determine whether studying education during secondary school influences students' academic choices, career pathways, or ongoing relationships with learning. For now, however, one conclusion seems evident: inviting students to examine education from the inside creates opportunities for deeper reflection about teaching, learning, and community. Whether students ultimately become teachers, educational assistants, counsellors, school psychologists, or informed citizens, understanding how education works equips them to participate more thoughtfully in the institutions that shape their lives. •

1 Statistics Canada, "Chapter C: The learning environment and organization of schools," *Education indicators in Canada: An international perspective*, 2018.
2 UNESCO, "Global report on teachers: Addressing teacher shortages and transforming the profession," UNESCO Publishing, 2024.
3 M. McLuhan & Q. Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village*, Bantam Books, 1968.



Ella Trumpower (centre left) with her German host family the Schuhs. Photos provided by author.

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

How international exchange brings BC's curriculum to life

By Rolf Hirschkorn (he/him), teacher, Vernon

WHEN WE THINK about the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care's vision of developing thoughtful, engaged and global citizens, it can sometimes feel abstract. These goals are rooted in the core competencies and big ideas, yet the challenge for educators is making them meaningful for students. However, international exchange programs offer a powerful way to bridge this gap by transforming curriculum into lived experiences and real-life applications. In this setting, communication, critical thinking, and identity are not theoretical, but they are applied daily in the real world.

As an educator, I have been involved with the BC/Germany Exchange program since the mid-1990s. I started off promoting the exchange to my students and in the last few years became more active in the running of this program. With a group of dedicated current and former teachers from the Okanagan, Prince George, and Lower Mainland, this program has provided several hundreds of BC students with a life-changing experience. Established in the mid-1980s this program originally began as an agreement between the ministries of education in BC and Mainz, Germany. Today it continues under the umbrella of the non-profit BC Heritage Language Association and the ministry of education in Mainz.

As German programs have declined in BC, the exchange program has morphed into a cultural exchange where prior knowledge of German is not required. Students can also now choose between a 6- or 10-week cultural exchange. The program's main goal, however, remains unchanged: to develop globally minded, adaptable students and prepare them for an interconnected world.

CURRICULUM COMES TO LIFE

At its essence, an exchange is a living example of BC's core competencies. Students must communicate across languages and cultures, often having to step outside of their comfort zone to build new relationships and navigate daily life. Activities that are given little thought at home, like ordering food, forming friendships, and participating in everyday discussions, now require purposeful thought, listening skills, and engagement. Two of the students who participated last year, Ella Trumpower and Kai van Dun, agree. "It is much easier to learn and pick up a language when you are surrounded by it," noted Kai. His statement emphasizes the value of an immersion exchange experience, when learning becomes authentic and the need to communicate is crucial. Ella agreed and added that over the course of the 10-week exchange, she began to build confidence in her willingness to take risks. "I realized that it really is not a big deal to go up to people with questions or even just chatting," she said.

These reflections highlight how communication competency extends beyond vocabulary. Students develop confidence, resilience, and the ability to adapt in unfamiliar situations, skills that are difficult to teach in a regular classroom setting alone.

MORE INFORMATION

Teachers and schools interested in offering this opportunity to students can learn more at ***bchla.ca*** or email ***exchange@bchla.ca.***

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH CULTURAL IMMERSION

Aside from acquiring another language, cultural immersion accelerates personal development. Living in another country requires students to solve problems independently, work through uncertainty, and develop self-awareness. “I am now much more confident, and I am able to talk to others much easier than before the exchange,” said Ella. And when she started to miss home, she helped alleviate that by turning to journaling, talking to her exchange partner, or calling her parents to update them on her experiences. For Kai, coming from a smaller community where the public transit system is not well-established in his rural area, he found more confidence and independence through using the German public transit system on his own. Such experiences align strongly with BC’s personal and social competency. Students are not only gaining knowledge, but every day abroad they are learning about themselves, building resilience, and developing skills that will carry forward into adulthood.

BUILDING GLOBAL CITIZENS

Building global citizens is one of the most significant outcomes of an exchange experience, as students develop global awareness and intercultural understanding by recognizing that their own worldview is shaped by culture and that there are many valid ways of living. For example, Germany’s education system is quite different from BC’s. The German system streams their students, and at the highest academic level (Gymnasium) the system is very structured and academically driven. Students receive more homework and have more frequent oral and written assessments with a strong emphasis on participation in class discussions. In some classes, oral participation makes up half of the class mark. On the contrary, BC classrooms emphasize flexibility, variety of choice, and diverse demonstrations of learning. By experiencing the German school system, the BC students learn to see both the strengths and limitations of each approach. In the end, this reflective process helps students appreciate both their own culture and others, by teaching them to thoughtfully and respectfully look at different ways of doing things in our interconnected world.

However, the benefits of the exchange begin even before students leave Canada. Hosting a German student in their home, school, and community encourages BC students and their families to view their own lives through a different lens. As they introduce their guest to local traditions, landscapes, schools, and customs, students often develop a greater appreciation for what they have and a deeper sense of gratitude for their community and country. Hosting also fosters leadership, responsibility, and pride, as students become cultural ambassadors who help others understand life in British Columbia and Canada.

WHY STUDENTS SAY EXCHANGES MATTER

Perhaps the strongest argument for exchange programs comes directly from the participants, and Ella and Kai recognize the broader importance of the program itself. When asked why others should take part, past participants consistently emphasize growth, perspective, and opportunity. During his time in Germany, Kai had the opportunity to build new life-skills, learn about another country’s way of life, and became more open-minded and independent. Ella echoes Kai’s sentiment, adding, “It’s a great way to immerse yourself in another culture…and challenge yourself.” Ella believes that this exchange gave her an opportunity to experience something completely different from her life at home, learn about the world, and apply her learning in real-life situations. Her experience in Germany made her realize that there is so much to discover about other cultures and that to fully understand other cultures “it is important to interact with locals and try talking to them to learn about their lives and the environment around them.”

LOOKING AHEAD

While BC has done a great job of providing international students with an educational and cultural experience here, the BC/Germany Exchange program is a true exchange that offers BC students a cultural experience abroad at a fraction of the cost.

Sustaining programs like the BC/Germany Exchange program depends on dedicated educators and schools that recognize the value of these programs and actively promote them to students. Schools in the Okanagan Valley, Prince George, and the Lower Mainland have inspired hundreds of BC students to participate, demonstrating the lasting impact of consistent support and advocacy. By becoming “exchange champions,” teachers and schools can help preserve and strengthen this unique opportunity by encouraging students to apply, and guiding students through the application process. Even small efforts can make a significant difference in ensuring the program expands and thrives for future generations.

As education continues to evolve, global learning opportunities like the BC/Germany Exchange are more important than ever. These experiences connect classroom learning to the real world, helping students build essential skills such as communication, critical thinking, and intercultural understanding. For schools, involvement means bringing the BC curriculum to life, and for students, it provides a transformative experience that shapes their perspectives and their future pathways. •



Kai van Dun takes in an exhibition in Germany.



BRIDGING THE GENERATION GAP

Supporting students in a rapidly evolving digital age

By Kathleen Decosse (she/her), French immersion teacher, Cranbrook

RECENTLY, I ATTENDED a concert with my son, a member of Gen Z, and it truly opened my eyes. It was my first time seeing a Gen Z artist perform for a Gen Z audience. Most kids recorded the whole show, and the artist had it livestreamed. Watching teenagers immersed in their screens and sharing the experience digitally was striking. Their way of engaging isn't better or worse than how I grew up; it's simply different, unique to their world.

As a Xennial, part of a micro-generation that experienced the shift from analog to digital, I believe both approaches have value, each suited to its time.

In my teaching practice, I am deeply committed to understanding the changing landscape of education and how best to serve students. Now, we are entrusted with educating Generation Alpha, children who are even more immersed in a digital universe. From birth, they are surrounded by interactive screens, educational apps, and online platforms that shape their learning and social interactions. For them, the internet and digital devices are not tools; they are integral to their entire worldview. The scope of their access to information and their comfort with technology is staggering. In many ways, they are poised to be the most digitally literate generation yet.

This landscape creates a significant gap; both in how these children learn and how we, as educators, can effectively support them. For Generation Alpha, learning is often visual, interactive, and instantaneous, contrasting sharply with traditional pedagogical approaches centred around pen, paper, and direct instruction. The challenge lies in adapting our methods to meet their needs while maintaining educational rigor and fostering critical thinking.

Here are some examples of changes I've implemented into my teaching practice to adapt to today's technological landscape.

The technological fluency of today's children requires us to rethink how we teach digital literacy and responsible technology use. Importantly, we as teachers must model responsible and ethical digital behaviour ourselves. For example, as an elementary school teacher, I use artificial intelligence, such as translation tools (yes, this article was first written in French) and lesson planning assistants to make my teaching more efficient. While AI now exists in nearly all spheres of our lives, responsible usage means including human oversight at all stages of use.

Artificial intelligence has helped me create richer, more engaging lessons, saving time and energy. And having more energy means being more engaged and present for students. However, I sometimes hesitate to openly discuss these tools, feeling a misplaced sense of shame or fear of seeming overly dependent on technology. Still, responsibly integrating these resources is crucial for preparing students for a future where digital tools will be everywhere.

Preparing students for the future entails incorporating digital technologies in meaningful ways; using multimedia, interactive platforms, and collaborative online projects; and teaching students to critically evaluate online information and navigate the digital landscape responsibly.

Equally important is fostering social-emotional skills. Despite their digital proficiency, these children still require guidance in developing empathy, resilience, and interpersonal skills, traits that are crucial for personal development and societal participation.

As educators, our role extends beyond content delivery. We must serve as facilitators, mentors, and lifelong learners. We should embrace technological tools not as threats but as assets that allow us to create more engaging, flexible, and inclusive classrooms.

Recognizing and valuing the digital fluency of our youngest learners, Generation Alpha, enables us to design educational experiences that are relevant, engaging, and empowering. By adapting our methods and perspectives, we prepare our students not only for academic success but also for responsible citizenship in a complex, interconnected world.

In this rapidly evolving landscape, the key is openness: openness to new ideas, tools, and approaches that will ultimately enrich our practice and benefit students. Together, we can bridge the generation gap and foster a learning environment where all students can thrive. •

WHAT'S IN YOUR TTOC BAG?



By the Teachers Teaching on Call Advisory Committee

A TEACHER TEACHING ON CALL (TTOC) never quite knows what the day will bring. One morning might involve leading a Kindergarten class through story time and carpet games, while the afternoon could mean supporting a high school science lab or supervising a gym full of energetic students. With so much variety, being prepared is essential. In addition to a variety of flexible lesson plans and activities, over time, many TTOCs develop a "go-to" bag filled with tools that help create calm, build connections, and support learning — no matter the classroom or grade level. In this article, we're sharing what's in our TTOC bag and how each item helps us feel confident, organized, and ready for anything the day holds.

This list doesn't exempt the employer from providing the necessities for a properly equipped classroom, however TTOCs often experience the reality of walking into an under-resourced classroom or an unfamiliar environment where they can't find something when they need it.

HERE'S WHAT WE CARRY IN OUR TTOC BAGS

Hand sanitizer: Prepare for snack time and avoid germs with clean hands.

Hair ties: Prepare for a surprise gym class or an unexpected lab. Wear your personal protective equipment (PPE)!

Safety glasses: Again, PPE.

Whistle: Get the students' attention in a gym class or outdoor learning experience.

USB drive: Useful when your computer does not connect to the printer and you need to get those copies fast. Also useful to store some ready-to-use worksheets than can be printed and photocopied when a day plan is not available.

Wardrobe car tote: Have your wardrobe prepared for any surprise. Sometimes you are assigned to attend a field trip or outdoor adventure with the potential of any weather, so have a tote in your car that includes rain gear, gloves, boots, socks, hat, sunglasses, or crampons (we see you, northern BC!).

Snacks: Choose your favourite to help you get through the day.

Prizes: For days when students need a bit of extrinsic motivation. Candy and stickers are our favourites.

Deck of cards: A great way to randomize group-making or for a game of probability.

Utensils (spoons, forks, knives): Some days, there's no time to get to the staffroom and you need to prepare to eat in your classroom or learning space for the day.

Advil/Tylenol: Days can be long and loud.

Band-Aids: For any bumps on the playground or paper cuts from the printers.

Tissues: For those sniffles (or tears).

Sticky notes and a pen: Jot down notes while you're on the go so you don't forget things to include in your notes for the returning teachers later.

Ready-to-go lessons: Like the 30 circles challenge that was previously published in *Teacher* magazine and is available on ***teachermag.ca.*** •







PEER SUPPORT SERVICE

Peer Support Service (PSS) If you are new to the profession, have a new assignment, are returning from a leave of absence, are in receipt of discipline, or a less than satisfactory evaluation report, and are on a Plan of Assistance, PSS can help. This confidential service is provided, at no cost to you, in your workplace and online.

PSS consultants use a trauma informed approach in their coaching, and the BCTF Aboriginal Lens guides our support to members: respect, relationship, relevance, responsibility, reciprocity, reconciliation and resilience. Consultants collaborate; share resources; help with curriculum, planning, and assessment; help support behavioural and varied learning needs; and much more.

For more information and to access PSS, contact Sherry Payne, Miranda Light or your local union.

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Mediators use a trauma informed practice and the BCTF Aboriginal Lens guides our support to members: respect, relationship, relevance, responsibility, reciprocity, reconciliation, and resilience.

The service is confidential, voluntary, and the outcome of mediations are not reported to local unions or school districts. Release time is provided at no cost to members. You may request to work with a mediator who has a similar background and life experience to yours, and mediations can be conducted in French and online upon request.

For more information and to access IMS, contact Sherry Payne, Melissa Howell, or your local union.

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ALL LANGUAGES BELONG HERE

On pages 16–17, read about how students in Alexa Bennett Fox's Grade 4 class teach each other their languages and build connections — in their learning and in their classroom community.