

TEACHER

Newsmagazine of the B.C. Teachers' Federation

Sooke teacher takes a stand

By Kathleen MacKinnon

"I've administered the tests for years and I believe they create undue stress for the children in our care. The last time I gave the test, a child dissolved in tears from anxiety. I'd put her in a situation I didn't want her to be in." – Kathryn Sihota

Kathryn Sihota, a Grade 3 teacher in the Sooke School District and a 27-year veteran in primary teaching refused to administer the DART (District Assessment of Reading Team) test to her students in the spring of 2007. After one of her Grade 3 students broke out in tears at the prospect of writing the test, Sihota took a stand.

After one of her Grade 3 students broke out in tears at the prospect of writing the test, Sihota took a stand.

"The test does not know that my children have never sat down, in complete silence, and been forced to write down answers to questions about subject matter with which they are unfamiliar, with no ability to have discussions with their peers, or their teacher, or to ask questions," Sihota said.

Sihota was threatened with discipline from her board, and a hearing date was set for August. In support of Sihota, and in opposition



Grade 3 Sooke teacher Katherine Sihota and BCTF President Irene Lanzinger, were joined by local presidents from around the province gathered outside the Sooke School District office on September 25, 2007.

to the government's proliferation of testing and data collection, local teachers organized a rally to be held just before the board hearing. When the superintendent heard about the rally, he cancelled the hearing. A subsequent hearing date was set for September 25, 2007.

This time, Ian Johnson, local president, assured the superintendent that a rally, which by now had captured the attention of teachers throughout the province, would not disrupt the hearing process. Presidents from all around BC flew to Victoria, boarded a bus, and arrived at the school board office enmasse, joining teachers from Sooke and neighbouring districts. Donald Stewart, a Sooke music teacher, provided the appropriate drum rolls as local presidents, introduced one by one, read statements of support from the teachers in their communities.

Presidents from all around BC flew to Victoria, boarded a bus, and arrived at the school board office enmasse, joining teachers from Sooke and neighbouring districts.

Rachel Soberg, parent of a child who was in Sihota's class when she refused to give the DART test and a candid speaker at the rally said, "If Kathryn decided (this test) was not appropriate for our kids to take, then I am going to trust her decision. As a parent I am not willing to trust someone who I have never met to make an assessment

of my 8-year old child."

A school trustee from the Cowichan School District, Eden Haythornthwaite also imparted a powerful message to rally participants. "It seems that testing is either used to convince us that despite the cuts to public education resources, the system is still working, or when it suits the government, testing is used to discredit both the system and those who provide the service," she said. Haythornthwaite went on to read out a letter of encouragement sent by Hanna Seymour, a parent at Koksilah School, in Cowichan. Seymour mobilized all the Grade 4 families at Koksilah to resist the FSA test. All but two families requested exemption from the test.

In its June 2007 report, *How Canada Performs*, the Conference Board of Canada awarded Canada an overall A for Education and Skills and ranked us 3rd in the world. Ironically the United Kingdom and the United States, countries whose programs and testing agenda we too often mimic, received a B and C, and a 7th and 16th world ranking respectively. (See "How does Canada Fare," page 3.) Finland, on the other hand, a country that does absolutely no standardized testing, came in first in the world—they too received an A.

Alfie Kohn, public speaker and author of eleven books and numerous articles on testing, personally penned a letter of support and commendation to Sihota (see sidebar "Rich instruction sacrificed"), and colleagues from as far

away as Japan and Australia sent greetings and encouragement. Sihota also received a card from a supporter in Colorado who enclosed \$27—one for each year of her teaching.

SEE SOOKE PAGE 3

As a parent I am not willing to trust someone, that I have never met, to make an assessment of my 8-year old child."



Parent Rachel Soberg speaks out

Rich instruction sacrificed

By Alfie Kohn

I've visited BC half a dozen times in the last two years and everywhere I go in the province I hear from teachers—and some administrators—about the devastating effects of the government's education policies. The corporate-style emphasis on "data" and "achievement"—and the tendency to unilaterally impose that agenda on classrooms from above—hasn't merely taken the joy out of learning (and teaching). To a large extent, it's taken the learning out of schools, as rich instruction is sacrificed in order to raise exam scores.

Most BC teachers are terribly unhappy about this—and, in my experience, the better the teacher, the more unhappy he or she is. But very few have stepped forward and said, "This must stop." That, in effect, is what Kathryn Sihota has said. In the best tradition of civil disobedience, she has done what many of her colleagues would like to have done and, arguably, should have done. She has concluded that if she can't justify spending classroom time preparing students for a test of dubious value, then she also can't in good conscience "administer" that test.

To punish Sihota would be a dreadful mistake. It's obvious that she has the best interests of her students in mind, but I respect her reasoning as much as her motives. I believe that her judgment about how best to teach and assess her students is better than that of provincial officials. I earnestly hope that her administrators and school-board members will join me in commending her courage and following her lead.

Alfie Kohn, a noted author and speaker was described in Time magazine as "perhaps the country's most outspoken critic of education's fixation on grades [and] test scores."

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E-mail: newsmag@bctf.ca

President's message



Irene Lanzinger

All over the province teachers are resisting attempts by the govern-

ment to reduce the breadth and complexity of teaching and learning. Increased standardized testing, obsessive data collection, and bureaucratic accountability schemes limit teachers' professional rights and autonomy and do nothing to help students learn.

In Sooke, a primary teacher, Kathryn Sihota, refused to administer a standard district-wide reading exam to her Grade 3 class. In her judgment, the test put unnecessary stress on her students, was not a useful assessment tool, and took valuable time away from teaching and learning.

Sihota was disciplined by the Board for refusing to administer the test.

Alfie Kohn, a renowned American lecturer on education, psychology, and parenting wrote a letter of support. He said: "I respect [Sihota's] reasoning as much as her motives. I believe that her judgment about how best to teach and assess her students is better than that of provincial officials."

He's right. British Columbia teachers are rightfully proud of the first-class public education system they have helped to build. As professionals, teachers know that

learning is a complex process and that students learn in different ways and at different rates. No single test or assessment strategy is completely reliable, so teachers use a wide variety of assessment tools—projects, presentations, goal setting, quizzes, classroom tests, and more—to guide their students' learning.

On the day of Sihota's discipline hearing, teachers, BCTF Executive Committee members and local leaders from all over the province rallied to support her.

Katherine Sihota represents what is best in teaching—our willingness

to put our students above ourselves even when it involves some personal risk. And in rallying in support of her we represented what is best about the BCTF—our determination to support each other and oppose top-down, bureaucratic standardization measures that don't do anything to help our students.

When asked who they trust most on educational issues, the public always puts teachers at the top of the list. We must trust our professional judgment, speak up about what is best for students, and stand up for what we believe in.

Readers write

Lessons from Europe

This summer, I toured France, Italy, Morocco, Spain and Portugal. Eighteen airports later and countless security checks (the most bizarre being Heathrow where we were required to shuffle shoeless through some type of screening device), I was glad to be home.

As beautiful as Paris, Venice, Marrakech, Madrid, and Lisbon are—*nothing* compares to the beauty of our island in the Pacific. However, there are a few things we could learn from Europe and North Africa. Lights in hotels and public buildings are motion sensitive; air conditioners automatically turn off when you open a door or window; your hotel key card must be inserted into the wall in order to use the lights. Windmill generators are everywhere. Cars are compact and fuel-efficient. Public transport is reasonable and accessible. In every country there was evidence of reduction in energy consumption, on a large and small scale.

Not so in beautiful British Columbia.

In not one country, including North Africa, did I witness homelessness, people in despair, beggars, and addicts to the same degree as I see everywhere in BC. Does this mean those issues do not exist in Europe? Of course not, there will always be those who are struggling with mental illness, addictions, disabilities, abuse, and neglect. The difference is, there is money allocated to social and rehabilitative programs. They have also taken the Kyoto Accord seriously.

Currently in BC, one in four children lives in poverty. That is six to nine students in every class. As teachers we *know* how this impacts learning and well-being. I find this statistic shocking, although as a school counselor I am not surprised. I listen firsthand to the desperate experiences students share with me and not one of those students has expressed a desire to grow up

without the prospect of a safe place to sleep, food in their tummies, and someplace to turn to in difficult times.

To paraphrase a very wise person, the true measure of the worth of any civilization is the degree to which it takes care of its most vulnerable members. In this, British Columbia has failed miserably.

The entire world will bear witness come the 2010 Olympics. A superficial "cleanup" will not hide the truth. How do we want to be remembered?

Susanna Kaljur
Comox Valley

Thank you from North Ridge

The staff of North Ridge Elementary School would like to thank the many individuals and school staffs who have sent kind words and wishes, gifts and tributes, as well as messages of condolence on the loss of Manjit Panghali, a valued teacher and friend. The North Ridge community is reassured by your support and comforted by the warm thoughts of our colleagues and friends throughout the Surrey School District.

Messages of support and condolence have come from as far as Bulkley Valley district as well as schools in Lower Mainland districts. Again, we thank all those who have sent kind words of understanding and wishes for healing.

We remain emotionally devastated by the loss of Manjit, a beloved staff member and friend, but we have been sustained by the support of our community and by continuing to meet the needs of the students of North Ridge who Manjit cared for and loved so much.

In sincere appreciation.

Bob Insell
on behalf of the staff of
North Ridge Elementary



TOCs and seniority callout

Kendra Litke in her article on TOCs and seniority callout, (September 2007, *Teacher*) presumes (quite rightly) the competence and professionalism of teachers on call, and argues that a "by request" system, makes implicit judgment of individual TOCs, and by doing so, attacks that professionalism.

The latter presumption bothers me. Would that mean for instance that a teacher who nominates a colleague for "Teacher of the Year" (sponsored by several PSAs of the BCTF) is, in that positive act, passing negative judgment on other unknown individual teachers?

That aside, I am deeply offended by Litke's astonishing claim that individual teachers who currently use the request system may make their choice based on "nepotism and friendship networks." Now that is a quite explicit attack on the professionalism and integrity of individual teachers.

John Barnet
Surrey

Teacher newsmagazine censorship?

Please tell me if I am missing something. As a retired teacher, it is difficult to keep up with the latest news on the education scene. It was therefore very illuminating to have received *two* issues of the September 2007 *Teacher* newsmagazine of the BCTF. Both issues were identical in every respect save one—an article appearing on page 5.

The first September issue contained a somewhat innocuous article entitled "BCTF Labour dispute, Four-day strike, four-week lockout," written by Peter Owens. The article outlined, in a straightforward chronological manner, the history of the labour dispute between the BCTF and the BCTF staff union (Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers, Local 464). This dispute resulted in the longest shutdown of services (five weeks) in the history of the BCTF.

In the second September issue, received two weeks later, Owens' labour dispute article is completely missing, and has been replaced by two articles: "The rich and the rest of us" and "CCPA launches new web site."

According to *The Vancouver Sun*, September 26, 2007, the BCTF halted distribution of the newsmagazine, pulled the Owens article, and then resumed distribution. I guess I was one of the lucky ones who received both the *before* and

after censorship issues.

As if it weren't painful enough observing the two unions, members of which were my former colleagues, locked in a particularly nasty set of negotiations, the BCTF then took the unprecedented unilateral and undemocratic step of censorship of an informative article from the *Teacher* newsmagazine.

It is indeed ironic that the BCTF had allegedly been trying to strip the CEP 464 contract, including retiree benefits, in a similar unilateral manner to the provincial government stripping of teacher contracts. As teachers, we always considered that "the BCTF is us." Given the shameful example of these internal battles culminating in such blatant censorship, I'm no longer certain that's true. Such reprehensible tactics have no place in union negotiations.

Ken Abramson
Retired teacher, Vancouver

October zone meetings

The Executive Committee members of the BCTF fanned out across the province the weekend of October 12-14 to take part in one of the twice-yearly zone meetings—gatherings of local activists divided into nine zones. The meetings aim to provide an opportunity to do some serious strategic thinking about issues facing teachers and their organizations. The meetings are divided into plenary sessions where the campaign priorities of the Federation are discussed, and sessions that deal with discrete issues, e.g., social justice, professional issues, health and safety, Aboriginal education, TOCs, working and learning conditions, bargaining, and presidents' network.

The meetings aim to provide an opportunity to do some serious strategic thinking about issues facing teachers and their organizations.

BCTF First Vice President Susan Lambert believes these are very important meetings because they are the only substantive opportunity for people involved in these various issue areas to actually get together to brainstorm and network, formulate plans and do some strategic thinking during the school year. "They get to identify issues together, discuss and share problem solving, and plan for programs," says Lambert.

The zone meetings are not decision-making meetings but the in-depth discussions contribute to quality decisions in other deliberations.

This time around, local activists wrestled with both the increasing frustration of the government's testing agenda and with what is clearly a worsening situation regarding classroom conditions—particularly class composition.

—Murray Dobbin

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100-550 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5Z 4P2
604-871-2283, toll free 1-800-663-9163, Fax 604-871-2289
E-mail: newsmag@bctf.ca Web: bctf.ca/newsmag

Acting editor

Murray Dobbin

Assistant editor

Kathleen Smith

Design consultant

Betty Sommerville

Copy editor

Bev Humphries

2007-08 Teacher Advisory Board

Susan Fonseca

Glen Hansman

Andrew Lum

Patrik Parkes

Paul Steer

Staff writers

Murray Dobbin

Colleen Hawkey

Larry Kuehn

Moira Mackenzie

Advertising information:

bctf.ca/newsmag or

e-mail newsmag@bctf.ca

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BCTF Executive

Rebecca Blair

Carole Gillis

Patricia Gudlaugson

Jim Iker

Susan Lambert

Irene Lanzinger

Jill McCaffery

Jinny Sims

Robert Tarswell

John Wadge

Val Windsor

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Thank you

We missed listing one of the teacher education programs in our September issue.

Thanks to BCTF members for mentoring the next generation of teaching professionals.

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Malaspina University-College

Ron Sandland

Field Experience Co-ordinator

Faculty of Education

sandlandr@mala.ca

Tel: 250-740-6444

Fax: 250-740-6463

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After the rally, Sihota went into the hearing accompanied by her BCTF staff support person Richard Hoover, STA Co-president Ian Johnson, and BCTF President Irene Lanzinger. The board hearing, which was surprisingly short, was followed by a day and a half of waiting. On Thursday, September 27, 2007, the board made its decision known. They concluded that Sihota's actions were "a deliberate and overt refusal to follow the direction of your

Sihota replied, "I've got to do a lot of thinking about this and decide. My intention is to provide the best learning environment for my kids and if that means standing up again, well maybe that's what I'll have to do."

principal" and that "constituted insubordination." They issued a letter of reprimand and an order to administer the DART in the spring of 2008.

When asked if she would obey this order, Sihota replied, "I've got to do a lot of thinking about this and decide. My intention is to provide the best learning environment for my kids and if that means standing up again, well maybe that's what I'll have to do."

The Federation is grieving the discipline letter.

Kathleen MacKinnon is a retired BCTF staff person on temporary assignment to BCTF media relations.



Nanaimo Board of Education trustees under fire

The *Nanaimo Daily News* reported that the Nanaimo Board of Education was faced with dozens of protesters on the evening of September 26. The board was planning their next steps in the closing of up to six district schools with the goal of closing 1,700 empty spaces. Two of the schools are secondary schools, the others primary. The school district's staff recommended that a new secondary school be built on one of the sites of the targeted schools to accommodate 1,100 students.

According to board Chairperson Jamie Brennan, the district would have seismically upgraded schools, improved programs, and energy-efficient buildings if the staff's recommendations are approved. But parents and teachers from several of the schools disagreed. The board plans to have consultations, but protesters point out that the plan has already been forwarded to the ministry for approval. Consultations in this case amount to little more than informing those who are affected by what the board will do.

Murray Dobbin

Ronald McDonald expelled

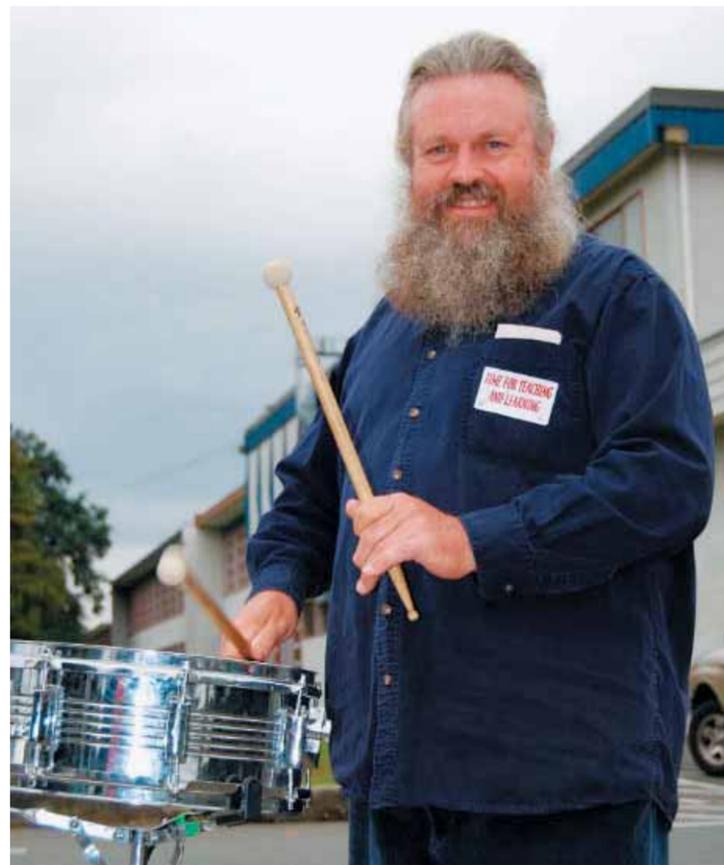
New Brunswick's education ministry has given Ronald the boot by rejecting a multimedia presentation on fitness hosted by the McDonald's mascot.

The ministry said that they heard Ronald's appearances were sending a somewhat contradictory and confusing message.

A McDonald's representative reacted saying, "From our standpoint, the program message is very clear—working with Ronald McDonald's celebrity, as an ambassador of physical activity, and taking that message to a whole new level."

The "Go Active Interactive School Show" and other McDonald's programs are still permitted in BC.

— VESTA News, CALM



RICHARD HOOVER PHOTOS

Left: Sooke music teacher Donald Stewart. Top: Saanich teachers Brad Myers, Al Collier, Chris Bocking. Above: Sooke Teachers' Association co-president Ian Johnson.

Looking back

70 years ago

Requests have been received from Prairie teachers addressed to specific British Columbia schools, and no doubt teachers and school children everywhere will be co-operating with the general local citizen body in sending neighbourly aid to distressed fellow countrymen. There seems a consensus of opinion, however, that all such efforts should be pooled and distribution left to the officials in the distressed areas, who have in hand definite schemes for the fair distribution of gifts from more fortunate parts of the country.

— October 1937, The BC Teacher

50 years ago

The centennial year in BC gives teachers a special reason to celebrate. One hundred years ago the Hudson's Bay Company brought out the Reverend Mr. Staines to teach the children of company employees. During the year 1957-58 our Federation members will number 10,000. Yet this prosperous province, with the highest birthrate and immigration rate in Canada, faces a distressing shortage of

teachers. Will you, every individual member, be such a good teacher that pupils, parents, school boards, and departments will be won to realize that we must have good qualified teachers, and that they can be recruited and retained only when salaries, pensions, and education finance are adjusted to give us the economic status worthy of our profession and its heavy responsibilities?

— September/October 1957, The BC Teacher

30 years ago

Teachers are well aware that TV has cultivated a speediness, an impatience, a lack of concentration that makes their jobs all the more difficult. It's harder to teach the basics. There's a lot of talk in educational circles about basics, a lot of "truths" become platitudes, web-footed answers to real, contemporary dilemmas. That the average child's primary social relationship (in hours spent) is with a TV set raises some fundamental questions.

By age 14 the typical TV consumer has witnessed 18,000 TV deaths and 350,000 TV commercials

in 22,000 hours of obeisance to our cyclopean god. That same adolescent has spent 12,000 hours in school, perhaps 20% of that time dealing with "basics."

— September/October 1977, The BC Teacher

10 years ago

In the current storm of passionate interest in technology, one school, Ridgeway Elementary, of North Vancouver, has planted a walled garden at its centre instead of a MacLab. Appropriately called *The Refuge*, this sanctuary to students and teachers alike has transformed the school and community in ways that Voltaire (and many others) would approve. In an otherwise sterile urban environment, students can walk down the hall and open a door to find nature. The gatekeeper and head gardener of *The Refuge* is teacher-librarian Chuck Heath. Beneath his white shock of hair, his eyes glowed with the intense joy of sharing what he knew with the child beside him.

— October 1997, Teacher newsmagazine

Chris Bocking, Keating Elementary School, Saanich

How does Canada fare?

Education and skills domain report card

Rank	Country	Grade
1	Finland	A
2	Sweden	A
3	Canada	A
4	Japan	B
5	Australia	B
6	Switzerland	B
7	United Kingdom	B
8	Belgium	B
9	Netherlands	B
10	Germany	B
11	France	C
12	Denmark	C
13	Norway	C
14	Austria	C
15	Ireland	C
16	United States	C
17	Italy	D

Source: The Conference Board of Canada

Quotes on assessment

"In Finland, the role of teacher-based assessment is all the more important because at Finnish comprehensive schools, students are not assessed by any national tests or examinations upon completing school or during the school years."

— Professor Jukka Sarjala, former director, Finland National Board of Education

"We are assessing the children's literacy skills, so there will be no reading this week."

— Note on the door of a London classroom

"Public education is not about being relentlessly evaluated for norms: it is about an open road, an equal start, the beginning of wisdom, and the chance to love learning for life."

— Eden Haythornthwaite Cowichan school trustee

Testing obsession undermining learning

By Susan Lambert

Ila Chapman, a Burnaby teacher, recently wrote a letter to the editor. She described “the stress, pressure, and added expectations and responsibilities laid on teachers” that are exacting a terrible toll. I know Ila Chapman. She is a consummate teacher—always examining her own practice and always willing to share ideas and units with her colleagues.

When Chapman says she is stressed, you know the whole system is stressed. Her letter listed the expectations that she says are crowding out her ability to teach: new report cards, assessments that require inordinate amounts of time, a crowded curriculum, the lack of support for children with special needs.

She is eloquent about the devastating effects when FSAs are unable to differentiate between the individual needs of children.

“They’re supposed to be a small ‘snapshot’ of achievement.” But they don’t take into account “...if a child lost his dog the night before, had a horrendous fight with a sibling, or is hungry or simply refuses to put forth a good effort.” Chapman’s school has been chosen to pilot the FSA and for her this is the last straw. “Does anyone at the ministry care at all about the logistical nightmare they have caused us?”

Chapman concludes “At some point we won’t have any energy left with which to solve all the problems and demands put before us.” She is speaking for thousands of teachers across the province who are enduring what Andy Hargreaves, in his new paper, “The Long and Short of Educational Reform,” (2007) calls *initiative overload*.

Ironically, government initiatives to reform our public education system are largely responsible for the anxiety and stress that is characteristic of schools today.

The public education system in BC is arguably one of the best in the world. We do better than most countries, coming second only to Finland on international measures even though we have a much more diverse population. And yet there has been over recent years an attack on public education that is truly puzzling. Why does Michael Campbell write in a recent *Vancouver Sun* column of the crisis in public education? What is the basis for calls for reform, the flurry of legislation, the hastily crafted public policy initiatives and the relentless testing?

Reform efforts, like the accountability/achievement policies, which

use FSA scores to publicly pit schools against each other, undermine public confidence. These policies have been tried (and have failed) in the United States, England, and New Zealand all of which fall far below us on international measures. Rather than emulating these jurisdictions, Hargreaves suggests we learn from Finland where there is almost no testing, and where:

“...trusted teams of teachers [write] much of the curriculum together at the level of the municipality, in ways that adjust to the students they know best. In schools characterized by an uncanny calmness, teachers exercise their palpable sense of professional and social responsibility in their efforts to care especially for children at the bottom, so as to lift them to the level of the rest. This is achieved not by endless initiatives, targeted interventions, or constant crunching of numbers, but by quiet, professional co-operation among all the teachers involved.”

“Does anyone at the ministry care at all about the logistical nightmare they have caused us? At some point we won’t have any energy left with which to solve all the problems and demands put before us.”

Here in BC, reform efforts come with funding cuts. Our spending on education as a percentage of provincial GDP fell 16% between 1998–99 and 2004–05, and as a result we are the only province that has increased its pupil/teacher ratio. We now have the highest PTR in the country.

Reform efforts in BC encourage the privatization of public education. The funding of private schools has increased to the detriment of public education. Now parents can apply for reimbursement of fees for educational courses, assessments, and services bought from private sources. These reforms increase the disparity between the rich and the poor and will undermine the quality of the public system.

It is difficult to comprehend the motivation behind reforms that appear to undermine a system that is recognized as world class. Hargreaves warns that these well-intentioned reforms “...run the risk of emphasizing only the performance numbers, of skewing the curriculum toward testable achievement, of launching endless initiatives, and interventions from the top. ...it’s important to grasp

that human capacity is enlarged not only by increasing the supply of training, materials, and resources but also by reducing demand of unnecessary and excessive external initiatives.”

Teachers across the province are facing tough choices. Some like Sooke’s Kathryn Sihota are asking themselves, Do I follow my professional conscience and refuse to administer a test I know will not benefit my kids and is causing them stress? Some, like Victoria’s Tara Ehrcke are acting to protect their right to control their own professional development choices. And others, like Ila Chapman, are saying I can no longer stand by silently watching the learning conditions in my classroom worsen.

Each is asking in one way or another for the space and time to learn and to teach as a professional. The frantic pace of change, the underfunding, and the top-down surveillance are all getting in the way of good teaching practice. It is time for a change—away from reforms that undermine teaching and learning and toward sustainable change informed by those closest to the teaching and learning process. A return to a considered, thoughtful, and calm approach to educational change that respects and values the voices of teachers.

Ila Chapman ends her letter with a request. “I love my job. I just wish I was allowed to do it—go into my classroom and teach my kids.”

Susan Lambert is the BCTF’s first vice-president.

Suggestions for sustainable, attainable authentic educational change

- Putting learning first, before achievement and testing—rather than equating achievement with tested attainment.
- Distributing leadership widely and wisely so improvement becomes a shared professional responsibility rather than the object of top-down government control.
- Ensuring improvement lasts beyond the tenure of one school leader or the government of the day’s election agenda by encouraging schools to work together.
- Connecting future changes to past achievements, of which experienced educators can be proud, rather than rushing through short-term reforms that dismiss or demean the past.

Andy Hargreaves is the Thomas More Brennan Chair in Education at Boston College.

Langley special education inquiry

By Gail Chaddock-Costello

It is early in the school year, yet as I proof this article for the *Teacher* news magazine, I have already heard that phrase dozens of times. It began at the BCTF Summer Conference in Kamloops, when delegates from districts across the province expressed a keen interest in the inquiry into special education in Langley. It appears our concerns regarding the rising numbers of students identified with special needs, the decreasing numbers of qualified staff to address their needs, and the lack of inclusion of special education teachers in the Bill 33 process, are not unique to Langley.

When the BCTF Executive approved our proposal for financial and staff support in February of 2007, they set in motion a series of presentations, workshops, and meetings that are continuing at a rapid pace this fall. At our last steering committee meeting, we were excited to review the research component of our inquiry. This work was completed under the direction of Dr. Maureen Hoskyn and her undergraduate and graduate students at SFU. The inquiry panelists have already been sent copies of the winning research

Parents are rightfully demanding their child be provided service according to their needs...

from the CRECHE (Centre for Research on Early Child Health and Education)—BCTF Scholarship Competition. An unexpected highlight for us was the news that one of our own Langley special education teachers, Elizabeth Wood, had written the first place winner: “Addressing the Working and Learning Conditions of Secondary Special Education Teachers: Embracing Collaboration.” We were delighted that Elizabeth Wood was available to meet with our committee, summarize her research, and answer questions relevant to the inquiry.

Our posters and bookmarks advertising the public hearings were distributed to teachers, CUPE 1260, and PAC representatives on September 10 and we quickly received requests for booking times to present to our panelists. We believe this indicates that parents of students with special needs, staff working with these students as well as local community support agencies, are increasingly concerned about the size of special education teachers’ caseloads. They realize with caseloads two to three times the size they were prior to our contact being stripped in January of 2002, that even highly trained staff, with the best of intentions, cannot deliver the same quality of programs, with the same degree of expediency, as was possible in 2002. In addition, these same groups express grave concerns regarding the lack of support for those “needy” but yet-to-be identified students, and the shortage of qualified staff should the positions be created.

This real sense of urgency energized our steering committee to complete the work required to organize a dynamic, student-centered “Inquiry into Special Education in Langley.” We have now completed the second component of the inquiry by training parents, teachers, and CUPE 1260 members to facilitate focus groups. These focus groups were used to solicit opinions on the topics of special needs and special education

in a highly structured setting, with groups of 8–12 individuals at each session.

CUPE staff conducted two focus groups with 12 participants in each group; LTA conducted two focus groups with a total of 23 teachers, and 28 parents held three focus sessions, all facilitated by trained parent volunteers. The data collected and recorded will be collated and made available to our three external panelists prior to the public hearings.

These hearings and the resulting recommendations *can’t come soon enough!* Stress levels are on the rise among special education teachers and regular classroom teachers. Parents are rightfully demanding their child be provided service according to their needs and the recommendations stipulated in their psycho-educational assessment. Unfortunately, as the school year unfolds, there are not enough special education teachers or assistants in place to provide the reading, scribing, augmentative communication support, and physiotherapy required for these students to experience optimum success in the school setting.

The Bill 33 consent and consult process, if it included special education teachers, might actually have an opportunity to identify and remedy some of these inequities in education. Currently, these teachers still appear to be beyond the scope of Bill 33—no caseload maximums, no cap on the numbers of identified students they should reasonably be expected to assist in any one block, and they are still required to accept all students with special needs who enroll in their schools, regardless of their caseload size. Why “regular” classroom teachers have limits under law but special education teachers are considered “exempt,” is a question worthy of an answer from the Ministry of Education. While we wait for that response, we are continuing to prepare for the third component of our inquiry, the public hearings held by our three external panelists.

When you read this, our Public Inquiry into Special Education will have officially finished. The hearings, presided over by our panelists Mike Suddaby, retired superintendent of schools, Maple Ridge; Nadine Guiltner, retired teacher and published author, and Dr. Shirley McBride, retired director of Special Programs, BC Ministry of Education,

Why “regular” classroom teachers have limits under law but special education teachers are considered “exempt,” is a question worthy of an answer from the Ministry of Education.

will already have taken place in Langley on October 24, 25, and 29. However, it is then that the most important section of the inquiry will be under way. The panelists will produce a report with recommendations regarding the working and learning conditions of special education teachers and students in Langley. It is, and always has been, our belief that this report will be a significant reflection on special education, not only for Langley, but for all school districts in BC.

We are convinced that collectively, as a community of concerned citizens, parents, and professionals, we can advocate successfully for the supports public education requires to meet the real needs of all students.

Gail Chaddock-Costello is 2nd vice-president, Langley Teachers’ Association.

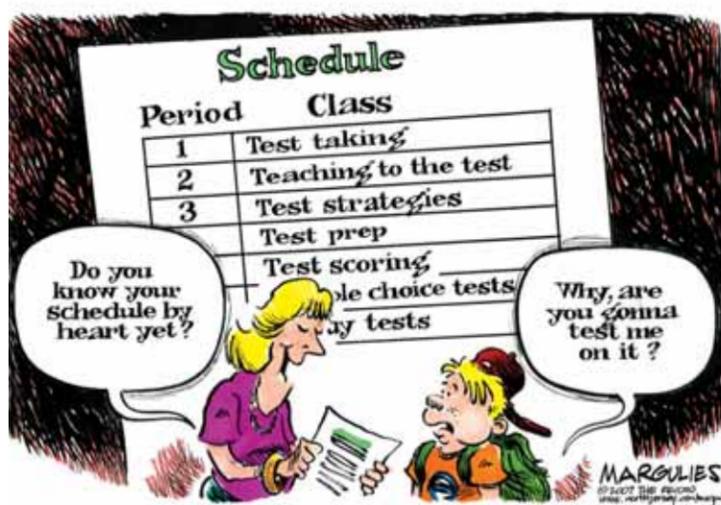
Cartoonist alert!

All of you amateur and aspiring cartoonists have an opportunity for fame and fortune—not. In the BCTF’s on-going fight to turn back the relentless testing-tide, *Teacher* newsmag is having a cartoon contest to see who can best pillory/ridicule/denounce and otherwise debunk the government’s obsession with testing. Comic strips are also eligible.

The deadline is December 14, 2007. The winner and three runners-up will all have their cartoons published in the January issue of *Teacher* and receive a fabulously inexpensive prize.

Teachers, send your entries to Kathleen Smith, assistant editor, at ksmith@bctf.ca.

Cartoonists...start your pens!



Victoria teachers fight for professional development days

By **Thierry Ponchet**

Are you taking professional development for granted in your local? PD days are under attack throughout the province. Victoria teachers have had an ongoing dispute with Greater Victoria School District regarding ownership of professional development days. The local's position has always been that five of the non-instructional days belonged to teachers and that the board kept control of the ministry day. The board took the position that with the exception of the October Provincial PD day and the district-wide PD day in February, the remaining days belonged to the district.

The union initiated a series of PD grievances that focussed on teacher professional autonomy with regard to PD days. Perhaps the grievance that had the most impact on PD in Victoria occurred in September 2005. This grievance involved a teacher who on a professional day advised her principal that she would not be attending the day's literacy activities, but would instead be exercising her professional judgment to determine the appropriate professional development activity

for her. The principal said that she expected the teacher to attend the literacy activity. The teacher asked the principal to clarify if she was ordering her to attend the school-based PD. Although the request was repeated several times, the principal never ordered the teacher to attend. The teacher spent the day doing professional development in her classroom. The teacher was subsequently disciplined by the district for insubordination.

The possibility of disciplining several hundred teachers because of their stand on professional autonomy regarding professional development was worthy of a second thought.

Many Greater Victoria teachers were outraged by the actions of the district. The union formulated a PD action plan that called for a concerted union action to apply pressure on the board. As a result of teachers' taking a stand for professional development, the board agreed to strike a bi-partisan committee to resolve this issue. A

one-year Letter of Agreement was signed that gave teachers control over four of the six non-instructional days and the right to determine the professional development activities at the school for all six NIDs.

After a year of labour peace, the board inexplicably declined to renew the Letter of Agreement. District management took a hard line and cited the Kamloops PD arbitration decision as a disincentive for renegotiating an agreement. The district's position was that teachers now owned only two of the six PD days. The remaining four would be under the control of the board.

Again Victoria teachers supported their local executive who proposed a second PD action plan that called for teachers to attend an alternate GVTA PD event on the first PD day of the year. The executive proposed a detailed action plan that was endorsed by the local's staff rep assembly. BCTF President Irene Lanzinger gave the keynote address, and other workshop facilitators were booked. We kept Victoria informed through several union alerts out to the schools. The union developed a pledge sheet

entitled "I'll be there" asking teachers to show their commitment to the action plan. We sent information packages to staff reps for dissemination to teachers in their schools.

Teachers have learned that political action can be a very powerful force in dealing with a recalcitrant school district.

When the information packages reached the schools, it wasn't long before the school district became more conciliatory. The possibility of disciplining several hundred teachers because of their stand on professional autonomy regarding professional development was worthy of a second thought.

On Thursday, September 13, 2007, the Greater Victoria School District and the Greater Victoria Teachers' Association signed a Letter of Agreement that gives Victoria teachers the right to determine what PD is best for them on four of the six NIDs. For the remaining two days, teachers need to get the authorization of the principal for participation at PD

events outside the school. Again, the PD school-based committees are responsible for planning and organizing all PD activities. Finally, the Letter of Agreement has no sunset clause unless both parties agree to review the agreement.

What have teachers learned from this experience?

Teachers have learned that political action can be a very powerful force in dealing with a recalcitrant school district. When a significant number of teachers are determined on a course of action, when these professionals move forward as one, united in a common goal and vision, then they become practically unstoppable. The district did not want to be placed in the embarrassing position of ordering teachers to attend school-based PD activities. Although for teachers in other locals, our PD victory may seem small, for many Victoria teachers it has given them an increased sense of purpose and pride as professionals.

Thierry Ponchet is president, Greater Victoria Teachers' Association.

BCTF Advantage

Program launch gets top marks

Check it out!

BCTF Advantage is off to a very good start. This exciting new Federation program was launched at an open house celebration at the BCTF offices on Saturday, October 13. The lively event featured exhibitors booths, activities for the whole family, prizes, a lively student marimba band, and

more. The BCTF has partnered with BCAA to develop BCTF Advantage, a voluntary program that draws on the power of the collective to provide individual members with unique offers for travel, insurance, retail products, and more. Go to bcf.ca and click on the BCTF Advantage logo to check it out.

MOIRA MACKENZIE PHOTOS



Innovative leadership at Juniper Ridge

By Dianne Dean and Jane Powell

Walk into any elementary school in BC and you will see students, together with their buddies with special needs, eating lunch and then playing outside games like football or catch. Intermediate students may listen to Grade 1 students as they read or help out in the office during break times. You may also see students making presentations about poverty to their peers in an effort to raise funds for a charity such as UNICEF.

While these activities take place in most elementary schools, at Juniper Ridge, a school of 340 students that lies in the hills above Kamloops, they are part of a program that sees every Grade 6 and 7 student take several leadership roles in the school. The program evolved because teachers noticed that some senior students had problems with conflicting schedules—a small number of them were taking on all the leadership roles in the school. When teachers started to address this problem, they realized that by restructuring the leadership opportunities so that all Grade 6 and 7 students were involved, not only did this re-organization eliminate the problem of some students being over-scheduled, but it also gave students who would not have been identified as leaders opportunities to fulfill a variety of roles and live up to, and even exceed, expectations.

To kick-start the program in September, community consultants offer training in communication and leadership skills to the student leaders. The principal and several staff members organize the program and train the students for specific responsibilities. The Grade 6 and 7 teachers divide the students into five homogeneous groups based on leadership ability, grade, and gender. Each team begins in one of five rotations. Students in the *Office Monitors* rotation perform tasks such as answering phones, making morning announcements, and doing some clerical work. The *Supervision* group supervises students in the computer lab and the Grade 1 students while they eat their lunch. *Peer Helpers* play games with students with special needs, read with primary children, or provide homework help. *School Spirit* students organize special events such as dances and pumpkin-carving contests and



teach playground games to primary classes. *Community Service* students promote giving back to the school and community by supporting projects like Christmas Amalgamated and events to raise money for trees and playground equipment.

Each group works in one placement for a two-month period before moving into the next one. In this way, all students have an opportunity to experience the various roles and responsibilities across the leadership program and discover their strengths—strengths they will continue to use in their adult lives and careers. They develop communication skills, a sense of social responsibility, and empathy for others. They learn social skills and how to work as a team. The benefits of the program also extend to the adults. The staff

collaborates to ensure the program runs smoothly and there is a renewed sense of excitement when they witness student growth.

Comments from staff and parents indicate that the program contributes to the positive school climate. There is a sense of community—not only for students who are receiving the benefits of the program, but also for the ones providing it. It is through this program that students learn that they have something to contribute and that they can make a difference. At Juniper Ridge, teachers and staff believe this is perhaps the most important learning for future citizens.

Dianne Dean teaches at Juniper Ridge Elementary School and Jane Powell teaches at the School of Education, Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops.

Women's history: A history of violence?

By Jane Turner

October is women's history month. Usually, this is the time we are reminded of Canada's first female Member of Parliament, Agnes McPhail, or Canada's first female Senator, Terese Casgrain, or Canada's first woman in space, Roberta Bondar. Women's history is often recounted as the litany of extraordinary women who broke the gender barrier in a variety of situations. However, it is important to reflect upon the contemporary lives of women, most of whose names we'll never know, in order to catch a glimpse of the women's history we are currently creating.

...the violence perpetrated upon women is escalating into new realms in unprecedented numbers.

Women's history is increasingly becoming a history of violence. Our own experience of women missing or murdered from Vancouver's downtown eastside or the aptly named "highway of tears" cutting across the centre of the province, starkly outlines the violence women face here in British Columbia. Women have historically experienced violence in their homes as well as in the public arena, however the violence perpetrated upon women is escalating into new realms in unprecedented numbers.

During the US Civil War, the only American civilians who were killed were voyeurs who got too close to the battlefield watching the action. When the battle suddenly overtook them, civilian casualties resulted. War used to be confined to killing soldiers on both sides, bad enough on any level, and worse when you consider many soldiers were involuntary conscripts. Today, however, civilians are purposefully targeted and called collateral damage. A recent, horrific, example of this is Darfur. Women are targeted as they walk to wells for their family's daily water. Horsemen surround the women, kidnapping, raping, and/or murdering them to create terror in their enemies' psyche, but there is another purpose for these brutal attacks on women and children. Women have not only become tools of terrorist warfare, they have become the source of wealth. Their kidnappings are motivated by business opportunities within the global sex trade.

In a report by the United Nations *Special Rapporteur* on human rights (February 2006), the focus was on

the trafficking of persons, especially women and children. The UN *Special Rapporteur* found that women and children are increasingly targeted as objects, bought and sold through and for the international sex trade. While there is a mythology that many women enter the sex trade willingly as a viable employment opportunity, the UN report dispels that notion unequivocally:

"It is rare that one finds a case in which the path to prostitution and/or a person's experiences within prostitution do not involve, at the very least, an abuse of power and/or an abuse of vulnerability. Power and vulnerability in this context must be understood to include power disparities based on gender, race, ethnicity, and poverty. Put simply, the road to prostitution and life within "the life" is rarely one marked by empowerment or adequate options."

So we find ourselves, at this stage of our historical development, in a paradox where in some instances, women are participating equally in public life as they never have before. For example, in the US, there is the very real possibility that a woman may be elected president and it is not being seen as completely outlandish. Yet, we have modern, democratic societies contemplating legalizing or the decriminalization of the sale of women's bodies for sexual purposes. Ironically, as the UN's *Special Rapporteur* notes:

"The act of prostitution by definition joins together two forms of social power (sex and money) in one interaction. In both realms, (sexuality and economics) men hold substantial and systematic power over women. In prostitution, these power disparities are merged in an act that both assigns and reaffirms the dominant social status of men over the subordinated social status of women."

While often touted as a move to protect or further liberate women, normalizing women's participation in prostitution and pornography results in just the opposite. It regresses women's equality with men.

As we celebrate women's history month every October and note the contributions and progress of women historically, we also need to critically examine women's present circumstances so that future generations do not reflect upon our own time as the "dark ages" of women's history.

Jane Turner is assistant director, BCTF Professional and Social Issues Division.

Teacher tips

Making gifted education work for students

By Charlene Watts

Ask gifted/talented kids about school and most will be quick to say that it's their number one hassle in life. It's boring. It's too easy. It's repetitious. It's irrelevant. It's blah, blah, blah. And the reason schoolwork may be all of these things is because it doesn't match their intellectual interests and capabilities. What can teachers do about it?

Acceleration

Acceleration allows students to jump to a higher level of class work than their ages would ordinarily

dictate. Students may skip a particular class or an entire grade. Many studies show that when they're allowed to learn at their own pace, students feel better about themselves, are more motivated and creative, and are more socially integrated.

Enrichment

School enrichment programs are designed to replace or extend the regular school curriculum. The goal of enrichment should be to help students work on higher-level skills, such as divergent and evaluative thinking, problem solving, and creativity. These skills can be taught through debates and discussions, research, or simulations.

Independent study

When students want to "do their own thing," an independent study may be just the ticket. Working at

their own pace in a program of special interest, with a mentor or teacher as a guide, independent study programs usually require a plan that includes:

- the object of study
- a list of goals/objectives
- a list of activities to achieve the goals
- a final project.

Study plans often take the form of a contract and may have credit available through the Board Authority Authorization (BAA) process.

Advanced placement (AP)

Advanced placement classes may be appropriate for students who are looking for greater academic challenges and more opportunities. Is your school too small to offer AP or does it offer it only on a limited scale? No problem. Calculus students may take the AP exam

without having taken the AP calculus course. And, there are no age or grade restrictions on who can take the exams. For more information, go to www.ap.ca.

Weighted grades and transcripts

Many students are given the option of taking secondary school courses at the honours level. Ask the principal or guidance counsellor what rewards exist for students who take honours level courses.

Mentorship

Mentorships enable gifted students to be paired with a student or an adult who is an expert in a particular area of study or profession they would like to pursue.

Early college entrance

Early college entrance is a time-tested strategy that is available to many gifted secondary school students. The dual enrolment option

allows students to take college courses at a local university/college while attending secondary school.

Seminars and minicourses

These increasingly common classes are for students, gifted or not, with similar interests and abilities. Classes may be offered during or after school, or on weekends.

The ideas are adapted from *The Gifted Kid's Survival Guide for Ages 11-18*, Judy Galbraith and *The Gifted Kids Survival Guide II*, James Delisle and Judy Galbraith. Delisle was the featured presenter at the 2007 fall conference of the Association for Educators of Gifted, Talented, and Creative Children (AEGTCCBC) in BC.

Charlene Watts is president of the AEGTCCBC PSA, the Bulkley Valley Teachers' Association, and a member of the BCTF Professional Issues Advisory Committee.

Social change with the click of a mouse

By Murray Dobbin

With the concentration of media, with people's lives increasingly overwhelmed with work issues, and laws restricting what NGOs can do with their money, taking part in democracy has been getting more and more problematic. Many people simply cannot find the time to join a civil society group or a political party. Influencing political events or the direction of the country seems an impossible task for the average citizen.

No Canadian government in the past 20 years has paid human rights the attention it deserves.

But in the US and Australia, and now Canada, the advent of social media is giving citizens another way of engaging in the democratic process. The most famous is MoveOn.org in the United States, a powerful online movement with over 3.3 million members that mobilizes on a wide range of issues to influence Congress. The organization describes itself as "a service—a way for busy but concerned citizens to find their political voice in a system dominated by big money and big media." Its founder, Joan Blades, says: "The powerful thing about MoveOn is that it is not a one-way broadcast media. The Internet, when used best, is a two-way media."

Kathleen Ruff agrees. She is a long-time Canadian human rights

activist, a former head of the BC Human Rights Commission, and also a former head of the recently cancelled Court Challenges Program. Last spring she founded RightOnCanada.ca—the web site and e-mail campaign vehicle she hopes will become a useful tool for Canadian social and political activists. The motto of RightOn Canada is to "Campaign to put human rights back on Canada's agenda."

The focus on human rights is no accident. No Canadian government in the past 20 years has paid human rights the attention it deserves. Here's just a partial list of the human rights failures of successive Liberal and Conservative governments:

- seeking to overthrow a world moratorium on terminator seed technology
- helping to sabotage a UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- blocking international action to control export of asbestos to developing countries
- weakening a UN Convention on Forced Disappearances
- failing to meet our obligations under international human rights law to address high levels of inequality and poverty in Canada.

As a model for her project, Ruff also has in mind MoveOn's equivalent in Australia, GetUp.org. In spite of Australia's very right-wing prime minister, GetUp has stopped the Australian government from reinstating a policy of detaining children under its

Migration Bill, freed Australian David Hicks from Guantanamo Bay prison, and forced the government to increase funding for the ABC (Australia's CBC equivalent). In a recent campaign to engage in the national elections, GetUp raised \$100,000 in 24 hours from its 300,000 members.

In the few months it has been active, RightOnCanada, (www.rightoncanada.ca) has taken on the issue of terminator seeds (in co-operation with the Canadian

Biotechnology Action Network), the issue of greater economic and social integration with the US, and the police provocateurs at the Montebello summit in August. Terminator seeds are genetically modified seeds deliberately engineered to become sterile after

RightOn has also campaigned against bulk water exports and the "harmonization" of standards for pesticide residue on fruits and vegetables with the US.

one harvest. RightOn has also campaigned against bulk water exports and the "harmonization" of

standards for pesticide residue on fruits and vegetables with the US. The project now has 4,000 subscribers who have sent nearly 20,000 e-mail letters to government and opposition leaders. It typically takes less than two minutes to send letters to the politicians involved.

Social activists across the country are overwhelmed, faced with myriad struggles (national, provincial, and local) that they are asked to get involved in. Many progressive Canadians feel isolated and are not able to find the time to be members of activist groups. RightOnCanada.ca may just be the political tool needed to help people get involved.

Murray Dobbin, a Vancouver author and writer is acting assistant director, BCTF Communications and Campaigns Division.



Working conditions of BC teachers in distributed learning

Investigating current issues, concerns and practices

Online learning, officially called Distributed Learning (DL) in BC K-12 schools, has been growing at a rapid rate. In addition, frequent changes in Ministry of Education policies on DL and relentless changes in the technology are having an impact on the working conditions of teachers working in these programs.

To find out about the working conditions and identify important issues for the BCTF, the Research Department conducted a survey of teachers in distributed learning programs in the 2007-08 school year.

The study showed that talking about class size and composition separately from overall workload did not make sense.

The survey reveals the complexity of teacher workload, a rapidly changing and competitive work environment, and the impact of policy and legislation changes, in particular as related to education funding. The study also hints at the impact of the shifting landscape on students, changing work patterns for teachers, and the increasing need for active, supportive

involvement of the Federation in the area of distributed learning.

Understanding class size and composition in a distributed-learning context was one of the initial research questions. The study showed that talking about class size and composition separately from overall workload did not make sense. Rather, class size and composition were best understood in the context of the course-delivery method, the ranges of grades taught, number of students, and variety of courses. Continuous intake means that often each student is in this sense a separate class, making class size a poor indicator of workload.

Workload is also linked with teachers' ability to modify and develop online curricula, which in turn is related to the timeliness and adequacy of training and professional development. Being able to take the time and having the skills necessary to do course modification and development work were issues raised in the study. Not surprisingly, rapidly changing delivery platforms and software tools were also workload issues.

While many teachers (60%) undertake course modification and course development work, comparatively few are compensated for this work (modification: 20%, development: 42%). Although only a few DL teachers (17%) indicated that issues related to copyright ownership had arisen, interviews indicated there are no clear and consistent guidelines for managing copyright ownership.

Teachers working in distributed learning recognize the role DL can

play for students whose needs are not met in a face-to-face classroom setting, but respondents expressed the concern that the typical students who enrol in DL are those at the upper and lower ends of a bell curve and that DL was increasingly being used as a dumping ground for high-needs students. Repeatedly it was stated that DL is not for all

...respondents expressed the concern that the typical students who enrol in DL are those at the upper and lower ends of a bell curve and that DL was increasingly being used as a dumping ground for high-needs students.

students, but fills an important need in the overall public education system.

It was when talking about the role of DL in public education that the perception of tensions between teachers working in DL and their non-DL colleagues were raised. It was thought that more awareness of the work of DL teachers and more explicit support from the Federation was warranted.

This study is a step toward understanding the issues faced by teachers working in distributed learning.

To read the full Research Report, please follow this link: bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Publications/Research_reports/2007ei01.pdf

— Colleen Hawkey and Larry Kuehn, BCTF Research Department

BC fails to keep up with other provinces in education funding

It will not come as any surprise to teachers struggling to meet their students' needs that BC lags behind every other province when it comes to real increases (after inflation is accounted for) in public education funding. The figures were recently released by Statistics Canada.

The inflation rate for Canada was 15% between 1998-99 and 2004-05. Yet, the increase in average total expenditures per student in all of Canada was 28% over that same period—that is 13% over and above the inflation rate. In British Columbia, the increase in public education expenditures per student was only 5% above the inflation rate, just over one-third of the national average. It means that over the six-year period, the real increase in education funding in BC was a meagre 5% or less than 1% a year.

As a result of BC having lower increases than any other province, the student/educator ratio (fewer students per teacher) declined everywhere in Canada except British Columbia.

In BC, the student/educator ratio increased (more students per teacher) from 17.2 in 1998-99 to 17.5 in 2004-05. It had dipped to a low of 16.8 in 2001-02 then rose again with the current government in power. BC now has the highest student/educator ratio in Canada. Newfoundland's is lowest at 13.6.

Education expenditures as a percentage of BC's Gross Domestic Product (GDP is the total of all economic activity in the province) has fallen nearly 16% from 3.8% of GDP to 3.2% between 1998-99 and 2004-05. If the percentage had stayed the same, \$980 million more would have been in the provincial

education budget in 2004-05.

The situation for K-12 education in BC would be dramatically different if the government had maintained that 1998-99 level of spending. For just \$250 million—a quarter of the additional amount that the system would have if the same percentage of GDP were spent now as in 1998-99—we would be able to increase the number of teachers by 1,800 to what it was in 2001-02, the last year before the Liberals made the cuts.

This would restore teacher-librarians, counsellors, learning assistance teachers, and teacher specialist supports for special needs. These are areas that were legislated out of the collective agreement. The loss of these services created the crisis in special education that the system now faces. That extra money would also allow the system to actually meet the class-size and class-composition limits that were promised in Bill 33, but not delivered on.

In addition to the worst student/educator ratios, BC teachers are the lowest paid in the country, except for New Brunswick, on a per-pupil-taught basis. All of this is happening at a time when the GDP (the real wealth of the country) is growing rapidly—8% in this same time period—and at a time when the BC government is posting budget surpluses every year.

— Larry Kuehn

Source: Blouin, P., and Courchesne, M. (2007) Summary of Public School Indicators for the Provinces and Territories, 1998-99 to 2004-05, Ottawa: Statistics Canada. (2004-05 is the latest year for which StatsCan has figures for all provinces.)

The Fraser Institute's flawed report card

By Noel Herron

The midsummer release to an enterprising *Globe and Mail* reporter (via the *Freedom of Information Act*) of background briefing notes prepared for Education Minister Shirley Bond on the Fraser Institute's annual report card on public and private schools in BC provides a devastating indictment of the right-wing think tank's misleading ranking of schools.

The institute's methodology comes in for a withering critique by Victoria bureaucrats on no less than 23 separate counts of biased, inaccurate, and misleading strategies in preparing and publishing its rankings of schools.

With this revelation the shocking lack of forceful criticism by successive education ministers on the Fraser Institute's approach over the past decade should now come to a grinding halt.

The institute's methodology comes in for a withering critique by Victoria bureaucrats on no less than 23 separate counts of biased, inaccurate, and misleading strategies in preparing and publishing its rankings of schools.

The strong denunciation of these widely publicized reports, now emerging from an official government source, echoes the swelling criticisms by teachers, principals, superintendents of schools, school trustees, and some local parent groups.

This now makes it more difficult for the Fraser Institute, which many consider has a notoriously anti-public school bias, to dismiss criticisms of its methodology as simply coming from vested interest groups.

The institute's listings have previously come in for an additional scathing technical review from at least one other study (separate from the ministry's analysis) that challenged both the validity and reliability of its methodology. Adding questionable, interpretative tables to these lists, as the Fraser Institute has done in the past few years, does little to enhance its credibility.

All of this certainly won't stop the monopolistic CanWest media chain through its BC outlets, *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* newspapers, from publishing 15-page supplements each year ranking almost 1,000 schools across the province.

Both of these newspapers, with accompanying so-called "balanced" editorials have strongly supported the Fraser Institute's approach while patronizingly acknowledging the narrow academic focus it utilizes.

But don't expect either of these newspapers to discontinue publication of their supplements in light of the recent revelations—these biased lists sell far too many papers.

Some of the pointed back-grounder criticisms made by ministry of education officials were:

...there is "no consideration of context, region, or socio-economic factors" by the Fraser Institute in its comparative analysis of schools. In other words, public schools like Strathcona Elementary in the heart of the Vancouver's inner city (with the poorest postal code in Canada) are unfairly compared with elite private schools such as Little Flower Academy or St. George's in the affluent Westside:

...that three of the Institute's measures for high schools are based strictly on provincial exams but this "does not take into consideration such components as sports programs, arts, and caring teachers."

...that the over-the-top and misleading claim by the institute that it provides "a detailed picture of each school that is not easily available elsewhere" ignores the fact that both school and district reports supply far more in-depth and comprehensive information.

Contrary to the institute's claims that its annual exercise contributes to "encouraging and assisting all those seeking to improve their schools" with schools moving up a notch or two or more on its scales, there is evidence that its widely publicized results have had a negative and dispiriting impact on schools working hard on genuine school improvement.

The simplistic and narrowly focussed test-result approach used by the institute ignores the intersection of varied and complex school components that often combine in different ways to bring about genuine and lasting school improvement.

Some of these varied components are:

- co-operative and supportive leadership by principals
- ongoing, intensive, professional development by teaching and non-teaching staff
- systematic curricular goal setting and reviews
- updating the adequacy of a school's stock of contemporary teaching supplies and materials
- voluntary involvement by staff in extra-curricular activities
- the availability and the hiring of specialized teachers at the elementary level (physical education, ESL, special ed, and French) and at the secondary level (science, technology, ESL and learning assistance, and/or skill development) when needed
- access to innovative funding at a local level to combat a decade's worth of offloading and to meet increased demands
- added resources for schools in

disadvantaged areas across the province

- perhaps most important, a close focus on the development of a warm and welcoming school climate that generates school pride, productivity, and perseverance.

In particular, in reference to the latter component, contrary to the Fraser Institute, there is no quick fix for genuine school improvement. And it is patently absurd to state that a flawed ranking system of upwards of 1,000 schools, with some schools moving up a notch or two, offers a clear incentive for school improvement.

An experienced observer recently stated that the Fraser Institute's annual rankings simply serve as a provincial showcase for elite private schools that annually top (surprise, surprise) these lists with their sky high fees and exclusionary (no ESL or kids with special needs) admission requirements.

The invidious, ideological, comparison of these exclusive private schools with outstanding, open, public schools, year after year, is increasingly viewed with tremendous skepticism.

It's quite an understatement to say that the Fraser Institute's annual report card doesn't tell the whole story, as CanWest newspapers in Vancouver never tire of reminding us, but it's quite another matter to allow this misleading approach to go publicly unchallenged from the education minister's office.

The muted responses, and the almost apologetic tone of Shirley Bond and her Liberal predecessors over the past several years in responding to the annual ranking reports have been quite disgraceful.

The muted responses, and the almost apologetic tone of Shirley Bond and her Liberal predecessors over the past several years in responding to the annual ranking reports have been quite disgraceful.

Giving a free pass to the Fraser Institute is no longer acceptable in this province.

And while it may hitherto have been politically and ideologically astute for the BC Liberals to provide their toned down, non-responses, the jig is up in Victoria with the minister's briefing notes now in the public domain.

Education ministers must finally step up to the plate and publicly blast this contextless and biased listing for what it is—a well-financed and organized strategy designed to undermine public schools in this province.

Noel Herron is a former principal and Vancouver school board trustee.

Etat des lieux

Par Mohamed Chelali

Lorsque j'ai été recruté par la fédération il y a maintenant un peu plus d'un mois je pensais connaître tout de la FECB ou de ce que nous appelons communément la BCTF.

Ma surprise fut grande lorsque j'ai découvert une grande variété de services et de programmes disponibles pour les membres beaucoup plus large et plus étoffée que ce que je pensais.

Surpris? Oui. Mais agréablement surpris!!!

Savez-vous par exemple que le site Internet de la FECB est classé parmi les meilleurs du pays, que nous organisons une journée de la FECB dans la grande majorité des universités de la Colombie-Britannique destinée aux élèves maîtres. Que la FECB administre ou est partenaire dans le régime des pensions. Que la FECB a maintenant un nouveau plan pour ses membres avec divers avantages et bénéfices offrant des prix réduits sur les voyages personnels, les assurances, location, etc.

Savez-vous que la FECB soutient 33 Associations provinciales de spécialistes organisées autour d'intérêts partagés pour des sujets ou rôles particuliers dont deux nous concernent directement et qui sont très dynamiques. Ce sont l'association provinciale des professeurs d'immersion et du programme francophone et l'association des langues modernes (BCATML). Savez-vous que la fédération organise annuellement une conférence pour les nouveaux enseignants! Savez-vous que nous disposons de plus de 160 facilitateurs d'ateliers dont malheureusement 7 seulement pour les ateliers en français. L'année dernière, sur les 33 demandes d'ateliers en français, 15 ont été annulés par manque de facilitateurs. Il y a du travail à faire!!

Le bureau des programmes et des services en français est votre voix et votre lien au cœur de la fédération. Le soutenir, l'informer, l'impliquer, le promouvoir est le devoir de tout enseignant qui a le français comme langue première, langue de travail ou même langue seconde. Le nombre d'élèves au programme francophone avoisine maintenant 4000 alors que celui de l'immersion est proche de 40 000 élèves. Le nombre d'enseignants a aussi légèrement augmenté. En 2007 on comptait 1803 enseignant(e)s en immersion et 336 dans le programme francophone. Voilà un potentiel dont nous devons tous être fiers malgré les nombreux défis.

En parlant de défis et en ayant suivi la rentrée scolaire de cette année, on a pu constater que le déficit chronique des enseignants de français est devenu très inquiétant. Il en va de la relève, de l'expansion ou même de la pérennité de nos programmes surtout au niveau de l'immersion. Il faut dire que la pénurie d'enseignant(e)s de français existe tant au niveau de l'immersion qu'au niveau du programme francophone.

Pour le bien de ces programmes des solutions à court, moyen et long terme doivent être apportées dans les plus brefs délais. Le bureau des programmes et services de français au nom de la fédération est décidé à faciliter et aider à trouver des solutions innovatrices pour le bien de ces programmes et l'avenir de la francophonie en Colombie-Britannique.

Bien évidemment, il y a aussi le manque chronique de moyens humains et matériels qui peut être constaté ici et là pour soutenir et aider les élèves en difficultés d'apprentissage ou offrir des classes ressources. Ce manque est très criant dans le programme d'immersion. Il est de votre rôle et de votre devoir de revendiquer et aussi d'informer la fédération de chaque cas que vous auriez constaté.

On peut aussi parler du manque des ressources et du matériel pédagogique en classe non seulement en français langue, mais aussi en mathématiques, en sciences et en sciences humaines. Selon les dernières estimations le nombre d'élèves en immersion et dans le programme francophone représente environ 7.50% du total des élèves de la province alors que le nombre des enseignant(e)s des mêmes programmes n'est que de 6.30 % du total des enseignants de la province. Il y a du travail à faire et c'est peut être là qu'il faut aller chercher le manque en orthopédagogues et en classe ressource.

À la rentrée de septembre, on fait l'état des lieux, après il faut remédier et surtout solutionner. La tâche est ardue et exigeante mais c'est pour cela que nous avons besoin de vous.

En attendant, je vous souhaite une bonne année scolaire et beaucoup de plaisir et de joie avec vos élèves. Surtout n'oubliez pas que nous sommes ici pour vous servir et vous aider.

Mohamed Chelali, coordinateur des Programmes et Services français à la FECB.

Très urgent

Appel pour des facilitateurs d'ateliers en français

Nous manquons cruellement de facilitateurs pour les ateliers organisés par la FECB dont vous pouvez trouver la liste sur le site du BCTF à l'adresse suivante: bcjf.ca/francais

Si vous êtes intéressé(e)s et motivé(e)s pour animer un atelier, contactez-nous dès que possible. Nous nous engageons à organiser votre formation, tous vos frais seront bien entendus couverts par la FECB. Toute suggestion d'atelier est également la bienvenue. Nous nous tenons à votre entière disposition si vous avez besoin d'information supplémentaire.

Tel : 604-871-1844 ou 604-871-1869
Courriel: chuarddelamarre@bctf.ca

School declines Fraser Institute invitation

The staff of Sir Matthew Begbie Elementary School forwarded this letter to The Fraser Institute regarding the Garfield Weston Awards.

"On behalf of the teaching staff at Sir Mathew Begbie Elementary School, we are responding to your letter of August 29, 2007, regarding the Garfield Weston Award for Excellence. The teaching staff at our school met recently to discuss your

invitation to the awards ceremony.

"At this meeting the staff voted unanimously to decline your invitation. There are several reasons for our refusal to participate in an event sponsored by the Fraser Institute. Chief among these reasons is that we do not accept the way in which the FSA results are used to rank schools. Many other factors that contribute to improvement in academics are not considered in

these rankings such as the inclusion of students with special needs and the overall diversity of the student population in BC public schools. In addition to this, the FSA result is a one-time measure of student achievement and does not reflect the richness of the curriculum, the variety of students' learning strategies, or ways of showing their learning.

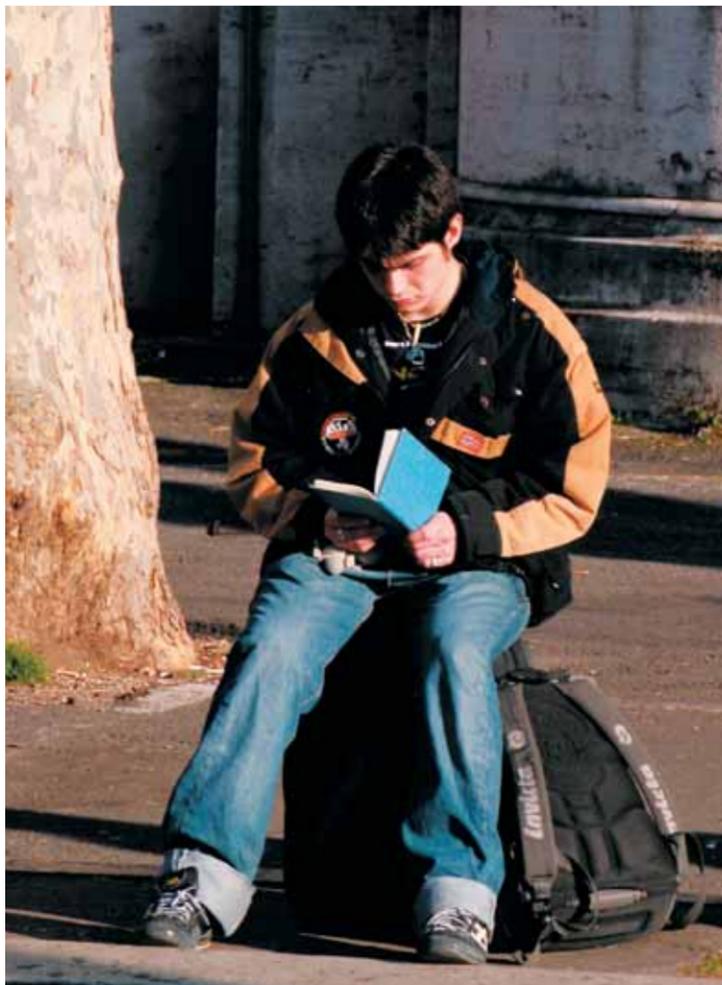
"We also object to the assumption

that these awards reflect the work and commitment of one school community as opposed to another. As educators, we know that this can only serve to pit one school community against another, which is completely counter-productive. All BC public schools are dedicated to addressing the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students and academic achievement cannot be isolated from these

other student needs.

"Finally, we feel that giving cash rewards based on a single set of tests fails to acknowledge the challenges faced by some school communities and discriminates against schools that would benefit most from more funding."

Marsha Merrill, senior staff rep, VESTA and Margaret Vis, staff committee chair, Sir Matthew Begbie Elementary School, Vancouver.



It takes a crowd: the story of an adolescent non-reader

By Honey Halpern

Look carefully behind a successful reader and you'll find a crowd of supportive adults. But, what about the unsuccessful readers? Did the adults drop by the wayside or, more likely, did that crowd never materialize? Usually, it's the latter. So, we need to create that crowd for the hard-to-teach, non-reading student.

Changing a non-reader to a literate student needs an approach that is more complex than simply teaching a handful of strategies.

In workshops, we talk about this strategy and that technique to help the struggling reader. Teachers listen with interest yet, unfortunately, the post-workshop response from most teachers is that they can't follow up because they have so much to do, so little time to do it, and worse, so little interest and motivation from the students themselves. And they are right. Changing a non-reader to a literate student needs an approach that is more complex than simply teaching a handful of strategies.

I recently had an e-mail from a friend of mine, Julie, a secondary school learning assistance teacher to tell me that Brian, whom I had met and designed a program for four years ago, because he could not read, had just got 90% in Communications and 74% in History 12 in his provincial exams! Yes, that accomplishment came with the help of a reader scribe, but the truth is he could never have achieved those grades without being able to read and write and think at a competent enough level to work his way through those courses.

Julie, excited and delighted at Brian's success, wanted me to know the good news and thank me for the reading assessment and program support that I offered when he was in Grade 9, as she felt that this was the beginning of Brian's successes. But really the beginning of Brian's achievements happened when Julie

recognized that Brian had not yet learned to read and asked me to work with her to develop a literacy plan.

From her description of his reading behaviour, I chose a high-interest book written at about a Grade 1 level and listened to him read aloud, after he first read it to himself. I wanted to observe his approach to text and also give him a chance to put into practice his decoding and comprehension skills. As Brian read the few simple pages aloud to me, I realized that he had no idea how to go about reading connected text. There was nary a pause for any punctuation, including periods, many made-up nonsense words, and no intonation. His word-by-word reading was slow and laborious and made no sense at all. He had no reading skills and he was in Grade 9.

Julie and I concluded that since Brian had never learned to read, it was our responsibility to teach him and so we worked on designing a program. But he was in secondary school, not elementary school, so who could do this? Every LA block already had half a dozen or more needy students and there was simply no opportunity to give this student the privacy and personal attention required for him to benefit from this program. However, fortunately for Brian, Julie was able to find an educational assistant who was interested in this challenge. In addition, a school counsellor offered access to a small room, one that was ordinarily used for interviews and meetings. The number of people working with Brian went from one to four.

However, in order to get EA time, the school administrator had to agree. Next, the school-based team had to give their thumbs-up to one-to-one teaching of reading three times a week. By then we had added to our group the administrators, counsellors, a school psychologist, and the other teachers on the school-based team.

Brian and his educational assistant hit it off right away, as she was interested in learning how to teach reading and he was motivated by all the positive attention he was receiving. Meanwhile, the EA was taught how to apply an individual-

ized, tailored-for-Brian, program. They met regularly in a small, quiet room, and with the encouragement of Julie, progress was soon apparent.

I worked in another school and in order to make fluid transitions from easy-to-read material to more challenging text, my administrator had to give the okay for me to visit Brian's school and confer with Julie and her EA.

The crowd was growing. Over the years, Brian had other teachers who needed to be apprised of his reading program and when possible, help with his reading tasks, so add more people to his program.

Brian's father, who had always shown an interest in his son's schooling and had always wanted his son to learn to read, was naturally part of the team. The number of people involved in Brian's remediation program continued to grow.

At the centre of Brian's program was Julie, the teacher who early on realized that Brian had the need and the right to learn to read. Over the four years that Brian was her student she had the full responsibility to keep all the parts of the reading program in place:

- Brian's timetable
- EA timetable and training
- a quiet private place to work
- appropriate leveled material
- family support
- suggestions for home reading
- organization of my visits to monitor and encourage the progression
- school-based team (SBT) validation
- communication with the administration.

During Brian's Grade 11 year, the EA took a maternity leave, but Julie, still convinced that Brian could succeed at reading, convinced a new administrator and a new SBT to help her find another EA; the training of the new EA began and the program continued. It was relatively easier as Brian, by then, had gained the necessary level of confidence, along with maturity, to accept help and support from another adult.

Meanwhile, every few months, I continued to be invited to meet with Brian and his EA to hear him read and to talk about his reading.

Have you lost count of the number of people who contributed to Brian's exam scores? I have. But the exact number doesn't matter. What does matter is that what is required is not just one teacher but a crowd consisting of teachers and administrators and family members who know what to do to make sure that Brian leaves school as a literate citizen.

...what is required is not just one teacher but a crowd consisting of teachers and administrators and family members who know what to do to make sure that Brian leaves school as a literate citizen.

Every student has the right to learn to read, but to create a successful program it is necessary to rethink the current model of teaching reading to adolescents that centres wholly on the student and a single resource/learning assistance teacher. Instead, we need to recognize that it takes more than one person to make it happen; it takes a small but serious, and carefully co-ordinated, crowd of supportive and knowledgeable adults.

Honey Halpern, a retired teacher, is working part-time as a sessional lecturer in Language and Literacy Education at UBC.

Get out there and sell

By Kevin Epp

Fundraising in the public education system is commonplace. New schemes are being launched daily, aimed at the customer base that our sales force of students have direct access to. It appears that these new revenue generators are designed to maximize profit but little, if any, thought is put into the subliminal messages our involvement sends and what this teaches our students.

At many schools in BC one such fundraising program is the annual Canadian Community Reading (CCR) Magazine Program. The Parents' Advisory Committee at the school signs on with the CCR and the students are enlisted as the sales force. The campaign kicks off with a school-wide assembly. The

...the teachers are informed that the teacher with the top-selling class will receive an expensive gift.

professional sales agent from the CCR presents a well-designed pitch aimed directly at the students, playing on their hypersensitive material desires. The students are shown an amazing array of incentive awards. The sales agent begins by introducing the snack food items students can win on a daily basis and then slowly, stepping through the movements of this symphony of sparkles, he introduces the video games, the cash, and the toys the students can earn through their sales efforts. At the crescendo of this production, the students are introduced to the enormous stereo system that the champion of the program will receive.

The staff is told at a staff meeting when the program will begin, when it will end, and the paperwork responsibilities they have. Teachers must collect completed orders and monies from their class, organize them as per instructions, and submit them in the customized envelope from the CCR. Quietly, and without any of the fanfare of the motivational assembly held for the students, the teachers are informed that the teacher with the top-selling class will receive an expensive gift. The campaign lasts for several weeks after which the PAC receives a substantial cut of the profits from the CCR.

Although the amount of class time that the paper shuffling takes is minimal, the overall impact of the program on instructional time is significant. There is the opening assembly, draws, daily announcements, which sound like poorly scripted commercials, and reminders to complete the required paper collection. When considered in their entirety, the particulars of the program take a chunk of instructional time. The school does not spend any class time helping the students and the program achieve greater results. We do not teach any sales techniques or communication skills that could assist the students in being more productive, and relieve some of their anxiety about selling.

The loss of class time is significant and disturbing. Instructional time allotted to meaningful curriculum is already stretched too far. Using the entire student body as a labour force to raise funds for the school seems inappropriate. In at least one Lower Mainland district, mailings home are now accompanied by advertisements, which the school board sells to local retailers. Students are being used to reach their audience of homes and the district endorses certain retailers by providing direct delivery of their mailings.



One thing is clear about most fundraising in BC schools. Teachers are not consulted about what type of work is done to raise the funds. Many individual programs raise money through a variety of sales drives and fund-a-thons, and these programs are rarely, in my experience, discussed at a school-wide staff forum. Whether it is a food drive for a local charity or a band trip to Timbuktu, the school's focus is "get out there and sell it."

The kick-off motivational assembly for the CCR every year is a catalyst for me. It disturbs me or forces me to wrestle with an ethical dilemma. Gandhi says we should ask how our actions benefit the poorest man (Nair, 1997). When I consider some of BC's poorest school citizens and the magazine program, I see that they may benefit from the funds raised. When I shine the light of ethical discourse on sales-based fundraising, and in this specific case, the magazine sale, I am compelled to examine it from the three directions—action, motive, and outcome.

The entire magazine process is ill-conceived and poorly executed. The PAC's motive behind the sale is admirable. The motives of the students and the teachers seeking material rewards are clear, and their own to wrestle with. The outcome of the magazine sale is superb. The school, many teams and groups within the school, and a number of the school's neediest students benefit directly in a variety of ways. It is also abundantly clear that without PAC money earned through fundraising, many of these benefits would not be realized.

Instructional time allotted to meaningful curriculum is already stretched too far. Using the entire student body as a labour force to raise funds for the school seems inappropriate.

This year, after the program was under way, I held a discussion with my class about the ethical issues around the magazine sales. These 13-year-olds had a variety of opinions on the sale, their involvement, and the worthiness of such a program within the school. I shared the highlights of this discussion with the principal and the PAC fundraising chairperson. Finally, I have brought the issue of rewarding a staffperson as top producer to the staff for discussion.

I would prefer an environment where fundraising for the school was unnecessary, however, that is a naive notion in today's economic climate. By working through this dilemma via some ethical guidelines, I have reached a place where I understand why the PAC and the school participate in this type of fundraising. I do not agree with the actions. I understand the motives. I approve of the outcome. Until the current government in BC funds school programs adequately, I will have to struggle with the contradictions of this situation and watch everyone else "get out there and sell!"

Kevin Epp teaches at KVR Middle School, Penticton.

On being well

Wellness is caring about...

By Julia Johnson

So what is it you care about? If you consider this question, your response might be that you care for your job; that you are happy you are teaching. With that you begin to have thoughts of how you want to be the best you can be at what you do, so you will achieve some measure of success. Somewhere along this path you hope you will be acknowledged in some way for your efforts perhaps by colleagues or parents.

Maybe devoting your life to your work is not your central focus, but a means to an end and the thing you care about is the person you have chosen as a life-time partner; the person who knows your dreams, listens to your stories, values your opinion, provides you with love and encouragement during stressful or upsetting times; the person who knows your strengths and weaknesses, and continues to be there for you.

Those of you who are altruistic may have an unselfish concern for the welfare of others. You find yourself caring for the homeless, for those who live in poverty, for those who suffer social or political injustice. And in your caring you become an advocate; your speaking becomes the voice of dissent, the voice demanding change, the voice of hope for the less fortunate.

Perhaps your concern is for the environment and you care that the

earth's resources are being depleted, that global warming threatens the survival of the human and animal kingdom, that consumerism and global capitalism is ecologically and socially unsustainable. In your caring you attempt to "walk the talk" of your convictions by living more simply and consuming less, hoping your life's choices will lessen your imprint on the earth.

If you are a parent perhaps what you care about is your family, your children and your dreams for them. You want them to be healthy and happy. You hope they will value learning, fulfil their aspirations, and be safe wherever they go. At no time in your caring do you envision they will harm themselves or others, and when they do you wonder where you went wrong.

The Dalai Lama has called the 20th Century "a century of violence" and in the aftermath of the VTEC shootings one is left to ponder this perspective. It is the conviction of the Dalai Lama that "The key to creating a better and more peaceful world is the development of love and compassion for others."

If we listen to the testimonials of those who have been responsible for school or workplace massacres we hear that their pain, their isolation, their perceived lack of "love and compassion" from others were some of the reasons they were driven to commit these atrocities. Definitely, the lack of love and compassion, the feeling of exclusion, would contribute to an unhealthy perspective on life. The development of love and compassion for others would definitely help bring about a better and more

peaceful world. The question becomes how to create a peaceful world, how to extend love and compassion to others, and how to make this a reality.

For me, the answer is in understanding that we can't have love and compassion for others when we do not have it for ourselves. Teaching our children from the time of their birth that the body they are given is a gift; that it is their responsibility to care for this body because it shelters their heart, mind, and soul; that this body will be their means to express their creative spirit that will maximize their potential is the key. Endowed with the responsibility of caring for and looking after their bodies, children learn they are entrusted to make choices that protect the gift they have been given and with that comes a respect and an acquired pride for the wise choices they make to stay healthy.

When children learn to make healthy lifestyle choices for themselves they create the consequence of extending that care and compassion toward others and toward the decisions they will make as adults that affect the social, economic, and political well-being of humanity and the physical well-being of the earth. Caring that begins at the individual level sets in motion a wellness journey where personal peace is found, where world peace is the destination, and where preservation of the planet and life on it, is the reward.

Julia Johnson, a retired learning resource teacher in Quesnel, is a BCTF PD wellness associate. livingjewels@shaw.ca

Health and safety

A prescription for a healthy and safe workplace

By Mark Keelan

Sometimes it feels good to be right. Even better is when being right causes changes to be made that will help to protect the health and safety of workers in this province.

In 2001, one of the plans in the current government's election campaign was to eliminate red tape in order to make BC more attractive to businesspeople. Subsequent to their election, the government ordered that regulations be slashed by one-third. As a result, the Workers' Compensation Board set out to eliminate many of the regulations that accompany the *Workers Compensation Act*.

The business community urged the WCB to move toward performance-based regulations, which set standards or goals that companies say they will strive to achieve. Employers argued that nobody was in a better position to determine how best to achieve the goal of reducing workplace injuries than the individual employers themselves. They stated that the prescriptive regulations then in effect hampered their ability to be competitive.

Organized labour disagreed. The BC Federation of Labour and its affiliates, including the BCTF, strenuously argued that prescriptive regulations should not only be left in place, but should be strengthened. Labour feared that when it came to a conflict between keeping

workers safe and maintaining the bottom line, employers would cut corners.

The Workers' Compensation Board (now called WorkSafeBC) decided to move toward performance-based regulations. Between 2002 and 2004, several regulations were changed. One of the most significant changes was to the first-aid regulation. In March 2004, 27 pages of prescriptive regulations were reduced to 3 pages of performance-based regulations.

A key component of the changed first-aid regulation removed the obligation for employers to conduct a risk assessment of their operations. The risk assessment must take into consideration things like the number of workers who may require first aid, the nature and extent of the hazards in the workplace, and the types of injuries likely to occur. Based on the results of the risk assessment, the employer has to make decisions about such things as how many first-aid attendants must be on duty at one time, what level of training the first-aid attendants need, and what type of first-aid supplies are required.

Interestingly, despite the fact that WorkSafeBC gave employers what they asked for, the negative response was almost immediate. Employers discovered it was difficult to determine appropriate levels of first-aid coverage without the prescriptive regulations. They were soon asking WorkSafeBC for changes.

The WorkSafeBC board of directors has approved changes to the first-aid regulations that include a partial reversal of the trend toward performance-based regulations. The new regulations, which will come into force in early 2008, prescribe the number of first-aid attendants required in a

workplace, the level of training the first-aid attendants must have, and the type of first-aid supplies that must be on hand. The new regulations were lifted directly from what was replaced in 2004.

The new first-aid regulations follow on the heels of new regulations regarding the orientation and training of young and new workers. These new regulations were outlined in the September 2007 issue of *Teacher*. However, noteworthy is the fact that the young- and new-worker regulations are very prescriptive.

Changes to the regulations governing workers who work alone, or in isolation, are a further indication that WorkSafeBC may be moving away from performance-based regulations. The changes have just been approved by the WorkSafeBC board of directors and will come into force February 1, 2008. They strengthen the existing requirements and require employers to either eliminate hazards associated with working alone or minimize the hazards to the lowest level practicable. Most of the attention being paid to the changes focusses on the requirement to prepay for fuel products at gas stations and the increased security for convenience store clerks. However, given that a large number of BCTF members work alone, the changes to these regulations should be looked at carefully because they provide more protections than are currently in place.

The apparent shift back by WorkSafeBC to more prescriptive regulations should be cause for celebration by working people. It is evidence once again that when workers stick together, positive things happen.

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



A chess course—almost

By Arnie Nermo

After labouring several months, developing a Board Authority Authorized course (BAA) for the Surrey School District, I received a call that I had been dreading for weeks. The Abbotsford Board of Education was offering me a position I could not refuse. I believed I was within a hairs width of having the first secondary school chess courses in North America approved, but with the acceptance of the job in Abbotsford I had to leave behind the possibility of a secondary school chess course; and now my work was all for naught, but maybe not!

I can offer you all the groundwork to apply this BAA chess course in your own school district. I am glad to share it with you for the following reasons: It can provide students of all abilities with an enjoyable lifelong, intellectual pursuit (a general opinion of chess as an elitist or exclusive activity couldn't be further from the truth). It is an activity where even the weakest academic students can match their wits and beam with success. It is a proven and valuable self-esteem builder. In addition, chess demands that participants exercise their best powers of planning, memory, decision-making, judgment,

Chess demands that participants exercise their best powers of planning, memory, decision-making, judgment, creativity, and concentration.

creativity, and concentration. A secondary school chess course can be the venue for developing critical thinking, analytic, strategic, and tactical problem solving. These skills are applicable and transferable not only in the mathematics curriculum but also to many of life's situations. Interestingly, chess is known to assist cognitive development for students in four areas—

logic, memory, awareness/analysis, and pattern recognition with overall improvements in all school test results, especially mathematics and reading. (Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal WGCTA). The educational benefits of chess are already recognized by its inclusion in the required curricula of over 30 countries including Canada (Quebec and New Brunswick). It is evident that chess is more than just a game.

Chess is known to assist cognitive development for students in four areas—logic, memory, awareness/analysis, and pattern recognition...

The teacher of a chess course need not be an expert or aficionado. A rudimentary knowledge of the game would suffice, although a passion for the game would be a definite asset. The application of teaching pedagogy to chess knowledge is not novel. The lessons needed and skills to be learned are inherent and self-evident in the sources and materials provided. It is a course that can easily be taught to keen students, at many of our secondary schools.

As an educator with over 25 years experience, I believe that a secondary school chess course would finally break a paradigm of curricular thinking in BC. Historically schools have been dependant upon the good will of volunteers and sporadic community support. This has not been enough. A chess course will fill a definite need for students in the secondary school curriculum. I know this through the personal experience of having had noon-hour chess with an attendance of over 25 students daily at two separate Surrey secondary schools. I believe implementing this course in BC schools will be a bold step and show a new direction in fulfilling this need. If you are interested, contact me.

Arnie Nermo teaches at Robert Bateman Secondary School, Abbotsford. arnie_nermo@sd34.bc.ca.

Wal-Mart using courts to undermine workers' rights

Canadians should take note of the situation in Weyburn, SK, because if demonstrates our courts are just another device in Wal-Mart's union-busting toolbox.

On April 19, 2004, UFCW Canada applied for certification for the Wal-Mart in Weyburn and hearings on the application began.

According to the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board (SLRB), 90% of all cases are decided within 10 days of the last hearing date.

The last hearing date for the Weyburn Wal-Mart application was in December 2005. Yet workers in Weyburn are still waiting to find out if they can bargain collectively. Wal-Mart seems to play by a different set of rules.

Early on in the Weyburn proceedings, Wal-Mart demonstrated its contempt toward the SLRB by claiming that the board did not have the authority to request an internal document, "A Manager's Toolbox to Remaining Union Free."

When the board naturally insisted on seeing the document, Wal-Mart took the parties involved on a legal goose chase that went all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. The Supreme Court refused to hear the argument. Wal-Mart was forced to return to the SLRB (this after a six-month delay) now claiming that no such document ever existed in its Wal-Mart Canada offices.

While the above is brazen, the true depth of Wal-Mart's audacity was revealed by its application to the Supreme Court that *The Saskatchewan Labour Relations Act* was a violation of its charter rights. In particular, the Arkansas-based retailer contended that the act disregarded its freedom of expression.

The corporation insisted that an employer should have the right to

communicate with its workers in an unfettered manner. Note: this company was stuffing notes into its Canadian employees' pay envelopes including press releases about the store it shut in Jonquiere, Quebec shortly after it unionized.

In July 2006, just when it looked like Weyburn Wal-Mart workers might finally get a definitive answer, Wal-Mart launched another preemptive assault on the board—this time alleging that because of bias the board was incapable of rendering a fair judgment.

Once again Wal-Mart dragged the charges up the judicial ladder. The Queen's Bench dismissed Wal-Mart's allegations as "a fantasy." Then it went to the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal, and lastly to the Supreme court of Canada, which on April 19 refused to hear Wal-Mart's latest appeal.

Wal-Mart's exploitation of the courts is not something isolated to Saskatchewan. The Bentonville-based company has engaged in similar tactics in BC, Ontario, and Quebec. In Gatineau, Wal-Mart has been wrangling with the union and the Quebec Labour board for more than two years.

When you are the largest corporation in the world, massive legal bills are a drop in the bucket. Wal-Mart makes a net profit of \$3 million per hour, every day of every week of the year. To put that into context, one hour's earnings are enough to pay for 12,000 billable hours of legal work a week. Consequently, companies like Wal-Mart don't have to think twice about tying up the courts for months, all the while wasting judges' time and taxpayers' money.

However, there is a much larger cost to Canadians. By abusing the process of the Canadian judicial system, Wal-Mart is undermining

the rights of our nation's workers. Wal-Mart knows what happens when working people have to wait five, or six, or 10 years to find out if they can form a union. They become demoralized. They move on or they, understandably, adopt a cynical view of the process.

Ensuring that workers have the right to organize and bargain collectively plays a fundamental role in creating an equitable society. It is the best check on unfettered capitalism and the surest way to make sure that the gap between the rich and poor does not become a chasm.

As working in the service sector becomes a reality for more and more Canadians, we cannot afford to let the Wal-Marts of the world have their way with our institutions and, by doing so, turn out rights into illusions.

Wayne Hanley, national president, UFCW Canada, CALM.

Wal-Mart lumped in with North Korea

Human Rights Watch, which usually monitors rights violations in countries like North Korea, reports that Wal-Mart's efforts to remain union-free has violated US law as well as its employees' rights.

Violations include eavesdropping on workers, using surveillance cameras to spy on them, and firing those who express an interest in union representation.

The April 30 report was Human Rights Watch's first study of a US company's treatment of its workers. Wal-Mart has more than 1.3 million workers at about 4,000 US stores, none of whom belong to a union.

—The Guild Reporter, CWA/CALM

Supreme Court recognizes right to bargain

On June 8, 2007, the Supreme Court of Canada recognized a constitutional right to collective bargaining.

In 2001, the BC government passed a law that nullified a number of collective agreement provisions in the health care sector. As a result, negotiated protections against contracting out and layoffs, as well as bumping rights, became invalid. The law also precludes employers and unions from future bargaining on those issues.

A number of unions challenged the law, arguing that it violated the charter's freedom of association guarantee. The Supreme Court agreed. In reaching this conclusion, the courts reversed its earlier decision, holding that "the grounds advanced in the earlier decisions for the exclusion of collective bargaining from the charter's protection of freedom of association do not withstand principled scrutiny and should be rejected."

The court based its recognition of collective bargaining as a constitutional right on the following:

1. An examination of Canadian labour history reveals that collective bargaining has long been recognized as a fundamental aspect of Canadian society.
2. International law protects collective bargaining as part of freedom of association.
3. The protection of bargaining under section 2(d) of the charter is consistent with the charter's underlying values, including human dignity, equality, liberty, respect for the autonomy of the person and the enhancement of democracy.

The court stressed, however, that the right to bargain is not absolute. Section 2(d) of the charter protects only against "substantial interference" with associational activity, in that the intent of effect of the challenged legislation (or government activity) must "seriously undercut or undermine the activity of workers joining together to pursue common goals of negotiating workplace conditions and terms of employment with their employer that we call collective bargaining."

The court held that certain provisions of the challenged law created substantial interference with health care employees' right to bargain. The court found that, by invalidating existing agreement, the law undermined the past bargaining processes that formed the basis for these agreements.

Further, by prohibiting provisions dealing with specified matters in future agreements, the law undermined future bargaining over these matters.

The court also considered that the nullified provisions were central to the freedom of association of workers, in that they related to "essential protections" such as employment security and seniority.

Finally, the court found that the government measures constituted a virtual denial of the right to a process of good faith bargaining and consultation.

The court also held that the law could not be upheld under section 1 of the charter as "a reasonable limit prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and

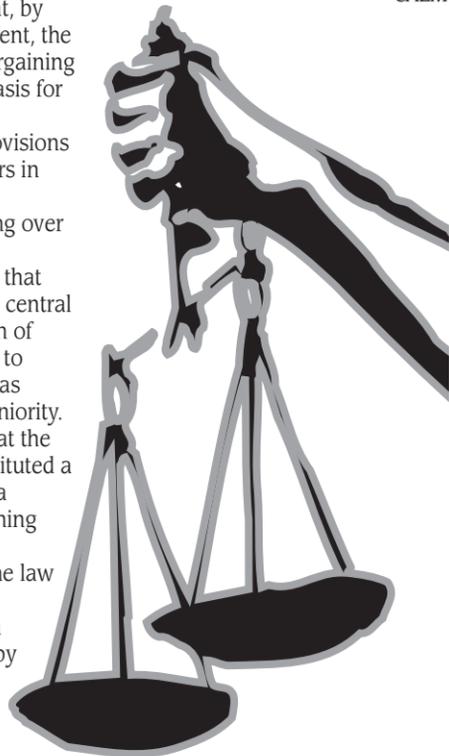
democratic society." The BC government failed to establish that the legislation "minimally impaired" the bargaining rights of employees.

As a result, the Supreme Court ruled that certain provisions of the challenged legislation were unconstitutional. However, it suspended its declaration for 13 months to allow the BC government to address the repercussions of its decision.

For more information on labour law issues, visit SGM's web site at www.sgmlaw.com.

Charlene Wiseman practises labour law with Sack Goldblatt Mitchell in Toronto.

—CALM



A school is gone—but not forgotten



By Steve Fairbairn

Well, it wasn't really a school—any more. It was a building that once was a school.

"The school" was closed in 2002 but that is a different story.

The school in question—the building that once was a school—was still called Elkford Elementary School. It was located in a small rural BC community at the end of Highway 43 in the Southeast Kootenay region of the province.

On August 11, 2007, at approximately 6:45 a.m. the end arrived. By the time the sun set that day, a fire had destroyed the school, leaving only the gymnasium.

Elkford exists because of coal mining. The process that became "fording coal" began in the late 1960s, with Elkford being incorporated as a community in 1971.

Elkford Elementary School opened soon after that as a collection of four portables, without even a gymnasium. As the years went by it grew and grew and grew—the addition of more portables, foundations, permanent classrooms, and a gymnasium as the school's growth paralleled that of the community.

At one time there were two classes of each grade. There was a music program, special education program, a full-time teacher-librarian, a principal, a vice-principal, and there was a very active and supportive parent community.

Teachers moved into the community and stayed. Many stayed after they entered their retirement years.

As the community grew, a secondary school and another elementary school (Rocky Mountain) were built uptown.

By the early 1990s all three schools were full—full to bursting.

As time passed, the number of children in town began to drop—the mine was no longer hiring and families were moving past the child-bearing years. At the turn of the century, the provincial funding formula was changed. The school district no longer found it economically viable to keep all of its schools open.

Promises of extra support and specialist positions in the remaining elementary school were made, if the community agreed to peacefully surrender one school to closure.

Elkford Elementary School was closed in June of 2002.

The school sat vacant and boarded up—lonely and unloved by everyone except the 1,500 or so people who were former students of

the school, their parents, the teachers who once taught there, and the many town residents who remembered the pride that came with the first school in Elkford—a school they worked hard to get, and one they were proud to call their own.

To the school board the vacant building was a liability—one that had to be disposed of.

In the spring of 2007, the board got its wish. They came to an agreement with the municipality, and Elkford became the proud new owner of the building.

The plan was to make it into a community centre of some kind. A committee of interested townspeople was struck and they were in the process of looking at how the building could be used.

In the meantime, the vacant building had become a playground for teens and others who repeatedly broke in and rummaged through the dark and lonely halls. Rumours hinted that people who had come into town to find work were squatting in the building.

On August 11, 2007, at approximately 6:45 a.m. the end arrived. By the time the sun set that day, a fire had destroyed the school, leaving only the gymnasium.

No one was hurt, no one died. No child was displaced. No teacher lost any materials. The only thing that was lost that day was a little bit of Elkford.

I think it knew that it would never hear the peals of laughter of children at a recess break, the sound of hundreds of running feet at 3:10 p.m. on a Friday afternoon...

I think it—the being of Elkford Elementary School knew. I think it knew that it would never be a safe, welcoming place for the children of Elkford again. I think it knew that it would never hear the peals of laughter of children at a recess break, the sound of hundreds of running feet at 3:10 p.m. on a Friday afternoon, or the screams of excitement in the gymnasium as children learned new skills, or watched puppet shows and skits.

I think it knew, and chose to end its existence without shame.

Elkford Elementary School may be gone, but it will never be forgotten—it will live on in the memories of those who loved it.

Steve Fairbairn is president of the Fernie District Teachers' Association and a teacher who lives and works in Elkford.

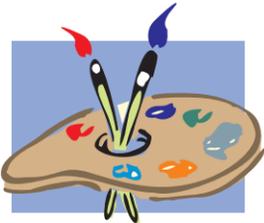
Yours for the asking

50 for 50 arts challenge

The Canada Council for the Arts has asked Canadians to participate in 50 arts activities in celebration of our 50th anniversary—ranging from reading a poem to singing in a choir to attending a film festival to looking at a painting—and keep a record of their experiences on the 50 for 50 Arts Challenge web site, www.artschallenge.ca. The site, inspired by the successful social networking site, www.43things.com, invites users to create a list of 50 arts-related activities they will undertake in 2007. It is fun and user-driven, creating a sense of community. Students are encouraged to discover new things and share them with their friends.

The package is available for download, free of charge, on the Canada Council's web site, www.50.canadacouncil.ca. Contact us if you wish to receive bookmarks to promote the 50 for 50 Arts Challenge at your school.

For more information about the education package, or the Canada Council, contact Ruby Clifford, 50th Anniversary Officer, at 613-566-4305 or 1-800-263-5588, ext. 4086; rubby.clifford@canadacouncil.ca.



EcoKids brings the environment into ESL classrooms

Earth Day Canada invites elementary school teachers and educators to check out their EcoKids English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) lesson plans, now available online at ecokids.ca. They're free!

EcoKids, a free, curriculum-linked environmental education program, has been promoting environmental awareness to young Canadians for over 10 years. Its ESL initiative addresses the increasing number of new immigrants in Canada's classrooms. The environmental lesson plans, formally evaluated by ESL professionals, are learner-centred, readily applicable, and linked to K-6 curriculum.

To access the EcoKids ESL lesson plans, visit ecokids.ca. To learn more about Earth Day Canada, visit earthday.ca.



Thinking globally, acting locally, 20 years of love

CODE, the Canadian international literacy agency that manages *Project Love*, has shipped more than a million and a half kits of school supplies to students in Africa and the Caribbean.

Project Love has been adopted by hundreds of thousands of Canadian teachers, who recognize the project and its accompanying curriculum-based educational resources as an opportunity for their students to learn about international issues and assist their peers in the developing world.

CODE partners with local education-based organizations in the countries where it works. Professional support is given to teachers who are often accustomed to teaching with few resources.

This year Project Love kits—each containing a pencil, an eraser, a ruler and a notebook—will be sent to primary school students in Tanzania, where only 69% of youth can read or write, and Senegal, where only 39% of the population is literate. Resources for education in both these countries are limited and such school supplies are beyond the means of most families.

For more information on CODE visit www.codecan.org or contact Jana McDade at jmcdade@codecan.org, 613 232-3569 ext.252.

Youth exchanges

The Society for Educational Visits and Exchanges in Canada (SEVEC) is recruiting participants and groups for its youth exchanges.

- Exchanges are for groups of between 10 to 30 students aged 12-17 years
- Teachers or youth group leaders must apply online on behalf of the group before Oct. 1st (no need to know names of students at this time, just approximately how many will be in your group)
- SEVEC, through government funding, pays for participants' airfare
- Students spend a week on exchange in another part of Canada and then host their twin group in their own community for one week
- Exchanges can focus on: language learning, culture, music, sports, volunteerism and more.

Sign up at www.sevec.ca, call 1-800-38-SEVEC, or e-mail kjfraser@sevec.ca.

Overseas private schools investigated for "grade inflation"

The *Vancouver Sun* reported October 1, 2007, that the BC government is in the process of investigating several overseas schools certified by BC for grade inflation. Education Minister Shirley Bond has stated she wants to ensure all students in the three Chinese schools in question meet the provincial standards required to earn the BC secondary school graduation certificate known as the Dogwood.

The problem actually surfaced first in BC private schools, some of which were giving students passing grades in English 12 even though they were failing provincial exams. Those schools—Century High School, Kingston High School, Royal Canadian College, Pattison High School, and St. John's International High School were warned they could be decertified if they did not quickly reduce the gap between the results.

Now Education Minister Bond is focussing on an overseas school, which is directed by Jim Beeke, a former government inspector of BC independent schools, until he resigned in 2005 and joined Maple Leaf International Schools.

Healthy Buddies program may get chopped

One of the most successful and highly lauded education projects in BC and possibly in Canada, may die on the vine because of lack of government interest and funding. It's the Healthy Buddies project that gets older elementary students (Grades 4-7) to "buddy-teach" the younger children about healthy living. It has received high marks, especially from those desperate to deal with the growing childhood obesity crisis. According to *The Vancouver Sun*, it has been endorsed by several prestigious institutions—UNESCO, the World Health Organization, and the American Academy of Pediatrics journal.

The project, which blends three themes—nutrition, physical fitness, and positive body images started out as a pilot project with collaboration between Sechelt Elementary School and Children's Hospital. It has expanded to 45 schools in the past two years. But, despite a study funded by Sick Kids Foundation of Toronto, showing a lower BMI (Body Mass Index—a measure for obesity) and lower blood pressure in participants, the Campbell government is apparently set to abandon the project just as it takes off in Ontario and Quebec.

Murray Dobbin

New BCTF lesson aids

1 LA SR221—Rethinking Mathematics: Teaching Social Justice by the Numbers Edited by Eric Gutstein and Bob Peterson, 184 p. ©2006. This book is a Rethinking Schools Publication and it includes a unique collection of more than 30 articles by American teachers that shows teachers how to weave social-justice principles throughout the math curriculum, and how to integrate social-justice math into other curricular areas as well. This is real-world math that helps students analyze problems as they gain essential academic skills. "Rethinking Mathematics" helps teachers develop students' understanding of society and prepare them to be critical, active participants in a democracy. Grades 4-12. \$19.95

2 LA SR222—Open Minds to Equality: A Sourcebook of Learning Activities to Affirm Diversity and Promote Equity by Nancy Schniedewind and Ellen Davidson, 400 p. ©2006. This 3rd edition of "Open Minds to Equality" is an educator's sourcebook of activities to help students understand and change inequalities based on race, gender, class, age, language, sexual orientation, physical/mental ability, and religion. The activities also promote respect for diversity and interpersonal equality among students, fostering a classroom that is participatory, co-operative, and democratic. An essential resource for teachers, leaders in professional development, and curriculum specialists. This is a Rethinking Schools Publication of Milwaukee, WI. Grades 4-12. \$27.95

3 LA8201—An Integrated Primary Peace Curriculum: A Beginning by Tina Anderson, ©2007, 78 p. This resource package includes integrated primary peace education activities and worksheets related to language arts, literature, math, science, social studies, art, music and drama plus ideas for peace themed presentations and multicultural activities. Peace education web sites are also listed. \$7.95.

4 LA 9983—The New Teacher Book: Finding purpose, balance, and hope during your first years in the classroom A Rethinking Schools Publication, Milwaukee, WI ©2004, 236 p. Teaching is a lifelong challenge, but the first few years in the classroom are typically among a teacher's hardest. This book is a collection of writings and reflections—some by new teachers, others by veterans with decades of experience to share that offers practical guidance on how new teachers from Kindergarten through secondary school can effectively navigate the school system, form rewarding professional relationships with colleagues, and connect in meaningful ways with students and families from all cultures and backgrounds. \$17.95

5 LA 8003—Sight Word Books—Level 1: K-1 Creative Teaching Press, 146 p. ©2001. This book features 30 cross-curricular mini-books with fun, predictable text, which can be reproduced and students can personalize to make their very own set of beginning readers. The stories in this resource give students repeated practice reading and writing over 50 words that most commonly appear in print. Also includes tips for making "reading sticks" that help students follow words as they read and clever ideas for turning the mini-book covers into student-made art projects. Each mini-book also has a place for students to dedicate their book to someone special. The sight word books are great tools for boosting comprehension skills, improving fluency, and expanding vocabulary and are also useful for English as a Second Language. Note that this book is produced in the USA and may contain some US-based standards. Grades K-1. \$17.95

6 LA 8011—Picture Sorting—Hands-On Word Study Activities: K-2 Creative Teaching Press, ©2004, 58 p. This book requires students to group words into different categories, drawing their attention to word patterns that help in understanding how words work. This resource

includes over 350 full-color punch-out picture cards as well as sorting mats and labels. Sorting ideas and suggestions are included for whole-class, small-group and individual work. Sorting activities include beginning consonant sounds, beginning consonant blends, beginning consonant digraphs, ending consonant sounds, short and long vowels, rhyming words and syllables. Note that this book is produced in the USA and may contain some US-based standards. Grades K-2. \$20.95

7 LA 8012—Word Sorting—Hands-On Word Study Activities: K-2 Creative Teaching Press, ©2004, 58 p. This book requires students to group words into different categories drawing their attention to word patterns that help in understanding how words work. This resource includes over 440 full-color punch-out picture cards as well as sorting mats and labels. Sorting ideas and suggestions are included for whole-class, small-group, and individual work. Includes sorting activities to reinforce short and long vowel words, y-words, r-controlled vowel words, compound words, contractions, homophones, and prefixes and suffixes. Note that this book is produced in the USA and may contain some US-based standards. Grades K-2. \$20.95

8 LA 8460—Money: Grades 1-3 by Ruth Solski, 99 p. Revised ©2005. This teacher guide integrates language arts and math with more than 55 reproducible worksheets and activities. Currency and literacy is combined in one book. Students learn the concept of money through 21 mathematic activities and 10 money illustrations. Worksheets include skill at the bottom of each page. Literacy activities include reading comprehension, phonics, word study, creative writing and matching. Answer key included. \$16.95

9 LA 9442—Multiplication and Division Drills: Grades 4-6 by Nancy Wilson and Paul Laporte, 131 p. Revised ©2006. This Canadian resource book includes hands-on practice activities for the basic facts of multiplication and division. Begin with the 1-2 times tables, then progress through single to four-factor multiplication drills. Also included are factor pyramids and multiplication wheels and an introduction to decimals. Division steps start with single-digit divisors without remainders, and move to three-digit divisors with remainders. Includes 114 pages of reproducible drill and word problem worksheets that can be used as homework sheets or timed exercises. Answer keys and certificate of completion are also included. \$17.95

10 LA9443—Money Talks: Teaching Math with Canadian Content by Wilne Ferré and Cora Gaillard, 80 p. Revised ©2000. This teacher guide includes 45 reproducible and hands-on activities with real world contexts. Study the history of money, the barter system, the Canadian mint, budgeting, banks and ATM machines, cheques/credit cards plus piggy banks, purses, and wallets. Research metals, alloy symbols, currency in other countries, and famous rich people. Includes an answer key. Grades 3-6. \$15.95

More curriculum resources and information are available at www.bcalmer.ca.

To order the above lesson aids, enclose a cheque payable to the BCTF or authorized PO to BCTF Lesson Aids Service, 100-550 West 6th Ave., Vancouver, BC V5Z 4P2 or call 604-871-2180, toll free 1-800-663-9163, ext. 2180, with a Visa or Mastercard. GST, postage/handling are included in prices. Orders sent by return mail. Lesson Aids office and display room hours: 9-5 p.m. Mon. to Fri. from Sept. to June; 9-5. Tues. to Fri. during July and Aug.; 9-12 on Sat. during Sept., Oct., Jan., and Feb. bctf.ca/LessonAids.

Project Overseas

July-August 2008

Sponsored jointly by the Canadian Teachers' Federation and its member organizations

Each year Project Overseas sends about 50 Canadian teachers to work in partnership with teacher organizations in English- and French-speaking developing countries to provide professional-development in-service programs to teachers. Projects are based on requests from CTF's partners in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, and take place during the summer. PO is a volunteer experience, but administrative, travel, and living expenses are covered.

For more details, visit bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=6298

Requirements: BCTF membership, an appropriate teacher's certificate, a minimum of five years' teaching experience in Canada, Canadian citizenship, proof of a valid Canadian passport, excellent health, and evidence of flexibility and mature judgment.

Deadline: CTF application plus BCTF forms must be received at the BCTF by **November 14, 2007**. For information and to request an application and forms, contact Anne Field or Amber Vint 604-871-2283, toll-free 1-800-663-9163, afield@bctf.ca, avint@bctf.ca

Retirement seminars

Two seminars—"Your Pension, Your Future" and "Thinking About Retiring" are being offered in these areas for 2007-08.

Preregistration is required; the time and location will be confirmed by e-mail or by mail. The forms are available at tp.pensionsbc.ca.

Thursday and Friday seminars are 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. and Saturday seminars are 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Date	City
November 8	Victoria
November 15	Kamloops
November 17	Kamloops
November 24	Coquitlam
December 1	Kelowna
January 10	Abbotsford
January 12	Abbotsford
January 17	Surrey
January 18	Surrey
January 19	Surrey
January 24	Campbell River
January 26	Victoria
February 7	Vancouver
February 8	Vancouver
February 9	Vancouver
February 14	Vernon
February 16	Penticon
March 6	Burnaby
March 8	Burnaby
March 29	Fort St. John
April 3	Nanaimo
April 5	Nanaimo
April 19	Prince Rupert
May 3	Castlegar
May 8	Delta
May 10	North Vancouver

For more information, contact: Teachers' Pension Plan, Seminar Services, Box 9460, Victoria, BC V8W 9V8, Toll free 1-877-558-5574, Fax: 250-953-0436, E-mail TPPseminars@pensionsbc.ca.

There's more to it than money

The BC Retired Teachers' Association is offering workshops that will follow and complement those presented by the BCTF/Pension Plan, but will be limited to fewer than 30 participants.

After you attend a pension seminar, you will realize there is more to it than money, and who

better to share their expertise with you than retired teachers?

Retirement living brings with it life-altering situations and a wide variety of choices, some financial, some legal, and all to do with lifestyle. Achieving a balance doesn't just happen.

A pension seminar is coming to your area. Ask your local to contact the BCRTA (604-871-2260/2) to book the free follow-up workshop.

Factor 88? Don't wait!

Teachers who have reached the age of 64 or the factor 88, age plus contributory service with the teachers' or municipal pension plan, may voluntarily withdraw from the BCTF Salary Indemnity Plan: Long Term.

If you have reached age 65 or factor 90, you are no longer eligible for long-term benefits and should

withdraw. As the BCTF does not have access to your personal pension information, it is up to you to apply to withdraw.

Send a completed withdrawal form, available from Income Security, local presidents, or online at bctf.ca/SalaryAndBenefits.aspx?id=4782 to the BCTF Income Security Division.

Please also discuss this issue in your staffrooms.



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Ever thought about a teacher exchange?

The Canadian Education Exchange Foundation is a registered non-profit foundation dedicated to facilitating international and inter-provincial teacher exchanges.

Applications are now being accepted for the 2008-09 school year. Destinations include the United Kingdom, Europe, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States.

BC is a very desirable destination for foreign candidates, and it has not been possible to meet the demand for teacher exchanges in BC in recent years!

For more information and an application: www.ceef.ca, e-mail: cwilk@ceef.ca or tel: 604-739-7596.

To connect with the BC Exchange Teachers' Association, go to bcteacherexchange.blogspot.com.

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PD Calendar

NOVEMBER 2007

30 Delta. The Mineral Resources Education Program of BC is offering the K-3 Kids and Rocks: Geology and its Impact on Our World and Grade 5 Integrated Resource Unit on Mining workshops. 8:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m. Registration is \$50 and is open to all BC teachers and TOCs (with an additional \$10 charge for out of district teachers.) Download the registration form at www.bcminerals.ca/pdf/Workshop-DeltaSD30Nov2007.pdf or call 604-681-4321 ext. 108 for more information.

JANUARY 2008

24-25 Vancouver. The BC Alternate Education Association 21st annual Challenge & Change Conference. Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre. For more information, contact: DJ Pauls, Conference co-ordinator at dj.pauls@sd34.bc.ca or at school 604-859-7820, ext. 234.

31-February 2 Vancouver. The Early Years Conference 2008, Valuing all children. All children have the right to opportunities for realizing their full potential. Some children by nature of individual, family, or community circumstances are more vulnerable and will need extra support in achieving this. In order for these supports to be most effective, we must look through the eyes of the child. We must integrate our knowledge of the principles of child and family development with research and innovative practice. Special attention will be given to children in care and children with disabilities. For further information and downloadable flyer visit our web site www.interprofessional.ubc.ca, or contact us at ipad@interchange.ubc.ca or 604-822-7542

MARCH

2-4 Five sites. Interactive Innovations. Held at five sites connected via webcasting, the conference welcomes all educators, parents, and students. Themes include literacy, secondary learners, the first 10 years, equitable futures and leadership. Check out the web site: www.interactiveinnovations.ca. Registration opens in early fall, 2007. To hold a space, e-mail interactiveinnovations@shaw.ca. See you there!

7 Prince George. Educational Spring Fling: 4th North Central zone conference. Featuring Barry MacDonald, MentoringBoys.com as keynote in addition to PITA and BCPTA mini conferences. Excellent variety of workshops for all grades and subject areas. Prince George Senior Secondary School. Brochure and presenter information will be available December 2007at, www.bctf.ca/NorthCentralZone. For more information contact Deb Vandal at dvandal@sd57.bc.ca or 250-562-7214.

13-14 Vancouver. Special Education Association of BC presents its 33rd annual Cross-currents Conference at the Westin Bayshore. Keynote speaker Deborah Estes, "Brain Power." Workshops and exhibitors for regular and special educators. Contact person: bjfoulds@telus.net

APRIL

19-20 Kelowna. UBCO offers a French and Spanish Immersion Weekend. \$350 includes tuition and three meals. Accommodation at the Manteo Resort is extra. Teachers can use their Tuition Fee Certificate toward the tuition fee. Call 250-807-8177 or visit www.ubc.ca/okanagan/continuingstudies

25-26 Kelowna. Catalyst 2008, "Scientific and Environmental Literacy." Keynote speakers: Simon Jackson (Spirit Bear Youth Coalition Founder) and Bob McDonald (Quirks and Quarks). The Grand Lakefront Resort and Conference Centre, Kelowna. Co-chairs: kmorley@bcsccta.ca, grainey@bcsccta.ca, Check web site: www.bcsccta.ca, for presenter, delegate, and exhibitor registrations.

MAY

3 Vancouver. Investigating Our Practices 2008. 11th Annual Conference. Teachers from different educational contexts convene at UBC to share their investigations, understandings and questions. Call for Proposals. Submission Deadline - March 7. Registration fee: \$25 (\$15 for students.) Lunch and refreshments included. Scarfe Education Building, 2125 Main Mall, UBC. For more information, contact Judy Paley, 604-822-2733, judy.paley@ubc.ca

9-11 Campbell River. UBC offers a French and Spanish Immersion Weekend. Teachers can use their Tuition Fee Certificate toward the \$250 tuition fee. April Point Resort offers a great two nights, four meals package to all participants. Call toll-free 1-866-528-7485 or visit www.frenchcentre.ubc.ca/weekend.html

JUNE

30-July 17 Quebec City. Institut de Français, UBC à Québec, French Bursary Program for Teachers. This French immersion program is intended for all teachers and administrators interested in learning or improving their French language skills. www.frenchcentre.ubc.ca/quebec or toll-free 1-866-528-7485.

PSA PD Day October 17, 2008

PD Calendar web site:
bctf.ca/ProfessionalDevelopment.aspx
Additions/changes:
msteale@bctf.ca

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Project Overseas

By Jan Walsh-Hohert

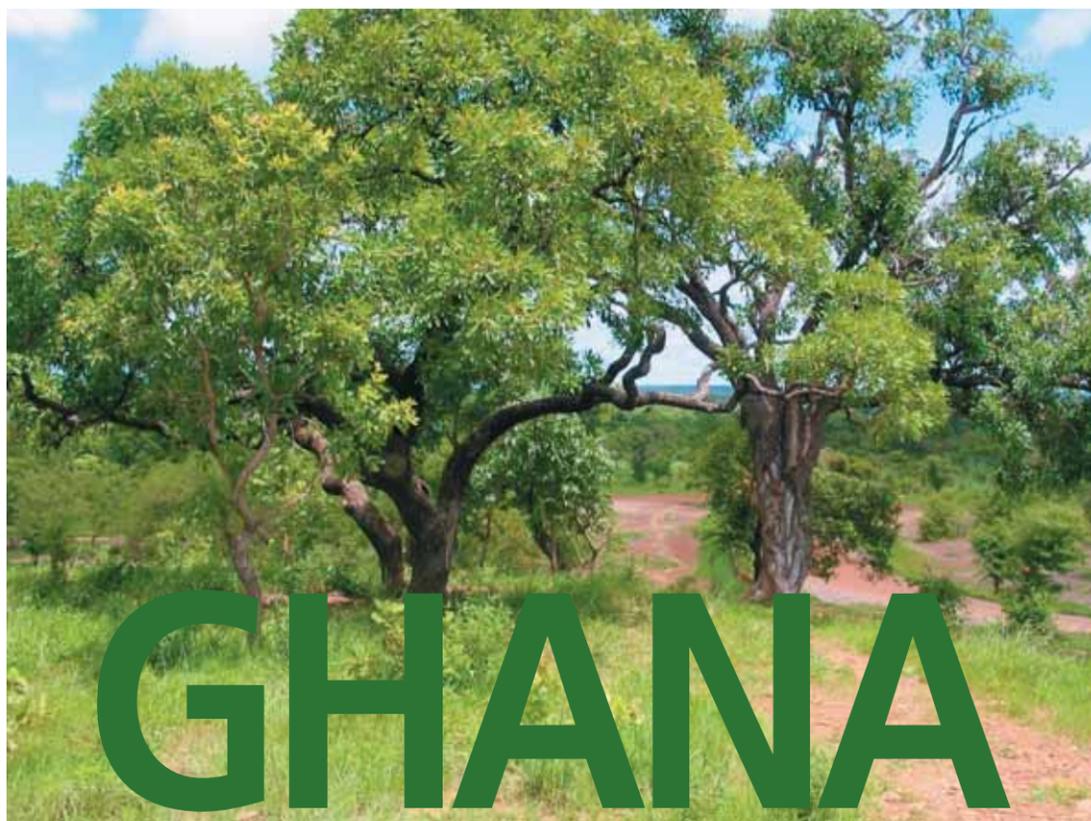
Project Overseas 2007 Team Ghana met for the first time at CTF in Ottawa during early July. We were there for orientation with 45 other teachers heading to 12 other countries throughout Africa, the Caribbean, and Mongolia. The 6 of us come from a variety of backgrounds and parts of Canada. We were born in Canada, Barbados, Tanzania, Britain, and the United States. We live in Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, and Nunavut. We were strangers when we met, strangers with a common goal. We were going to Ghana to work with teachers from GNAT (Ghana National Association of Teachers) for the delivery of professional development to teachers from three different regions of the country—Kumasi, the territory of the Ashanti people, Koforidua to the east, and Hohoe in the agricultural Volta region close to Togo.

Our team of 6 grew into a team of over 20 once we met our Ghanaian counterparts—co-tutors, some of whom were going to teach with us, and others who were to deliver courses in English and French. Meeting Ghanaians can be quite disarming until one gets used to it. Upon being introduced for the first time, the polite response is a formal handshake and exchange of names. This is all just fine until the person

Our Ghanaian friends were always ready to smile and laugh, ready to share their stories and their pride in their country, and to be open about their challenges and their needs.

whose hand you are shaking looks at you, smiles warmly and says, “Akwaaba” or “You’re welcome!” The first few times this happened, my immediate thought was that I had not yet said thank you for anything. Later I understood that I was being told that I was being welcomed, welcomed to Ghana. And we were. The hospitality was memorable.

During the opening exercises at each location we encountered a sea



JAN WALSH-HOHERT PHOTOS

of about 200 faces, the faces of strangers. We sang *O Canada* and learned the moving Ghanaian national anthem. We tried to extend greetings in the language from each region—a popular, if not proficient, effort. As the week passed and we taught math, science, and administration to teachers at all grade levels, the faces became familiar and the connections strong. At the end of each week, during closing ceremonies, we left a room full of friends and felt sad to be moving along to the next location.

Our Ghanaian friends were always ready to smile and laugh, ready to share their stories and their pride in their country, and to be open about their challenges and their needs. Many teach in schools with class sizes of over 60. Some are assigned to schools that have fallen apart so they teach under a tree. Adequate teaching materials can be scarce, supplies difficult to get. Some work in places where they do not speak the local language. Although English is the official language of Ghana, people often speak two or three other languages and English skills are often very weak.

Poor English skills can be a hazard to success in a country that maintains high academic standards

Poor English skills can be a hazard to success in a country that maintains high academic standards and the old British system of accountability through exams.

and the old British system of accountability through exams. Teaching conditions can be very challenging. Many attempt to teach over the sound of traffic, baby goats calling their mothers, people passing by. Many have very little teacher training and may not have mastery of the content for the courses they teach. Many are working far away from home for a small amount of pay. All try their best to keep children coming to school, not always an easy task.

Our Ghanaian friends constantly demonstrated the strength of their community—singing and dancing and eating together. Their warmth, hospitality, and generosity were always on display. We were encouraged to try their favourite foods, to wear their brilliantly coloured clothing, and learn their dances. The extended family is the core of their community and

society. Much of their strength comes from their belief that they are all one people despite their numerous tribes and languages and religious beliefs. This strength brought them through independence from Britain 50 years ago, and has led to peaceful times ever since.

The July 2007 issue of *Vanity Fair* magazine, dedicated to Africa, contains a memorable interview between Brad Pitt and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The Ghanaians in my classes had no idea who Brad Pitt was, but they clearly loved the Archbishop. In my class we read the interview and talked about the concept of *ubuntu*, the interconnectedness of all humans. Desmond Tutu says, “We say a person is a person through other persons. You can’t be human in isolation. You are human only in relationships.” Working together, we all felt interconnected. It is impossible to spend time in Africa and not feel that way.

In addition to our work we had time to travel and see other parts of Ghana. Among the places we visited, the slave castle at Elmina along the Atlantic coast was most memorable for me. St. George’s castle was built by the Portuguese in 1482, captured by the Dutch in

1637, and then by the British in 1872. It was expanded when the slave trade replaced gold as the major export. Storerooms were turned into dungeons filled with suffering humans while Europeans attended church a floor above them. At one time there were 12 such castles along the coast of Ghana.

The history of the slave trade was so well explained by the excellent tour staff, that everyone left feeling humbled and subdued by the sheer brutality of colonialism, by “man’s inhumanity to man.” On the lighter side, we were impressed with the presence of Canadian engineering feats in Ghana. First was the aerial walkway at Kakum—a series of rope walkways very high up in the jungle canopy. Second was the incredible Akosombo Dam that created a huge inland lake and enough power for Ghana as well as two other countries. Ghana also features two beautiful waterfalls at Boti and Wli, spectacular beaches, the Mole Game Reserve, cultural centers, markets, and, in Black Star Square in the bustling capitol of Accra, the monument to Nkrumah, the leader who helped Ghana achieve independence.

Teaching conditions can be very challenging. Many attempt to teach over the sound of traffic, baby goats calling their mothers, people passing by. Many have very little teacher training and may not have mastery of the content for the courses they teach.

We returned home wondering what lasting impact our work would really have on the teachers we met. It may be difficult to ever know the answer to that question, but what we do know is that we shared a great deal, and experienced some of the challenges of a developing country. Ghana is a country trying to educate all school-aged children, and GNAT is trying to provide professional development for all teachers. We salute those goals. We appreciate the Project Overseas experience. We miss our friends.

Jan Walsh-Hohert is a Saanich teacher on leave.

