

Teacher

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3 Public education conference

What really counts! Rethinking accountability



Marjorie Dumont (above) along with Shana Smith brought First Nations greetings to participants of the BCTF What Really Counts! Rethinking Accountability conference. The conference attracted 300 teachers, students, parents, academics, trustees, and MLAs to discuss the increasing bureaucratic demand for testing and data, and consider ways to refocus education on what children and society need.

by Peter Owens

The "What really counts! Rethinking accountability" conference held on October 27-28, 2006, attracted 300 teachers, students, parents, academics, trustees, and MLAs. SFU Dean of Education Paul Shaker gave the keynote address exploring the meaning, history, and contemporary use of accountability.

Shaker made the point that accountability is really just another word for evaluation and determining what it is that we value. According to Shaker, evaluation must be meaningful and broad, "A meaningful evaluation system has to accommodate the diversity of human experience. This isn't for some altruistic or idealistic reason, it is the way life is lived, it is the way citizens participate in society, and in their own personal lives. We should be suspect of any accountability system that neglects the full dimension of life."

Shaker described the current accountability drive as a simplistic attempt to apply a certain kind of science to education that can be assessed through a pencil-and-paper test.

Shaker, who recently came to Canada from the US, observed that there is a greater sense of community and shared responsibility in Canada than there is in the US. He used the example of help from Vancouver reaching New Orleans after the

hurricane sooner than the help of the American government. According to Shaker there is an element of sadism in American society that views people who flunk tests, lose their jobs, who are poor, or don't have medical insurance, as losers who suffer from some kind of moral defect. This fits well with materialism and consumerism where there has to be winners and losers. "Status doesn't mean anything unless there are people of lower status and greed knows no bounds," he said. He spoke of

Any accountability or assessment model must be comprehensive, future oriented, and much more complex than a multiple-choice test designed to sort rather than assess.

"market fundamentalism" and the Fraser Institute's belief that all government services should be handed over to the market, including education and health care.

Rather than this simplistic belief system based on consumerism and greed, Shaker emphasized the importance of the whole person, including spirituality. By spirituality he did not mean religion *per se*, but "that which brings meaning into people's lives." Although it

could be religion or faith it could be logic and reason, aesthetics, or some other means of services.

He argues that we need to raise the level of consciousness of people about the importance and direction of public education. We need good public discourse and information so society at large can have meaningful input. Any accountability or assessment model must be comprehensive, future oriented, and much more complex than a multiple-choice test designed to sort rather than assess.

A group of North Delta secondary students facilitated table discussions after Shaker's presentation.

A panel of Vancouver secondary students opened the session on Saturday and gave their insights into the impact of the government's accountability scheme on their lives. They were concerned that the growing emphasis on standardized tests was narrowing the curriculum. They were aware of teachers changing their instructional strategies as test dates approached. Students were also concerned about the fact that standardized tests have now been added at the Grade 10 and 11 level.

The UBC Faculty of Education Drama Collective presented the trial of professional accountability, illustrating the chilling effect that accountability has had on American teachers and universities.

Susan Fonseca and Gail Chaddock-Costello closed the conference by describing how the government's accountability scheme has negatively affected Socials 11 instruction and support for special needs.

There was a positive energy and sense of commitment to ensure that our students receive an education that helps improve our society.

The BCTF planned the conference with the co-operation of the faculties of education at SFU and UBC. Members of both faculties prepared and presented workshops along with BCTF members and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Participants attended workshops where they explored the issues, exchanged ideas, made connections, and discussed actions to be undertaken once back in their communities. There was a positive energy and sense of commitment to ensure that our students receive an education that helps improve our society.

Peter Owens is assistant director, BCTF Communications and Campaigns Division and editor of Teacher.

Presentations and other conference information can be found on the BCTF web site, bctf.ca.

President's message



Jinny Sims

I had the honour of representing the BC Teachers' Federation at our first meeting of the Canadian Labour Congress on October 27 in Ottawa. This was the first time the BCTF has been represented at a national labour centre since 1956.

Prior to and during the council meeting, I was involved in direct lobbying of Members of Parliament on the anti-replacement-worker legislation, Bill C-257. At the second reading, 167 MPs voted for the legislation and 101 voted against. I want to thank all members who lobbied the MPs—please continue. The lobby was a good example of the CLC working on an issue of importance to all trade unionists across the country. If the legislation had been in place last year, Telus would not have been successful in its strike-breaking activities.

We also dealt with issues that will be important in the next federal election—health care, education, child care, women's rights, and many others. We have seen cuts to skills and literacy programs, the Court Challenges Program and cuts to Status of Women Canada. Teachers have a proud history of advocating on equity and access issues. Teachers understand the impact on students and families when access, support, and equity are denied and barriers are placed in the way of participation and success.

The face of Canada has been changing under the current minority government; we have to take stock of the type of Canada we want and advocate freely and actively for it in the months to come.

Teachers have an important role to play in helping to build a just and civil society. I know we will all be working with the CLC and others for a better Canada.

Jinny

Admire Hall's ability to express hope

I am deeply appreciative of the thoughts expressed in the poem, "No wall high enough," by Budd L. Hall, published in the September 2006 issue of *Teacher*. His words echo my own beliefs, and I would like him to know that I admire his ability to express his hopes. I would also like permission to send copies to my eight mature grandchildren, and my other relatives, friends, and my political representatives.

R. Harvard Smithers

Teaching is about people

A teachers' job is never done is an adage as true today as it was 30 years ago.

As someone who taught 20 years, and worked in coaching and professional capacities with my local union, the experience has left me with a different perspective on what is important in our field.

Now that I have been on LTD for several years, my perspective has been altered. I spent so much time keeping my nose to the grindstone that those who had left teaching due to physical or mental strains were quickly forgotten. I was busy enough trying to keep my head above

water, let alone worry about someone gone.

One person I taught with had a heart attack and was off for several months; I did send him a card and felt I had at least shown recognition of his difficult times.

Most physical ailments heal and the person returns to work. However, some don't heal and the person doesn't return. While no one is irreplaceable, people who have made a contribution deserve to be remembered.

To remember those who have left is a sign of respect for the profession of teaching, one that says yes, education matters, and individual teachers matter, too.

Veteran teachers have a responsibility to demonstrate the way things should be done to incoming teachers; to show how those who have given years to teaching, and are now gone, are also important.

The Federation provides wonderful financial support to those on LTD and SIP, and this demonstrates the collegiality that reflects why our Federation has been so successful over the years. Very few professions extend financial support such as that which comes from the BCTF.

As one who has benefited greatly from this financial support, I have heartfelt

appreciation for the BCTF membership.

In the final analysis, teaching is about people—students, teachers, parents—and society at large. An appreciation of the efforts of those who have left abruptly shows recognition of the humanity that bonds us all, and for many of us reflects why education is so important and why we went into teaching in the first place.

Steven Faraher-Amidon
Surrey

Students more polite than educators

I was so pleased to be able to attend the morning event with students to hear His Holiness the Dalai Lama on September 8, 2006. All of the students were remarkable—attentive, polite and very well behaved.

The afternoon event with educators was, unfortunately, disappointing in the respect that the attendees were not particularly attentive or polite. I had to stand up twice for people to come and go, others were late and there was chatting in the aisles. The rudest thing was for people to be rushing out when the guests were still on the stage at the close of the event. I think a number of these 'educators' thought they were at a hockey game or something! I was glad

my students were not there to witness this behaviour. However, in the spirit of the message of the Dalai Lama I am letting go of my annoyance!

Ellen McDonnell
Burnaby

Historical perspective right on!

Two predominant thoughts emanate from Ken Novakowski's article "Historical perspectives" in the October issue of *Teacher*. He has an amazing grasp of the significance of history in terms of personal, cultural, and institutional developments.

The article underlines what I have long thought. Locally, in terms of bargaining learning and teaching conditions and rights, the Federation has made fantastic gains, with some temporary setbacks, including the provincial institution of the College of Teachers in 1987. In the 1960s and the 1970s, when the BCTF even managed to have the provincial exams cancelled, I was fond of quoting an art education profession from Stanford University, Elliot Eisner, who stated, "What is counted, counts."

Your article is right on regarding what is happening in the public school system today.

John Church
Vancouver, retired

Visit the new bctf.ca and enter our online contest

The new and improved BCTF web site was launched on November 8! The new look and feel of the site is in response to the very constructive feedback from members and local activists who participated in focus groups last summer. We also received many suggestions from members who regularly visit the site. Thanks to everyone. We have included a feedback link on the site so that we can continue to hear from you.

There is still considerable work remaining to build our online archive of publications and to ensure that all of our content is the most current information available; please visit often as the site will be updated daily. The next phase of development will feature web forums that members may join to discuss issues affecting teachers.

Be sure to enter our online contest. You just need to find the information and answer the questions on the site, and you will be eligible for a draw, provided you are a BCTF member. The prize is dinner and a night for two at the Hotel Vancouver. Travel arrangements will be provided if our winner does not live in the Lower Mainland.

So go to bctf.ca, explore our pages, and enter the contest.

The BCTF web site is your site, and it will continually evolve to meet your needs in your role as a teacher and/or local officer.

— Diana Broome

Educational cultural exchange to China

The Tianjiao International Education Group is offering a cultural exchange trip to China in summer 2007 that will highlight the history, landmarks, and most importantly the culture of this beautiful region.

The program is sponsored in part by the Ministry of Education of Beijing and the 2007 focus is called "Follow Dr. Norman Bethune to China." A thousand people will attend a memorial ceremony and teacher exchange forum on July 18, 2007.

The exchange is organized by Tianjiao tour guides in China and permits participants to experience the elements of China's past, present, and future. The tour includes The Forbidden City, The Great Wall, and the Terra Cotta Warriors. Visit a local school, factories, and markets.

There are three tour choices with early-bird specials if you register before December 16, 2006: \$1,980, \$2,380, or \$4,580.

For more information, contact Tianjiao International Education Group, 604-639-4448, E-mail: info@canadatj.com, web site www.canadatj.com.

Bursaries for BCTF members

In 2005, the Autism Community Training Society (ACT) was the beneficiary of funds from the BC Teachers' Federation. The BCTF was required to distribute fine monies resulting from their illegal strike. In recognition of BCTF's decision to give this money to ACT, and in acknowledgement that addressing the educational needs of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) requires specific training, ACT is pleased to announce the development of a bursary fund for BCTF members.

BCTF members who want to attend an ACT workshop will receive a bursary for 80% of their registration fee if they live a significant distance from the event; 65% if it is close to their community. Those living in the Lower Mainland, within the boundaries of the GVRD will receive a 65% bursary to attend workshops within the Lower Mainland. Applicants will need to provide proof they are a BC public school teacher.

For more information, call 604-205-5467 or check our web site at www.actcommunity.net.

BCTF winter holiday closure

The BCTF office will be closed at noon on December 22, 2006, and will reopen at 8:15 a.m. on January 2, 2007.



The message

I hear on the news there's
No money for supplies
No money for resources
No money for upgrading
I read in the paper there's
No money for aides
No money for special needs
No money for teachers
I read on the web site there's
No money for our children
No money for their education
No money for our future
I will not listen.
I do not understand.
I refuse to accept.
We need to invest, to support,
and believe in
Our schools
Our teachers
Our children
And look forward to a promising
future for all.

— Darryl Smolik



Teacher

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Students from John Oliver, Sir Winston Churchill, and King George secondary schools, in Vancouver, and BCTF 1st Vice-president Irene Lanzinger participate in a panel discussion at the "What really counts! Rethinking Accountability" conference. They offer some thoughtful examples of the negative impact of the government's increasing bureaucratic demand for testing.

Historical perspectives

BCTF's relationship with organized labour

by Ken Novakowski

On Friday, October 27, I attended a meeting of the Canadian Labour Congress Executive Council as an observer. The occasion was the seating of Jinny Sims as a member of the Executive Council representing the BCTF. It was an historic moment for our organization, which throughout its 90-year history has been formally in and out of the house of labour, but has always had a strong working relationship with other organizations in our province and country representing working people. Becoming a member of the CLC following the successful member vote in April 2006, we joined three other teacher unions that have been on the CLC executive council for many years—the Ontario Secondary School

Earlier this year, in April, BCTF members voted by 78% to join the Canadian Labour Congress and thus to continue our membership in the BC Federation of Labour.

Teachers' Federation and the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association since 1996, and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario since 2000. Together, the four teacher organizations represent about 140,000 Canadian teachers.

It was 50 years ago, in 1956, that the BCTF decided to end its formal relationship with organized labour. In 1942, members voted 56% to join the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress. In that same time period, the BCTF took its first province-wide strike vote, which carried by a similar 57%. That vote was never acted on because the federal government brought in a national wage freeze. At the time, the labour movement was pressing the government for social security and labour regulations. Teachers played an active role

in the Trades and Labour Congress and in local labour councils. When the Canadian Labour Congress was created in 1956, it involved the merger of the Trades and Labour Congress with the more militant industrial unions that had emerged in the late 1930s and 1940s. The 1956 BCTF AGM voted narrowly to turn down a motion to join the Canadian Labour Congress and thus began our 50-year absence in the national halls of labour.

During those 50 years, the BCTF worked with the labour movement on key issues and in major campaigns and in 2003, we voted by 58% to join the BC Federation of Labour for a three-year trial period. It was not an overwhelming vote, but it was clear that teachers now felt it was important to formalize our membership in the house of labour. Our collective agreement and our collective rights were under assault from the Campbell government, as were the rights and conditions of other public-sector unions. We clearly needed to work more closely with each other.

There were two notable actions that we took with labour during our 50-year hiatus. In 1983, the Bill Bennett government introduced 26 pieces of legislation intended to strip the social-security safety net that was so carefully built by successive governments since World War II. His legislative package included granting public-sector employers the right to lay off any employee without cause. For teachers, who had no seniority rights or provisions, this was a threatening piece of legislation so we stood together with other working people in Operation Solidarity and on November 8, 1983, went out on strike around the province. We were out for three days and we did get the right to bargain seniority severance provisions into our salary agreements. But more importantly, we turned a corner in understanding the importance of solidarity and in standing up for others.

Prior to our solidarity experience of 1983, when CUPE or other organized support workers went on strike in our schools, teachers went to work. Yes, we crossed their picket lines. We refused to do their work but that was the extent of our support for their strike. Following the experience of November 1983, when teachers put up picket lines at every public school in the province teachers changed their position on this critical labour unity matter and thereafter refused to cross the picket lines of their co-workers out on strike.

And on June 1, 1987, when the BC Federation of Labour called a general strike over government anti-labour legislation, teachers and the

BCTF participated fully. We really were part of the labour movement but had not yet made the organizational decision to join.

Earlier this year, in April, BCTF members voted by 78% to join the Canadian Labour Congress and thus to continue our membership in the BC Federation of Labour. Our provincial strike of October 2005 demonstrated the power of

Our provincial strike of October 2005 demonstrated the power of solidarity; we need to be together with our friends and allies, both for them to be there for us and for us to be there for them.

solidarity; we need to be together with our friends and allies, both for them to be there for us and for us to be there for them.

Following the CLC Executive Council meeting on October 27, we attended a dinner at the Museum of Civilization commemorating the 50-year history of the Canadian Labour Congress.

It felt right for teachers to be there with that broad cross section of Canadians, over three million strong, who are fighting for a better Canada for their members and for all Canadians.

Ken Novakowski is the BCTF's executive director

Student leadership

Focus Group is a student-led initiative whose main purpose is to teach students to be valuable, contributing members of both the school and the outside community. By participating in Focus Group, students gain a variety of leadership and positive interpersonal skills, such as public speaking, teamwork, event planning, and organizational skills. Students participate in facilitating focus groups with their peers to get input about issues that are important to the school population, and then work on finding solutions and implementing them within the school. As well, through Focus Group, students are given opportunities to take part in workshops and conferences outside of the school, which concentrate on making students more socially conscious.

Only two months into the school year, and students at North Delta Secondary School already show signs of becoming great leaders. Opening Day—the first day of the school year at North Delta Secondary School, was largely organized by the Focus Groups students. To give the school year a great start, they organized and ran a welcoming assembly for all students, as well as a barbecue. Also, in September, Focus Group students were given the opportunity to attend the honoured Dalai Lama's dialogue on Nurturing Compassion, which was attended by students from all across British Columbia.

Focus Group students got a chance to attend the BCTF's Public Education Conference; this year's theme was "Rethinking Accountability." The keynote address was given by Dr. Paul Shaker, the current dean of education at Simon Fraser University. It was aimed at offering recommendations to questions posed by the BCTF such as how we can better focus on teaching and learning and how we can work together for our public schools, with a specific emphasis on redefining accountability in our school system.

Following the keynote address, Focus Group students were given the opportunity to show their skills by facilitating focus groups with the adults attending. They conducted a round-table group asking each adult to answer two questions related to the keynote address. These questions exposed the participants to each other's opinions, ideas, and different interpretations of the keynote address. The facilitations were a valuable part of the learning process for all the adults, and gave everyone an opportunity to express their opinions.

Focus Group continues to grow with the addition of many new facilitators this year who are eager to get involved and make a difference in their schools and their community.

Deepinder Grewel is a focus group member and a student at North Delta Secondary School, Delta.

Looking back

70 years ago

It is often argued in British Columbia that while elementary education should be free, high school education should, to a large extent, be paid for in fees by those who benefit from it. The fundamental fallacy in the fee-paying proposal is that it is society in the wider sense and the organized State more concretely, which benefits from education in all its stages. If this is not so there is no justification for a public system of schools at all. Advocacy of fees implies a complete non-understanding of the social function of education.

— Nov. 1936, *The BC Teacher*

50 years ago

It has been suggested that the teaching profession has rejected merit rating far too casually; that even if it is sincere in the belief that its opposition to the principle is well founded it should be prepared to "study" the problem objectively. The

Federation has looked deeply into merit rating. All the available literature on the subject has been carefully read, a great many research studies have been examined, and the relatively few existing schemes closely scrutinized. The conclusion that a full-scale study of merit rating would be futile was inescapable.

— Nov. 1956, *The BC Teacher*

30 years ago

Initially many principals scoffed at the idea of staff committees. Teachers, however, smarting under the discipline of a few autocratic principals, and provoked by decisions that affected them but into which they had no input, embraced the new concept. Many principals have considered the BCTF policy on collegiality and staff committees to be an invitation to confrontation. They feel betrayed by their own organization. Others have embraced the concept, and have committed themselves to sharing decision-making. Some

completely—others only as a means of self-preservation.

— Nov./Dec. 1976, *The BC Teacher*

10 years ago

Over the past six years, elementary schools—much more so than secondary schools—have been inundated with a host of new programs, curriculum alterations, and policy changes. While many changes are worthwhile and welcomed, their cumulative effect has left elementary school parents, teachers, and principals dazed and bewildered. Elementary school teachers in the past have demonstrated tremendous flexibility and resiliency in meeting the diverse and changing needs of their students. Let's not push our luck by adding to the workload.

— Nov./Dec. 1996, *Teacher newsmagazine*

Chris Bocking, Keating Elementary School, Saanich

Education services go semi-private

The Ministry of Education is engaged in a process of contracting many aspects of education services to semi-private organizations. In the process, it excludes teachers from a decision-making role.

BCEd Online is one of these semi-private organizations. When it started, there were a number of teachers involved. Officers of CUEBC (Computer Using Educators of BC) were very active, including doing most of the organizing for the annual conferences held by BCEd Online.

Then a decision was made to formalize the structure and create a society. The members of the society are school districts that choose to join. This created a legal structure so the ministry could shovel cash out the door to be spent on the ministry priorities for technology, but out of the direct hands of school districts or direct accountability by the government. With a legal structure and funding in place, BCEd Online then could hire staff to carry out these projects. One of the main purposes of BCEd Online is professional development related to technology—but without teacher participation in decision-making.

This is the strategy being used in a number of areas by the ministry. *BCEd Online* is one of these. Joining BCEd Online is “voluntary” for school districts, but any district that does not join must develop its own software to do the same thing—an expensive venture.

Still another example is the new *Virtual School Society* that is to be given a revenue stream of 5% of the ministry funding of school districts for students in distributed learning. This money is to be used to develop course materials—so curriculum resources will be developed by this society rather than by school districts or the ministry. When a school district signs the required contract with the ministry to offer distributed learning courses, one provision forces them to join the *Virtual School Society*.

ERAC (Educational Resource Acquisition Consortium) is another of these organizations. It is supposed to be an organization that makes costs for textbooks and learning resources less expensive by

aggregating demand and using the Alberta resources organization as a conduit for some of the materials.

You may notice a pattern here. The government creates a semi-private organization. It is a society with the school districts as members and, of course, nearly always administrators, generally district administrators, as the representatives of the members. These then receive government money to carry out projects, or districts have to pay them money to carry out projects (*Virtual School Society*, *BCEd Online*, *ERAC*).

This is the kind of decentralization that is characteristic of neo-liberal policies everywhere and, in particular, favoured by Deputy Minister Emery Dosdall. Direction can be given from the centre, while handing off the accountability to someone other than the government.

The control system for distributed learning is particularly convoluted. Based on the new provisions in Bill 33, a district must get approval from the ministry to offer distributed-learning courses. The ministry only gives approval if the district will sign a contract issued for only a year at a time and if you don't play by the rules, forget another contract. The standard contract is on the ministry web site at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/dist_learning/policy.htm.

The contract requires districts to turn over to one of these semi-private organizations resources for development of learning resources for distributed learning (the *Virtual School Society*). It also requires the district to “work to meet or exceed the Distributed Learning Standards.” Guess who developed the Distributed Learning Standards? That's right, not the ministry, but another of these semi-privatized organizations, *BCEd Online*.

These semi-private organizations have a couple of things in common. One is that teachers are generally excluded from decision-making—it is mostly administrators who represent the boards that are members. The other is that the ministry gives direction by funding and contracts, but is not carrying out the work itself and escapes accountability for the results.

—Larry Kuehn

The teacher-librarian A students' best bet to acquire information literacy skills

by Lesley Edwards

One of the truly gratifying aspects of my job as a secondary school teacher-librarian is the work I do with teens helping them to become better at finding useful information on the Internet.

I remember the Grade 12 student who appeared in the library with panic written all over her face. “I spent all weekend searching the web for information for my project and couldn't find a thing. The assignment is due in two days.” I asked her what her topic was and immediately pulled up three great sites using a Google search. She looked at me incredulously. “How did you do

that?” she asked. Now this was a hardworking, intelligent student and yet she was flummoxed by a simple search. She had no idea how to use keywords effectively.

How many know that even the creator of Wikipedia does not recommend it for student use?

I remember a class doing a project on substance abuse. They had been given clearly defined questions to answer and yet several of them were having difficulty. When I checked with them to see what keywords they were using for their search they

replied, “Shrooms.” With a little coaching they were able to come up with the term psilocybin, which netted them sites from sources such as Brown University's health education page. They learned that a search using slang results in sites that offer unreliable or biased information. I then directed them to the links provided at the bottom of Brown's page where additional reliable information could be found.

Without expert guidance, how many students will learn to use a directory like the Librarian's Internet Index at <http://lii.org>, or go beyond the first page of Google to discover how to do an advanced search? How many know about the great online



Teachers' tips

Time management? Who has time for that?

by Rob Taylor

It seems strange to be writing an article on time management for teachers because so much of our time is actually managed for us, through such things as timetables, bell schedules, meetings, and conferences. We also plan our time carefully with day-books and previews.

Nevertheless, here are some quick ways to manage your time and stay sane.

- Set attainable goals. You are not going to manage a triathlon training schedule, learn raku firing techniques, practice piano for an hour a day, and still have time for your job and your family, so be realistic.

- Start with a master schedule for a week, a month,

or a year depending on how optimistic you feel.

- Block out time commitments that are not going to change, such as report-card time, interview days, meetings, and professional days.

- On a dayplan, block out personal commitments in order of priority, e.g., gym or fitness time, time to read, and commute time. Do the same with work related tasks, preparation, marking, reporting, phone calls, and so on.

- On your school-based timetable, plan time for prep, marking, meetings, and personal relaxation. Try to plan for at least one-hour blocks before or after school to ensure you can actually accomplish something, not just get started.

- Be cognizant of the up and down times, don't bother scheduling test marking at 2:00 p.m. after a staff luncheon—trust me, you won't do it, better to plan for a brisk walk around the school. Use the up and down times to your advantage.

- Keep in mind that work tends to expand to fill your time—don't let it.

- An important question to ask yourself with regard to teaching is whether you are spending more time planning and preparing a task than it takes your students to actually complete it. If that's the case, is there real value in your planning and preparation or could the students benefit from working through the planning and preparation themselves?

- Determine where you think time is wasted. Is it impossible to photocopy at 8:30 a.m. because there's a line-up? Plan not to do it then or plan other things that you can do while you wait in that line-up.

- Remember *Murphy's Law* and stay flexible. Anything that can go wrong will, and it will take longer than you planned, so make sure you leave some spaces to breathe.

- After you've made the schedule, review it. Is it realistic? Can you really mark 39 English 10 essays while running on the treadmill and cooking supper? If you can—stick to it! If you can't—change it.

- If it all works, and you find you have a spare moment, then reward yourself by doing something you wouldn't normally

have time for—a cup of coffee, a visit with a friend, 10 minutes of stillness.

All you need to do now is find time to read this article!

Rob Taylor teaches at Nesika Elementary School, Williams Lake.



databases that many schools and all public libraries subscribe to? How many know that even the creator of *Wikipedia* does not recommend it for student use? And finally how many know how to evaluate a web site for accuracy, authority, and reliability?

Try this at home. Do a Google search using the keywords "Martin Luther King." The first hit seems great, but closer examination shows that it is hosted by Stormfront, a white supremacist group. Similarly, the first result of a Google search for "In Flanders Fields" takes you to the American Arlington Cemetery site, the second is a Belgian museum with nothing about the poem. The eighth is hosted by a Canadian white supremacist group—the Canada First Immigration Reform Committee. There are great teaching and learning opportunities here, but those "teachable moments" are too often lost when teacher-librarians are not part of the research process.

Public librarians also offer great information services but are more likely to provide the answer teenagers need rather than teaching them how to find

We don't hand teenagers the keys to the family car without training them to drive, so why are we so willing to turn them loose on the Internet without strategies for navigating successfully and staying safe?

the answer for themselves. When a class comes to the school library to do research, I make sure that part of their session includes learning and practicing information literacy skills.

For me, teaching information literacy is all about the process, the skills of finding information, judging its quality and usefulness, paring it down to essentials, and recombining it in ways that challenge the user to employ higher-order thinking skills. It's about using information ethically and with integrity. We don't hand teenagers the keys to the family car without training them to drive, so why are we so willing to turn them loose on the Internet without strategies for navigating successfully and staying safe? Who better to provide solid Internet-use strategies than a teacher-librarian?

Lesley Edwards is a teacher-librarian at Seycove Secondary School, North Vancouver.

For further information, read the following:

- "The Crisis in Canada's School Libraries: The Case for Reform and Re-Investment" by Ken Hancock at www.peoplefor-education.com/librarycoalition/Report03.pdf.
- A report prepared for the National Library of Canada, "Elementary and Secondary Schools: The Role, Challenges and Financial Conditions of School and School Library Resources in Canada" at www.collectionscanada.ca/9/14/index-e.html
- "School Libraries and Student Achievement in Ontario" at www.accessola.com/osla/graphics/eqao_pfe_study_2006.pdf.

Better funding, better futures

The Federation of Post Secondary Educators (FPSE) has initiated a campaign entitled, *Better Funding. Better Futures*. You may have seen the print ads in your local newspapers. This campaign is focussed on the sky-high tuition fees and chronic underfunding that is limiting access to post-secondary education for many young people. The ads raise the issues and call on the government to invest in BC's future. The FPSE web site at www.fpse.ca/ features the ads and an "e-mail Premier Campbell" feature.

The results of a poll conducted by Ipsos Reid in August show that:

- British Columbians are very concerned about access and affordability issues in our public post-secondary education system.
- 62% agree that tuition fees at BC's colleges, universities, and training institutes are too high. This same question has been asked in previous polls.

In 2003, 43.8% said tuitions were too high. In 2005, the number climbed to 55%.

- 70% agree that high tuition fees are preventing young people from getting the degrees and diplomas they need to get ahead.
- This campaign is focussed on the sky-high tuition fees and chronic underfunding that is limiting access to post-secondary education for many young people.***
- 74% agree that many young people can't get the courses or programs they need to complete their post-secondary education.
 - 74% think that students in colleges, universities, and other post-secondary institutions are taking on an unfair burden of debt to pay for their education.

- 81% agree that student debt is making it harder for students to complete post-secondary education and training.
- British Columbians think that the provincial government needs to do more to ensure that post-secondary education is more affordable and accessible for all.
- 90% agree that one of the best ways to solve BC's current skills shortage is for the provincial government to invest more in public colleges, universities, and training institutes.
- 80% support the idea of reducing tuition fees.
- 84% think that the provincial government should increase public funding to post-secondary institutions to support more course options and higher enrolments.
- 87% support an increase in student grants.

Commenting on the poll in early September, president of



FPSE, Cindy Oliver, stated, "It may be back-to-school week for thousands of post-secondary students, but this latest poll suggests it should be back to the drawing board for BC Liberals' post-secondary education policies."

The Canadian Federation of Students has also been very active in lobbying government to address conditions that create a significant burden of debt on young people attending post-secondary institutions. CFS is calling on the provincial government to provide funding to reduce tuition fees by 10% in 2007-08 and a further 10% in 2008-09.

— Moira Mackenzie

Okanagan TOC/student teacher conference

“You are not alone” was an important message many participants at the Okanagan teacher on call, beginning teacher, and student teacher regional conference took away with them on September 23.

Planned and supported by the Vernon and Central Okanagan Teachers' Associations, the BCTF, and UBC Okanagan, the conference was a resounding success according to facilitators and participants.

The opening message by Vernon PD Chair Brent Kisilevich, stressed the importance of building networks of support through the union and colleagues. Alice Rees, from the Central Okanagan Teacher Centre encouraged students and teachers to be reflective practitioners and to sustain themselves by keeping their joy in teaching.

Workshop choices included assessment, classroom management, Aboriginal history and culture, parent-teacher interviews, and effective techniques for teachers on call.

Conference organizers also scheduled sessions for each cohort—teachers on call, beginning teachers, and student teachers—to meet as an intact group with representatives from the union, the districts, and the university to ask questions and raise issues pertinent to their role. Many evaluation forms stated that this was the most valuable session of the conference.

Many participants said they look forward to next year's conference, so perhaps this will indeed become an annual event in the Okanagan.

— Margaret Ross

Supply and demand statistics

1. How many teachers are likely to retire in the next 5 years?

Approximately 10,000—Each year for the past 5 years approximately 1,500 teachers have retired. This past year, the figure was 1,805—up by about 200 over the previous year. With about 35% of the teaching work force between the ages of 50 and 59, and an average retirement age of 59, we can expect retirements to remain close to 2005 levels for at least the next

5 years. This means we can expect approximately 10,000 retirements over the next 5 years.

2. The numbers of teachers retiring will not be consistent across districts.

Some districts have a younger overall teaching force than others. In Coquitlam, for example, 29% of the teaching workforce is 50 years or older, whereas in Nanaimo, this figure is 44%.

3. How many new teachers are hired each year?

About 1,000—In 2005, there were 1,135 teachers (about 3.4% of all teachers) with 1 or less years of teaching experience, which means these teachers were likely new hires for that year.

For each of the 3 years prior to this year there were only about 600 new teachers hired but in 2000 and 2001, the numbers were closer to current new hires—about 1,200 per year.

4. How many teachers have fewer than 5 years teaching experience?

There are approximately 6,400 teachers with 5 or fewer years teaching experience. This represents about 19% of the teacher work force. (About 40%

of teachers have fewer than 10 years teaching experience.)

5. How many new teachers graduate each year?

The universities and university/colleges in the province graduate approximately 1,800 to 2,000 graduates from teacher education programs per year.

6. How many teachers on call are there?

About 6,500—According to the BCTF Member System, (October 2006) there are currently 6,536 teachers on call. This number is about 900 more than recorded in the January 2006 snapshot.

— Colleen Hawkey
BCTF Research

BCTF Membership data

	Jan/05	Oct/06
Full-time members	31,734	32,674
Teachers on call	5,378	6,536
District staff/teacher	1,254	1,254
Adult educator/night school	403	331
Associated professionals	110	335
Total*	38,879	41,130

*Includes about 150 Vancouver adult educators

International news

Retirees teach English in Cuba

The BCTF International Solidarity Program supports two programs for teaching English in Cuba—one for retirees and the other for active members.

ESL Cuba volunteer is for retired educators prepared to donate their talents and skills to teach Cubans English. Volunteers pay their own costs while on the island for three weeks. Part of the time is spent working either with university students or with young children.

The program runs twice next year, from February 3 to 24, 2007, and again in November. Details of this program are available on the web at www.cubavolunteer.com.

The BCTF Cuba ESL Teacher In-service Project sends teams of BCTF members with second-language experience to offer eight-day in-service programs for Cuban secondary school teachers during December and July holidays. Project members for this year are in place. If you are interested in applying, watch for an ad in a future edition of *Teacher*.

Five-month strike in Oaxaca ends

Teachers in Oaxaca, Mexico, spent more than 150 days on strike from May to October this year. The strike started with demands for the government to provide textbooks and food for children at school, as well as salary increases of more than the 7% offered. It soon expanded to civil disobedience in support of social demands by indigenous and other commun-

ity organizations that had joined the teachers.

Oaxaca is one of the poorest states in Mexico and has a large indigenous population. Many children are not in school because their families cannot afford any fees—or even to feed their children. The teachers are also among the poorest paid in Mexico.

The situation was very volatile. On October 18, gunmen shot and killed Panfilo Hernandez, a preschool teacher, as he stepped out of a meeting with other teachers and members of the APPO, the community-based assembly, in the Jardín neighbourhood of Oaxaca City. Hernandez was the ninth person to be assassinated during the conflict.

With only some of their demands met, the teachers felt they had to vote to return to school in late October. The government promised a 30%

salary increase over six years and to drop criminal charges against some 300 union leaders. Teachers will extend school hours to make up some of the lost instruction time during the strike. Oaxaca teachers' union leader Enrique Rueda Pacheco said Friday that the decision to return to work was based not on pressure from [national union head, Esther] Gordillo or the federal government but from "the commitment we have to the children of Oaxaca."

Despite returning to school, the teachers' union will continue to call for the replacement of the governor who escalated the strike by sending in masses of police to break up a peaceful occupation of the central square in the city.

For an update on the status of the situation with teachers in Oaxaca, check the international solidarity section of the BCTF web site.

— Larry Kuehn

Sounding the alarm in

by Yvonne Eamor

In little more than 10 years' time, one in three BC residents will be foreign-born and we are ill-equipped to handle the educational challenges that ratio will provide, according to Chris Friesen, director of Settlement Services, Immigrant Services Society of BC.

"We are not prepared because the focus of Canada's immigration and integration program has always been immigration of adults, not children and youth. But almost 40% of immigrants to BC are the young," Friesen says. "In 2017 there will be a fundamental shift within BC society, and not just in the Lower Mainland, but throughout the province. It begs the question: are the foundations in place? Are approaches in place to handle the increasing challenges that we're starting to see? How prepared are we to deal with this?"

In his opinion, not very. While there is discussion of ESL issues and challenges at the provincial and federal government levels, Friesen says there is a clear lack of an agenda. He indicates a lack of cohesion is getting in the way of progress. "Because we deal with federal and provincial and local jurisdictional responsibilities and other issues, it's very difficult to develop a provincial agenda that better supports these immigrant youths. In the meantime, teachers are having to deal with the challenges in the classroom." He says the challenges that boards are facing in BC are shared across the country, but without any national dialogue or national agenda on how to support the exploding ESL student population.

Friesen feels teachers are not receiving the education they need to practice their profession. "We have 2,600 teachers coming out of post-secondary teacher training and they only

have one core foundational course to deal with ESL work. That's just one indication, in my opinion, that we've fallen behind in how we train teachers. They are handling situations to the best of their ability, but they don't have the tools to deal with the complexities in their classrooms. And that speaks to how we are training our teachers."

"We invite immigrants to Canada and want them to become productive citizens and achieve their potential, but are not providing the services for them to do that."

Our lack of preparedness for the future is nothing new to Randy Henderson, past president of the English as a Second Language PSA and Prince George District ESL resource teacher. Henderson was one of the authors of "A Crisis in ESL Education in BC Schools" (www.bctf.ca/eslpsa), a report compiled and submitted to government earlier this year by the PSA to sound the alarm on the brewing crisis in ESL education across the province. "It highlights the significant erosion in services to ESL students across the province," says Henderson. "We wanted to draw government attention to a situation that is very unsatisfactory for the student. We are dropping the ball in their education."

The report states "ESL learners in BC public schools are rapidly increasing...and now constitute the majority in the larger urban school districts, and are rapidly increasing in numbers in all other jurisdictions of the province." It goes on to say that it is critical "that we support these new learners, our future citizens and taxpayers, as effectively as possible."

The government has not responded to the document.

Henderson says, "We invite immigrants to Canada and want them to become productive citizens and achieve their potential, but are not providing the services for them to do that." With the projected increase in the number of ESL students throughout BC, Henderson agrees with Friesen that a co-ordinated effort needs to be developed.

"I've been to settlement discussions where federal officials asked about how they could encourage new immigrants to land somewhere else other than the MTV (Montreal-Toronto-Vancouver) corridor. What's that going to do? Seems to me there's more deflection of the problem than addressing it because it doesn't matter where you have your new immigrants landing or residing, the problem is, what are we going to do and what services are we going to provide as a nation to the people we're inviting to our country?"

Henderson says that while "it's just silly" to think a student is going to be touched by a magic wand and learn the language in the five years the government has allotted, consideration and support must also be given to their parents. "The parent issue needs to be part and parcel of some kind of comprehensive plan between provincial and federal governments. Since the federal government is in charge of immigration, it's they who need to take the bull by the horns and mandate that the provinces provide services to the people we've invited into this country."

Henderson says, "take a parent who was a teacher in their homeland but here, is bussing at a restaurant. And there are lots of immigrant families living in poverty and that creates another set of dilemmas for parents because they're no longer living their



lives long term, they're living short term, pay cheque to pay cheque."

He points out, "there is no ESL advocacy group for parents or students. Some of these parents are not quick to get into our schools because they come from cultures where institutions like schools are

UBC language and literacy professor, Lee Gunderson, recently studied 5,000 immigrant students in Vancouver. The results are startling: 60% "disappeared" before they completed Grade 12 and 40% dropped out before they graduated.

highly respected and know best, and it's a matter of putting all their confidence and faith in schools to do the best job for their kids. Unfortunately, I'm not seeing that

with the programs we're able to offer."

Friesen asks, "Why don't we have standardized ESL orientation materials for newcomer parents? How can they advocate on behalf of their kids when they can't speak English and are not aware of the system?"

UBC language and literacy professor, Lee Gunderson, recently studied 5,000 immigrant students in Vancouver. The results are startling: 60% "disappeared" before they completed Grade 12 and 40% dropped out before they graduated.

Gunderson's research pegs 10% of BC's student population as identified ESL and Friesen says that's only going to grow. "It's projected that over the next five years, 28,000 children will immigrate here every year. That's half the student population of the entire Vancouver school district."

Yvonne Eamor is the BCTF's media relations officer.



Students from North Delta Secondary School facilitate discussions after the keynote address at the BCTF "What Really Counts! Rethinking Accountability" conference. Three hundred participants discussed what really matters and ways to refocus education on the whole child rather than accepting the bureaucratic demand for more simplistic data.

Bill 33 misgivings

This letter was sent to the Comox Valley School District superintendent on September 25, 2006:

We, the teachers of Highland Secondary School, would like to register our misgivings about Bill 33 and its implementation. We are concerned that this bill has created the false impression that class sizes at the secondary level are being addressed. Furthermore, we fear that our participation in the "consultation" process may indicate that we have had real input into the size and composition of our students' classes.

Bill 33 apparently mandates class size maximums of 30 and limits of 3 students with special needs per class. We would be remiss in our duty to the public and to our students if we did not categorically state that no such limits have been (or can be) observed at our school. In fact, class sizes at Highland are larger than they have ever been, with 61 classes over 30 and 48 classes with more than 3 provincially designated special needs students. There is no doubt that the widespread public support of our job action last fall was due to our commitment to reasonable class size and com-

position. We deeply regret that no advances have been made—despite government rhetoric to the contrary.

Under the legislation, "consultations" must occur between administration and all secondary teachers with classes in excess of the numbers quoted above. At Highland, this meant that 35 of our 39 teaching staff have been "consulted." Because there are no resources to ameliorate any of these violations, these consultations are meaningless. Not a single class size at Highland has been reduced courtesy of Bill 33. The end result is simply that time that could be better spent on education and administration has been wasted on a ruse designed to give the public the false impression that the government is addressing a crucial educational issue.

Let us not mince words. Bill 33 is a public-relations exercise. Your teachers will continue to advocate for learning conditions that optimize the educational opportunities for all students and that allow for individual attention for all students, regardless of ability.

That is our job.

Teaching staff, Highland Secondary School, Comox.

What exactly is a Francophone school?

by Daniel Bouchard

You teach for the Francophone district? Is that one of those private schools? My child is in French Immersion, is that the same thing?

These are some of the questions I am asked by teachers at English workshops or even by the general public and I answer as best I can.

I tell them that I am a native Franco-Columbian still living in Maillardville and that I teach in my public community school, l'École des Pionniers de Maillardville, with students whose background is connected to our French heritage in Canada and across the world.

Let me start from the beginning and recount the story of French education in British Columbia.

In the early 1900s, Fraser Mills, the largest mill in the world at the time, was in dire need of good workers specializing in the wood industry. They had a fairly large group of experienced Québécois brought by train to Coquitlam, promising them a church and school in order to preserve their culture and language. These pioneers founded Maillardville, which they named, not after the well-known duck, but after their

...It is the heart of our community, that which promulgates and preserves our culture, that which binds us and lets us continue to pass on our unique Canadian identity to our children.

first parish priest, Father Maillard. As well, Québécois nuns were brought in to deliver the best quality French education possible to the often very large families, some of them my relatives. After the Second World War they built a second French church and private school to accommodate the migration of French Canadians from the prairies.

I went to this second private school, belonged to the French community all my life, and even taught there for a few years. As there was no public French school, my father paid to have his seven children go to six different private schools (elementary schools, boys' French boarding high schools in Edmonton, and my sister in Maillardville) while still paying public property taxes to support the public schools. He was double-taxed at the time, but still managed to make ends meet. He would just jokingly tell us to put more water in the soup and it would last longer.

Prime Minister Trudeau opened our eyes to the fact

that one-third of Canadians were Francophone and had the right to have their children educated in French anywhere in Canada. From then on, Francophone parents endeavoured to have a Francophone education for their children in British Columbia.

In my teens, I witnessed the first fiery public meetings for French public schools in BC and my baby sister was in the first public Francophone class in Maillardville. Francophone parents fought to ensure their children's rights and more than once engaged the province in the possibility of involvement with the court system.

Nearly 10 years ago, thanks to our Charter of Rights and to these parents, we got the right, not just to have our French schools, but to manage them.

When the Francophone Education Authority or le Conseil scolaire francophone was instituted in 1996, I was teaching in one of the Francophone schools. We had Francophone programs before that but were isolated and governed by the various school districts within which we taught. We had to make many of our own resources and were pretty much on our own.

The Conseil scolaire francophone is one of the few regional school districts in Canada spanning an entire province with 39 sites. We are a small group of nearly 300 Francophone teachers educating almost 4,000 students and we now have our own school board, administrators, consultants, etc.

Finally we can govern our own schools, and even have the right to acquire land and have schools built. Surprisingly, the bulk of our incoming money is generated per student head, about the same amount as our English counterparts, and like you, we have found ourselves in the same deficit situation for the past number of years. We are not elitist; we have roughly the same proportion of children with learning challenges and have our share of children with special needs, too.

Why do I teach for the Francophone district? Why did

my ancestors and I sacrifice so much for so long to keep our Francophone children educated in our mother tongue? The answer is simple. Without passing on our language, we cannot transmit our culture, our historical identity, our uniqueness. Without our schools, we could easily slip into the mainstream culture as have so many of us.

I say, let's celebrate our diversity, our uniqueness, our differences, and the fact that Canada is a success story that

Without passing on our language, we cannot transmit our culture, our historical identity, our uniqueness.

accomplished what our European counterparts never could. We have French Immersion, but we also can be proud to have our Francophone schools in every province in Canada!

So what is a Francophone school? It is the heart of our community, that which promulgates and preserves our culture, that which binds us and lets us continue to pass on our unique Canadian identity to our children. It is not a French immersion school since only children who are under the Charter of Rights can attend.

To all British Columbians, mille mercis! It worked for me, a 53-year-old native French BC Canadian, a product of the Francophone system, and I truly believe that it is working for our children of French heritage in our Francophone public system.

Thank you also British Columbians for your respect of our needs and for allowing us to make it happen.

It is quite something to conceive that Francophone education is nearing the 100-year mark in BC.

Joyeux 20e anniversaire à l'École des Pionniers de Maillardville!

Joyeux 10e anniversaire au Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique

La voici mon histoire, mon vécu, ma passion et j'en suis extrêmement fier!

Daniel Bouchard is vice-president of the Francophone Teachers' Union.

Students can reach out to others during the holiday season

by Virginia Brucker

Children make great volunteers—they are full of enthusiasm, energy, and optimism. There are many good reasons why kids should volunteer. Studies show that people who help others are healthier and happier. When children volunteer, their self-esteem is enhanced as they learn new skills and make new friends. They see themselves as kind people capable of making a difference, and they learn to live more hopefully. They develop a



- donate gently used books to a family shelter or a daycare that needs them.
- organize a warm coat collection and donate the coats to an organization that needs them.



stronger, richer sense of self and often have greater empathy and compassion. Volunteer activities help build character and teach social responsibility. The holiday season provides many opportunities for elementary and secondary school students to reach out to others.

Your students can:

- make tray favours or cards for Meals-on-Wheels clients.
- sort food at a food bank.
- invite an elderly neighbour or relative to attend their holiday concert or band performance.
- make a pillow, quilt, or stockings for a shelter. This is a great project for home ec classes.
- organize a pet food drive for the local SPCA.



- collect used eyes glasses for the Lions' Club eyeglass-recycling program, which are sent to developing countries. (Visit www.clerc.ca to find where to send glasses.)

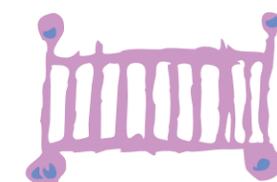


- read stories to younger students. And later on, consider organizing a big-buddy tutoring program where children regularly help younger children with reading.
- help little buddies write thank you letters to Santa for last year's gift.

"Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves..."

— James Matthew Barrie

- organize a party for the local special olympics participants. Or better still, volunteer to help with special olympics throughout the year.
- donate items their family has outgrown such as a crib, bedding, baby clothes, or baby toys to a local shelter or program for teen parents.



- visit a seniors' centre. Organize a craft or baking session for seniors or help write and address their seasonal cards.
- set up a wrapping station in a local mall to raise money for a charity that has special meaning for them.



Virginia Brucker is a Vancouver Island teacher-librarian who wrote *Gifts from the Heart: Simple Ways to Make Your Family's Christmas More Meaningful*.

A newly revised and expanded edition is available at bookstores across Canada. Royalties support research for the Canadian Cancer Society. To date, book sales have raised \$98,500 for research. Published by Insomniac Press, 2006, 336 pages, ISBN 1897178301, \$19.95.



BC's growing

Canada's working poor

When working is not enough to escape poverty

According to a report published this past August by Human Resources and Social Development Canada, there are over 1.5 million Canadians affected by working poverty and one-third of them are children under the age of 18. The authors estimate that there are about 653,300 working poor persons in Canada. The definition of working poor is a worker between 18 and 64 years old, not a full-time student, who worked at least 910 hours in one year.

Using the most recently available census data, the authors confront a number of myths and popular misconceptions about the working poor. One of those myths is that if you work hard, you won't be poor. According to the study, working poor are as "attached" to the labour market as non-poor workers, working on average, as many hours as the latter group (about 2,000 per year).

And the working poor aren't always the same people. Over a six-year period, one in 10 working-age adults will experience at least one year of working poverty.

The working poor have less favourable employment conditions: they are more likely to have atypical work schedules, are less likely to have access to dental and health-care plans, life or disability insurance, a pension plan, or to be unionized.

The study found that you were more likely to be among the working poor if you lived in BC, were the sole breadwinner with dependant children, if you were self-employed, and if you were less well educated.

Working poverty rates were highest among those with less than high school education (9.1%), a rate that dropped by a significant three percentage points to 6.1% with high school, post-secondary (4.8%) and university (3.2%) educated workers had the lowest working poverty rates.

British Columbia had the highest rate of working poor in the country at 10.2% and Vancouver (9.5%) had the

highest percentage of working poor compared to five other major city centres: Toronto (5.3%), Calgary (5.2%), Ottawa/Gatineau (3.7%), Montreal (3.4%), and Winnipeg (3.2%).

The most recent Statistics Canada low income cut-off data for a single person in a large urban area is \$17,219 compared to \$11,264 for someone living in a rural area. For a family of four, these cut-off levels are \$32,556 and \$21,296 respectively.

— Colleen Hawkey,
chawkey@bctf.ca

Source: Human Resources and Social Development Canada, (August 2006). *When Working is Not Enough to Escape Poverty: An analysis of Canada's working poor*, working paper. SP-630-06-06E

Poverty comes to school every day

by Stacey Kemp

In 2003, BC had the highest poverty rate in Canada with 23.9%. That is appalling when you think that it's basically one in four children. In BC that is over 200,000 children, approximately the same as the population of Cranbrook, Nanaimo, and Kelowna combined. The national poverty rate was 17.6%.

Most families that are living in poverty have some employment at minimum wage jobs with no benefits so they make \$8.50 an hour. After paying for daycare and rent, which is over \$1,000 a month, there is no money left.

The other big concern is the child labour laws. It used to be that if you were under 15 you had to have permission from the school and your parents to work. In 2003, new legislation was passed that allows 12-year-olds to work 35 hours a week if they are not going to school. If the child is attending school, the school no longer has to give permission, they only need permission from one parent.

There are now 12-year-olds who are working to help their families.

Living in poverty affects learning. It is wonderful that schools have free-lunch programs but imagine coming to school without having eaten in 18 hours. That's the reality for a lot of these children. Because we do academics in the morning, we need to advocate for a breakfast program. I've tried in some schools but with limited success.

So what can teachers do? The biggest thing is understanding that these kids are not living in poverty by choice. They were born into it and they don't have any options—understanding is very important. We also need to look at understanding the relationships and the children's method of speaking. Rudy Payne's book on poverty was about storytelling and how children growing up in poverty will typically start at the end of the story and tell you what the final result is and then back track. When kids are in the office being disciplined, the teacher and principal are often only seeing the final results and the children are not given the chance to go back and explain why it happened.

In closing, I want to say that relationships are key and teachers need to build on those relationships so that kids will stay in school and be more successful.

Stacey Kemp is an elementary counsellor in the Okanagan-Skaha school district and a member of the BCTF End Poverty Action Group.

Why are there so many poor among us?

by Jean Swanson

The latest stats from Stats Canada figures on the distribution of wealth are from 2001.

- The poorest 10% has no wealth—they are in debt.
- The second poorest has virtually no wealth. That's 20% that has no wealth.
- The third 10% poorest has 1% of the wealth.
- The fourth poorest has 2%.
- The fifth poorest 10% has 3%.
- The sixth 10% still only has 5%.
- The seventh poorest has 8%.
- The eighth poorest 10% has 11% of the wealth.
- The second richest 10% has 17% of the wealth.
- The richest 10% has 53% of the wealth.

If wealth were distributed equally, they'd all have 10%. The poorest half has only 6% of the wealth, and the other half has 94%. A literacy expert, Carmen St. John Hunter said, "Poverty is the underlying cause of illiteracy. Without any proven will to break the chain of poverty, no government has been able to make significant progress toward universal literacy."

There is a fascinating book by Richard Wilkinson who is an epidemiologist. He quotes research studies that show income inequality in developed countries is bad for just about everything. Countries with great inequalities will have more racism, more sexism, a worse performance in school, more drug abuse, more sickness, shorter lives, more despair, more alienation, more street crime, and even lower voter turnout.

It is not so much because the poorest can't afford decent nutrition, or that the poorer people live in polluted areas, or they don't have the proper housing, it is because it is so stressful to continuously fight against the stigma of being seen as less than other people. According to Wilkinson, facing discrimination caused by poverty and racism actually unleashes hormones and causes

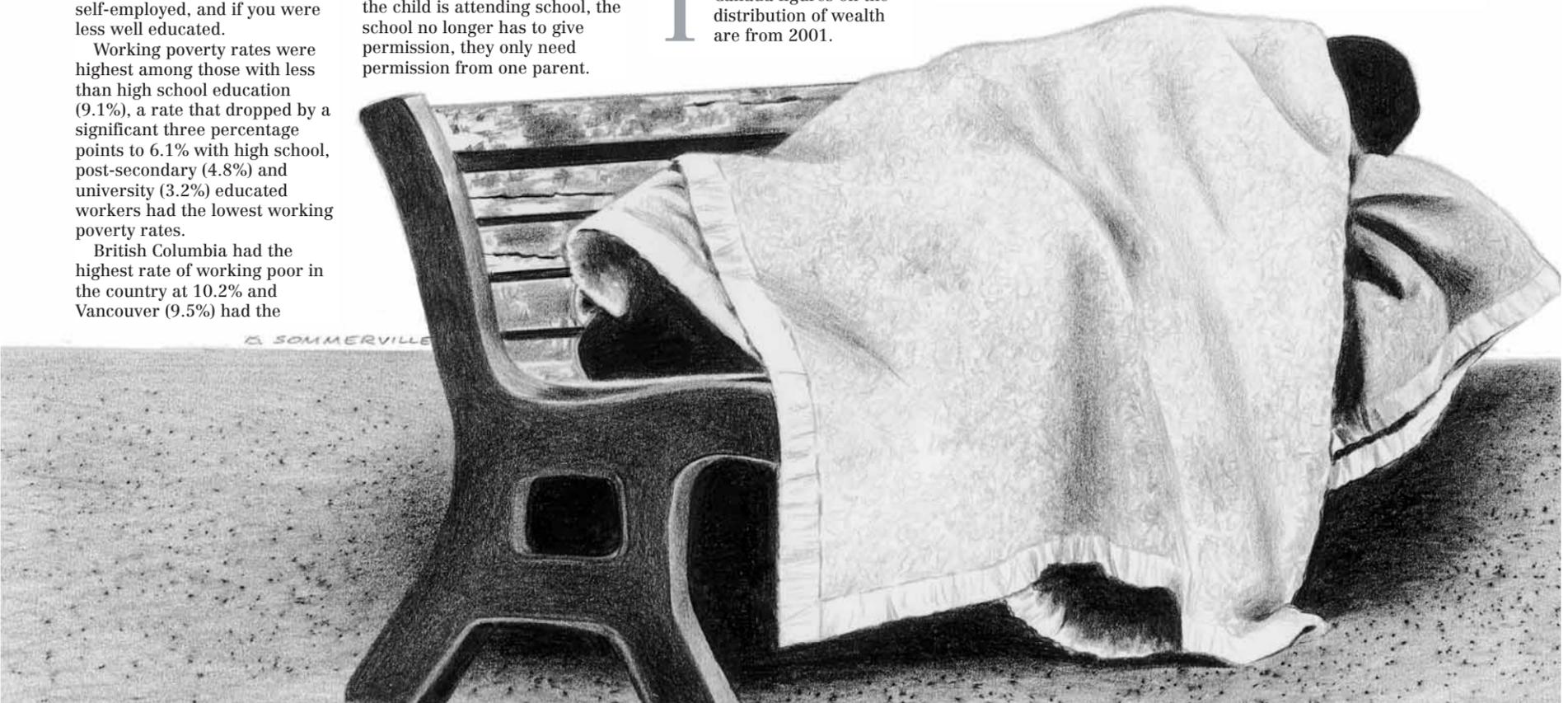
immune system responses that cause poor people in unequal countries to get sick more and die sooner.

Here in BC, our economy is booming, but we have horrible poverty stats. According to the National Council of Welfare, BC has the highest rate of child poverty of all the provinces. The Federal government's market-basket study says that 30% of BC children are living in poverty.

The real solution is to end poverty and reduce inequality in our province and our country. We are capable of doing this if we make our politicians develop a political will to do it.

In 2002, some single parents on welfare in BC lost as much as \$400 a month through welfare changes. If a father pays maintenance to a mother on welfare, 100% of it is deducted from her cheque. If the mother tries to work to supplement the welfare, 100% of her earnings are deducted from the welfare cheque, and if she doesn't declare it, she's a criminal. The welfare rate for a single parent and the child is \$968 a month plus there is a child-tax benefit of \$123. The dieticians of Canada and the BC regions say that if a family on welfare spends a reasonable amount on rent and other necessities of life, they will have virtually nothing left for a nutritious diet. A person working full-time at the minimum wage gets about \$16,000 before deductions and childcare, so they are not much better off.

Right now it is very important to be putting as much pressure as possible on the provincial government for welfare and minimum wage increases, and to build affordable housing. I have never seen so much momentum for these changes, not from the government but it is coming from every where else because the situation is so bad. For example, the National Council of Welfare puts out reports every year about how bad welfare payments are but



poverty crisis

this year the media covered it. *The Vancouver Sun* has had two editorials calling for higher welfare rates. *The North Shore News* has called for the same thing.

Vancouver, Victoria, Kelowna, Maple Ridge, and Kamloops have passed resolutions calling for welfare-rate increases, and I think Burnaby is going to do that soon.

I'm now with a group called "Raise the Rates" and we formed in January 2006. We want four things:

- welfare rates increased by 50%
- an end to the barriers that are keeping people in need off of welfare
- everyone on welfare to be allowed to keep the first \$500 they earn
- minimum wage of at least \$10 an hour and an end to the training wage.

We've got the posters, we've got leaflets that say: *Could you live on \$6 a day?* So far our members from the Anglican church have sent this material to over 100 Anglican churches and parishes in the Lower Mainland, and they want more. The Labour Council has endorsed our demands and is helping us get the posters printed. The BC Nurses' Union gave us \$5,000. The NDP is beginning to wake up on this issue although they need to do a lot more on it.

You could join and support *Raise the Rates*. Teachers can let the government and the opposition know that they want higher welfare rates, higher wages, and more affordable housing. We do have a \$3 billion surplus so there is no excuse for not doing that, no excuse whatsoever.

Newfoundland, Quebec, and Ireland have recently adopted anti-poverty strategies. In Ireland, which has the oldest anti-poverty strategy, poverty has been reduced from 15% to 5%. By ending taxation for low-wage earners, increasing welfare, providing more money for training, and transportation and heat.

I'm hoping that the BCTF can continue to step up the pressure on government to even out some of these obscene wealth stats and help all children have an equal chance to learn and thrive.

Jean Swanson is an antipoverty activist and helped form Raise the Rates.

www.raisetherates.org

We can afford to end poverty

by Seth Klein

You can sense the momentum building to address poverty in our communities. Mark Lee, the economist from our office, and I went to present an anti-poverty plan for the province to the provincial Finance Committee. The Surrey Chamber of Commerce gave a presentation, most of which I disagreed with, but interestingly on this issue, and in light of the upcoming Olympics, they were very clear. We've got to deal with homelessness before the Olympics. I gather from one of the members of the Finance Committee that this is the single message they have heard more than any other as they have travelled the province. So the momentum is building.

For those of you who are teachers in the classroom, you may find yourselves in these debates sometimes with your co-workers, friends, and family. I just want to equip you with some facts and then some further solutions so you can do that good work.

Whenever you are talking about poverty and welfare rates, you are confronting three dominant myths:

1. Welfare is more generous than it is.
2. Welfare is easier to get than it is.
3. Poverty is inevitable, it will always be with us.

To speak to the last of those first. It's not true, there is nothing that is inevitable about it. To paraphrase the organization that Jean Swanson helped found some years ago, it is legislated in many ways. It is the result of bad policies, and bad policy choices. Conversely, there is a great quote from Nelson Mandela, "Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be eradicated by the actions of human beings."

People need to know that those jurisdictions that decide they are going to do something—do, and within a remarkably short period of time, they can make huge dents in prevailing poverty rates. Ireland is one such example.

BC and Newfoundland consistently rank as having the worst poverty rates in the country. Whenever you draw this to the attention of the BC

government, they respond the same way. Oh the stats are old, the economy is picking up, we don't need to worry about it and as we work, there will be a strong economy. The Conservative government in Newfoundland, in the face of this same statistic, responds completely differently. Their response is, we are aware of these statistics, and they are unacceptable.

The main policy goal in BC in the last few years has been welfare caseload reduction. The goal of Newfoundland is poverty reduction. These are very different goals. Welfare caseload reduction is neither good nor bad. It depends on why it is happening and it depends on what is happening to those who leave.

In the same way that our premier is always going on about the Five Great Goals, you can go to the homepage of the Newfoundland government and download their detailed book of an anti-poverty plan. It is not just a plan for the ministry responsible for welfare. It is an over-arching goal of government across ministries, with targets, timelines, performance measures, and a minister responsible. All kinds of people's jobs and duties now hinge on their ability to meet these goals and to take a province over a 10-year period from having one of the worst poverty rates to one of the best.

If you just asked people, Do you think we should increase welfare rates? I suspect it would be split down the middle. But what we found when you tell them what people actually get on welfare and then ask them, 74% say yes.

A lot of rules have made welfare much harder to access, and we've written a whole paper on this called, "Denied assistance—Closing the front door on welfare in BC." A lot of those changes are unknown to people. When you tell them about it, they do not like what they hear. It does not sit well with them. It is an information gap, not a values gap.

British Columbia not only has the highest child poverty rates in the country, it has the highest poverty rate overall, the highest childhood poverty rates, the highest rates for single-mother families, but has also been operating in defiance of the national trends. The situation in this decade has been improving nationally, yet between 2000 and 2004 has become dramati-

cally worse in BC. For single-mother-led households, poverty rose 15.8 percentage points between the years 2000 and 2004. That is a huge increase in the poverty rate. What is happening relates to the policy changes that were introduced in 2002, because a lot of them ended up specifically targeting in effect single-mother households.

There was a straight cut in benefits in 2002, just under \$50 a month, cuts to shelter allowance for families of three or more, a loss of the earnings exemptions, as much as \$200 or more of income a month, and the loss of the family maintenance exemption, another \$100 a month. Before 2002, single-parent households could combine work and welfare and other income in such a way that got them just above the poverty line, and after 2002, the rules didn't allow them to do that anymore.

It has become much more difficult to access social assistance in the first place. The government claims that welfare cases have gone down, a good news story that more people are leaving and they are leaving for work. But when we got the month-by-month freedom of information data that actually looked at how many people over this whole four-year period were going onto welfare and how many people were leaving, something interesting emerged. Turns out that there is no increase in the number of people leaving welfare. The decline in caseloads is entirely because of a reduction in the number of people getting on. It is about a massive tightening of the rules in different and subtle ways, an

increase in the outright denials and the dramatic increase in what we call the discouraging factor of a system that has become so complicated and onerous to navigate that people simply walk away. There's a direct correlation between that and the increase in homelessness that we all witness.

We went before the Finance Committee and we outlined our anti-poverty strategy and pointed out that in a province as rich as British Columbia, there's no reason why we couldn't do this.

We laid out a detailed anti-poverty strategy, which included:

- raising welfare rates.
- increasing welfare eligibility.
- increasing minimum wages to \$10.00, although that is a non-budget item.
- dramatically increasing the stock of social housing.
- changing some of the rules so that lower-income people have more access to post-secondary education and training.
- increasing access to child-care.

In the first year of our plan, it would cost \$2.3 billion. That's a lot of money but we all know the surplus for the year just closed was \$3 billion. The current year will again have a surplus between \$2 and \$3 billion. According to our projections, next year's surplus is looking to be \$4 billion until they make changes with February's budget. So the money is there to do something dramatic and bold.

Seth Klein is BC director, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. www.ccpa.com

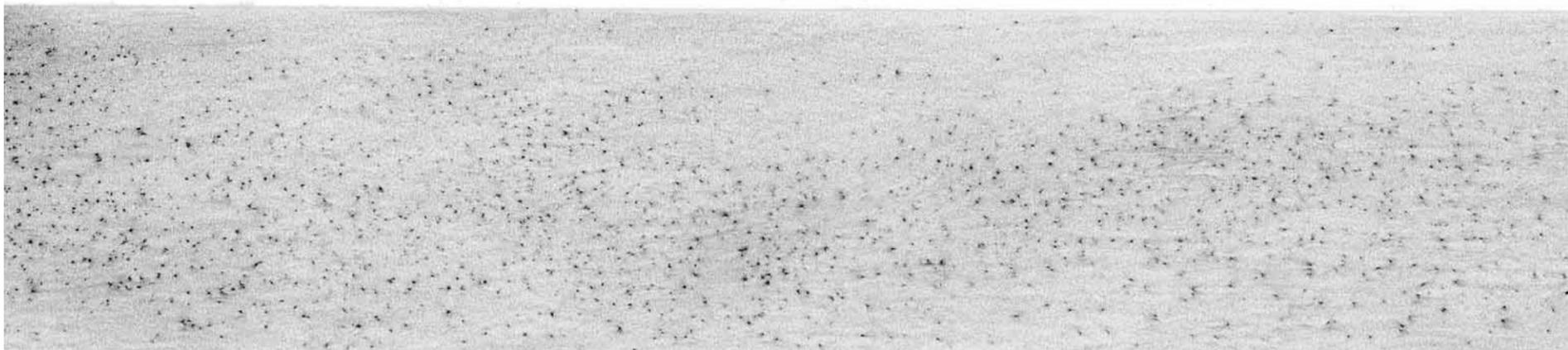
Wealth in Canada in 1999

The wealthiest 10% of family units held 53% of all personal wealth. The poorest 10% were in debt by \$2,100.

Deciles (family units ranked by net worth)	Total net worth %	Median net worth \$
All family units	100	81,000
Lowest 10%	—	-2,100
Second 10%	—	3,100
Third 10%	1	14,300
Fourth 10%	2	35,500
Fifth 10%	3	64,700
Sixth 10%	5	101,500
Seventh 10%	8	152,600
Eighth 10%	11	220,800
Ninth 10%	17	338,100
Highest 10%	53	703,500

— amount too small to be expressed

Source: Statistics Canada's survey, The Assets and Debts of Canadians, March 2001, catalogue no. 13-595-XIE.



Health and safety

WorkSafeBC in schools

by Mark Keelan

There is a common misconception among many workers, including BCTF members, that the Workers' Compensation Board, WorkSafeBC, is interested only in denying compensation claims and is not particularly concerned about workplace health and safety. These workers believe that there is no point in calling a WorkSafeBC officer about a health and safety problem because the officer will not do anything about it. This is simply not true. While WorkSafeBC officers are short-staffed and overworked, they write thousands of inspection reports each year that include thousands of orders requiring employers to live up to their health and safety obligations.

British Columbia school districts are not exempt from WorkSafeBC scrutiny. From January to June of 2006, BC school districts were presented

with 94 inspection reports that included 114 orders.

The orders provide an excellent overview of WorkSafeBC's expectations for the health and safety of workers in British Columbia schools. The following verbatim excerpts from the orders are some of those expectations.

General health and safety

- The occupational health and safety program must be designed to prevent injuries and occupational diseases, and without limiting the generality of the foregoing, the program must include appropriate written instructions, available for reference by all workers... Examples of such written instructions include violence in the workplace, investigation of accidents, spill clean up and WHMIS.

- Without undue delay, ensure that workplace conditions that are hazardous to the health or safety of workers are remedied.

Investigations and inspections

- An employer must immediately undertake an investigation into the cause of any accident or other incident that resulted in injury to a worker requiring medical treatment.

- Every employer must ensure that regular inspections are made of all workplaces, including buildings, structures, grounds, excavations, tools, equipment, machinery and work methods and practices, at intervals that will prevent the development of unsafe working conditions.

Ergonomics

- The employer must identify factors in the workplace that may expose workers to a risk of musculoskeletal injury (MSI).

Indoor air quality

- The employer must ensure that temperature and humidity levels within the indoor work environment are maintained

within acceptable comfort ranges, as far as is practicable.

- The ventilation system must be balanced to ensure that each space within the building receives an adequate allotment of outdoor air.

Hazardous materials

- The employer is ordered to ensure that general WHMIS education, as it pertains to the workplace, is provided to workers on how to access current MSDS information, the content required on MSDS, and the significance of this information.

First aid

- This officer directs this school to conduct a first-aid assessment to determine and implement adequate first-aid supplies and services.

Violence

- A risk assessment must be performed in any workplace in which a risk of injury to workers from violence arising

out of their employment may be present.

- Incidents of workplace violence as defined on OHS Reg. Section 4.27 require investigation if the workers are subjected to violence or have reasonable cause to believe there is risk of injury.

- An employer must inform workers who may be exposed to the risk of violence of the nature and extent of the risk.

The *Workers Compensation Act* and the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation contain many significant protections for workers. But, they are just words on a page unless they are enforced. BCTF members should ensure that each workplace has a functioning and effective joint health and safety committee. And when the employer throws roadblocks in front of the joint committee, call WorkSafeBC and ask an officer to write orders.

Mark Keelan is the BCTF's health and safety officer for prevention.



Some BCTF staff participated in Run for the Cure in memory of friends and colleagues who have passed away from cancer.

Help prevent cancer by preventing exposure to toxic chemicals

The Labour Environmental Alliance Society (LEAS) is calling for regulation and right-to-know labelling of toxic chemicals in order to reduce our exposure to chemicals linked to breast and other cancers.

LEAS research co-ordinator Sean Griffin says there is a growing body of scientific evidence demonstrating a link with chemical exposure and breast cancer. Numerous chemicals including methylene chloride in paint strippers, pesticide ingredients, and even an ingredient, bisphenol-A, that can leach out of hard plastic water bottles have been associated with breast cancer—and exposures at a young age may be especially critical.

Another group of chemicals linked to cancer are the toxic fire-retardant PBDEs that have now been listed as CEPA-toxic by the federal government but still have not been banned from

use. Griffin says, "We need to take the next step with toxic PBDEs and introduce regulations that would eliminate them from use in Canada."

"Prevention gets lost when everything is focussed on the cure—and we owe it to our kids to do whatever we can for cancer prevention by reducing their exposure to pesticides and other toxic chemicals," says Mae Burrows, executive director of LEAS.

LEAS publishes the *CancerSmart Consumer Guide*, which targets toxic household and personal-care products and garden pesticides and recommends safer alternatives. Over 20,000 copies of the guide have been distributed in Canada.

For more information please visit the LEAS website at www.leas.ca.

Mae Burrows, executive director, 604-526-1956 or Sean Griffin, research co-ordinator 604-254-9412.

A taste of farming for classroom teachers

by Julia Poole

The summer institute organized by the BC Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation and set in the pristine meadows of Montfort House on Vancouver Island, not only provided teachers with the experience of hands-on farm life but with the culinary delight of farm fresh local foods as well. Engaging speakers and learning activities helped teachers to become more knowledgeable about Canada's and BC's farming and food production. Field trips offered first-hand opportunities to talk with the farmers who bring our food to our local markets. This program is one of the hidden treasures of teacher professional development.

Chef Daniel Lesnes of Garibaldi Secondary conjured up culinary delights for each meal, connecting our learning with real-life experiences. This inspired me to bring the same experience to my students, to help them understand how our food is grown here in BC and the many hands that work together to bring food to our tables. The experience helped me understand how important it is to develop the connection between our food production and my students' food consumption, their health, lifestyle, and job futures.

The opportunity for teachers to learn about agriculture from other teachers who specialize in this field was made possible through the support and sponsorship of BC farmers and

producers. The enthusiasm of Lindsay Babineau, executive director of AITC, is contagious and the results of her efforts to create a comprehensive and informative, fun-filled learning experience for teachers of BC are well worth spending some of your summer holidays to see. If you have never lived on a farm, this is one life experience you will not want to miss. The course can be taken for UBC credit through professor Gale Smith of the Home Economics and Continuing Education Department. Information and projects for classroom use can be found on the Agriculture in the Classroom web site at www.aitc.ca/bc

Julia Poole is an ICT/Applied Skills Helping Teacher, Surrey. poole_j@sd36.bc.ca.



Teachers attend a summer institute organized by BC Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation at Montfort House on Vancouver Island.

On being well

Workplace wellness

by Julia Johnson

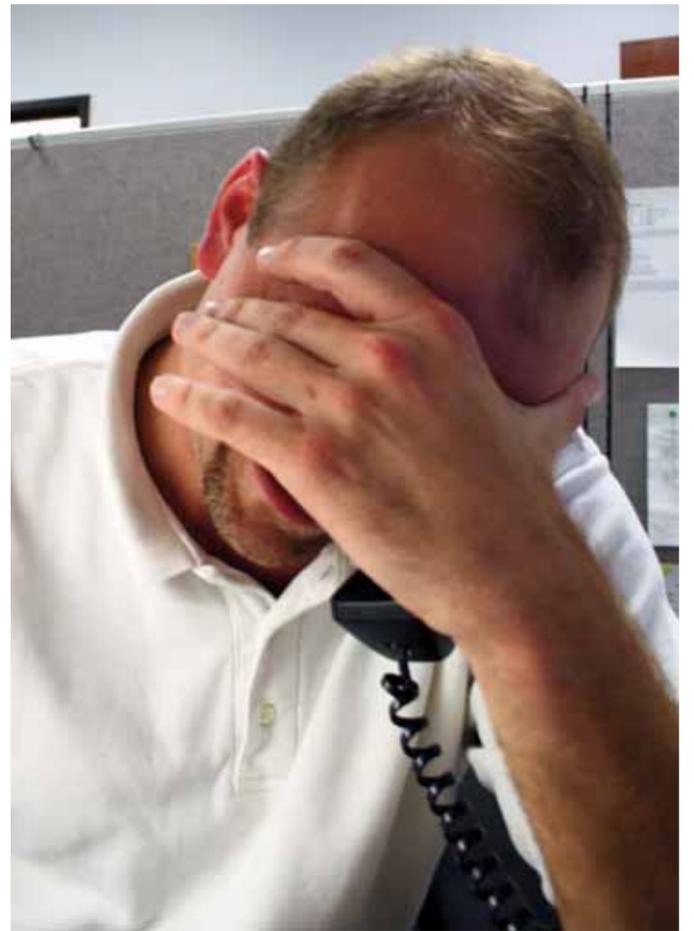
The National Quality Institute, an independent, not-for-profit organization, is the leading authority in Canada on workplace excellence and healthy workplace criteria. To promote workplace health they set aside October 23 to 29 as Healthy Workplace Week. During this time, Canadian organizations are encouraged to participate in wellness strategies designed to increase awareness of the importance of healthy workplaces and the relationship a healthy workplace has to the long-term success of an organization. Recent surveys in the United Kingdom indicate that stress is the number one workplace health issue and 60% of our waking hours are at work.

The October 14 edition of *The Vancouver Sun* featured an article on Canada's top 100 employers for 2007 as determined by MediCorp Canada Inc. For seven years this organization has produced a reference guide for job seekers listing the best practices of businesses because the increased number of retired baby boomers has created a highly competitive job market. As a result, employers are struggling to find ways to attract and keep skilled employees. In determining which companies across Canada would make the Top 100 list, MediCorp reviewed seven key areas: (1) physical workplace,

(2) social atmosphere, (3) health, financial, and family benefits, (4) vacation and time off, (5) employee communications, (6) performance and management, and (7) training, skills, and development.

These evaluative categories illustrate a paradigm shift in the way employees are presently choosing their employers. No longer is an attractive salary the driver of employment. People are striving to achieve a balance between their work and other aspects of their life in response to their increased stress levels. High on the list of benefits being sought is improvement of working conditions that permit flexible work hours, on-site daycare, tuition subsidies for upgrading, and paid leave for professional development. Employers attempting to be attractive, sweeten the pot with programs that address the personal well being of their employees. Some of these incentives include subsidized fitness activities, in-house health education courses, and financial and consultative support for family issues. New to the benefit package is the more innovative idea of some companies to demonstrate their philanthropy and community involvement by providing paid time-off for employees to volunteer. It would appear that the world of business, in its efforts to attract highly skilled and creative employees is responding to the work-life balance issue that confronts many of us today.

For those of us in teaching, this issue is of paramount concern because the daily professional demands made on teachers have many layers that create stress in our lives. The layer that is up close and personal is how teachers respond to the emotional baggage that each student carries into school. Within each classroom there are students who have experienced troubled home lives because of divorce, neglect, poverty, drugs and alcohol, abuse that is emotional, sexual, or physical, or environments that are violent. In addition, teachers must attend to the needs of the students in class who have special requirements, who have learning disabilities, and whose first language is not English. In preparing to teach this diverse group a layer of stress is added by the expectation to embrace research on such topics as: student learning disabilities, multiple intelligences, learning styles, student strengths, student life experiences, and brain research. When the curriculum layer is considered, additional stress is experienced if resources are lacking, or if curriculum is new and training is inadequate. Stress and frustration are close companions when working with each of these layers in the context of time because each situation requires time for consulting, meeting, reflecting, and planning, and there are



insufficient hours in a work day to perform all of these tasks with care. And when a work day is finished and one returns to the safety of home, waiting are the additional responsibilities that come with the many roles of wife, husband, girlfriend, boyfriend, partner, friend, mother, father, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, grandparent, and caregiver of children, parents, and grandparents.

A teacher's life is an integral part of each life that makes a

school community. To acknowledge this is to accept the precept that our personal wellness has an effect on all of those around us and we have a responsibility to ensure that our workplace supports a vision of work-life balance.

Julia Johnson, a retired learning resource teacher in Quesnel, is a BCTF PD wellness associate and a member of the Teacher Newsmagazine Advisory Board. livingjewels@shaw.ca.

BC's worst school just may be its best

by Gary Mason

According to the Fraser Institute's most recent rankings of British Columbia elementary schools, the picture doesn't get much grimmer than Roosevelt Park in Prince Rupert. Out of the 1,009 schools rated, Roosevelt Park and two others tied for last.

Many of the kids entering Kindergarten at Roosevelt Park don't know their colours, for instance, don't know the difference between an apple and a banana.

What a morale booster for parents, students, and teachers at Roosevelt Park. The lousiest school in the province. Roosevelt Park's overall rating out of 10 was 0.0% for 2004-05. That compares with St. George's, an independent boys school in Vancouver, which scored a perfect 10.

Of course, there are a few things that the rankings don't take into account.

You know, just little things the teachers at schools such as St. George's and others never have to worry about. Like the fact that 71% of the children entering Kindergarten this year at Roosevelt Park were deemed "at risk."

What does that mean? It means they did not possess the basic language skills children should possess by the time they're ready to enter the school system.

Many of the kids entering Kindergarten at Roosevelt Park don't know their colours, for instance, don't know the difference between an apple and a banana.

Many of them have the language skills of a three-year-old. Or less.

The Fraser Institute's rankings are based on results from the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA), a province-wide test in reading, writing, and numeracy. It is administered each spring to children in Grades 4 and 7.

Oh yeah, that's another thing about Roosevelt Park.

Of the 20 pupils who took the FSA test in Grade 4 last year, only 11 had actually been in the school since Kindergarten.

In some classes there might be eight or nine children with special needs.

There is usually a 50% turnover of pupils from year to year. So, even though many of the children at Roosevelt taking the assessment test each year have received most of their schooling elsewhere, Roosevelt gets stuck with the results.

Many of Roosevelt's classrooms are filled with children

who have "issues," as they say. Many are affected by fetal alcohol syndrome. In some classes there might be eight or nine children with special needs. Many children have witnessed horrible violence at home. Or have had to deal with other traumas.

Roosevelt Park offers suicide programs. Why? Because once a month or so, a child at the school discloses to someone that she or he is thinking of ending it all.

One girl just finishing Grade 6 at Roosevelt was recently asked by her teacher, as part of a class exercise, what her earliest childhood memory was. She said she remembered one night when she was seven being left at home alone by her mother who went out for a few drinks.

When she didn't return, the little girl decided to pack up her younger sisters—one was three, the other a newborn—because she feared the people from Children and Family Services would come and apprehend them.

It was the middle of the night and the three had to descend a steep staircase from their house. The seven-year-old was trying to manage a buggy and lost control. It went rattling down the stairs with the baby in it,

knocking over the three-year-old at the bottom. Thankfully, everyone was okay.

By the time the girl told this story, she'd been in five foster homes. A couple of years ago, 40 of the school's 200 pupils were in government care. That's another thing the Fraser Institute rankings don't tell you.

Roosevelt Park offers suicide programs. Why? Because once a month or so, a child at the school discloses to someone that she or he is thinking of ending it all. Seems the kids at Roosevelt have things on their minds other than the FSA. Who would have thought?

The "lousiest school in the province" has piloted a wonderful new program called Parents as Literacy Supporters, or PALS. It teaches parents how to help their children read and write. You see, many of the parents weren't taught themselves.

There's another program called Parents and Children Education Services, or PACES. It's also a first in British Columbia. It offers parents advice on basic parenting skills

Roosevelt Park has piloted a number of programs. In fact, it's been so successful that educators from far and wide have arrived at the school to see the programs in action.

such as how to play with your children and how to stimulate their minds. At Roosevelt Park, as much of the work is about helping the parents as the students.

Roosevelt Park has piloted a number of programs. In fact, it's been so successful that educators from far and wide have arrived at the school to see the programs in action.

"We're trying to fix kids here... That's a bigger challenge than getting their FSA results up.

The Prince Rupert Daily News did an article on the Fraser Institute's latest rankings and how Roosevelt Park finished dead last. That must have made the kids feel even better about themselves, don't you think?

Steve Riley, the school's principal, just shakes his head. What are you going to do? "We're trying to fix kids here," he said in an interview. "That's a bigger challenge than getting their FSA results up. There are so many factors in the kids' lives here that affect their schooling, it's not even funny."

Factors the Fraser Institute's rankings don't take into account. Which is why the "lousiest school in the province" may just be the best.

Reprinted with permission from *The Globe and Mail*, June 13, 2006, gmason@globeandmail.com.

Teachers retired

The following teachers retired prior to October 2006.

5 Southeast

Kootenay

Joanne Anderson
Veronica Aragones
Florence Baturin
Vicki Bjerstedt
Robert Buxton
Glen Carter
Maureen Farish
Franklin Hastings
Robert Hogg
Heather Hudson
John Hughes
Marion Hurd
Roger Kitson
Karen Larsen
Terrance Minnis
Joseph Paniec
Joanne Pighin
Donald Rivers
Maria Squance
Donna Stephens
William Stephens
Charlene Sundstrom
David Stock
June Vandenbergh
David Wall
Judith Watson

6 Rocky

Mountain

Patricia Almas
Virginia Anderson
Suzanne Chambers
Brent Gillies
Heather Murphy
Gail McLean
Virginia Partridge
Marianne Rennick
George Smedley

8 Kootenay Lake

Chilcotin

Sally Albert
Kenneth Alexander
Ann Atamanenko
Mason Brown
Judith Cameron
John Chisamore
Lynne Cook
Herbert Couch
Robert Foreman
Richard Foulger
Candace Fray
Mary Garnett
Jennifer Horlacher
Olwen Humphries
Doris Lynn Johnson
Jill Marie Kimmel
Dorothy MacKinlay
Arthur Maxwell
Rita McDonnell
Keith McMillan
Donald Nowoselski
Bruce Paterson
Geoffrey Peake
Sylvia Raine
Katherine Reyden
Dale Rumohr
Tim Spencer
Peter Stoll
William Sweet
Larry Tremblay
Daniel Wack
Jill Winters
Beverly Wyers

10 Arrow Lakes

Allan Arnett

Theresa Mandalik

19 Revelstoke

Karen Stockand

Marilyn Taylor
20 Kootenay-Columbia
Fred Bojey
Douglas Carter
Sharon Clement
Michael Davey
Phyllis Dalgopol
David Dudley
Irene Furey
Bill Gorkoff
David Healing
Mary Healing
Margaret Hill
Suzanne McVicker
Christa Minor
Mary Treloar
Elizabeth Vigue
Dwight Visser

22 Vernon

Robert Advent
Marjorie Alfawicki
Norma Beeby
Patricia Bock-Philippis
Marilyn Boughen
Thomas Buffie
Judith Burns
P Lee Caufield
Bill Darnell
Gayle Dill
Brenda Fulbrook
Cindy Gatzke
Horst Giese
Wendy Gorman
Theresa Heinrichs
Diane Isman
Kenneth Kereliuk
Karen Leahy
Sharon Marsh
Joseph Morgan
Evelyn Nell
Grant Nelson
Russell Niehaus
Charles Peltonen
Janet Robson
Deloy Glen Routley
Connie Rush
Valerie Salmon
Robert Shannon
Susan Steinke
Leila Ward
Claire Wilkins
Darlene Yamaoka

23 Central

Okanagan

Raymond Bueckert
Kathryn Ervin
Tania Korby
Carol Taylor

27 Cariboo-

Chilcotin

Elsie Archie
Kitty Ashe
Margareta Britz
Richard Bryan
Sheila Gibson
Shirley Gordon
Charles Griffin
Garth Holmes
Christine Kilpatrick
Barbara MacLeod
Adrian Messner
Heather Russell
Peter Smith
Susan Zirnhehl

28 Quesnel

Robert Allen
William Atkinson
Sieglinde Bentham
Evi Black
Kathleen Breadner
Ron Caskey
Bonnie Chlebek
Herbert Chlebek
Vicki-Lee Hansen
Julia Johnson
Michael Kavanagh
James Lang
Sandra Loughheed
Doug Maley
Marie Skinner
Barbara Spencer
Herbert Sturt
Laura Ann Sturt
Elizabeth Van Halderen

33 Chilliwack

Charles Beamin
Barbara Caldwell
Dave Clyne
Myla Davis
Betty Doerksen
Laura Friesen
Johnson Hartman
Joan Hill
John Johnson
Susan Jordan
Patricia Kennedy
Heather Lennie
Barry Lyon
Peggy Robertson
Christine Schoeffel
Patrick Stedman
Terry Teeft
James Todd
Susan Todd
Jo Tymoschuk
John Van Laerhoven
David Whitaker

Florence Williams
Wendy Winstanley

34 Abbotsford

Brian Ashton
Percy Austin
Blanche Baker
Jacqueline Brunet
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Rumi Sasaki
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Patricia Smith
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35 Langley

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John Wiebe
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Gordon Wilson
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Pamela Wood

36 Surrey

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Carlyle Beach
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Ethel Phillpotts

Robert

Teachers' pension plan

by Carolyn Prellwitz

Important information for teachers considering retirement

If you are considering retiring soon, you will be interested in this important information about retiree dental benefits.

Projections have shown that costs for the non-pension benefits will exceed the funding available by the middle of 2007. As a result, the existing subsidized dental plan for retired Teachers' Pension Plan members will end on July 31, 2007, and a new, unsubsidized voluntary dental plan will take its place on August 1, 2007. Retirees and beneficiaries receiving a pension will pay full premiums under the new plan for coverage for themselves, their spouses, and their dependants.

This change to the plan reflects the need for the Teachers' Pension Plan to achieve a balance between the rising costs of non-pension benefits (extended health, dental, and inflation protection) and the limited funds available to pay for these benefits. The new group dental plan will be less costly for the pension plan because it will not be subsidized. At the same time, it will provide coverage at a group rate not available to individuals.

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left-hand side navigation bar on the home page (Purchase of Service Application Package, Pension Transfer Application, Reinstatement of a Refund Request for Cost).

The TPP web site also has a Purchase Cost Estimator to help determine the cost of purchasing a leave of absence. You can then use your Personalized Pension Estimator to determine how much the purchase will increase your pension.

BCTF staff are available to assist with all of the above. Telephone 1-800-663-1921 or e-mail directly to alambert@bcf.ca or cprellwitz@bcf.ca.

Responsible investing and the TPP

The Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees has been very progressive in expanding its emphasis on using responsible investing criteria in managing the assets of the Teachers' Pension Plan. The Board's

investment agent, bcIMC, has developed, at the request of the board, a pooled investment portfolio designed to replicate the risk and return characteristics of the Domini 400 Social Index. Approval to participate in this new investment portfolio was given by the board at its October 2006 meeting.

The Domini 400 Social Index is a US index that is loosely modeled on the S&P 500 Index but incorporates responsible investment principles in the construction of the index. This includes negative screens to exclude companies that have significant exposure to tobacco, weapons, alcohol, gambling, and nuclear power, as well as incorporating positive qualitative screens to include companies that exhibit desirable social traits such as strong community relations, workforce diversity, good employee relations, and sustainable environmental practices. The trustees believe that participation in this new pooled investment fund will be consistent with the trustees' fiduciary duty to manage the plan in the best financial interest of plan members.

The board has also agreed to enhance its Statement of Investment Policies and Procedures to describe better its recognition of responsible investment factors in making investment decisions.

The Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees, through the bcIMC, continues to vote its proxies and to engage companies by encouraging them to use high standards when considering responsible investing issues. It is the board's belief that well-governed companies that meet the environmental and social expectations of their stakeholders are better positioned to deliver sustainable investment results that contribute to the long-term financial success of the pension plan. A summary of bcIMC's activity in this area on behalf of the board is available at www.bcimc.com.

Finally, Responsible Investing Reports from the TPP can now be found on both the web sites of the TPP and the BCTF. The first report was posted June 2006.

Carolyn Prellwitz is an assistant director in BCTF's Income Security Division.

Access pension information online

Where?

Teachers' Pension Plan (TPP) web site at tpp.pensionsbc.ca

How?

Click on "My Account" on the right side of the TPP home page. Enter the username and temporary password provided for you on your 2005 TPP members' benefit statement. Your password is above your name and social insurance number in section 1 of the statement. If you have misplaced your statement, phone the TPP to have a new one mailed to you. Toll-free 1-800-665-6770, Vancouver 604-660-4088, Victoria 250-953-3022.

What?

Your personal profile, your pension service history, and your personalized pension estimator.

Choosing the right options

Undecided about your Joint Life option? *Choosing the right options: Your BC public sector pension and the joint life question, 2006 Edition* by Ken Smith is available from the BCTF Lesson Aids Department (see p. 12 for ordering instructions)—\$15.

An interactive Excel CD version (\$30) is available from Ken Smith, 5120 Ewart Street, Burnaby, BC V5J 2W2.

Pension seminars 2006-07

Venues are still to be confirmed in specified locations. Members who register for a particular seminar will receive an e-mail confirming specific time and location.

Contact information for registration and more information about the TPP Member Seminars is:

Telephone 250-356-2466, or toll-free at 1-877-558-5574.
 Fax 250-953-0436
 E-mail TPPseminars@pensionsbc.ca
 Web site www.tpp.pensionsbc.ca

Abbotsford	November 25	9 a.m.-12 p.m.	Abbotsford District Teachers' Association
Coquitlam	January 11	6 p.m.-9 p.m.	Gleneagle Secondary School
Coquitlam	January 13	9 a.m.-12 p.m.	Gleneagle Secondary School
Surrey	January 25	6 p.m.-9 p.m.	Kwantlen University College
Surrey	January 27	9 a.m.-12 p.m.	Kwantlen University College
Nanaimo	February 10	9 a.m.-12 p.m.	Coast Bastion Inn
Vancouver	February 15	6 p.m.-9 p.m.	Best Western Chateau Granville
Vancouver	February 17	9 a.m.-12 p.m.	Best Western Chateau Granville
Prince George	March 1	6 p.m.-9 p.m.	Days Inn
Prince George	March 3	9 a.m.-12 p.m.	Days Inn
Williams Lake	March 10	9 a.m.-12 p.m.	Overlander
Kelowna	March 31	9 a.m.-12 p.m.	UBC Okanagan Conferences & Accommodations
Terrace	April 14	9 a.m.-12 p.m.	Best Western Terrace Inn
Campbell River	April 21	9 a.m.-12 p.m.	TBA
Burnaby	April 26	6 p.m.-9 p.m.	BCIT Burnaby
Burnaby	April 28	9 a.m.-12 p.m.	BCIT Burnaby
Cranbrook	May 5	9 a.m.-12 p.m.	College of the Rockies
North Vancouver	May 10	6 p.m.-9 p.m.	TBA
North Vancouver	May 12	9 a.m.-12 p.m.	TBA

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www.hellocuba.ca

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 fax 604-320-0535
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 web www.variety.bc.ca/legacy
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WHISTLER Village North, 2 bd. deluxe townhome. 604-531-6847, hpjanzen@shaw.ca. View at www.whistlervacationhome.ca.

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PD CALENDAR

DECEMBER

7–9 Vancouver. The 12th Annual Provincial Conference on Aboriginal Education, Literature, and Literacy will be happening at the Westin Bayshore Vancouver. The conference is an opportunity for educators and administrators to discuss innovative practices. Visit www.fnesc.ca/conferences/index.php#conf or call 604-925-6087 for details.

JANUARY 2007

26–27 Vancouver. The BC Alternate Education Association's 20th annual Challenge & Change Conference at the Vancouver Sheraton Wall Centre. Keynote speaker: Gary Phillips, along with many other informative, fun, and inspirational sessions, and the not-to-be-missed Schmooze. Details: www.bctf.ca/bcaea, (follow Conference link.) Co-ordinator: DJ Pauls, dj_pauls@sd34.bc.ca

FEBRUARY

15–17 Kamloops. BC Art Teachers' Association Annual Conference, About Face 2007. Art can make one look at an image, a person, an object, the world in a different way. It can change one's perspective and it can bring one's attention to what has previously been overlooked. Delegates will do an "about face" in Kamloops, an exciting, vibrant city where the arts thrive. Information TBA. www.bctf.ca/beata

MARCH

8–10 Victoria. 2nd International Conference for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: Research, Policy, and Practice Around the World. Fairmont Empress Hotel. The conference goal is to provide participants with the means to use research and practice to inform and shape policy regarding fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Information www.interprofessional.ubc.ca. Contact Joanne Nam at ipad@interchange.ubc.ca.

15–16 Vancouver. The Special Education Association of BC presents its 32nd annual Crosscurrents Conference at the Westin Bayshore, featuring a line-up of top quality presenters and a wide range of sessions relevant to teachers working with students who have special learning needs. Information TBA fall 2006 at www.bctf.ca/sea or contact Priscilla Fortier, priscilla@shaw.ca.

APRIL

19–20 Saskatoon. Where It's AT—Assistive Technology for Children & Youth Conference. Speakers: Susie Blackstien-Adler, M.Ed., B.Sc. O.T. (Bloorview Kids Rehab, Toronto) on supporting participation of students with high needs in the activities of the classroom; and Stacey Harpell, B.S., M.S., CCC-SLP (Saskatoon Health Region), on social communication. Contact Events of Distinction 306-651-3118; f: 306-651-3119; efofd@sasktel.net.

19–21 Toronto. Inner City: Strength in Diversity—Advocating for the Future. This national inner-city conference is calling for contributions and participation. Session categories can include: Student leadership, Teaching practice in the inner city, Teacher development for the inner city, Student well-being, Curriculum and programs, Family and community partnerships, Funding and policy. Contact Jeffrey Kugler, jkgugler@oise.utoronto.ca, Ph: 416-9233-6641, ext. 7859.

21–22 Kelowna. Manteo Resort. UBC offers a French and Spanish Immersion Weekend. \$250 includes tuition and three meals. Teachers can use their Tuition Fee Certificate toward the fee. Call 604-822-0802 or see www.languages.ubc.ca

PSA PD Day October 19, 2007

PD Calendar web site
<http://pdonline.bctf.ca/conferences/PD-Calendar.html>

Additions/changes?
Contact Elizabeth Lambert,
elambert@bctf.ca

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Finding voice

by Suzanne McCarthy

She came to our school at the age of 10, severely hearing impaired, with the English vocabulary of a two-year-old. She had only been in Canada for two years but her mother tongue was no more familiar to her than English.

She sat sideways on the chair and let her hair hang down over her face, covering cheeks smeared by tears, and did not respond to speech. She followed her sister through the hallways and made sure she did not get left behind.

Clinical tests showed there was adequate residual hearing to change this, but she could not discriminate enough sounds to differentiate *treat* from *street*, and *teak* from *teach*.

I heard an unusual sound one day, and turned to see her laughing. It was over a year and I had never heard that sound before.

One day, I noticed in her drawing of an island that she portrayed perspective and contour in a way that few adults could. My skin tingled with amazement.

We finally got an assessment that showed a high average intelligence. The psychologist came to me later and said that it was a good thing that we had demanded this, since she could so easily have been dismissed as mentally handicapped.

"No one ever told me that," I protested.

"No, they did not have the heart to tell you that all your efforts would be for nothing."

We made a photo essay of her day and took it to the school board petitioning for an aide. The audio clinic worked to improve her hearing aid, and we tried cued speech, lip reading,

She did learn to ask questions, but whispering only, forming words with her lips, and standing in front of me, she looked up, finally, and not down.

speech therapy, computerized vocabulary and story programs.

But most of all, we required feedback for every interaction, all day long. Every adult that came into our school was scheduled to bring in their pet. Through touch and petting and playing, she counted legs and felt the fur.

"Soft, long, black, white, curly, straight, big, small."

"Look at my mouth, child, while I say the word—you say it, do you hear me? This dog is big, big and soft. Feel the ears, and the tail. The tail, once more, show me the ears, and now the tail."

She did learn to ask questions, but whispering only, forming words with her lips, and standing in front of me, she looked up, finally, and not down. At first, it was only this.

"Does a hamster have four legs?"

"Is a cat soft?"

She sorted out sound from context, foreground from background, and began to recognize that some sounds had meaning in a way that others did not.

She would run into my room from class and whisper the utterances that she had identified. She heard someone say that they had to go pee, she heard someone call someone else stupid, then she heard a school announcement. One day she heard a joke!

She listened to stories on the computer, *Little Bear* and *Three Billy Goats Gruff*. I heard an unusual sound one day, and turned to see her laughing. It was over a year and I had never heard that sound before.

Finally we got an aide assigned to her. It took six months to get the right person. But finally we were able to get that one right person to go with her through the day, with a dry-erase board, and an FM system. Every instruction was clarified and confirmed.

"Did you hear that? What was the teacher's announcement? What are you supposed to do next? Put up your hand and ask? Speak out loud, child, I can't hear you."

"People have to hear you. Use your voice. This is voice. Do you hear it? I turn my back and you talk and I hear you. Then I turn my head to look at you. Your voice does that. It makes me turn around."

She came by my room when I was not looking, my head was down, looking at my desk, and she stood in the door and called out in a loud voice.

"Ms. Marthy!"

I had never heard her voice before. I jerked my head up and looked at her. She beamed. We played this game every day for weeks. She called my name and like magic my head came up and I looked at her. Then she knew that she existed to other people not just herself.

She is learning how to speak and listen and ask questions and be part of our world.

Now she can read and write and talk and play. She dances, does gymnastics, and draws cartoons—books full of cartoons filled with dialogue.

She was reading out loud all through a reading test and I said,

"You can read silently."

"Oh, no, I have to hear myself read. That is how I understand

it. I listen to the sound of the words."

Today she asked, "What does *tingle* mean?" How I feel when you talk, child.

"What does *appreciate* mean? Did you see that movie? I had a play date. I rented the movie with the subtitles. It is better that way. I like to learn big words. I need some more books to read."

"Don't you ever stop talking? Don't ever stop talking!"

She told her aide the other day,

"I used to have a bad life, but now I have a good life."

She came to me today and said,

She still needs that one person beside her, and one day, one year, but not now, she will be able to speak on her own.

"I am ready now to write about my life. I can do this myself. I remember what it was like. I didn't know any English, I could not talk to anyone. I was very sad."

She still has meltdowns and sad days. Sometimes she curls up and pulls into herself and goes back to where you cannot reach her. She has her bad days, and she is angry.

She needs to tell her story and listen to her own voice speaking out loud. She is learning how to speak and listen and ask questions and be part of our world. She still needs that one person beside her, and one day, one year, but not now, she will be able to speak on her own.

Suzanne McCarthy teaches at Livingstone Elementary School, Vancouver.