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# Teacher

## Understanding the rules of culture



by Lexi Charlie

**E**very child, regardless of ethnic origin, comes to school with a culture. Children are developing their own cultural identity with each experience in the school and in the community. To write this article, I asked myself how I, as a Penelakut Aboriginal teacher, might help you to better understand how culture influences the behaviour of your Aboriginal students. I shall focus on dispelling three myths that affect the education of Aboriginal students:

- Aboriginal parents don't care about their child's education,
- Aboriginal students are quiet and passive learners, and
- An oral culture is an illiterate culture.

At first glance, these may seem like harsh statements. Set in context, they reflect the sincere concerns of teachers coping with, but not necessarily understanding, the impact of Aboriginal parents choosing to raise their children by cultural rules.

Aboriginal culture today echoes an earlier time when we were hunter-gatherers. We are still carrying the cultural traits and habits learned and refined to ensure survival in those times. Behaviours we see in the classroom may not mean what

we think they mean, as they are coming from a different cultural perspective.

**The solution that will enlist the support of the Aboriginal parents is a solution in which they are contributing to the decision of the child, not one where they are making the decision for the child.**

### Why Johnny won't come to school

Have you ever had an Aboriginal child in your class who did not attend school? And when you spoke with the parents, it didn't help. You found them to be unsupportive when they responded, "He knows he should go to school. We can't make him go." It's hard to understand the behaviour of the parents when your way, as a teacher, is to give advice to the child and then to take action. You are left wondering why the Aboriginal parents don't care about their child's education.

But that is just perception. The reality is that the parents are doing what they have learned from their culture. They are obeying a cultural rule. Aboriginal parents are strongly influenced by the principle of guidance without interference. The belief is that children must make their own choices in everything: from homework to attending school, eating habits to choice of friends. Children are responsible for their own learning by watching and absorbing what they see.

I remember at the age of 15 wanting to learn how to drive a car. I asked my father to teach me. He handed me the keys and said the car was outside. My father thought I should have learned how to drive by observation. He had modelled for me many times how to drive a car. It was my responsibility to learn.

Knowing this, how can you as a teacher honour the cultural rule of non-interference? One strategy is not to ask parents direct questions like, "How can we help Johnny?" expecting them to contribute advice or recommendations. Instead, speak out loud about some of the factors that must be considered in coming up with a strategy to meet the student's needs, just as if you were reviewing for your own benefit. Pose the issues themselves,

without offering a direct solution. Welcome the long silences. They give parents time to sort through their ideas. Train yourself to become a good listener instead of the talker. You will reach a solution, but perhaps not the one you expected. The solution that will enlist the support of the Aboriginal parents is a solution in which they are contributing to the decision of the child, not one where they are making the decision for the child.

**The most appropriate strategy in almost every case was to consider all responses and walk through the situation mentally before taking action.**

### I can't teach someone who is passive

Aboriginal students are often labelled "unresponsive," "passive," or "quiet." This behaviour stems from the survival technique of thinking things through before actually trying

## President's message



**David Chudnovsky**

A study conducted recently by the Canadian Teachers' Federation reveals some dramatic trends. More than two-thirds of Canadian school boards will have trouble finding both generalist and specialist teachers next fall. Three-quarters of boards across the country had trouble attracting TOCs in the past year. Shortages already exist in every province, especially in science, math, technology, and speech therapy.

While this situation makes us anxious about the health of our system, the shortage also creates opportunities. School boards must begin now to provide our underemployed colleagues—those part-time teachers and TOCs who give excellent service every day across B.C.—with the opportunity to move into their own classrooms and into full-time appointments.

The teacher shortage has additional implications for the coming round of bargaining. B.C. teachers deserve a significant salary increase. We haven't seen a raise that means anything in almost a decade. But when we bargain for ourselves, we'll be negotiating for the future of public education as well. If we are to attract the best and the brightest of our young people to teaching, and if we are to retain our experienced colleagues, we need competitive salaries.

The shortage is international. There is no quick fix to be found recruiting in other countries. The only viable solution is to make teaching in B.C. a much more attractive career choice. That means competitive salaries and improved working conditions.

Our single most effective tool in achieving these goals is collective bargaining. It's up to each of us to make the coming round of negotiations a success—for ourselves, and for public education.

*David*

## Opinion: Affiliation

As a veteran teacher of 26 years in B.C., I often wonder if newer members of the BCTF like Carole Gilles have researched any of our history before they submit an article to the *Teacher* newsmagazine. It is hard to believe that the last AGM even approved the renewal of a process to become affiliated with the B.C. Federation of Labour. This issue has been defeated on numerous occasions in the last 25 years. Why are we wasting our hard-earned money paid to the BCTF to revisit this non-issue? Gilles and new, younger, members of the BCTF need to be reminded that we were forced to become a union!

We had no choice to remain a Federation as we would have lost control of our organization to the government. The average age of BCTF members is 44 years. Many of our members supported the last CUPE strike because the CUPE members work directly with us in schools. It was unfortunate that the two organizations gave the NDP government a week's wages all for nothing. Our custodians have received absolutely no increase in wage and benefits since the strike occurred. I, for one, and many of my veteran colleagues, do not want to be forced into supporting a B.C. Federation of Labour member's strike! The only issue I can see in the future that we would support our own BCTF union for, is our pension because, so many of us will retire in the next five to seven years!

I do not think we need any other organization's vote or support. We control our own destiny because we are the teachers of the students of B.C. Our voices are heard every day we go to work. We do not need the affiliation of any other unions to get our issues heard. That is what we pay our union over \$1,000 a year to do. We are strong enough, and we do not need to take our place in the labour movement. We are not labourers. We are teachers.

**Sam Saprunoff**

Kelowna

## Teachers on call

Inspired by David Chudnovsky's speeches on August 23 and 24 at the BCTF Summer Conference 2000, I am "organizing, articulating, and advocating." I am TOC staff rep of the Nicola Valley Teachers' Union; the issue that is most important to me is improving the working conditions of TOCs (the working poor of the BCTF).

Led by our local president, Terry Scheitel, Merritt's TOCs have mailed 110 letters throughout B.C. voicing our concerns. Recipients of the letter include politicians (NDP and Liberal), school board trustees, parent advisory councils, BCPSEA, BCTF president and bargaining co-chairs, TOC Advisory Committee, Canadian Teachers' Federation, School District 58 Superintendent,

dent, and every local in the province.

At the Summer Conference, speakers representing the Nurses' Union, Hospital Employees' Union, CUPE, and the College Institute Educators urged us to standardize our contracts in order to improve our strength in bargaining. TOC pay rates and benefits must be standardized across the province to end the dreadful disparity in wages (\$114 – \$278), holiday pay (0%–4%), benefits (none to full), and travelling expenses (\$0–\$25/day).

We are not asking for more than what others receive, but we will not be satisfied with receiving less than others who do the same work. I urge you to place TOC working conditions on your local's top five list of priorities for 2001 bargaining.

**Deb Stowell**  
Merritt

## Trinity Western University

I am responding to a letter "Proud that BCTF is challenging TWU" by Cheryl Sosnowski (*Teacher*, September 2000).

I read long ago that the philosophy of the anarchist at the turn of the last century, was that the results of the destruction of the commonwealth were perceived to be better than the commonwealth itself.

That philosophy was the seed of the fascist movement that dominated the 20th century, which resulted in the huge conflict of the times and The Holocaust.

Modern liberalism seems to have brought us to the brink of a new anarchy with the same philosophy: Destroy the moral standards to which our society adheres because whatever replaces them will be better.

Perhaps the BCTF should consider the reasons why so many people are home schooling or turning to private or church-affiliated schools or to the new and popular alternative educational opportunities for their children. Thoughtful, caring parents do not want their children influenced by such beliefs as expressed by Sosnowski, or in fact, those expressed by the BCTF.

I fear for the commonwealth if our society, and especially our teachers, cannot tolerate religious freedom.

**Mary Davidson**  
Salt Spring Island

In response to the letter from Cheryl Sosnowski (*Teacher*, September 2000), please note that it is the College of Teachers, not the BCTF, that is challenging Trinity Western University in the Supreme Court. TWU's teacher education program received a positive report from the college's own evaluation committee. However, the college denied final approval in response to the TWU code of conduct. The college contends that because TWU students sign an agreement to abstain from sex outside marriage (in-

cluding heterosexual or homosexual relationships), TWU students would discriminate against homosexual students/parents.

Sosnowski appears to have a negative attitude toward Christians. Presumably she would still be professional enough to treat students from Christian homes just as she would students from any other background. TWU graduates are capable of the same kind of professionalism, regardless of their personal beliefs. If any teacher does behave in an inappropriate manner, the college has the means to discipline that individual. It's a scary thing to judge people based on their beliefs, rather than on their actions.

**Melanie Stroh**  
Howe Sound

## Congratulations

Congratulations to Grandview Elementary School on developing your community garden out of the wasteland. "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." May your garden grow well.

**Margaret Cooper**  
Powell River

## Apologies

In the October issue of *Teacher*, Maureen MacDonald wrote "In Memoriam" on page 3. MacDonald teaches at Florence Nightingale Elementary School, Vancouver. We had reported she was president of the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association. Barbara Parrott is president of VESTA.

On page 13, "Teachers retired," we printed Linda A. McEown's name as having retired from North Vancouver #44. McEown has not retired.

We apologize for any inconvenience these errors have caused.

—Editorial staff

## AGM 2001 deadlines

- December 15: deadline for submission of local resolutions.
- January 31: deadline for Executive Committee nominations.
- January 29: deadline for candidate statement copy for *Teacher* newsmagazine.
- March 2: deadline for withdrawal of candidate names from ballot and agenda.

## Yours for the asking

### YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada

A new program organized in co-operation with Exchanges Canada and the Department of Canadian Heritage is offering youth opportunities to form strong links between their own communities and communities elsewhere in Canada. The YMCA Youth Exchanges Program encourages exchanges that promote understanding and appreciation of the diversity of Canada.

The group reciprocal exchange program intended for Canadians between the ages 12 and 18 who would like to experience the country. Priority is given to low-income youth, aboriginal youth, rural or isolated youth, intercultural exchanges, and exchanges including youth with disabilities. Groups of between 10 and 30 participants are twinned with groups of youth the same age from another province or territory, and they take turns staying in each other's homes. The exchange usually lasts five days, excluding travel time. Transportation costs for all eligible participants and organizers are covered while the exchange groups pay for the local transportation costs and other expenses when hosting the twin group. Where local resources are not available, additional support may be requested and the needs and resources evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

For more information, contact Karen Schlichting or Ellen Clague at (604) 685-8066, [ellen.clague@vanymca.org](mailto:ellen.clague@vanymca.org).

## Heritage Trust scholarships

The British Columbia Heritage Trust has announced its Student Prizes program for 2001.

Applications must be received by February 28, 2001. This year, the program will award ten student prizes of up to \$500 to Grade 12 students graduating from secondary school, to be applied to post-secondary education for the 2001–02 academic year.

Information and applications are posted on [www.heritage.gov.bc.ca/trust/scholar.htm](http://www.heritage.gov.bc.ca/trust/scholar.htm).



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**Volume 13 Deadlines:**  
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## Write to us

Letters to "Readers Write" may be edited for reasons of legality, taste, brevity, and clarity. To be considered for publication, they must be no more than 150 to 200 words, signed, and include a home phone number for verification.

## New Teachers' Conference

### February 9 & 10, 2001

The conference will be held at Delta Pacific Resort and Conference Centre, Richmond, BC. Hosted by the B.C. Teachers' Federation, the conference costs \$50. Learn about:

- communicating with parents
- report writing
- socially responsible teaching
- safe and caring schools
- multiple teaching strategies
- working with students with special needs

- stress and time management
- practical tips for thriving in the classroom
- BCTF support and services
- technology/curriculum

Conference brochures will be available in schools and on the BCTF homepage, [www.bctf.bc.ca](http://www.bctf.bc.ca). For more information, contact Elizabeth Lambert in the PD Division (604) 871-1837 or 1-800-663-9163 (local 1837).

## New teachers

### Record keeping

- Accurate record keeping is a teacher's prime responsibility. When you report to parents/guardians, you will want to relate student achievement to the learning outcomes.
- Devise a simple method of keeping your student records current. They should be immediately available should parents/guardians wish to discuss the progress of their child.
- Keep an anecdotal file where you can note pertinent information on work habits or behavioural problems (useful when preparing formal reports).
- Some records can be kept by the students using graphs or comments to show weekly progress.

For a new teacher, making judgments about student progress may seem a bit overwhelming, but with organization and a good plan for evaluation, your students will receive quality information about their progress.

### Tips for assessment and evaluation

- Before the beginning of the year, you will need to have in place a written procedure for evaluating student achievement.
- Ask your administrator for a copy of the current provincial reporting policies.
- Ask your administrator for a copy of the school policies on student evaluation. Also get a copy of the school report card so that you know how student achievement is reported to parents/guardians.
- Allow students some choice in the topic or method of presentation. Students will perform better if they enjoy the task.
- Avoid using evaluation as a threat or a punishment. Students should not feel tricked. Hand out your marking criteria when you give the students the task. Students need to know how they will be judged so that they can perform their best.
- Keep accurate records of student achievement.
- Keep parents/guardians informed of student progress. Parents/guardians should not be surprised with a student achievement problem cited on a report card or at parent teacher interviews.

- Keep up to date with any ministerial orders regarding student reporting.
- Plan your student assessment and evaluation tasks when you plan for instruction. Make sure that the assessment task is consistent with the type of learner outcome specified in the curriculum.
- Talk with other teachers of the same grade level or subject about strategies they use and appropriate weighting for different units of the curriculum.
- Use a variety of assessment strategies. For example, use a combination of short written assignments, pre-tests and post-tests, projects, performances, tests, teacher observation, student self-assessment, and unit exams.
- Use student results as feedback on your test or project design. If there is a problem with your wording of a question, throw it out. If the project instructions were not clear, allow the student a second chance.

Excerpts from the *New Teachers' Handbook*. To obtain a copy, contact the BCTF PD Division, or check our web site: [www.bctf.bc.ca/beginning/handbook](http://www.bctf.bc.ca/beginning/handbook).

*Janet Amsden  
Fairview Elementary School  
Maple Ridge*

### 70 years ago

*Education and labour:* The proposal to raise the school-leaving age in Britain to 15 years is meeting some opposition on the ground that by giving advanced education to a larger section of the community, the country will ultimately find itself almost without a supply of unskilled labour. Which is another way of saying that a certain proportion of people should be kept in a semi-literate state in order that the menial jobs of life may be done. Is there any real reason why the menial jobs should be done by illiterate people—why a scavenger should not be as educated as, say a bank clerk?

- BC Teacher, January 1931

## Top 10 BCTF lesson aids

### 1 Hebdon: Chemistry 12, A Workbook for Students.

Dr. Jim Hebdon 345 p. ©1997. This workbook is a revised and expanded version of the "small schools Chemistry Project," and specifically rewritten for the 1996 Chemistry 12 B.C. curriculum. Some features of this cartoon-illustrated book: covers every topic in Chemistry 12; provides a complete set of students' notes, with clear concise explanations; contains a large number of relevant exercises, specifically designed to develop student understanding at every step in the development of a theory or procedure; includes questions which are typical of every type of question found in Ministry exams; includes a wide range of problem difficulties, from easy to "scholarship" level; answers to all questions are included; contains numerous fully worked examples; includes explanatory diagrams; and includes a glossary of important terms. Grade 12. LA 4022-\$27

### 2 Daily Math Practice, Grade 1.

Produced by Evan-Moor Educational Publishers, California, 112 p. 1999. This book is based on current mathematics standards. The book is divided into a 36-week progressive program. Five minutes a day is required to practice four or five math essentials. Scope and sequence charts and answer keys are included. Worksheets are reproducible. The format is also appropriate for remedial, adult literacy, and ESL use. Grade 1. LA 8452-\$19.95

### 3 Daily Math Practice, Grade 2.

Produced by Evan-Moor Educational Publishers, California, 112 p. 1999. This book is based on current mathematics standards. The book is divided into a 36-week progressive program. Five minutes a day is required to practice four or five math essentials. Scope and sequence charts and answer keys are included. Worksheets are reproducible. The format is also appropriate for remedial, adult literacy, and ESL use. Grade 2. LA 8453-\$19.95

### 4 Daily Math Practice, Grade 3.

Produced by Evan-Moor Educational Publishers, California, 112 p. 1999. This book is based on current mathematics standards. The book is divided into a 36-week progressive program. Five minutes a day is required to practice four or five math essentials. Scope and sequence charts and answer keys are included. Worksheets are reproducible. The format is also appropriate for remedial, adult literacy, and ESL use. Grade 3. LA 8454-\$19.95

or five math essentials. Scope and sequence charts and answer keys are included. Worksheets are reproducible. The format is also appropriate for remedial, adult literacy, and ESL use. Grade 3. LA 8454-\$19.95

### 5 Daily Math Practice, Grade 5.

Produced by Evan-Moor Educational Publishers, California, 112 p. 1999. This book is based on current mathematics standards and is designed to support. The book is divided into a 36-week progressive program. Five minutes a day is required to practice four or five math essentials. Scope and sequence charts and answer keys are included. Worksheets are reproducible. The format is also appropriate for remedial, adult literacy, and ESL use. Grade 5. LA 9426-\$19.95

### 6 Weather Theme Unit.

Darlene B. Davis 128 p. ©1996. This unit is designed to study weather and the role weather plays in our daily life. It is a hands-on approach encouraging children to explore and ask "why." The teacher is a guide. The theme is connected to the curriculum with activities to encompass all areas. The theme is developed to be presented over a four- to five-week period, which can be easily revised to suit the goals and interests of any class. The unit includes 37 lessons and hands-on activities including literature selections, poetry, vocabulary development, math suggestions, art, music, social studies, life skills, planning guides, writing ideas, parent involvement ideas, a glossary, bibliography, and student evaluation and record keeping suggestions. Grades 7-10. LA 9290A-\$9.95

### 7 Cards Eh!

Developed by JK Productions, Richmond, BC ©1998. *Cards Eh!* is a unique deck of high quality playing cards that colourfully celebrate and teach Canadian geography and heritage. In *Cards Eh!* the 10 provinces, two territories, and country as a whole are each associated with one of the 13 traditional Ace to King denominations while the four traditional suits are associated with coats-of-arms, flags, major cities, and major rivers and lakes. The two wild cards in the deck are used to explain and depict the new organization of the Northwest Territories. The game can be

played in many different ways by individual students, small groups, or the whole class. Suitable for use with ESL. Grade 1-12 and adult. LA 9224-\$8.95

### 8 Gandhi: The Truth Can Fight.

Ann Lee Finkel 96 p. ©1997. This short biography, written for young readers aged 12-15, emphasizes how Gandhi's early struggles with himself and his environment strongly influenced his character. The book introduces Mohandas Gandhi, the first person to demonstrate that fundamental change could be brought about through nonviolent action on a large scale. His leadership helped bring independence to India in 1947. The book gives young people a perspective on the culture and customs of India. The style is simple and straightforward. The book can be read as a biography or in connection with the study of India. It could also be used in a counselling or religious-group setting, as a starting point to a discussion of conflict resolution or non-violence. Grades 7-10. LA 9290A-\$9.95

**9 Gandhi: The Truth Can Fight—Study Guide.** Ann Lee Finkel 19 p. ©1997. This study guide includes a set of chapter-related questions for discussion or written work, suggestions for activities, recipes, and a map. Grades 7-10. LA 9290B-\$4.

### 10 Salmonids in the Classroom—Life Cycle Puppets.

Produced by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Five hand-sewn sock puppets with detailed body markings of sturdy felt. Suitable for hands-on use with students. Depicts life stages of salmon: egg, alevin, fry, adult, and spawner. Recommended by the B.C. Ministry of Education. K-7. LA S55-\$45

*For a complete listing of over 900 BCTF Lesson Aids, consult the catalogue in your school library or the Lesson Aids online catalogue. [www.bctf.bc.ca/LessonAids](http://www.bctf.bc.ca/LessonAids)*

*To order any of the above lesson aids enclose a cheque payable to the BCTF or authorized purchase order to BCTF Lesson Aids Service 100-550 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5Z 4P2. GST and postage/handling are included in the prices. Orders are sent by return mail.*

## LOOKING BACK

### 50 years ago

*Schools need support of parents and public.* Perhaps the most fundamental principle in a youngster's upbringing is consistency. If a preschool child is told one thing by mother, and a different one by father, he becomes confused and does not learn. If he is taught one thing at school, and the opposite at home, he cannot learn. If the youngster acquires an unreal picture of the world, he cannot adjust himself when he goes out into adult life.

If these things do happen, neither teachers nor parents nor public are individually to blame. Education is a co-operative endeavour. Teachers, parents, and the public must work together all the time—the one cannot function without the help of the others.

- BC Teacher, November 1950

### 30 years ago

*Sincere congratulations are in order for everyone involved in this year's salary negotiations.*

Perhaps the key to this year's successes was a change in the approach to negotiations. In the past, both sides often took initial positions and traded concessions until an agreement was reached.

This year the process was quite different. Both teachers and trustees agreed to approach negotiations more realistically. Both searched for significant evidence on which to base their judgments of what constituted a fair and just increase for teachers.

- BC Teacher, December 1970

### 10 years ago

*Should teachers formally affiliate with labour?* That is the question put to a task force of BCTF members appointed by the Executive Committee last spring. The group is to bring a recommendation to the 1991 BCTF AGM.

The question of affiliation at this time was initiated by the local bargainers at a BCTF conference after the last successful round of bargaining.

- Teacher News magazine, November 1990

**CULTURE from page 1**

them. In a hunter-gatherer society, stress and danger were always present. A bad decision resulted in harm or death. The most appropriate strategy in almost every case was to consider all responses and walk through the situation mentally before taking action.

Today, in schools, the terrain is the classroom, not the forest. Aboriginal students unfamiliar with a subject feel stressed and in danger, and in keeping with their culture, they retreat into positions of careful observation. The more unfamiliar the situation, the more you can expect the student to withdraw into physical immobility and silence.

**Stories were told over and over because each lesson became more meaningful with repetition.**

By knowing this, you have an opportunity to allow students time to gather their thoughts. By understanding this cultural conflict, you can support the student. Recently I was working with a student who, I sensed, wanted to tell me something. I realized that it was important to allow him to sit next to me and to be silent. After a time he was able to share with me what was on his mind. Aboriginal peoples value silence as a skill, and being silent is not an empty activity.

To address this cultural difference, teachers can try to extend the response time for students when asking a question, realizing that Aboriginal students in particular will feel more comfortable if they have some time for reflection. Another strategy is to make a situation more familiar, and elicit greater participation, by adapting the rituals and symbols of your local community. For example, some schools use the talking circle where a feather, talking stick, or rock is passed as a symbol and held by the individual whose turn it is to speak.

Another aspect of the perceived passive behaviour of Aboriginal students has to do with eye contact. Teachers have complained to me that Aboriginal students are disrespectful: "When you talk to them, they won't look you in the eye." The truth is the opposite of the perception. When elders speak to us, we are taught not to make eye contact. This is a sign of respect.

**An oral culture in a print-based world**

Aboriginal people have only recently started to write down their language, stories, and songs. Traditionally, we were an oral society, and we still are today. Western society has had an attitude that oral cultures are inferior and even illiterate. Schools have been reluctant to include Aboriginal studies because a written curriculum has not been available.

And yet, for generation after

generation, Aboriginal children have learned the history and rules of belief and behaviour of their people through oral

**Remember, Aboriginal people, like you, are living within their culture and sometimes we don't realize that the rules and attitudes we accept and live by are even there.**

legends, stories, songs and prayers. Stories were told over and over because each lesson became more meaningful with repetition. Children learned that the more one listened, the more there was revealed and learned. The oral culture, as it requires interaction, created a close, connected community—strengthened tribal identity and continuity.

It is difficult to capture the essence of an oral culture. The best way to accomplish this in schools is by inviting elders in to the classroom to share their life stories, legends, or songs. Ask a local Aboriginal community member about the protocol of inviting elders to a school. Prepare your students by talking about the importance of elders to the classroom. You are likely to find that because this is something Aboriginal students are familiar with, they will be more involved. Understand that for elders to translate their

stories into English means losing some subtlety in the meaning of a story.

It is important to be aware that legends or stories can be owned by individuals, by families, or by the community. Only a particular person or family can tell a story that belongs to them. There are many stories that are not restricted and that can be told for everyone to hear for entertainment or instruction. Check with your teacher-librarian for stories written by Aboriginal authors. In recent years, there has been an outburst of pride in oral storytelling.

I encourage you to be involved and get to know your local Aboriginal community. And when a Aboriginal child or parent does something that puzzles you and causes you to stereotype, try to react differently. Remember, Aboriginal people are living in a world with rules for behaviour different from those of society at large. I hope that by explaining just a few of their rules, I have shed some light on the cultural conflict you face from time to time in your classroom. Remember, Aboriginal people, like you, are living within their culture and sometimes we don't realize that the rules and attitudes we accept and live by are even there. Like you, we assume that all people naturally think that way.

*Lexi Charlie is the Aboriginal education co-ordinator with SD 79 (Cowichan Valley).*

## Aboriginal education workshops

### Aboriginal History and Culture

This workshop is based on the content of Aboriginal studies and is aimed at providing background for teachers at all grade levels to better understand the situation of Aboriginal students and current issues, such as the treaty process.

### Inclusive Schools and Teaching

This workshop is based on implementing the concepts in the inclusive schools and teaching practices recommendations from the Task Force on Aboriginal Education. Each workshop will focus on a limited number of the many items included in the Task Force Discussion Guide. The workshop will conclude with developing plans for continuing work on inclusive practice.

### Beyond Words: Creating Racism-Free Schools for Aboriginal Learners

This workshop will be based on the handbook that is being developed.

For further information, contact Merle Williams: (604) 871-1854, 1-800-663-9163 (local 1854), fax: (604) 871-2291, [mwilliams@bctf.bc.ca](mailto:mwilliams@bctf.bc.ca).

- Develop a support network for beginning teachers.
- Improve working and learning conditions for teachers and students.
- Fill full-time positions with the current substitute and part-time teachers.
- Provide greater opportunities for in-service training.
- Increase investment in public education, including better salaries.

Nancy Knickerbocker is the BCTF's media relations officer.

## December 6, National Day of Remembrance

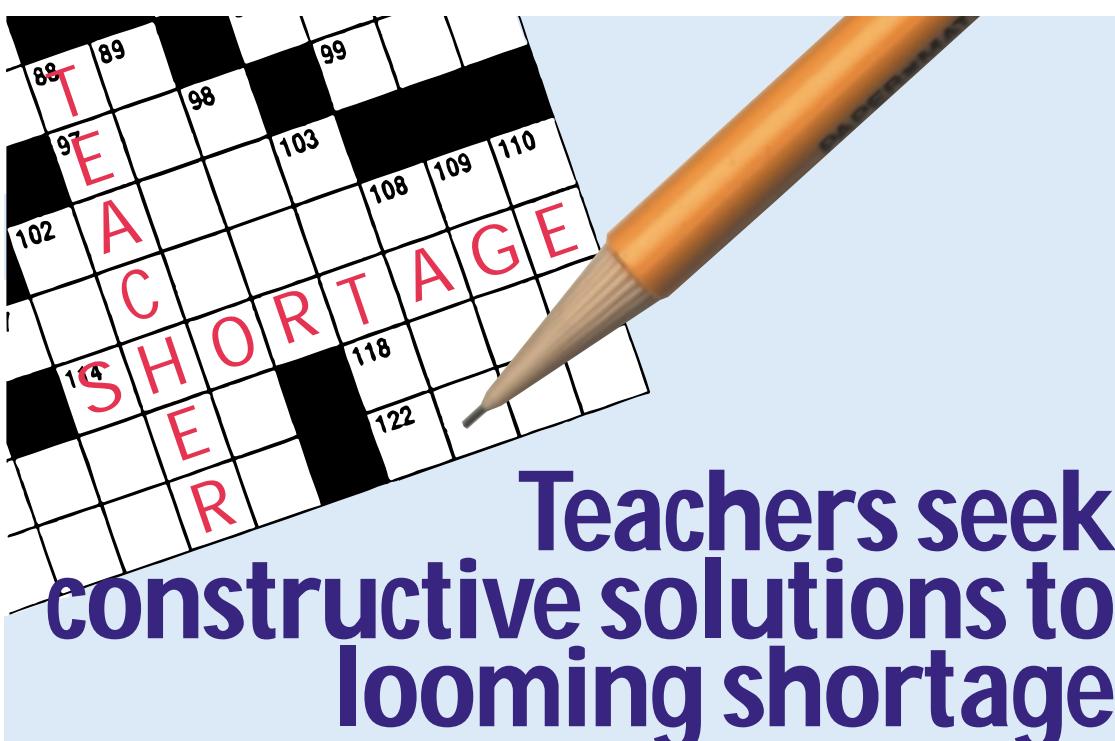
The day was established in 1991 as an official day of remembrance and action on violence against women. It is a time for us all to reflect and to remember the 14 young women who were so tragically killed on December 6, 1989.

Geneviève Bergeron, 21  
Hélène Colgan, 23  
Nathalie Croteau, 23  
Barbara Daigneault, 22  
Anne-Marie Edward, 21  
Maud Haviernick, 29  
Barbara Marie Kluznick, 31  
Maryse Laganière, 25  
Maryse Leclair, 23  
Anne-Marie Lemay, 27  
Sonia Pelletier, 28  
Michèle Richard, 21  
Annie St-Arneault, 23  
Annie Turcotte, 21

were killed by a man who believed that because they were engineering students, they were feminists, and therefore women who had stepped out of their rightful place.

Violence is an issue for all of us, and we must all, as individuals, institutions, and communities, take action to build a culture of safety.

- Margaret Ross



by Nancy Knickerbocker

There's no doubt that change causes stress, but resisting change causes even greater stress. "It's like the cartoon character Dilbert says, 'Change is good. You go first!'"

Dennis VanRoekel had teachers chuckling as he began his keynote address to a conference of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, but it was all leading up to a serious question: "What are we willing to change to deal with the demographic challenges facing our profession?"

VanRoekel, a former high school math teacher, is now the secretary-treasurer of the National Education Association, the largest union in the United States, with more than two million members.

He was speaking to about 170 teacher union leaders and staff who met in Ottawa October 14-16 to explore ramifications

of the impending teacher shortage upon bargaining, communications, and professional development issues. A CTF survey conducted just prior to the conference revealed some disturbing trends.

For example, more than two-thirds of Canada's school boards will have trouble signing general and specialized teachers next fall. All provinces have shortages, especially in science, math, technology, and speech therapy. Three-quarters of Canadian school boards had difficulty attracting substitute teachers in the past school year.

VanRoekel spoke of the crucial need to recruit more young people into the profession and to offer them meaningful support and mentoring during their first few years in the classroom. "There is no profession in the world that treats its rookies as roughly as we do," he said.

Rising enrolment and demand for smaller class sizes have

combined to create a shortage of millions of trained teachers throughout the United States.

"We are starting to be successful in convincing people that class size actually counts," he said, "but this has had a huge impact upon teacher supply and demand."

In particularly short supply are bilingual, ethnic-minority, and male elementary school teachers. "There's a real need for understanding of diverse cultures and ethnicities, and the teaching force must reflect that diversity back to the students."

VanRoekel outlined some strategies various states use for attracting and retaining quality teachers: Advertising campaigns, web-based recruiting, substantial signing bonuses, loan-forgiveness programs to help people pay off the cost of their post-secondary studies, housing benefits, better orientation and ongoing support, and mentoring programs. Ultimately, he said, we have to change the

traditionally oversupply of teachers has been treated as an individual problem, while a shortage is seen as an institutional problem. Dibbon's research points to both shortage and oversupply existing at the same time, depending on geographical location and subject area.

In light of all the research presented at the conference, CTF is calling for the following measures:

- Increase the number of spaces in teacher training institutions.

# Health and safety

by Lynne Sinclair

**A**n injured teacher recently expressed her frustration with the workers' compensation scheme that prevents her from suing her employer. While she was right in her assessment that her rights had been restricted by the *Workers' Compensation Act*, her concerns reminded me that few of us in the teaching profession know and appreciate the history regarding worker health and safety. Few of us stop to recognize the workers before us who lost their lives, went on strike, and in other ways fought for health and safety laws and standards, including a compensation scheme.

## We must never become complacent about our health and safety in spite of the protective laws...

We owe a great debt to those workers and other unions for the protections from lead, asbestos, formaldehyde, and other workplace toxins to which teachers were once exposed. One of my first teaching jobs was in a secondary school where an art teacher suffered from a permanent and life-threatening lung disease caused by leaded glazes and lack of ventilation. We must never become complacent about our health and safety in spite of the protective laws; we must always remember the lessons of the past.

As with most worker rights, workers' compensation has its roots in the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century. Work had become far more dangerous with the move from workshops of six people to factories of thousands. Equipment was much more powerful, and workers had far less control over how work was done.

Another significant change was to the relationship between worker and employer. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, an employer was viewed as having a long-term responsibility for

the well-being of workers and was expected to care for the workers if they became ill or injured. After the Industrial Revolution, most employers claimed no responsibility for workers who had been injured on the job, and workers had to use the courts.

Workers began suing employers for negligence in the early 19th century. Although people often successfully sued other people when they were injured by equipment (for example, passengers in a train wreck), workers discovered that they were not afforded the same legal rights. The courts ruled that employers could make use of three special defences in negligence cases advanced by workers. Those common-law defences could be used even when the employer had been proven to be negligent. They were contributory negligence, where if the worker could be proven to be in any way negligent, the case would be thrown out; negligence of fellow worker, where if another worker had in any way contributed to the accident, the case would be thrown out; and the voluntary assumption of risk, in which employers argued that workers were aware of the dangers of the jobs they assumed.

So, in train wrecks where passengers could successfully sue the owner who was proven negligent, very few workers would ever receive compensation for injuries or illnesses because railway work was known to be dangerous or because workers had been proven to have contributed to

## Workers began suing employers for negligence in the early 19th century.

the accident. Workers were to be held accountable for the consequences of accidents; it was argued that the common-law defences made workers more careful. In reality, most injured workers could not afford to hire lawyers and were afraid to alienate their employer as they wanted to be reinstated



once well. Therefore, few workers sued employers, and workplace injuries and illnesses caused unemployment, poverty, and family breakdowns.

Juries began to ignore the three defences and instructions from judges. In one such case in Manitoba, the jury decision was appealed, and the Court of Appeal overturned it, stating:

The tendency of juries to give damages to plaintiffs in such cases is so great that I can not but think that they are frequently influenced to do so by sympathy irrespective of the evidence or the weight of evidence. The practical result of trying such cases by jury is to make employers insurers of their employees' safety, a liability which the law of master and servant does not impose. (*MacIntyre v. Holiday, Manitoba Court of Appeal, 1909*)

However, laws were eventually passed that limited the employer's right to use one or any of the three common-law defences, and employers as well as workers became dissatisfied with the system. Employers

complained because insurance rates were too high, and most workers continued to receive little or nothing for workplace injuries and illnesses.

In 1910 an Ontario judge, Sir William Meredith, struck the compromise that has underpinned workers' compensation schemes across Canada. He addressed the five major questions of the debate about proposed compensation plans:

1. Would it be necessary to prove negligence?
2. Who would pay the injured worker?
3. What guarantee of compensation would a worker have if the employer was not insured or went out of business?
4. Who would operate the system?
5. Was there a role for the courts in workers' compensation?

After four years of investigation, Meredith recommended a new compensation system, based upon five principles: no fault coverage, collective liability, guaranteed benefits, independent administration, and

exclusive jurisdiction. In this historic compromise, workers gave up the right to sue in exchange for guaranteed compensation, and employers agreed to compensate all workers in exchange for ridding themselves of lawsuits. The Ontario government passed the *Workmen's Compensation Act* in 1910. British Columbia passed similar legislation in 1917.

The debate about workers' health and safety and compensation did not end with the new compensation schemes. Indeed, as new dangers are discovered and issues such as violence and indoor air quality arise, the debate will continue. So will the debate about whether the historic compromise was a good one for workers. There can be no debate, however, that most injured workers now receive compensation whereas in the past they either lost in court or suffered in poverty, too broke to hire a lawyer.

Lynne Sinclair, is an assistant director in the BCTF's Organization Support Division.

## Saskatchewan teachers demonstrate solidarity

In the spring, Saskatchewan teachers rejected a contract offer that included a salary increase of 5% over two years.

In rejecting the deal, teachers knew they would have to take strong action to support their bargaining committee in order to get a collective agreement that more closely meets their needs. When school opened in September, they launched a work-to-rule campaign, effectively shutting down extracurricular activities. Their actions triggered a massive student protest in front of the provincial legislative building. School trustees reacted negatively, and threatening to deduct wages, accused teachers of withdrawing required services.

After only six days, however, a new deal emerged, including an 11% salary increase over 2.5

years and an employer contribution to the teacher healthcare plan equaling 1.6% of payroll. That deal was ratified.

Saskatchewan teachers have demonstrated once again what it takes to get an acceptable deal at the bargaining table: membership unity and support.

A strong case, skilled negotiators, and effective leadership are important in bargaining, but objectives cannot be achieved without the members' standing firm in support of their demands.

B.C. teachers can learn from the Saskatchewan experience.

- Garry Litke

## Class size

by Irene Lanzinger

My TOC assignment for the day was Math 9, Math 10A, and Math 11 at Gladstone Secondary School. In spite of my 17 years as a teacher and/or a teacher union leader, I was apprehensive. The sum total of my experience as a TOC was five days, and my experience with

modified math classes was somewhat less than positive. I once had a Math 9A/Math10A split class with 27 students that made me reconsider teaching as a career.

Imagine my delight when, as the students filed in, I pulled out the attendance sheet and realized there were only 15 students in the class. The next emotion that hit me was pride at the work our local had done in bargaining a grievance settlement that put a class-size limit on modified classes.

In the first three rounds of local bargaining, Vancouver teachers achieved class-size limits, including lower limits when students with special needs are integrated into classes. The language has been the source of many disputes between the Vancouver School Board and the Vancouver teachers' locals. In the past five years, I have been closely involved in these disputes as vice-president and then president of the Vancouver Secondary Teachers' Association (VSTA).

The situation reached a peak in the 1996-97 school year,

when, in secondary schools alone, there were 260 classes in violation of the collective agreement. That grievance was settled in February 1998, with compensatory time or money for the teachers of all 260 classes listed in the grievance and a pool of money (\$250 for each violation) that went to schools to be used to support teachers with students with special needs in their classes.

However, the grievances continued. The VSTA set a goal of resolving class-size grievances early in the school year in order to force the board to put more staff in schools to meet the limits rather than compensate teachers after the school year was over. The 1998-99 class-size grievance went to arbitration in November 1998. In a mediated settlement, the board agreed to add 9.4 teachers to Vancouver secondary schools. As well, we modified the integration language for secondary schools and bargained a new limit of 20 to 22 students (depending on the number of students with special needs integrated) in modified science,

social studies, English, and math classes. The limit significantly reduced the sizes of modified classes, including my Math 10A class at Gladstone.

In January, I will be seconded full-time to work on the BCTF bargaining team, so my term as a TOC will be short. My time as a TOC will ensure that I will be at the table with a recent overview of the working and learning conditions teachers face every day.

As it turned out, the Math 10A class went very well. I left school that day with renewed faith in the wonderful work public school teachers are doing in this province. I also left with a renewed commitment to class-size limits as the single most important workload provision teachers have bargained. I know that commitment is shared by teachers all around the province and together we will continue to fight for class-size improvements in the next round of bargaining.

Irene Lanzinger is a teacher on call in Vancouver and a member of the BCTF's 2000-01 Bargaining Team.

# Silence is acceptance: Killarney rejects bully behaviour



by Nancy Knickerbocker

**W**hen Killarney Secondary School's bully-prevention team met over lunch-hour one Friday in September, a Grade 8 girl, sat quietly as the other students and the teachers chatted and munched their salads and sandwiches. Math teacher Roma Lake explained that the new student didn't have her lunch because she was afraid of the girls who were hanging around near her locker. She decided to stay out of their way, even though it meant going hungry.

"That makes me so sad—to hear that someone would have to go without lunch because of bullying," said another girl, whose eyes welled up in sympathy. Vice-principal Judith Pilley took her gently by the arm and set off in search of lunch.

Students, staff, and administrators at Killarney have been working together since 1994 to reduce bullying in the hallways and classrooms of the large, diverse, East-Vancouver school. PE teacher Vickie Lal, one of the key organizers, did her master's degree on the work they launched together.

"We have a real passion for this work," Lal said. "We want to do more."

The team, composed of an equal number of students and teachers, began by developing a code of conduct that aims to build a healthy, respectful climate based on clear expectations for positive behaviour. The code has been incorporated into the school culture, and it is printed in the students' agenda books, explained Melissa O'Donnell, who co-chairs the bully-prevention team with Lal.

Students also developed skits about bullying, which they presented at the elementary schools in the Killarney community. Through drama, they explored bullying and ways to reduce it.

To counter the notion that reporting bullying is the same

as "ratting," the team adopted the slogan "Silence is acceptance." They held a poster contest, and many beautiful projects emerged from the art room to illustrate the new concept.

The teachers also developed lesson plans to integrate with the English and social studies curriculums. This year, they will be focussing on resources for Grade 9, because research indicates that bullying is most problematic in that year, O'Donnell said. As another aspect of the work, teacher Tom Ross has raised awareness around violence against women through the White Ribbon

## To counter the notion that reporting bullying is the same as "ratting," the team adopted the slogan "Silence is acceptance."

campaign commemorating the Montreal massacre.

Killarney's administrators have supported the team's work through the years. In addition, they have studied and implemented restorative justice as a means of growing, and learning from conflict. Students, teachers, parents, and principals confront bullying and reconcile differences through dialogue or mediation.

In an interview, Grade 11 student Chloe Ash-Anderson echoed that holistic approach. "We can't just deal with the victims; we have to work with the bullies too," she said. "People who bully feel bad about themselves, and so they have to put others down. I feel sorry for the bullies too. A lot of them come from unhappy homes, and they don't have great lives."

To get a comprehensive picture of the issue, last year the team developed a survey on bullying and asked all 2,000 students to complete it. The

main forms of bullying were verbal, teasing, and rumours.

Perhaps most worrisome is that young people are reluctant to report being bullied to staff and to their parents.

"Even when teachers directly ask, students may not tell us what's going on," O'Donnell said, adding that they're beginning discussions on peer counselling and other ideas for mutual support among youth.

The team's latest task was to present the survey results at the school professional development day. They invited Dr. Shelley Hymel, associate dean of graduate programs and research in education at UBC, to discuss the latest research and analyze the survey results. She told Killarney staff that their findings are consistent with other schools in the Lower Mainland and, indeed, all of B.C.

Dr. Hymel's talk was followed by a colourful display by Lal and the other teachers, and then by heartfelt, thoughtful speeches by students.

Faiza Mohammed, Grade 12, is prime minister of the student council at Killarney. She spoke of how popular, successful youth often are confronted by bullies with a civilized veneer. "My bullies didn't have fists; they had smiles on their faces," she said, but the wounds hurt just the same.

Guppy Sandar, also a Grade 12 student, said teachers notice overt physical bullying, but they don't see the more subtle forms. "There's so much more that you are missing," he said. "And often it's more serious than it looks."

Grade 11 student Rani Padhy spoke of how bullying interferes with learning. "We come here to learn, and, man, we love this school!" she told the teachers on their Pro-D day.

"We appreciate all the hard work you put in, and we know you do get stressed out sometimes, but students get stressed out too," Rani said. "We want to learn, and we look up to you because knowledge is a gift."

Nancy Knickerbocker is the BCTF's media relations officer.

## Foundation skills assessment

**I**n the spring, teachers administered the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) test under protest, effectively communicating their professional and ethical concerns regarding the FSA, and setting the stage for more scrutiny and informed discussion of the results this fall.

Schools are required by ministry policy to report their FSA results in all years of the accreditation process. However, the BCTF succeeded in getting ministry policy that requires the following statement to be included with FSA results in accreditation reports:

"This information provides a snapshot of how our students performed on the most recent Foundation Skills Assessment. However, we do not yet have enough years of data to determine whether performance on FSA is improving, decreasing, or staying about the same in the school."

This ministry policy should help discourage attempts to determine trends with insufficient data.

The 1999 and 2000 FSA results cannot be compared at the provincial, district, or school level because the tests differed in significant ways:

- lack of school results in 1999
- no written response items for reading comprehension at Grades 7 and 10 in 1999
- no writing assessment at Grades 7 and 10 in 1999
- additional testing time in 2000
- new scoring rubric for numeracy in 2000.

Individual student results must go to parents, but the timing and method are open to district choice. There is no greater obligation to send home FSA results than to send home report cards. That is, there is no reason to mail the FSA results when report cards are normally sent home with students.

The ministry has suggested that teachers might distribute the results to parents at the first regularly scheduled parent-teacher-student interview of the year, or if the results are not available in time, at a subsequent regularly scheduled interview.

Alternatively, schools might have a meeting for parents interested in hearing about the tests and getting their children's results. A ministry leaflet for teachers, "Communicating Individual Student's FSA Results," makes distributing the results seem onerous and time-consuming. The BCTF offers more practical advice for members on dealing with individual student results.

The tests were quite limited in scope: one piece of first draft writing, comprehension questions only in reading, and only word problems on some aspects of numeracy. Even at this early point in the school year, teachers have better, more detailed, information from regular classroom assessments to share with parents.

Individual student results will be represented by a bar on a graph labelled "Not Yet Within Expectations," "Meets Expectations," and "Exceeds Expectations." There will be no percentages, raw scores, or numbers of any kind. The bar will be quite wide in order to graphically capture the confidence level associated with this test. The bar will therefore sometimes fall across two

categories. Many parents will find this lack of precision in the individual student results unsatisfactory. However, it accurately reflects the lack of precision on a one-shot large-scale assessment.

Many students' results will be similar to their general classroom performance. Other students will have done less well on the FSA test than they generally do in class because of the stresses of writing the test, the unfamiliar format (e.g., multiple choice), the limited time allowed, the narrow format of the test (e.g., only word problems in numeracy), and the lack of opportunity to refine their work (e.g., first draft writing). For example, we know from previous ministry PLAP data that students' classroom writing scores average a scale point higher than their writing on a provincial assessment.

One group of students deserves special mention. The ministry allowed very few students to be exempted from writing the tests. Many ESL students and students in certain special needs categories who are not receiving instruction in grade-level curricula had to write the provincial tests based on that grade-level curricula. Those students have generally been tested at the school or district level and shown to be incapable of handling material at grade level; the students and parents have received that information. For the province to then test them on the curriculum they were exempted from and tell them once again that they are not yet within the expectation of the grade is unnecessarily cruel. Teachers will want to exercise special sensitivity when dealing with such situations.

- Anita Chapman

## Rank rankings

**I**find absolutely no benefit in ranking schools against one another, because that's not about excellence. It creates a poisonous ethic. Schools aren't trying to learn from one another. They're trying to beat one another and edge each other out in the rankings.

"I would be outraged as a parent or a teacher to find a chart that attempts to sort schools and tell me who is better than whom. A lot of schools that may not look good on standardized tests are actually far superior in the way they energize students and help them to become more proficient thinkers. That's not the same thing, necessarily, as being able to bubble in the right oval."

"What tests are primarily measuring is the size of the houses in the neighbourhoods. The overwhelming proportion of the variance of tests scores is accounted for by socio-economic status."

"Look at what happens to teaching practices when administrators brandish a copy of MAT-7. Does it lead to better hands-on science projects? Does it lead to kids understanding math better from the inside out? Does it lead to rich literacy instead of worksheets? If the answer were yes, you'd have a strong case. But the answer is not only no, but often that the teaching gets worse, that the best teachers leave...and that more kids drop out."

Alfie Kohn, author of *The Schools Our Children Deserve*.  
Source: CCPA Education Monitor, Summer 2000.

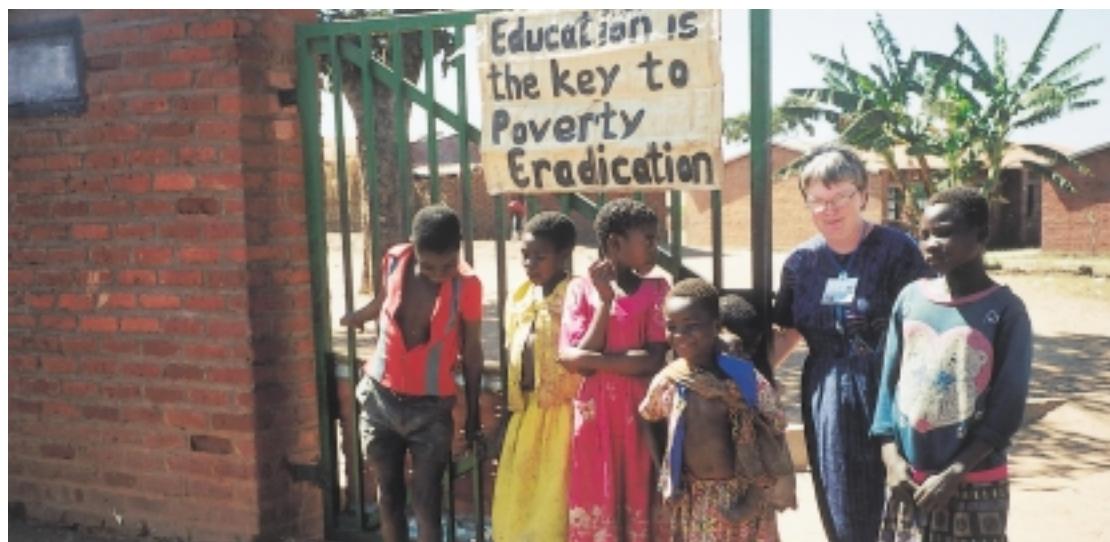
## It's a long way to Lilongwe, Malawi

by Mary Leah DeZwart

In the summer of 2000, I was among the Canadian teachers on Project Overseas in Malawi, East Central Africa. I had to consult an atlas to locate Malawi, and the Internet to find out what the country is like. Both sources of information were interesting but inadequate to describe a beautiful country and gentle people.

Through Project Overseas—Malawi, we were to assist the teachers' union of Malawi in putting on a three-week in-service for teachers wishing to improve their qualifications, in many cases, obtaining their high school graduation. The government of Malawi's declaration that all primary education should be free has resulted in a teacher shortage and extremely large classes. Teachers often have Grade 11 and three months' teacher training. They value education greatly and want to get more of it.

INSET as the in-service is known, was held at the Natural Resources College 20 minutes outside Lilongwe, the capital city of Malawi. The Natural Resources College was built with Canadian money in the 1980s. It was undergoing a management change while we were there, having been purchased by a Danish development agency. The campus has long, covered walkways connecting substantial brick classrooms. The two-foot moat around each building reminded me that we were there in the winter or dry season. It was hard to imagine that the moats contained downpours that would happen a few months later. I think it rained only once while we were there, and the evenings were



**Mary Leah DeZwart and children outside the gates of Chatata Primary School, Lilongwe, Malawi.**

positively chilly at times. So much for the people who said to me, "Won't it be really hot in Africa compared to Kamloops?"

Each Canadian teacher was paired with a co-tutor. I taught home economics, but more properly speaking, I assisted my more-than-competent co-tutor deliver a program intended to help the teachers obtain one of their Malawi State Certificate Equivalents. The MSCE is very similar to the British "O" levels. The home economics curriculum is being *Malawianized* as my co-tutor put it, but only Form One has been completed. It will be three more years before the government examinations catch up to the new curriculum. We therefore had to teach a curriculum that was based on distinctly non-Malawian everyday items. The gods must have been laughing the day I had to teach all about laundry. I'm notorious in my family for shrinking any-

thing wool and dyeing everything pink. Washing machines are not common in Malawi, so it was rub, knead, and squeeze, depending, of course, on whether you were using cotton, wool, or synthetics. I had to donate my gray sweater to the wool-blocking demonstration. It took three days to dry (and those nights are cool!). I bought a box of starch and learned to mix it up—just like pudding, my co-tutor said. Then I had to teach it. I borrowed my roommate's shirt and starched it so much she never had a wrinkle in it for the remaining time in Malawi.

Probably the highlight of the whole teaching experience was the day we did the food demonstrations. My co-tutor wanted me to teach all about flour mixtures. I figured this was no problem since I have been teaching foods and nutrition classes off and on since 1974.

Finding recipes was the first hurdle. They were all in grams. We guessed a little, interpolated a lot, and came up with four variations on the cake method, and one pastry recipe. The cakes mostly turned out, except possibly for the rubbing-in method, which was rather flat. The pastry was also a bit of a failure. I didn't realize how dependent I was on a pastry blender and lard rather than two knives and margarine. Buying the eggs was also an experience. I needed nine, but bought twelve just to be on the safe side. Lucky for me, because eggs come in plastic bags, not cartons, and I kneeled on three on the way home.

I also must admit that I kept doing things wrong. Fortunately my co-tutor knew the right way to do things in home economics. From her I learned to tilt the bowl at a precise 45-degree angle and use the back of the

wooden spoon when creaming sugar and margarine. I always thought you used a wooden spoon instead of a metal one because the sound of the latter would drive you nuts, hitting against the sides of the bowl. Apparently not. I probably shocked my co-tutor with my surprising lack of knowledge, but she was tactful and didn't embarrass me in front of the students. Like any good teacher, she provided me with a good reference book and the opportunity to make my own mistakes.

That is probably the whole point of Project Overseas. We learn from each other. As North Americans we go in with considerably more resources but much less humility. I came out with a bit more humility and a great deal of respect for our colleagues in Malawi; they put up with huge classes and a dearth of resources; they are, despite all this, friendly and warm-hearted to the Canadian visitors, and they are fervent believers in education.

Project Overseas is sponsored by the Canadian Teachers' Federation, with contributions from all Canadian provinces. I hope the BCTF will continue to be involved with Project Overseas. Going to Malawi fulfilled a life-long dream, and I am still processing everything I learned. I hope to share my hands-on experiences in Africa with my colleagues and students in as many ways as possible and to encourage continuing support of international projects.

**Mary Leah DeZwart is a teacher on educational leave from Kamloops Thompson School District.**

## Next summer, help street children in Oaxaca

by Jacqui Birchall

**H**ave you ever thought about spending your summer holidays helping homeless children, learning a new language, and meeting wonderful people from around the world who share your ideals? Oaxaca could be the place for you.

Oaxaca City, in the State of Oaxaca, is a one-hour flight south of Mexico City. Oaxaca (pronounced wa-HA-ka) is a beautiful Spanish-built colonial city constructed on the ruins of an Aztec settlement. The summers are delightful with temperatures much like those in Vancouver. The surrounding countryside is filled with Zapotec ruins, craft-making villages, and farms where large fields are tilled with hand-held, ox-drawn ploughs.

Oaxaca's beautiful and lively town square is a modest building that yearly changes the lives of some 300 displaced indigenous children and their families. These are mostly Triqui Indians and their parents who come to the city in search of work and food. They generally find neither, and the children frequently die on the streets of this beautiful tourist destination. The children, from toddlers on up, beg all day until about eleven o'clock at night. They drink contaminated water, eat cast out food, and too frequently contract deadly diseases. Poverty means their young bodies are placed in orange crates or Styrofoam cartons for burial. There is no place for a

funeral service for these, the disenfranchised.

Through my conversations with these captivating and charming street children, I discovered that a small organization is working for change. Oaxaca Streetchildren Grassroots, Inc. is a small non-government organization run by volunteers from around the world. The organization feeds the children, provides medical care, education, clothing, bathing facilities, and the opportunity to go all the way to college should they so desire. It provides classes in the centre so that the children can be brought up to the same level as their counterparts in the state-run schools. Extra schooling is available in the centre to allow them to be successful once they start school. The centre provides the money for school fees and uniforms so that the children can gain an education that will help to break the chain of poverty.

The centre needs volunteers. It needs educators, medical personnel, and clever all-round building and painting types who are willing to donate a few weeks a year to work with this wonderful organization. One need not speak Spanish. The Mexicans who run the centre all speak English, the children learn in English. Many of the volunteers are unilingual Brits. The centre particularly needs volunteers in July and August each year. Volunteers need to provide their own accommodation, meals, and flights. Accommodation is available from homestays, hostels, or very

comfortable hotels. The centre can help to find accommodation. If volunteers wish to include Spanish lessons as part of their trip, one of the local language schools offers a discount to the centre's volunteers.

The organization has outgrown its present building and needs funding to buy a building. The building has to be in the more expensive town centre because that is where the needy families gravitate in search of tourist dollars. Landlords are unwilling to rent to an organization that caters to some 300 children. Also because of rent controls, landlords will give leases for only six months to a year. Oaxaca Streetchildren Grassroots, Inc. needs more office space, more classrooms, more dining space, more storage space, and sadly, a chapel for the funerals.

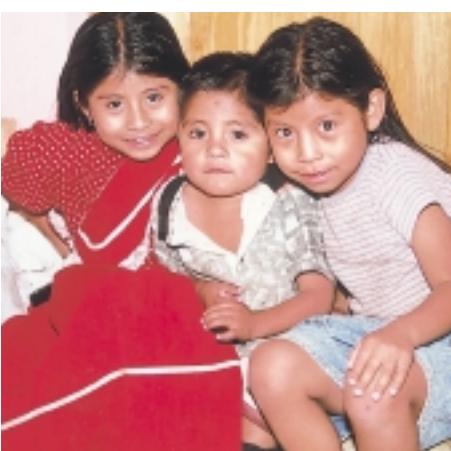
The executive director is Blandina Velasco Martinez; the educational director of the centre is Rubén de Jesús Flores. Flores was the first street child rescued by Harold and Jodi Bauman, the founders of the organization. Now in his 20s, he is university educated, bilingual, and fiercely energetic. Jodi Bauman spends her days searching the streets for children in despair. There is never enough room or enough money for the number of children. An Englishman, Lawrence Whitehouse, donated the money for the medical room. He and his wife were taken hostage in Yemen, and she was executed in front of him. He used the money donated at her funeral to build the beautiful and cheerfully

decorated medical room that is used to treat the children. As well as money, the centre needs medicine, shampoo, soap, and skin creams. This is the only place most of the children have to bathe and change their clothes. Sending clothing and shoe donations is not helpful to the centre as the organization is forced to pay heavy import duties. Taking these items personally to Oaxaca is better. It costs \$100 U.S. a year to support a primary aged child, \$175 U.S. to support a high school student, and \$60 U.S. per month feeds a family with four or five children.

The center offers the children classes in English, math, and art. In art classes, the children produce items for sale in the market. The children attend classes two hours a day, six days a week. The centre also has a library. The feeling there is joyous. There is a feeling of hope, of making a difference. There is a lot of time for the children to play, to eat, and to bathe. For the volunteers, it is an opportunity to have an unforgettable vacation, to meet like-minded interesting volunteers from around the world, and, of course to do something wonderful.

For more information, or to volunteer, e-mail Jodi Bauman [bauman@spersaoaxaca.com.mx](mailto:bauman@spersaoaxaca.com.mx) and Rubén de Jesús Flores or Blandina Velasco Martinez at [streetchildren@spersaoaxaca.com.mx](mailto:streetchildren@spersaoaxaca.com.mx).

**Jacqui Birchall teaches at Frank Hurt Secondary School, Surrey, and is a member of the Teacher Newsmagazine Advisory Board.**



JACQUI BIRCHALL PHOTOS

**Oaxaca Streetchildren Inc. need educators to donate a few weeks of their time to help educate homeless children.**

# WORLD TEA

## BCTF celebrates World Teachers' Day with African music and friendship

**O**n October 5, 2000, the seventh annual World Teachers' Day, the halls of the BCTF building resounded with the lively rhythms of Zimbabwean marimbas played by Eric Hartman and his Grade 6 and 7 students from Shaughnessy Elementary School. Their songs contributed enormously to the World Teachers' Day event, which took on an African theme this year.

Federation President David Chudnovsky called from Johannesburg, where he and Executive Director Ken Novakowski were representing the BCTF at the 10th anniversary celebrations of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union. SADTU President Willie Madisha offered greetings from a huge celebration that brought together teachers from throughout Southern Africa, and Northern Europe as well as Canada. The BCTF has a special place in the hearts of South African teachers, Madisha said, because of the history of support and friendship between the two unions.

**"Here in Canada, where we have one of the world's finest public school systems..."**

BCTF Second Vice-President Jinny Sims told those gathered for World Teachers' Day that there are about 55 million teachers worldwide, serving about one billion students.

"Here in Canada, where we have one of the world's finest public school systems, it's easy to forget that the vast majority of teachers have to struggle to give their students the most basic education," she said. "Around the world, 125 million children have never attended school at all. Most of them are girls. Another 150 million young children start primary school, but leave before they can read or write."

She explained that's why Canadian teachers have joined Education International and Oxfam Canada's campaign, "Education Now." Through the campaign, teachers are calling for a global action plan to make quality universal primary education a reality by 2015. They are also urging the International Monetary Fund to relieve debt in developing countries so they can devote more to public education and other social programs.

Even though everyone recognizes the importance of education to a society's health and well-being, the sad truth is that most of the world's teachers live at or below the poverty line, Sims said. For example, almost half a million teachers in Nigeria went on strike in October to back their demand



*Shaughnessy Elementary School students delighted the audience with their playing of the Zimbabwean marimbas. David Hamutenya of the Namibian Teachers' Union speaks with Don Reader and Jinny Sims.*

for a raise in average teachers' salaries from \$130 to \$155 per month.

In many countries, teachers who dare to assert their rights are often at risk of harassment or even violence. Don and Lois Warthe, BCTF members working as volunteers with street kids in Bolivia, wrote to the Federation:

"As World Teachers' Day approaches, consider those

***...the sad truth is that most of the world's teachers live at or below the poverty line...***

teachers in Bolivia who have been on strike for over 15 days. The government has fired them, tear-gassed some of them, arrested some of them, and threatened to terminate the school year early. At least 10 people have died, 100s arrested,

and many more injured. The military is responding with tear gas and live ammunition fired into the crowds."

In Bolivia and other repressive regimes, the authorities are threatened by the spread of literacy and democratic ideals. Hence teachers are often among their prime targets.

In the spring, BCTF leaders and members wrote to the Mexican government on behalf of Hugo Aboites, a distinguished professor and education researcher who was subjected to a protracted campaign of threats and harassment by the judicial police. He wrote back saying, "Your letters are a contribution to the basic individual and academic rights of one person, and to the defense of public education in our country. Thank you."

Sims said, "It is through our relationships with teachers like Hugo Aboites that we come to truly witness the nobility of our

calling, and to understand how terribly lucky we are to practise our profession here in the freedom and prosperity of Canada."

***In many countries, teachers who dare to assert their rights are often at risk of harassment or even violence.***

B.C. teachers try to share our resources and skills with colleagues overseas. At present, we are working with teachers' organizations in 17 countries of Latin America and Africa. Since 1981, the BCTF has committed 1.8% of dues revenue to the W.R. Long International Solidarity Fund. This adds up to about \$400,000 annually that goes toward this important work with colleagues abroad.

- Nancy Knickerbocker

## Don Reader wins 2000 BCTF International Solidarity Award

**T**he 1999 appointment calendar of the Namibia National Teachers' Union contains a photo of Don Reader with a caption identifying him as "Mr. Namibia." How is it that a retired Vancouver teacher could be honoured in a publication of NANTU, a union halfway around the world? It's because partnership, not charity, is the central philosophy of the BCTF's International Solidarity Program, and Reader exemplifies that spirit of collegiality and solidarity.

"The affection expressed in christening him 'Mr. Namibia' is probably the best reward that Don could get in recognition of his work," said BCTF First Vice-President Neil Worboys. "But the International Solidarity Award is a way of saying that Don's colleagues here at home also recognize and honour his contribution to the solidarity of teachers around the globe."

As a former colony of South Africa, Namibia also had to struggle to free itself from apartheid. That has meant struggling to rebuild its education system upon non-racial lines and recreating all aspects of the curriculum to reflect equity and social justice.

Reader first worked in Namibia in the summers of 1994-96, while he was still teaching. He worked in so many regions of the country that by the end of his three months, about one in ten Namibian teachers had taken part in his workshops! He also hosted and developed programs for NANTU officers who came to B.C. in 1998 and 1999 to take part in BCTF and Justice Institute training programs.

After he retired, Reader spent three months in Namibia working with NANTU, and during those months he found a special place in the hearts of Namibian teachers, especially a junior high school science teacher and NANTU activist named David Hamutenya.

Hamutenya was delighted to be able to be in Vancouver for the award presentation to honour Reader, who his children have come to call "Uncle MacDonald." He spoke of the tremendous regard that Namibian teachers have for Reader, and for the BCTF.

Reader thanked the BCTF for the honour, and for the opportunity to make Namibia his second home. "It has been a most rewarding way to end my teaching career," he said. He spoke of the great wealth and poverty of Namibia, the beauty of its contrasting landscapes of desert and lush river valleys, and he expressed his deep affection for Namibians, "a beautiful, bright, articulate people."

As for the teachers of Namibia, he said: "Their commitment is the same, but their struggle is far greater than ours."

# ACHERS' DAY

## Public education

**John Ralston Saul, well-known internationally for his growing impact on political and economic thought, spoke at a convocation at Simon Fraser University on October 5, 2000. The following is an excerpt.**

**R**igour is perhaps not the first word you would expect to hear from me. But think of rigour as a sense of self—of yourselves—of your worth as individuals, responsible individuals, as citizens, as members of a society.

You have the good fortune to live in a rich and exciting province, to have gone to a good public university in a country where the words *public education* have been interchangeable with the word *democracy* for 150 years. Let me be more precise: a country where the words *universal, properly funded, public education* is just another way of saying *democracy*.

Unlike our mythological mother country and our closest neighbour to the south, we turned our backs on the class divisions implicit in a less than universal public education system. And we did so as an integral part of becoming a democratic nation.

I say this today because I feel that your generation somehow is being blamed for wanting public education, for exercising your birthright; blamed for not treating it as a utilitarian training, the purpose of which is to produce employees.

Robert Baldwin, with Louis LaFontaine (the fathers of our democracy), defended the first important public education act in 1843, 157 years ago: "Surely those who are so fortunate as to belong to the favoured class, could not be so narrow-minded and so blind to their own interests, as to object to being taxed to reflect this great and important project."

Joseph Howe, the great Nova Scotia democrat, in 1848: "If you were my brother I would not permit your interests to weigh a feather against a trust so sacred as I believe our public school system to be."

Amor de Cosmos, who with John Robson led the struggle for democracy in British Columbia, spoke always of that "great principle" public education. And who was against it? Remember this whenever you hear arguments against the public system. Those who opposed public education were those who opposed democracy. They were known as the family-company—compact.

What was the rigorously defined and declared purpose of the great public education act of British Columbia in 1872? "To give every child in the province such knowledge as will fit him to become a useful and intelligent citizen in after years."

Note the operative word, *citizen*. Even in that small, poor society, utility was seen as an element subsidiary to citizenship. Your utility must serve your citizenship. Not the other

way around. Education in Canada has always been predicated first and foremost on your role as responsible individuals. Not on your role as employees—useful or not.

Much of the dubious questioning of the necessary universality of education is dependent upon forgetting our past, our foundations.

What we do know about ourselves and our civilization is that public education has made us a successful society. What's more, we have been willing to pay for it as citizens, as taxpayers.

This is quite different from saddling young citizens with debt levels upon graduation, levels which have tripled in a decade.

There is a cloudy, punitive argument that says students must bear this burden almost as a penalty for wishing to be educated. Curiously enough, those who argue this will often be those who also argue for greater deregulation and competition. They say they want a risk-taking population in an open market. And yet they also want graduates to begin their adult lives as a modern version of indentured labourers.

High debt levels merely slow down our graduates; slow down risk taking, slow down the marketplace. This is a system designed to turn active, imaginative graduates into passive employees.

Let's be clear about the effect of unsustainable costs and the resulting debts on individual students. Wherever tuition goes down, enrolment goes up. And where does the increase in students come from? From those with less money.

The challenge of democracy—that which makes it a difficult system to live with, but the best system nevertheless—is that it requires us to look beyond ourselves and our own needs, to the needs of the greater good. If we are rigorous and determined, the public good will be served. And we, as part of it, will benefit.

Source: *Simon Fraser University News*, October 19, 2000.

## SADTU now a strong, well-organized union

by Ken Novakowski

**P**icture this: A large meeting of teachers at Durban City Hall, in South Africa. And during the meeting, while the president was speaking, teachers stand up and start singing, clapping, and dancing.

That is one of my fondest memories of my recent trip to South Africa. David Chudnovsky and I travelled to South Africa to participate in the 10th anniversary celebrations of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU). We were there because, of all the teacher unions we have worked with through the BCTF International Solidarity program, SADTU has become one of our closest friends. We were there to acknowledge the significant success SADTU has realized, growing from a fledgling multiracial teacher union 10 years ago into one of South Africa's strongest and well-organized unions. And we were there to recognize the influential role that SADTU is beginning to play in Education International and the leadership role it has assumed among teacher unions in Africa. We were honoured to be invited and to have our work with SADTU so recognized.

The event in Durban, on October 2, was one of many that David and I took part in, along with a host of international guests representing teacher unions from the United States, Japan, the Nordic countries of Europe, and from other parts of Africa. The occasion in Durban was the Kwa-Zulu Natal Provincial celebration of SADTU's 10th anniversary. David represented all international guests when he addressed the Durban teacher meeting on the importance of teacher solidarity.

During my visit, I learned how similar are the issues that we face as teachers in different parts of the world. There are differences, to be sure, but each

year, in virtually every country, teacher organizations tackle issues like education funding, testing and assessment, teacher certification, and collective bargaining.

The BCTF played a key role in helping SADTU organize itself when democracy was not yet a reality in South Africa. As part of our international solidarity work in southern Africa, we sent cadres of B.C. teachers to work with SADTU on basic union training programs. David was a trainer who made several trips to South Africa over the past six years. Wherever we travelled in

*...each year, in virtually every country, teacher organizations tackle issues like education funding, testing and assessment, teacher certification, and collective bargaining.*

South Africa, David was well known to a lot of SADTU members, who appreciated the role he had played on behalf of the BCTF in helping them get their union organized. And while SADTU learned a lot from the BCTF in its early years of existence, it is clear now that we B.C. teachers could learn a lot from SADTU. I gained a heightened awareness of the importance struggle plays in enhancing one's understanding of the process of social change.

To commemorate World Teachers' Day, on October 5, we attended a large rally of teachers in Witbank, in Mpumalanga province. David and SADTU President Willie Madisha participated in a telephone hook-up that evening with a World Teachers' Day activity at the BCTF Building in Vancouver. Willie, who is also president of COSATU, a major labour central organization in South Africa, was the keynote speaker at the BCTF AGM earlier this year.

Another highlight of our visit occurred on Friday, October 6, the actual anniversary of SADTU's founding. The day culminated in a huge banquet with a long list of speakers and presentations. On behalf of the BCTF, we presented SADTU with a First Nations woodcarving to commemorate the anniversary.

All our time in South Africa was well scheduled and busy. In addition to a morning tour of schools in Soweto Township, we participated in seminars on topics like teacher unity, the role of parents in the education system, the role of student organizations in policy making and school governance, and HIV/AIDS and the responsibilities of teachers and their union in fighting the pandemic.

David served as a panelist at a seminar on globalization and public education. He identified some of the initiatives the BCTF has taken in raising awareness about globalization, including the Public Education: Not For Sale conference we held in May with the Coalition for Public Education. It became clear as the seminar discussion continued that we are part of a world-wide movement of teachers, trade unions, and other progressive organizations taking on the threats posed by globalization to public services like education.

When I commented to a SADTU activist how impressed I was by the spontaneous singing and dancing I had witnessed in Durban, I was told that the SADTU Executive Committee has a vice-president responsible for culture and another one to deal with sports. The union organizes singing, dancing, and other cultural competitions among the provinces, and of course they have sports competitions. Didn't I say earlier that we could learn a lot from SADTU?

I left South Africa feeling proud of the important role the BCTF played in helping SADTU get started and very pleased that we have such good friends on the other side of the world.

*Ken Novakowski is the BCTF's executive director.*



(Left) Teachers' meeting at the Zebediela Branch, Northern Province. (Right) David Chudnovsky and Ken Novakowski present a gift from the BCTF to SADTU President Willie Madisha in Durban for the Kwa-Zulu Natal Provincial celebration of SADTU's 10th anniversary, October 2, 2000.

## OPINION

# Sanctions against Iraq

by Patrik Parkes

**O**n Saturday, September 23, 2000, Dennis Halliday, a former assistant secretary general of the UN, was in Vancouver to speak about the devastating effects of U.S.-led UN sanctions against Iraq. Halliday outlined some of the main issues and related anecdotes from his time spent in Iraq to an audience of more than 900 people. The sanctions against Iraq are of concern to all who value human rights. Specifically, it is of concern that Canada has endorsed these sanctions. And it is of concern to teachers that Iraqis' right to education has been undermined by the sanctions.

**Since the war and the onset of sanctions, birth weights have declined, and 30% of Iraqi children are at risk from acute malnutrition.**

Of specific concern to public school teachers is the prevention of basic school supplies—paper, pencils, and textbooks—from entering Iraq under the sanctions. Iraq used to have an education system that was free and universal. Now, having little cash, the Iraqi government has had to start charging tuition for even elementary education. Many children can't attend school anyway, forced to beg or prostitute themselves to earn money for their families. A generation of Iraqi children is growing up uneducated, angry, and isolated from the outside world.

When Iraq was prosperous, it imported 70% of its food supply, and it could afford to provide free healthcare for its citizens. Now Iraq is unable to import sufficient quantities of food, is banned from importing medicines and other medical supplies, and has no money to repair infrastructure destroyed by mainly U.S. bombing. During the Gulf War, 28 hospitals and 80% of all water and sewage systems were destroyed. Since the war and the onset of sanctions, birth weights have declined, and 30% of Iraqi children are at risk from acute

**Because of the sanctions, Iraqi people are unable to access basic medical necessities, and they are being starved to death.**

malnutrition. As a direct consequence of the sanctions, 6,000 Iraqi infants die each month. To make things worse, many are born with severe birth deformities resulting from

the use of depleted uranium in U.S. and U.K. bombs. Effectively, what is happening to Iraq can be called genocide. Because of the sanctions, Iraqi people are unable to access basic medical necessities, and they are being starved to death. The sanctions violate international law, which prohibits the starvation of civilians, and the destruction of things indispensable to human survival, as methods of warfare.

The ostensible purpose of the sanctions is to contain Saddam Hussein and prevent Iraq's weapons of mass destruction from being a threat. Dennis Halliday has suggested other motives for the sanctions. One is to promote the threat of Iraq in order to increase U.S. arms sales to Iraq's neighbours. Another is to control the supply of oil—"a form of neo-colonialism applied by the U.S. to dominate the Arab world." Indeed, keeping Iraqi oil off the world market helps inflate world oil prices, of benefit to U.S. oil companies.

Unfortunately, the Canadian government endorses the sanctions. At a time when the death of Pierre Trudeau has caused many Canadians to reflect on their nation, recalling the more independent image we used to project abroad, it is a great shame that Canada so blindly lends its help to exploits such as the sanctions against Iraq. Halliday remarked that Ottawa is acting as a branch of Washington. By supporting the sanctions and other injustices

**The sanctions violate international law, which prohibits the starvation of civilians, and the destruction of things indispensable to human survival, as methods of warfare.**

such as the bombing of Yugoslavia, Canada is projecting an international image of servitude to U.S. whims. This is an issue of serious concern to all Canadians.

Canadians need to pressure the government—through letter-writing campaigns, or other means—to end its support for the sanctions. Teachers can raise awareness by including the sanctions against Iraq in discussions of current events. The sanctions are of interest to social-issues clubs as well. If you require further information, or petitions, please contact Campaign to End the Sanctions Against the People of Iraq (CESAPI), c/o Ken Hiebert, (604) 253-1459.

Patrik Parkes is a teacher on call in the Coquitlam School District.



# Schools: A factory model

by Ed Harrison and Rob Sandhu

**E**arly 20th Century Education leads Teachers into the 21st Century."

Imagine that headline as a lead into a *Vancouver Sun* story about our education system. But in fact that is the situation. Back in the early 20th century, Franklin Bobbitt, at the Harvard School of Education, was proposing an education system that viewed the child as the raw material and the school as the factory that would mould the student into a marketable product. At each stage in the process, the managers were to constantly check the product for consistency using specified objectives. Within Bobbitt's vision of curriculum and schooling, the B.C. ministry's view of education would sit very comfortably.

**There is no room for debate about what is worthwhile in education...**

Prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs) clearly describe what the teacher is supposed to teach in a particular subject. When curricula were first developed in the mid-1900s, teachers working on them thought that they would be able to describe their subject area in more detail than ever before. PLOs started out as Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs). But if something were intended, the ministry testing branch could not be sure it had been taught. Thus ILOs became PLOs. Further, it was with some dismay that teacher curriculum developers were told by ministry representatives that they could only have 240 PLOs per subject. This raises the question, What do they do if the PLOs don't fully describe a subject? They link the ministry with a particular conception of schooling: Schools are factories that are to be controlled at every stage. The ministry's assumption is that if you control what is taught through PLOs, you control the process of education. That is not unlike Bobbitt's vision.

The performance-based outcomes also extend the control of the ministry. They are based on the model of the school as a factory. *Performance* is a term drawn from the theatre: the student becomes the performer, the one who performs for the entertainment of others. Performance is indeed theatre given that the PLOs never reflected the basis of a particular pro-

gram or course. But as long as the process of giving the performance is standardized and measured, students will be thought to be educated. Of course, the question that is begged is, Is this really education?

Where the factory-system approach to education begins to fall apart is around the issues related to accreditation. Accreditation is designed to ensure consistency with ministry standards of what constitutes a good school. But the time that was spent getting to that point and the speciousness of the questions has led to a fundamental questioning of the reasons for accreditation. Teachers have finally raised the question about the validity of the process. But the ministry insists that the process, flawed or not, continue.

The questions of process and substance reach a pinnacle over advanced-credit issues related to summer school. Questions related to marks (one school reports an average course mark in SS11 as 78%) and topics covered indicate that the process—that students go through the course rather than the substance (that there is meaningful discussion of the issues and time to reflect upon the material)—is more important.

**...the accountants factory model that Bobbitt suggested in the last century has come true.**

The process attitude toward education is a response to what the public wants: It wants accountability at any price. There is no room for debate about what is worthwhile in education, of what should be taught and how. It is the process that politicians want to be able to point to with the assurance that the "bang for the buck" can be measured and accounted for: the accountants factory model that Bobbitt suggested in the last century has come true.

Ed Harrison teaches at New Caledonia Senior Secondary School, Terrace, and Rob Sandhu teaches at the VSB/UBC Transition Program, Vancouver.

# Women in Canada

**C**anadian women have made tremendous strides in their educational attainment in the past several decades. In 1996, 12% of all women aged 15 and over had a university degree—double the figure in 1981 (6%) and four times that in 1971 (3%). Women, however, are still somewhat less likely than men to have a university degree.

The overall difference in the proportions of women and men with a university degree is likely to narrow further in the future, since women currently make up the majority of full-time students in universities. However, women's share of full-time university enrolment declines at higher levels of study. While they make up the majority of full-time students in most university departments, women continue to account for a minority of full-time enrolment in mathematics and science faculties.

In 1999, 55% of all women aged 15 and over had jobs, up from 42% in 1976. As a result, women accounted for 46% of the work force in 1999, up from 37% in 1976. A substantial

## ...women currently make up the majority of full-time students in universities.

proportion of employed women work part-time. In 1999, 28% of all employed women worked less than 30 hours per week, compared with just 10% of employed men. The employment rate of women with children has grown particularly sharply in the past two decades, especially for those with preschool-aged children. By 1999, 61% of women with children less than age three were employed, more than double the figure in 1976.

The majority of employed women continue to work in occupations in which women have traditionally been concentrated. In 1999, 70% of all employed women were working in teaching, nursing and related health occupations, clerical or other administrative positions, and sales and service occupations. The proportion of women employed in traditionally female-dominated occupations, however, has slowly declined since 1987, when 74% were in such jobs.

Women have increased their representation in several professional fields in recent years. In 1999, women made up 49% of business and financial professionals, up from 41% in 1987. Women also made up 47% of all doctors and dentists in 1999, up from 44% in 1987. Women have also increased their share of total employment in managerial positions from 29% in 1987 to 35% in 1999. In

contrast, only 20% of professionals employed in the natural sciences, engineering, and mathematics in 1999 were women, a figure that has changed little since 1987 (17%). Even when employed, women are still largely responsible for looking after their homes and families. In 1998, women employed full-time with a spouse and at least one child

## The average earnings of employed women are still substantially lower than those of men.

under age 19 at home spent 4.9 hours per day on unpaid work, an hour and a half more per day than their male counterparts.

Women make up a disproportionate share of those with low incomes. In 1997, 2.8

million women, 19% of the total female population, were living in low-income situations, compared with 16% of the male population. Also in 1997, almost half of unattached senior women (49%) and 46% of all families headed by lone-parent mothers had incomes that fell below the low-income cut-offs.

The average earnings of employed women are still substantially lower than those of men. In 1997, women working full-time, full-year had average earnings of just under \$31,000 or 73% of their male counterparts' earnings.

However, the average earnings of these women is up from 68% in 1990 and around 64% in the early 1980s.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods, or data quality of this release, contact Colin Lindsay (613) 951-2603, F: (613) 951-0387, [lindcol@statcan.ca](mailto:lindcol@statcan.ca), Housing, Family, and Social Statistics Division.

# Pumping gas: Big oil companies and Alberta government profit

by Hugh Mackenzie

In July 1998, the price of regular, unleaded gasoline in Toronto was 52.5¢ per litre. At the end of September 2000, regular gas was selling for 76.9¢ per litre. That's an increase of 24.4¢ per litre—45%—in just over two years.

There is an obvious explanation: the 145%-plus increase in crude oil prices. But, that explanation has attracted surprisingly little scrutiny.

Instead, with the enthusiastic encouragement of the oil industry, the debate over what to do about this extraordinary increase in price has focussed on gasoline taxes.

A visit to the web site of any of the major oil companies reveals the now-familiar statistical core of their argument: bar charts breaking the price of gasoline in Canada into its various components, including taxes; bar charts comparing prices, with and without taxes, in Canada and the United States; and bar charts comparing gasoline prices in Canada with those in European countries and Japan.

The figures make their points. Taxes are shown to be the largest single component in gasoline prices in Canada. The price differential between Canada and the United States is shown to be entirely attributable to differences in tax levels. And Canadian gasoline prices are demonstrated to be lower than those in Europe and Japan.

Points powerfully made and absolutely irrelevant.

Irrelevant, because they offer no explanation at all for the increase in retail gasoline prices in the past year.

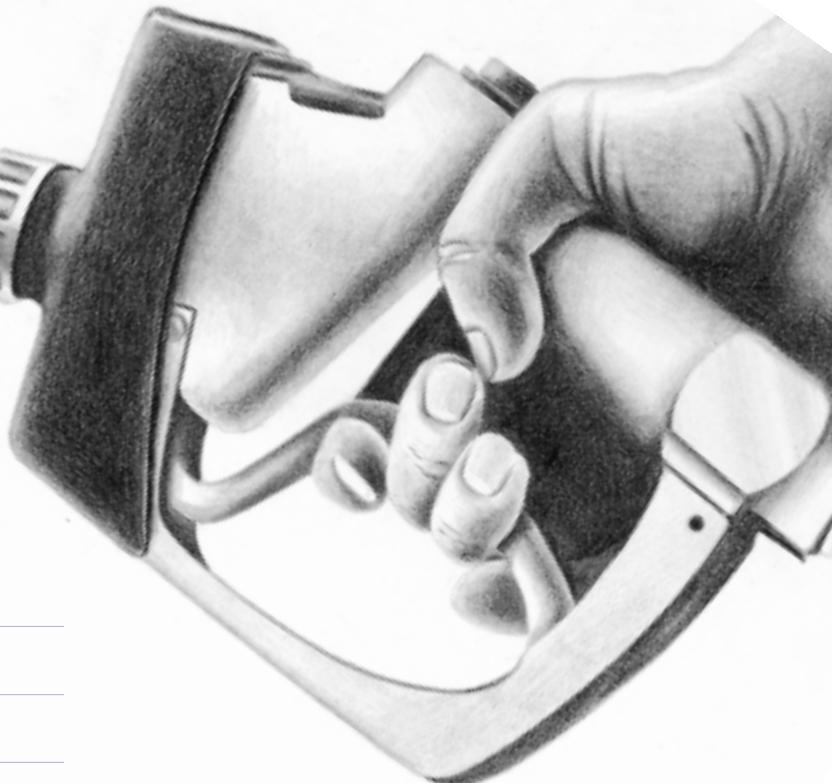
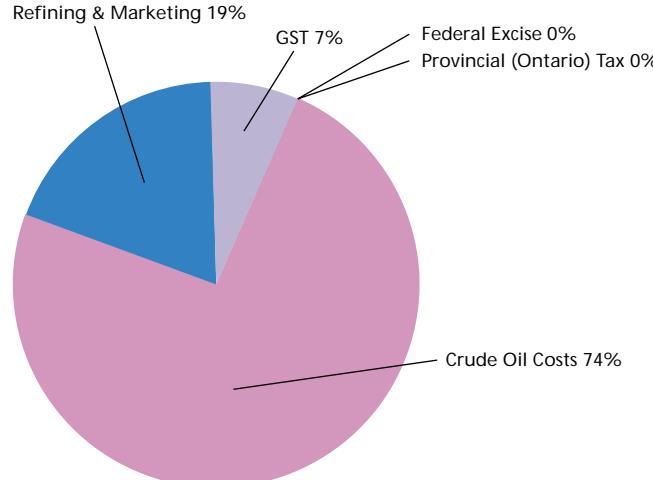
Based on data provided by the Canadian Petroleum Institute and Shell Canada, however, the details are readily apparent.

Figure 1 shows how retail prices at the pump broke down in July 1998, compared with September 2000. In July 1998, of the 52.5¢ per litre price at the pump, crude oil accounted for 12.5¢; Federal excise taxes 10¢; Ontario gas taxes 14.7¢; and the GST 3.4¢; leaving 11.9¢ for refining and marketing.

FIGURE 1  
Gasoline Price Breakdown



FIGURE 2  
Sources of Gasoline Price Increases



In September 2000, the retail price of 76.9¢ breaks down as follows: crude oil 30.6¢; Federal excise taxes 10¢; Ontario gas taxes 14.7¢; and the GST 5¢; leaving 16.6¢ for refining and marketing.

Figure 2 explains the price increase. Of the 24.4¢ per litre increase, only 7% is attributable to taxes; 74% is attributable to crude oil; 19% is attributable to refining and marketing.

And where does that increase go? We are encouraged to believe that the 18.1¢ per litre increase in crude oil prices disappears into the coffers of the Middle East and other members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. In fact, most of it stays right here in Canada—pure profit to Canadian crude oil producers. The 4.7¢ per litre increase for refining and marketing is right here in Canada as well. And, assuming that refining and marketing were profitable in 1998, that increase is pure profit as well.

Small wonder the oil industry in Canada has been forced to make the shocking revelation that it will be forced to pay corporate income taxes this year.

So in the face of these facts, what are Canadian right-

wingers focussing on? Not the windfall crude oil profits of the Canadian oil industry. Not the jump in pure profit in refining and marketing. No, they are focussed on the GST increase (a trivial 1.6¢ per litre) or the GST on provincial and federal excise and gasoline taxes (an equally trivial 1.7¢ per litre).

Why? Because any other target would put the Tories and the Alliance in conflict with major donors in the oil industry during an election. Stockwell Day, in particular, has dreams of cleaning up in the political fundraising race in the oil patch.

Blaming taxes for high oil prices is "on message" for an Alliance Party whose political future depends on its ability to sell Canadians lower taxes while disguising the implications for public services. The real message? Don't confuse us with facts, we know what side our bread is buttered on.

Hugh Mackenzie is research director for the United Steelworkers of America, and a research associate of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

An electronic version of this piece is available from the CCPA web page: [www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca).

## Professional development for teachers on call

by Maggie Kinnear

All teachers, including teachers on call, need professional development to learn and grow professionally in order to enhance their teaching and learning. Even though it is the responsibility of all teachers to make a continuing effort to develop professionally, the needs of the TOC are often overlooked when PD programs are organized. TOCs often feel isolated because they are excluded from school-based social and professional activities.

It is therefore very important that TOC contacts ensure that professional development activities are scheduled throughout the school year in their districts to meet the professional and social needs of the TOCs in their locals.

The BCTF offers workshops specifically designed for the TOC. These workshops give TOCs the opportunity to network with one another while they learn to be more effective in the classroom by learning new strategies in areas such as classroom management or communication skills. The workshops also assist the TOC in making a connection with the BCTF that provides support and resources for them. During workshops, TOCs will learn about employment rights and protections provided for them by the collective agreement.

To book a teacher-on-call workshop, consult the *BCTF Professional Development Services Book* for workshop criteria and booking procedures. The workshops, booked through the PD Division, are facilitated by BCTF PD associates who are also TOCs. Several workshops or modules offer a wide choice to TOCs. Before the workshop is booked, it is important to establish the professional development needs of the participants so an appropriate workshop choice can be made. It is also necessary to establish a preferred and alternative date (booking must be made at least one month prior to requested date), the venue, and the number of participants (a minimum of 12 participants is recommended). A BCTF PD associate will then contact you to discuss expectations and module choices. The BCTF will make the necessary travel and accommodation arrangements and cover the costs for the associate. The contact person is responsible for booking the facilities and making arrangements for refreshments. Associates recommend scheduling workshops for TOCs on professional development days, after school, or on a Saturday. Most TOCs do not want to miss a teaching assignment on a regular school day to attend a workshop.

Organizing a teacher-on-call mini-conference is another professional development option for TOCs. Mini-conferences have been successfully organized and well attended in several of the larger districts in the province. Information on how to organize a mini-conference can be found in the *Teachers on Call: Taking on the Challenge* resource binder 2000-01 (TOC contacts received the binder at the summer conference 2000).

Support your colleagues, and book a workshop soon.

Maggie Kinnear is a TOC in School District 51 (Boundary).

## How to become a BCTF-endorsed candidate for the B.C. College of Teachers

**T**he B.C. College of Teachers is the regulatory body of the teaching profession in B.C. The college has a focussed mandate: teacher education, teacher certification, and member discipline.

Responsibility for governing the college rests with the 20-person council. Fifteen of 20 council members are elected by the membership. Five council members are appointed (two by the cabinet, two by the minister of education, and one by the deans of the faculties of education).

Council members make policy decisions, make quasi-judicial decisions concerning individuals and institutions, represent the college on various external committees, and communicate with members.

Elections are held in each of 15 zones. Elections are held in even-numbered years in the even-numbered zones and in odd-numbered years in the odd-numbered zones. This year, elections will be in East Kootenay (1), Okanagan (3), Fraser Valley (5), Delta-Richmond (7), Metro (9), North Central (11) South Island (13), and North Coast (15). The term of office is two years beginning August 1 and ending July 31.

The BCTF has established a policy that provides for the selection of a BCTF-endorsed candidate in each zone where an election is being held. Only active BCTF members are eligible for BCTF endorsement as candidates in B.C. College of Teachers' elections.

Each local has the right to select one nominee. This nominee must be endorsed by an executive, delegate assembly, or general meeting of the local. Each local nominee must undertake to abide by the endorsement process.

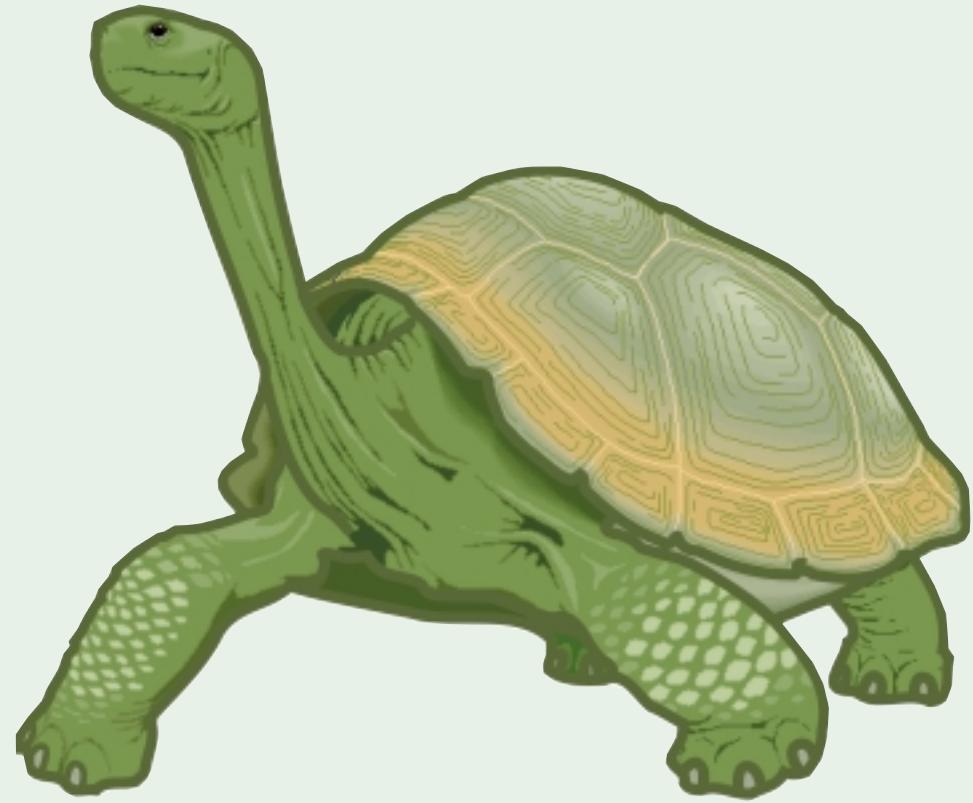
Once a local has nominated a candidate, the name of the candidate is forwarded to the BCTF zone co-ordinator (to be determined by the local presidents in each college zone). The zone co-ordinator ensures that each local in the zone conducts a vote to determine the zone's BCTF-endorsed candidate by secret ballot in accordance with BCTF procedures.

The BCTF will publicize, among members, the names of all BCTF-endorsed candidates. The BCTF provides funding to assist local nominees in seeking endorsement to become the BCTF-endorsed candidate in a college zone. The BCTF also provides funding to assist endorsed candidates in the college elections.

If you are interested in being considered as a local nominee for the BCTF-endorsed candidate in a zone, please contact your local president by January 15, 2001.

If you have any questions about BCTF college election procedures, contact Mike Lombardi, BCTF staff, 1-800-663-9163, local 1849, e-mail [mlombardi@bctf.bc.ca](mailto:mlombardi@bctf.bc.ca), or your local president.

# Teaching and turtles



by Sandra Gadsby

I will begin with the disclaimer that I am neither a teacher of turtles nor a zoologist. I am a social studies and fine arts teacher at an alternate secondary school in Maple Ridge. Our small, rural school provides 85 students with an alternate way of meeting their educational needs. Some of our students have behavioural problems compounded by learning disabilities. Many are at risk of becoming high school dropouts or worse. Our students are also very bright and challenging to teach.

Part of the challenge involves reconceptualizing curriculum and how we teach it. Our students have not been able to be successful with an inflexible and externally defined set of intended learning outcomes. So we adapt curriculum to fit the student. Here is a story about my efforts to do this with a student named L.B.

L.B. wasn't particularly interested in contemporary Canadian history or geography, as his homeland was China. L.B., like his peers in our program, select the courses on which to focus. Social studies was never at the top of his list. He had completed all of this Grade 10 courses except mine.

One afternoon, while talking to L.B., I discovered that we share an interest in turtles. As an art teacher and painter, I had been researching First Nations symbolism and was intrigued by the story of Turtle Island, the original name given to North America by the Cree. The First Nations unit in the Adult Basic Education program discusses Turtle Island and introduces students to alternate "world views." I saw turtles as a conceptual "hook" to make social studies more interesting to L.B.

In *A Study of Canada*, Anita Olsen (1988, p. 4-5) describes Canadian Aboriginal history and issues. She begins by examining theories about the origin of the first peoples to Canada, beginning with early European explorers. Olsen notes however, that history books often exclude Aboriginal accounts of the first people. Olsen introduces students to the

Cree story of the Earth's beginning. She notes that while other First Nations people's oral histories have different versions of this story, the themes are similar. Olsen observes that different versions of this story have been handed down for thousands of years, but none make any references to The People coming from anywhere other than Turtle Island.

### The story of earth's beginning: Turtle Island

The story begins with a world filled with water in which the animal inhabitants spend their time swimming. The animals tire and feel the need to rest and live on solid earth. The leader of the animals, Bear, calls a meeting asking for volunteers to dive down to depths of the waters and retrieve earth to the surface to be placed on Turtle's back.

The earth would be used to form an island on which all the animals could live. Mountains, hills, and vegetation would be added later.

All of the large and powerful animal inhabitants are unsuccessful in their attempts to find earth, except the lowliest Muskrat. Muskrat was gone for three days and three nights. He was thought to be drowned by the other animal inhabitants. He was later found dead, floating on his back holding a small ball of earth in his little fist.

As Bear predicted, the earth was placed on Turtle's back and eventually became the island on which all of the animal inhabitants and The People came to live.

### Turtles, Turtle Island, and L.B.

I approached L.B. with an idea for an alternate assignment in which he would research metaphysics, Turtle Island, and his culture. His daunting task was to write a paper connecting those ideas. The following story is the result of our collaboration. We are both proud of his work. L.B. has passed the course and is returning to China with his Grade 10 complete. Hopefully, he will also return with a different way of looking at his world.

Sandra Gadsby teaches at SD 42 Alternative Secondary School, Maple Ridge.

### World views, turtles, and me

Turtles play important roles in different cultures. Examples include the Cree story of Turtle Island and the celestial animals in Chinese culture. I am a Canadian with Chinese ancestry.

I will begin with looking at my own culture. The turtle is one of four celestial animals of Chinese mythology. The turtle is symbolized in landscapes as a protective hill around a house in Feng Shui. (Feng Shui refers to the ancient Chinese art of creating and maintaining harmony in one's environment.) The turtle also represents longevity, as some turtles live longer than humans. The Galapagos Tortoise lives up to 200 years. Humans could never reach that milestone.

The story of the Tortoise and the Hare that I heard as a child in Canada shows the wisdom of the turtle. Both the tortoise and the hare were to race to see who would finish first. The hare is really cocky and thinks he is going to win the race because the tortoise is so slow. The hare goes ahead hopping at a steady pace, but his arrogance is so great that he stops for breaks and takes a nap. Because of his arrogance, he loses the race. He was sleeping while the tortoise won the race.

The tortoise also has a role in metaphysics. According to the Cree story of the beginning of the Earth, the world at first was filled with nothing but water. The animals spent their time swimming because there was no land. They realized that they needed land to rest and feed on. The leader, Bear, called a meeting for the animals to discuss the problem. The solution was for the animals to grab the Earth and put it on Turtle's back.

I think the turtle is important in our stories about the world. If it wasn't for the turtle's back, the animals would not have anything to put the Earth on. The celestial animals are important in my culture and to me personally. They are fun to raise. They are very peaceful and soothing to watch. I have two pet turtles of my own and I love them very much.

L.B.

## Pensions

# Joint trusteeship approved by 87%

Teachers gave overwhelming approval to the tentative agreement regarding the joint trusteeship of the Teachers' Pension Plan. Eighty-seven percent of the 10,473 who voted, agreed to the deal.

What are the next steps in the process following BCTF and government approval?

While the agreement-in-committee dealt with the broad strokes of this new relationship, many details need to be straightened out before the trust becomes operational.

First, the BCTF Executive Committee must select five member-trustees to represent the interests of plan members on the 10-person trust. Selections will be made from the current Teachers' Pension Plan Advisory Committee and may include BCTF staff to ensure continuity.

Second, a detailed trust document must be agreed upon between the BCTF and government. The trust document will lay out the precise roles and responsibilities of the trustees, board operations, powers and duties of the board, and plan

member appeals, the current pension plan regulations, as well as the process for amending pension plan and trust rules. The BCTF has engaged the services of Vancouver lawyers David Blair and Michelle Blendell, of Victory Square Law Office, to assist in the completion of this task.

Third, Cabinet must proclaim legislative amendments to the current Teachers' Pension Act and give approval to the increase in government contributions.

Fourth, plan changes must be submitted and approved by both the Canadian Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA), formerly Revenue Canada, and the Pension Standard Branch of British Columbia. CCRA approval is necessary to ensure that the financial arrangements comply with the *Income Tax Act*. The Pension Standards Branch approval is necessary to ensure that the proposed changes fully comply with all provincial standards for pension plans.

Fifth, the new board of trustees must meet and, by resolution, carry the necessary policies and procedures to

breathe life into the new legal entity.

Finally, under the terms of the new arrangement, the pension board must enter into a service agreement with the B.C. Pension Corporation (formerly the Superannuation Commission). The service agreement will establish the specific service and performance standards required of the plan administrator.

All things being equal, the only change noticeable to plan members will be the remittance of an additional 1% of salary to the pension plan, starting in the new year. The new amount will be fully tax deductible and will not have any impact on either cumulative RRSP room or available RRSP room in 2001.

The BCTF membership has spoken on this important question, and the BCTF staff and officers and newly appointed pension-plan trustees will be working hard to ensure that the new scheme achieves the goals of providing a healthy pension plan for retirement.

*Questions related to the new joint trusteeship should be directed to the Income Security Department at the BCTF.*

## 2000-01 Retirement planning seminars

All teachers age 40+ should plan to attend one of the retirement-planning seminars listed. There is no pre-registration, nor fee. Seminars are on Saturdays from 09:00 to 16:00, except where noted \* (16:00 to 20:00). The agenda includes what retirement is, the Teachers' Pension Plan, legal issues, retirement experiences, pension calculations, and personal advice. Make sure to bring a calculator and your most recent pension statement. **Younger teachers are welcome.**

Date	Location
December 2, 2000	Richmond, Richmond Inn
January 13, 2001	Coquitlam, Westwood Plateau G&C Club
January 20, 2001	Abbotsford, Inn at Kings Crossing
January 27, 2001	Nanaimo, Coast Bastion Inn
February 3, 2001	Burnaby, Radisson Hotel Burnaby
February 17, 2001	Surrey, Sheraton Guildford Hotel
February 24, 2001	North Vancouver, Holiday Inn
March 3, 2001	Prince George, Coast Inn of the North
April 7, 2001	Chilliwack, BW Rainbow Country Inn
April 21, 2001	Castlegar, Sandman Inn
April 28, 2001	Kelowna, Ramada Lodge Hotel
May 5, 2001	Victoria, Victoria Conference Centre

## Should I stop my long-term SIP?

Teachers who have reached the age of 64 or the factor 88, age plus contributory service with the teachers or municipal pension plan, *may voluntarily withdraw from the BCTF Salary Indemnity Plan: Long Term*. If you have reached age 65 or factor 90, you are no longer eligible for long-

term benefits and *should withdraw*. It is necessary for you to apply to withdraw.

Send a completed form (available from Income Security, local presidents, or online at [www.bctf.bc.ca/pensions/salary/LT-Withdrawal Form.shtml](http://www.bctf.bc.ca/pensions/salary/LT-Withdrawal Form.shtml)) to the BCTF Income Security Dept.

## A salary indemnity plan primer

by Patti McLaughlin

**A**sk in any staffroom in the province, and chances are, not very many teachers know about the workings of the BCTF Salary Indemnity Plan. To assist, the Income Security Committee has asked that a series of columns in the *Teacher* newsmagazine over the coming year demystify salary indemnity.

The regulations governing the Salary Indemnity Plan (SIP) are on page 80 of the *2000-2001 Members' Guide to the BCTF*. The regulations may be amended or changed by the AGM.

### Who is eligible for benefits?

Every teacher who has a regular full-time or regular

part-time assignment is eligible for benefits. That includes teachers on temporary appointments. TOCs are not eligible.

A teacher is eligible for short-term benefits on the first day of work. Example: a new teacher, or an experienced teacher, new to a school district could become ill on the very first day of school, and both would be eligible for short-term benefits.

However, a teacher in either of the above examples, would not collect SIP benefits until his/her sick days in the local had been used up—to a maximum of 120 days per year in most locals (check your local contract). That means a new teacher, or one with little accumulated sick leave, would exhaust his/her sick leave, and, with medical substantiation of the illness, become eligible for benefits on the day following the last day of

sick leave. A teacher with lots of sick leave would, in most locals, be able to use a maximum of 120 of his/her accumulated sick days per school year, and with medical substantiation, then be eligible for SIP benefits on day 121.

The benefits for short-term SIP are simple to calculate. The benefit is based on a teacher's rate of pay on the last day of work before the onset of illness. It is simply 50% of the gross salary—tax free. But, the benefits will never be less than what a teacher would be entitled to receive on Employment Insurance. A teacher on short-term SIP is entitled to 120 days of benefit, or 20 months of benefit if a teacher is working part-time and collecting part-time SIP. In addition, a teacher on benefits continues to accrue pension credit.

Teachers on short-term SIP have no deductions from their benefit cheques, but SIP does not provide coverage for MSP, Extended Health, or Dental.

Teachers should check the provisions within their own collective agreements on this issue. It's important that teachers collecting SIP don't let this coverage lapse.

The regulations governing long-term benefits are a little different. To be eligible for long-term benefits, teachers have to have worked for 20 days (one month).

Long-term SIP benefits come into effect after teachers exhaust their 120 days of short-term SIP benefits and whatever remaining sick days they may have in their school districts. If a teacher continues to be disabled after short-term SIP, and if there is continued medical

substantiation of the claim, that teacher may be eligible for long-term benefits. Those benefits are calculated by a formula:

- 65% of the first \$25,000 of salary
- 50% of the next \$40,000 of salary
- 40% of everything over \$65,000 of salary

This benefit is also tax free, and, as in the case of short-term benefits, MSP and Extended Health Benefits are not covered. Check your collective agreement.

*Patti McLaughlin, SIP administrator, is an assistant director in the BCTF's Finance and Administrative Services Division.*

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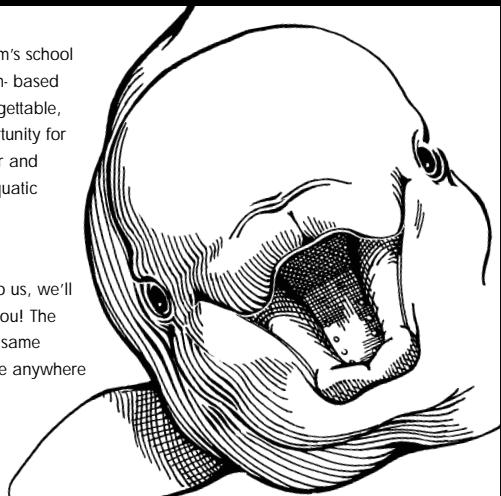
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If you would like more info on the Teacher Tour in December 2000 or the Student Tour of March 2001, please contact Carmen Christiansen at CoDevelopment Canada (604) 708-1495 or [ccodev@web.ca](mailto:ccodev@web.ca)

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## FOR RENT

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## MISCELLANEOUS

**MOTORHOME FOR RENT.** 23 ft. Class C, excellent condition, 22,000 miles, stove, fridge, roof air; generator, rear bath, TV, awning, etc. Very reasonable rates. Non-smoking only. Call (250) 595-2436 (Victoria).

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**EDUCATIONAL VISUAL ARTS TOURS** for Grade 10-12 Art students. 7 to 10 days on location in Mexico. EVATours web site: [www.artistvacations.com](http://www.artistvacations.com)

**TEACHER EXCHANGE** East Coast Australia 2002 - Manual arts/ Graphics/Tech. and Design. or Home Economics/jr. social ed. Close to surf, beaches & mtns. Contact Chris Jimmieson, e-mail: [cajim63@yahoo.com](mailto:cajim63@yahoo.com)

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**DARE TO DREAM:** A Survival Guide for Self-Publishers. By Claire Scott. To order this unique 83-page book, send cheque/money order to: Butterfly Blessings, Box 574 TN, 7620 Elbow Dr., SW, Calgary, AB T2V 1K2. \$15 plus \$2.50 p/h per book. No GST.

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## NOVEMBER

**25 Richmond.** Fifth Annual Adult Educators' PSA Conference: The Challenge... with Virginia Sauve, Discerning the Precious Moment, Best Western Richmond Inn. Contact Marianne Yanes-Pawlowski, (604) 535-0507, [mariannejorge@telus.net](mailto:mariannejorge@telus.net), [www.bctf.bc.ca/epsa/confinfo.html](http://www.bctf.bc.ca/epsa/confinfo.html).

## JANUARY

Vancouver. Gestalt Experiential Training Institute, 17-month core training program starts January 2001. Contact Geoff Lyon, p/f: (604)873-5708.

**17-18** Calgary. Level 1: Solution-Focussed Counselling with Nancy McConkey, MSW. Contact Solution Talk, (403)216-8255 F (403)949-3321, [soltalk@telusplanet.net](mailto:soltalk@telusplanet.net), [www.solutiontalk.ab.ca](http://www.solutiontalk.ab.ca).

**18-20** Richmond. B.C. Association of Student Activity Advisors' Conference, Working Together To Empower Youth, Hilton Vancouver Airport Hotel. Contact Gloria Solley, p/f: (250)477-8592, [gloria@bcasaa.bc.ca](mailto:gloria@bcasaa.bc.ca), [www.bcasaa.bc.ca](http://www.bcasaa.bc.ca).

**19** Calgary. Strategies for Solving School Problems with Nancy McConkey, MSW. Contact Solution Talk, (403)216-8255 F (403)949-3321, [soltalk@telusplanet.net](mailto:soltalk@telusplanet.net), [www.solutiontalk.ab.ca](http://www.solutiontalk.ab.ca).

**24-25** Edmonton. Level 1: Solution-Focussed Counselling with Nancy McConkey, MSW. Contact Solution Talk, (403)216-8255 F (403)949-3321, [soltalk@telusplanet.net](mailto:soltalk@telusplanet.net), [www.solutiontalk.ab.ca](http://www.solutiontalk.ab.ca).

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**25-26** Vancouver. B.C. Alternate Education Association (BCAEA) Conference, Challenge and Change 2001, Sheraton Wall Centre. Focus on working with adolescents "at risk." Downtown Eastside tour of sites and services for street kids and runaways. Contact Dorothy Joyce Pauls, (604) 859-3015, [dj\\_pauls@sd34.bc.ca](mailto:dj_pauls@sd34.bc.ca).

**27** Kelowna. Learning Assistance Teachers' Association (LATA) Conference, David Bouchard on Reading and the Reluctant Reader, Grand Okanagan Lake-front Resort. Contact Lynda Mawer, 8614 Foster Road, Vernon, BC V1H 1C9, f: (250) 558-1065, [lmawer@sd22.bc.ca](mailto:lmawer@sd22.bc.ca).

## MARCH

**15-16** Vancouver. Special Education Association (SEA) Conference, Crosscurrents, Westin Bayshore. Keynoter Richard Lavoie. Contact Pearl Wong, (604)576-1528, [pearlw@uniserve.com](mailto:pearlw@uniserve.com).

## APRIL

**TBA** Kamloops. B.C. Business Education Association (BCBEA) Conference. Contact Corrie Macdonald, [cmacdon2@cln/etc.bc.ca](mailto:cmacdon2@cln/etc.bc.ca).

**TBA** Lower Mainland. B.C. Science Teachers' Association (BC-ScTA) Conference, Catalyst 2001. Contact Kitty Morgan, [kmorgan@telus.net](mailto:kmorgan@telus.net), [www.bctf.bc.ca/bcscsta](http://www.bctf.bc.ca/bcscsta).

**2-3** Calgary. Level 2: Solution-Focussed Counselling with Difficult Clients with Nancy McConkey, MSW. Contact Solution Talk, (403)216-8255 F (403)949-3321, [soltalk@telusplanet.net](mailto:soltalk@telusplanet.net), [www.solutiontalk.ab.ca](http://www.solutiontalk.ab.ca).

**5-6** Edmonton. Level 2: Solution-Focussed Counselling with Difficult Clients with Nancy McConkey, MSW. Contact Solution Talk, (403)216-8255 F (403)949-3321, [soltalk@telusplanet.net](mailto:soltalk@telusplanet.net), [www.solutiontalk.ab.ca](http://www.solutiontalk.ab.ca).</

# One picture of poverty

by Michael Scales

**T**ommy usually sat by himself on the edge of the playground. He usually hunched over a tiny notebook in his shabby, worn-out, and ill-fitting clothes working on an elaborate drawing. Generally his pictures were detailed portrayals of two armies at war; despite the disturbing themes, the artistic talent and ability were obvious. I sometimes asked him why he

**Tommy had completely covered every square inch of every blackboard in my room with an incredibly detailed and elaborate rendering of the Three Wise Men visiting Jesus.**

was alone and if he wanted to play with the other students. He said he wanted to but he didn't like the other kids because they laughed at him and called him names. Taking Tommy's concerns and disclosures seriously, I immediately took steps to

improve the situation for him. In the process, I found out that Tommy was not only the smallest child in my class but also the oldest student in Grade 4 because his continuing struggles with reading and attendance had caused him to repeat an earlier grade. His frequent absences for various health problems caused him the most grief. He was tormented with "little wormy" and "stinky."

My attempts to stop the verbal abuse met with mixed success. For one, when I had the name callers apologize to Tommy and offer to play with him, Tommy would unfortunately reply with some comment such as "I don't have worms anymore, fatso." The net result would be that Tommy would scurry back to the shelter of a playground corner and draw his pictures of war. My most successful attempt to help him was a couple of weeks before Christmas when I asked him to draw a picture on my blackboard with a Christmas theme to it as part of the class's project to decorate my room. Within a few days, Tommy had completely covered every square inch of every blackboard in my room with an incredibly detailed and elaborate rendering of the Three Wise Men visiting Jesus. Angels, and trumpets, and

sheep, and a cast of thousands were dispersed throughout the hills of Bethlehem. As a result, Tommy became not only the hero of the classroom but also the major discussion topic of the teachers' staff room. Of course

**During those last two weeks before Christmas, I usually saw Tommy playing with other kids.**

every other class in the school came down to my room to see the amazing "Tommy's Drawing." No one in my class or in the school would let me or anyone else touch a speck of chalk dust of Tommy's masterpiece. During those last two weeks before Christmas, I usually saw Tommy playing with other kids. His usual corner of the playground sat empty.

After Christmas, life for Tommy returned to normal. Fortunately, much of the hurtful name calling had decreased and was replaced by references to him as "Tommy, The Artist." However, I still usually saw him on the edge of the playground by himself. I made several attempts to talk to his parents about how we could better

realize his talents and overcome some of his learning and attendance problems. Neither parent seemed to have a paying job, but only Tommy's mother ever showed up for the parent/teacher meetings. Tommy's mother was similar to Tommy in stature and personality. She was petite and withdrawn, and she tended to gravitate to the edge of a social situation. I could not estimate what her reading or writing ability might be since she never took the opportunity to do either one in my presence. Our discussions about Tommy were generally short and amicable, and while we couldn't find a guaranteed solution to the health and attendance problems because Tommy's mother was not confident that she could get effective medical help, we did make plans for Tommy to have some educational testing in the latter part of the school year.

The testing was never completed however, and I lost track of Tommy and his family after they suddenly moved that spring. Apparently, Tommy's father couldn't get a job in town, and I think there were some difficulties with their landlord. The family's departure saddened me for a number of reasons. For one, I never saved an example of Tommy's artwork

to show to others when I tell them this story. Also, my greatest sadness is that while I was able to momentarily diminish the verbal bullying that Tommy experienced on the playground, I could not stop the economic bullying that forced his family to move to another community. While children will call someone "wormy" or "stupid" and drive a child to the edge of the playground, it is the parents of those name-calling children who will do a greater injustice when they will not hire someone because of appearance or not rent to someone who has a child.

**I could not stop the economic bullying that forced his family to move to another community.**

I keep hoping that I will see Tommy again. By now, he may have his own children. I also hope that the bullying by his peers will have stopped for good, and he and his family won't find themselves living on the edge of our community, in poverty.

*Michael Scales is a teacher on educational leave from the Langley School District.*



## Collaborative Kindergarten celebration

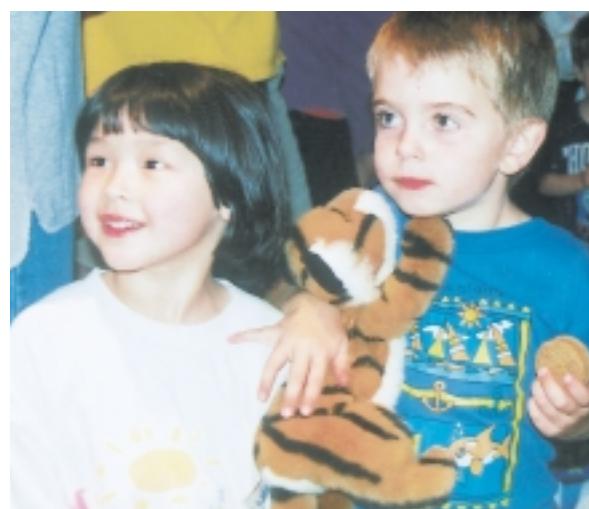
by Sandi Paterson

**L**ooking for ways to promote literacy in the community, Squamish teacher-librarians brainstormed with the Squamish public librarian. Together they decided that the first event would be a celebration to welcome new Kindergarten students early in the fall. During the first week of school, all new Kindergarten students were given an invitation to the big event. They were encouraged to dress for a bedtime story and bring their favourite stuffed animal.

At 18:00, the doors to the Squamish Public Library opened, and in streamed two-hundred-fifty children and adults. Teacher-librarians were at three different stations. Children heard a variety of wonderful bedtime stories and then enjoyed juice and cookies. The highlight of the evening was the arrival of Franklin, the larger-than-life storybook turtle. Franklin was overwhelmed with handshakes and hugs! All the new Kindergarten students received a copy of *Franklin Goes to School*, a gift from The Friends of Squamish Public Library.

We are planning to have another literacy celebration, this time for Grades 4 and 5 students. Students will be invited to come find out all the wonderful opportunities the library provides.

*Sandi Paterson is teacher-librarian at Valleycliffe Elementary School, Squamish.*



**Teacher-librarians and public librarians in Squamish hosted an evening of bedtime stories for Kindergarten children to celebrate literacy and school opening in September.**