

TEACHER

Newsmagazine of the BC Teachers' Federation

Budget rally in Courtenay

Kids matter

On October 1, BCTF President Irene Lanzinger joined teachers, parents, and supporters from the Comox Valley for a rally in Courtenay outside one of the local hotels. Inside, government and opposition MLAs on the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services were meeting about the 2009 provincial budget. The rally was staged to support the BCTF's position that next year's budget must include more resources to help children in their daily lives and in the classroom.

School District 71 is facing multiple challenges this year. There

are schools slated for closure even though many students are being put into overcrowded and mouldy portables. While speaking to local media, Irene Lanzinger blamed the challenges facing the Comox Valley on cutbacks by the provincial government and pointed reporters to the BCTF's submission to the finance committee.

Teachers at the rally were also joined by Susan Barr, a current School District 71 trustee, who is working with teachers to speak out against cuts and government downloading.

– Rich Overgaard,
BCTF media relations officer



Irene Lanzinger tells local reporters that the provincial government has to do more to keep schools open, reduce class sizes, and improve conditions for kids with special needs.



RICH OVERGAARD PHOTOS

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Teachers, parents, and supporters rally in Courtenay to pressure government and opposition MLAs to increase funding for BC's students.

Members speak out on FSAs Hung up on high stakes testing

By Susan Lambert

We love teaching. We love the kids and the crazy things they say and do. I chuckled each time a student came into the library and asked, "Do you have any good books here?" or the Kindergarten child who asked his teacher why he wasn't out working? The kids are our joy and passion. But lately we've been inundated with everything from faddish policy initiatives to the relentless demands of the high-stakes achievement agenda.

The endless stream of directives is drowning us. We no longer have the time to be the reflective practitioners we yearn to be. In fact, with provincial tests driving both the endless data-gathering and mandating an ever-narrower and more superficial curriculum, we find that this government does not want teachers as autonomous professionals thinking too much about how they teach and how to tailor instruction to individual students. In

fact, it seems as though, they prefer us to standardize our methodology as well as our curriculum. That's what it seems "best practice" is all about. Finding the one superlative instructional program that we all can copy. Since when is instructional methodology not situational—not in tune with different learning styles, and the intellectual and physical challenges each child brings to the teaching-learning partnership?

The FSAs would simply be another innocuous series of tests for a few grades if they didn't drive the agenda of standardization and if standardization didn't in turn drive the pursuit of private education alternatives. What the FSAs do, through the Fraser Institute's rankings and the dumbing-down of the curriculum—an inevitable result of the competition for marks—is undermine the public's confidence in public education. The testing/achievement agenda is an intentional and conscious effort to drive parents away from public schools into private schools, and that's why

they must be stopped.

"While the Fraser Institute claims that it publishes the rankings of public schools so that parents can make an informed decision about where they send their children to school, these rankings are intended to create dissatisfaction with public schools. They are aimed at showing that private schools consistently rank toward the top of the 10-point scale and that public schools rank from the top all the way to the

bottom. The ultimate aim of the Fraser Institute's school rankings is not to encourage choice among public schools, but to establish dissatisfaction with public schools in general." – Charles Bingham, "The True Purpose of School Rankings." (See page 7.)

On a recent tour of California schools, we were shocked that children are tested in every grade for hours on end (Kindergarten

See **HUNG UP** page 7

On the inside

In memoriam: Sam Fillipoff	3
177 Shuttered schools	4
The work of trustees	5
Members speak out on FSAs	7
Vancouver Secondary's struggle with class size	11
One school's journey through action research	16

President's message



Irene Lanzinger

There are so many things to be proud of in our public education system in British Columbia. Every day we see wonderful things happening in schools across the province. Unfortunately we also see the many ways in which the system

is being eroded. We see large classes, teachers struggling to meet the needs of students with special needs, school closures, school fees, and other indications of creeping privatization. These are all serious symptoms of chronic underfunding. But there are also more subtle forces at work. The provincial government has had a determined agenda to increase the use and misuse of standardized testing. They have introduced province-wide tests at Grades 10 and 11. They require districts to have accountability contracts, now renamed achievement contracts. They encourage the proliferation of school- and district-wide tests to provide data for the achievement contracts. And, they stubbornly cling to the administration of the Foundation Skills Assessment tests every year

to every Grade 4 and Grade 7 student. This allows the Fraser Institute to rank elementary schools on the basis of the test results. Trustees, principals, parents, and even the minister of education agree that the ranking is invalid and a complete misuse of the test. These tests are not a good assessment of individual schools or individual students but they do have some valid uses. They can give us some general information about how well our students are doing province-wide in reading and mathematics skills at the Grade 4 and 7 levels. However, this information would also be available to us if the test were conducted on a random-sample basis. The BCTF has repeatedly urged the ministry to conduct the tests on a random-sample basis. Conducting the tests in this manner would not

allow the Fraser Institute to rank schools. It would also mean that libraries, computer labs, and teaching time would not be lost for three weeks of every year in every elementary school in the province. For years BCTF members, particularly Grades 4 and 7 teachers, have been engaged in educating parents and the public about the negative aspects of FSA testing. We won a very important court case on freedom of speech that allows us to send information home to parents outlining our concerns. Many parents have sought to have their children withdrawn from the test. In many instances this attempt to withdraw students has been met with resistance or pressure tactics from administrators who themselves are under pressure from the ministry to ensure that all

students write the test. The FSA is a critical element of the provincial government's testing and accountability agenda. The United States provides very clear and often extreme examples of how the over-emphasis on standardized testing leads to a narrowing of the curriculum, profound loss of professional autonomy, loss of creativity and innovation in teaching methods, and dramatic increases in privatization of public schools. It is time for all of us to support our colleagues in Grades 4 and 7 and take a stand against the FSA and the concept of public education that it symbolizes. As you might expect, we have a plan! Take the time to attend school and local meetings and learn how you and your colleagues can help to end this intrusion into public schools.

Readers write

Tests cause undue stress for students

A new school year represents an opportunity for fresh beginnings and improvements in education, as well as, a time to reflect on the challenges that we as teachers face when trying to protect children from the unsound standardized testing of Grades 4 and 7 students. The time has come for teachers to unite and take responsible actions to end FSA testing. Together we can make a difference by saying no to government practices that cause undue stress for our students and that provide no information to improve our classroom practices. We know that our concerns about the FSA are valid. Together we can get the government to listen. Together we can create change and improve education for our students. That is why I support the BCTF campaign against FSA testing and strongly urge all teachers to do the same.

Michelle Hernandez
Coquitlam

Narrowing the curriculum to teach to the tests

At the 2008 AGM, I was happy to hear that the BCTF was finally going to take action to oppose the problematic FSA tests. I know from talking to other Richmond staff union reps that I am not the only Richmond teacher to have concerns about these tests. Others too are upset about the narrowing of curriculum to teach to the test, the misuse of the statistics by the Fraser Institute, and the undue emphasis placed on the school scores by principals and well-meaning parent advisory committee members looking to "improve education for our kids." We know that this type of test is harmful; just last week,

British officials admitted that their country's focus on improving standardized test scores has actually had a negative impact on students' math skills by taking the focus off more meaningful activities like problem solving. Since my daughter is in Grade 4 this year, I will be doing my best to explain to the parents of her classmates why I think they too should oppose the FSAs, but I can't have much impact alone. I need the BCTF to build support for a campaign that can make a real difference. Polls have shown that the public trusts us more than the government on education issues like these. If we take a strong stand against FSAs, I think we can win parents over. Let's not miss this opportunity to act the way we did with Grade 10 provincial exams! Let's actually do something this time.

Lisa Descary
Richmond

Say "No" to the tests

My nephews go to school in Washington State. They are tested, tested, and then tested some more. My brother phones me sometimes in desperation as his sons struggle with this testing regime they now live in. This September, our teaching colleagues in Bellevue, WA, did not begin school when the rest of us did because they were on strike for a salary increase and to get some of their professional autonomy back. Their job action did get some of their professional autonomy returned. Congratulations to them. In BC, we are faced with an increasing accountability agenda forced upon us by the government. Is this the best for our students? Do all these tests support our students'

learning? When schools and students are identified as being at-risk with the use of these tests, does extra support, money, and staff come to help? No. Then why do we, as teachers, continue to administer these tests? It is not just about the FSAs. It is about the Grade 10 final exams, the Grade 11 final exams, the Grade 12 final exams, the RADs, the DIBELS, the DARTs, and what other new test that is being written to measure accountability. Some of these tests do identify students' needs, but if they are just being used as a form of data collection with no extra support, then they are just as bad. Most of the universities in BC have decided that Grade 12 exams do not need to be part of their application process. They have realized that a students' mark is not just dependent on how well she or he can write a test, but rather about her or his learning. It is time that we, as the BCTF, take a stand and say, "No" to tests that are just for data collection as part of the government's accountability agenda. We must be heard to advocate loudly for what is best for our students and our schools. We must ensure that what we do in our classrooms and schools supports all of our students and their learning.

Ieke Giese
North Vancouver

DART mandatory in SD 42

Regarding the article, "What is DART?" (*Teacher*, September 2008), the authors of this article fail to mention that, in SD 42 (Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows), the administration of the DART instrument is mandatory (by board policy) for teachers of Grades 3 and 6 students. Subsequently, the data is collected

by district staff and used as part of the district achievement report, and stored in data "silos." In this way, instead of merely informing practice, the DART test further erodes the professionalism of teachers in our district.

Lucinda Tooker
Maple Ridge

Excuse us, we're just visiting your planet

Even though we maintain a tight orbit around the province's political centre, Sooke (SD 62) might as well be Pluto—so little is known about our dark little local. We are the shadowy, distant cousin of our more oft-recognized neighbours. We are moved by gravitational forces greater than our own, and as such, act in concert with the Federation on provincial causes. But just as often, we find ourselves moving in ways that are at odds with other locals. There are many things we do that are uniquely Sookensian. We are an island on an island. Isolated and individualistic, we are the epitome of autonomy. Like all similarly isolated communities, we are rapt with the anticipation of a visit from rarely seen official visitors. At the time of this writing, the Sooke local is preparing for the landings of alien arbitration teams, whose deliberations and decisions will have all educational lenses in the province keenly focused, brushed, and turned our way. One day last year, in the classic Sooke tradition of independence, Kathryn Sihota chose to teach to her students—to engage them in some active learning—rather than subject them to a district-mandated test. Her choice was not made in simple opposition to the test, but was based on what she believed was in the best interests of her Grade 3 students at that time, on that day.

Every test (including the DART) can be standardized—or not. Assessments (tests) in and of themselves, are not bad things. Every teacher knows that. When tests are imposed on teachers to be administered with strictures, scripts, strict, prescribed marking criteria, and with applied and enforced norms, they take on the odious character of standardization. They become bad things on any level. If there is a teacher anywhere in the province who tells her Grade 3 students to suspend their enthusiasm for learning, put any sense of discovery aside, pick up their pencils, be quiet, and write a test composed by someone who knows nothing about them—a test with which they are completely unfamiliar, with no opportunity to ask questions, and which doesn't even count for their grade—I would hold that that teacher doesn't belong in the classroom.

The Sooke DART was never characterized by Sihota, nor by others in our dim, distant local as just another standardized test. The way in which teachers are directed to administer the test is what makes the Sooke DART different. Teachers are guided by district-imposed rules, standards, and instructions that impinge on teacher autonomy in ways that standardized tests do. Worse than that, DART results in Sooke are used to measure school achievement in much the same way that FSAs are used by the Fraser Institute to rank schools province-wide. Sihota was making an autonomous decision not to subject her Grade 3 students to a potentially demoralizing, stressful assessment, on that day, under those conditions, at that time. There's much more here than niggling opposition to politically mandated data collection. Sihota's statement wasn't simply a challenge to Sooke district's misguided accountability agenda (of which the DART is a part) but it was a powerful statement in defence of us all, and of our autonomy in the classroom. Portraying Sihota's act as garden-variety politicking and insubordination, as the media is wont to do, demonstrates an unfortunate unfamiliarity with planet Sooke and, by inference, trivializes the courage, and the strength of conviction of Kathryn Sihota, and the stand that she took in defence of her students, and of public school teachers province-wide.

Patrick Henry
President, Sooke Teachers' Association

Retired teachers appreciate *Teacher*

Just to let you know that I most definitely wish to continue receiving *Teacher*! It's an excellent way of keeping up-to-date with a career that I loved dearly and, although I've been retired for 20 years, it's one way to try to keep abreast of what's going on in the profession and in the union. Thank you for all of your efforts over the years—it's very much appreciated in spite of the fact that we often don't let you know how much we appreciate your hard work. Thank you..

Jack Glover
Vancouver

I would very much like to have you continue to send me your excellent *Teacher* newsmagazine. I have taught in BC for 35 years and have been retired for 10 years. I enjoy reading the newsmagazine and appreciate the opportunity to keep up with what's happening in education. I would like to express my gratitude to the BCTF for making *Teacher* available to retirees.

Lance Cuthill
Cranbrook

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Volume 21
1 September 2008
2 October 2008
3 November/December 2008
4 January/February 2009
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6 April 2009
7 May/June 2009

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RICH OVERGAARD PHOTOS

Top: School District 71 Trustee Susan Barr joined members from the Comox District Teachers’ Association to lobby MLAs to include more resources for students in next year’s budget. Above: Teachers, parents, and supporters rally in Courtenay to pressure government and opposition MLAs to increase funding for BC’s students.

In memoriam

Sam Fillipoff

Devoted husband, father, son, brother, outstanding teacher, visionary, race relations consultant, passionate peace activist and child advocate, community worker, loyal friend and totally engaged citizen. Passed away July 23, 2008, aged 63.

Sam Fillipoff’s sudden and tragic passing after a short but courageous battle with Crutzfeldt-Jacob’s disease has left a deep and lasting void, not only in the lives of his family members, but also in the lives of so many colleagues and community members.

Sam Fillipoff was the epitome of the engaged citizen as he relentlessly pursued peace, social justice, and equality for all people. He embodied the ideals and principles of friendship, pacifism, and simplicity from his Doukhobor heritage.

Early in Fillipoff’s teaching career, at Vancouver’s Lord Strathcona Elementary School, he saw the inequity of educational opportunity for his students who lived in an area of Vancouver that incorporated the Downtown Eastside with the poorest postal code in Canada. As a result, in the early 1970s, he took action and led his colleagues in spearheading the Northeast Sector Project, a plea for the school board to implement measures to help level the playing field for these students. His master’s thesis at Simon Fraser University was based on describing this vision.

The Northeast Sector project while unsuccessful at the time, served as an impetus for later and long overdue reforms in Vancouver’s inner-city schools. At the time, it challenged the long-held

concept that education and social issues were separate and distinct entities.

From this time on, Fillipoff was an indefatigable education and community activist and a leader in the areas of poverty, homelessness, racism, discrimination, equality of educational opportunity, and social justice. He stood up and spoke out on controversial issues and as a result he was repeatedly denied promotion to a school-based principalship position. However, his role as a teacher-leader was outstanding.

In his last school, Grandview/ʔuuqinak’uuh Elementary School, he focused on the needs of First Nations children and with the help of others created a beautiful community garden on the school grounds.

Fillipoff served with great distinction as the race relations co-ordinator for both the BC Teachers’ Federation and the Vancouver School Board. The policies he helped formulate and the materials he helped develop, plus the workshops he led, and the in-service work he did in city schools and across the province broke new ground on multiculturalism and race relations.

On peace, his major thrust in retirement, he was untiring. As with all his projects, he immersed himself in this work and promoting a culture of peace for children became his all consuming passion—phone calls, e-mails, articles, public forums, visiting local schools, attending school board and city hall meetings, plus one-to-one lobbying were strategies he employed effectively.

He was proud to work on the 2006 World Peace Forum in Vancouver and his inspired idea to turn war toys into peace art resonated across the province.

We will miss Sam Fillipoff greatly in the years ahead but his legacy lives on.

– Alva Jenson and Noel Herron

Looking back

70 years ago

As a class, teachers are rather conspicuously free from racial prejudices. In many of our schools, children of numerous national stocks mingle in friendly fashion; not as Orientals and Occidentals; not as English, French, German or Hottentot, but simply as children; and a pretty lovable lot they generally are. Whether we should have encouraged Orientals to come to British Columbia is open to debate. Our duty of treating them with humanity, when they have been admitted and actually permitted to get born here, is not open to debate. That admirable young men and women are to be treated forever as a caste apart, *The BC Teacher* refuses to believe. The Federation has itself assumed no official attitude in relation to this question, but certain teachers have had the courage to protest against policies that are as dangerous as they are unchristian.

– October 1938, *The BC Teacher*

50 years ago

With monotonous regularity some trustees state, “It is practically impossible to get rid of an incompetent

You give it all you’ve got and they still want more

By David Denyer

A tragic event can be very effective in bringing us to our senses and focusing our attention, if only temporarily.

One such event, reported recently in the *Times* newspaper of London was the apparent suicide of a very well-respected and devoted head teacher of a small rural primary school. It appears she may have been driven to despair by a hostile inspectorate blind to the obvious merits and virtues of the school and interested only in uncovering minor inefficiencies and mistakes.

Such an event, notes the writer of the article, is symptomatic of our current hypercritical society in which people’s efforts are never “up to snuff” and are continually exhorted to meet impossible standards, false expectations and that totally mythical and vacuous cause—“the pursuit of excellence.”

In our small portion of the globe, teachers have been quite regularly and often relentlessly excoriated. One only has to recount “It’s all about achievement,” supervision of learning, foundation skills assessment and attendant ranking by the Fraser Institute, unending school district assessment, school and school district goals that reduce the curriculum to a largely instrumental notion of literacy, numeracy, and a skewed notion of social responsibility, inadequate funding, school closures, crowded conditions, and aggressive and petty data-driven bureaucracy in the name of accountability. All of these elements and more join common cause in creating a world in which, despite people’s best efforts, they are destined to fail.

The media theorist, Nick Couldry, uses the example of reality TV as reflecting this prevailing wider order of social and economic regulation characteristic of contemporary market-driven societies. In *The Apprentice* for instance, he says “...playing by the rules, doing all the approved tasks, counts for nothing unless you have proven yourself in front...” [of the Donald].

“Contestants show character by submitting to that authority in all its arbitrariness.”

The sociologist Richard Sennett has tied this phenomenon to what

he sees as the increasingly personalized and charismatic nature of corporate authority. Who hasn’t had the experience of having their ears assailed and feeling of worth undermined by a senior administrator and/or fashionable guru holding forth on what constitutes “best practice” and is “good for kids” as though they were the only ones graced with the enlightenment that this unique insight had afforded them?

“Every system of cruelty requires its own theatre,” says Couldry, “to legitimate its norms, values, and institutions.” Neoliberalism, argues Henry Giroux, of McMaster University, is one such theatre of cruelty.

“What is new about neoliberalism in a post 9/11 world is that it has become normalized, serving as a powerful pedagogical force that shapes our lives, memories, and daily experiences, while attempting to erase everything critical and emancipatory about history, justice, solidarity, freedom, and the meaning of democracy.”

Consequently, we have lost sight of the “human” and “humans” in and behind the effort and the work that gets done despite the odds.

What a revolutionary notion then to accept and acknowledge that people are doing their best and reward them accordingly—we may even get better results!

David Denyer is an assistant director, BCTF Communications and Campaigns Division and editor of *Teacher newsmagazine*.

Message for retired BCTF members

We are planning to cut the number of copies we print of the *Teacher newsmagazine*. We are happy to provide a copy to you if you want to receive it but we will only mail to you for two years after you retire. In January 2009, we will stop mailing to teachers who retired prior to January 1, 2007, unless you contact us and request to be left on the mailing list.

Contact us at news@bctf.ca if you retired prior to January 1, 2007, and wish to continue receiving the newsmagazine.

Of course the newsmagazine is available online at bctf.ca/news.

teacher.” The BC Teachers’ Federation has long taken the stand that incompetency in the classroom should not be tolerated. It is our opinion that if school boards wish properly to exercise the authority they have, they can discharge inefficient teachers. However, the BCTF has insisted that the proper procedures of dismissal be followed so that all teachers are assured of fair treatment.

– Sept./Oct. 1958, *The BC Teacher*

30 years ago

Declining enrolment is a very serious problem. It threatens to undermine the financial support for schools. It will force the closure of many schools. It will lead to the laying off of large numbers of teachers. Right? Wrong! Each of those statements is a myth, and it’s time they and other myths about declining enrolment were put to rest. In 1975, the BCTF developed a set of staffing guidelines for elementary and secondary schools that would provide basic services at an acceptable level. Today many schools meet these criteria but the majority do not. Those schools that do not

meet the criteria are generally suffering from excessively large classes, lack of preparation time or inadequate learning assistance, library or other specialized services.

– Sept./Oct. 1978, *The BC Teacher*

10 years ago

Perhaps only 10 years ago, males who left school before Grade 12 or who graduated with marginal results could still look forward to a range of employment or career opportunities. In a resource economy like British Columbia’s, scores of such males could reasonably expect to find engagement in relatively low-skilled but well-paid jobs. That career path has gone the way of buggy-whip makers. Compounding this social and economic reality is the increasingly dysfunctional effect of media-driven negative male images. Films and television shows convey the powerful message for adolescent males that dumb is cool, violence is self actualizing, and lassitude is a career option.

– October 1998, *Teacher newsmagazine*

Chris Bocking, Keating Elementary School, Saanich

177 Shuttered schools across BC and counting



Among the casualties, clockwise from top left: Maple Drive School, Quesnel; Beaver Creek Elementary School, Port Alberni; Kanata Elementary School, Prince Rupert; Mt. Klitsa Junior Secondary School, Port Alberni; and Seal Cove Elementary School, Prince Rupert.

By Noel Herron

“These are things (school closures) that happened that we can’t undo. The past is...prologue.”
—Premier Gordon Campbell at launch of the new Neighbourhoods of Learning “pilot” at Queen Mary School, September 3, 2008

Once again, BC has the dubious distinction of leading the country in high profile statistics—the largest number of children living in poverty for the fifth year in a row, the lowest ranking in childcare performance of all 10 provinces, and currently, the largest number of closed schools in any province in all of Canada (177 and still counting).
With political pressure mounting each passing month, next year’s provincial election on the horizon, and the Ministry of Education’s belated and embarrassing U-turn on so-called surplus space in schools, the skittish BC Liberals rushed forward with a stop-gap project in early September called a Neighbourhoods of Learning “pilot” that effectively put the brakes on school closures across the province.

Once again, BC has the dubious distinction of leading the country in high profile statistics—the largest number of children living in poverty for the fifth year in a row, the lowest ranking in childcare performance of all 10 provinces, and currently, the largest number of closed schools in any province in all of Canada...

The “pilot” was ostensibly designed to “rejuvenate schools” especially “those hurt by declining enrolment” and closure.
Up to now there was never any attempt by the province to slow down, consult, and examine procedures with provincial education partners such as parents,

teachers, and trustees as the school closure juggernaut rolled relentlessly across BC.
In BC, for the past seven years until this September, the closing of schools across the province continued unabated, reinforced by rigid financial restrictions from Victoria.

No attempt was made to develop a made-in-BC solution that would take into consideration such items as geographic isolation, impact on delivery of local educational services, transition funding, social and economic impact on small rural communities, adequate advance notification of closures, and most important, the disruption in the lives of young children.
Other provinces set different examples. Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Ontario placed a moratorium on closures instead of the face-saving, last-minute advisory to school boards issued by BC Deputy Minister of Education James Gordon, in late June.
Saskatchewan, to lessen the blow, set up transition or bridge funding of \$350,000 per school, while Quebec, Ontario, and Saskatchewan mandated one-to-two years of advance notice to school communities facing the chopping block. Discussions are still continuing in many of these provinces.
In BC, for the past seven years until this September, the closing of schools across the province continued unabated, reinforced by rigid financial restrictions from Victoria.
All of this abruptly changed when schools in the premier’s own Point Grey riding were threatened with closure or downsizing due to seismic upgrading.
A highly politicized Neighbourhoods of Learning “pilot,” tailored for Gordon Campbell’s Point Grey riding, was unveiled the first week

of school with the premier and his minister of education presiding at a press conference in Vancouver.
This newly announced project would now allow three city schools to serve as neighbourhood hubs that deliver education and community services year-round under one roof.
We were told it would attempt to blunt the negative and cumulative impact of declining enrolment across the province.
When it was suggested to Premier Campbell at his September press conference that this was perhaps too little, too late for the 177 schools already closed, he conceded, “there are things that have happened that we can’t undo. The past is prologue...and we can now build an even brighter future for our schools, our neighbourhoods, and our students.”
He will have a hard time convincing rural school communities, devastated by closures, that they now face a brighter future.
Victoria-based, Jessica Van der Veen, a strong and leading opponent of provincial school closures blasted the lack of provincial intervention and planning as “short-sighted” and “mind-boggling,” particularly in relation to the projected baby boom in the next decade or so.
In a *Globe and Mail* interview she pointed to the damage local school boards were doing to vulnerable youngsters by not fighting Victoria on forced closures.
“In the BC Interior,” Van der Veen is quoted as saying, “some children are bussing three hours a day in all kinds of weather, including snow and sleet because closures are happening all over the province. These communities have just been shattered.”
Van der Veen’s group, one of the estimated 40 save-our-schools groups, which have protested local closings, will no doubt view with considerable skepticism the premier’s statement that “our schools are a critical component of our communities.”

The backlash against closures could cause political difficulties for Liberal MLAs in the months leading up to next year’s provincial election. It will certainly play a role in the upcoming Vancouver school board elections.
Rural school communities will cast a jaundiced eye on the disproportionate number of city schools in the new “pilot”—three out of five schools. While many existing Lower Mainland community schools will see political opportunism, if not cynicism, in the morphing of their community school title into that of a Neighbourhoods of Learning project.
It is no coincidence that two of the three city schools (Queen Mary and General Gordon) designated as Neighbourhoods of Learning schools (a redundant title given the existence of the long-established community schools network in the Lower Mainland), are located in the premier’s Point Grey riding.
Parents in other parts of the city
“In the BC interior, some children are bussing three hours a day in all kinds of weather, including snow and sleet because closures are happening all over the province. These communities have just been shattered.”
— Jessica Van der Veen

angrily questioned the upgrading of two schools in the premier’s riding while their schools had to wait in line and comply with the old rules. Shirley Bond, in an attempt to downplay the blatant political shenanigans by the premier, made matters worse with the release of a letter attempting to place the onus on the school board—a favourite strategy of this minister of education.
Local activists denounced both the board and the education minister for a “serious abuse of process and authority.”

The lack of fairness, the favouritism, the backroom deals, the discarded rules, the queue-jumping, the evasion and obfuscation, not to mention the bias in favour of city schools (when viewed from a rural perspective) have not just cast a pall over the Neighbourhoods of Learning project but tarnished this entire concept as a legitimate provincial initiative.
Local activists denounced both the board and the education minister for a “serious abuse of process and authority.”

It is very significant that not one of the three city schools selected by Victoria, with large populations—Queen Mary (475), General Gordon (365), and Strathcona (486)—was in any way vulnerable to school closures—one of the key reasons for launching the Neighbourhoods of Learning “pilot” in the first place. Small schools that took a big hit were ignored in this process.
At time of writing, the provincial government has not named the two remaining rural schools and the education minister is unable to state whether the so-called “pilot” will last one, two, or three years, or what the final price tab will be.
Liberal leadership in response to repeated concerns and complaints from both urban and rural boards consisted of finger-pointing at local boards and evasion or buck-passing by a visibly displeased minister of education.
It was only when the school closure juggernaut rolled up to the premier’s Point Grey riding, and the crescendo of complaints regarding seismic upgrading reached deafening proportions, that a self-serving, flawed, and highly partisan plan emerged in response to a serious province-wide issue.
Schools on the cusp of closure deserve much better than this.
Noel Herron is a former Vancouver principal and school trustee.

The work of trustees; the responsibility of community

By *Eden Haythornthwaite*

I have been a trustee in Cowichan for three years this fall and prior to that, I worked closely with my son Gabe when he was a trustee—it was during his time at the board table that the Community Alliance for Public Education was established. I ran as a CAPE trustee on the ballot in 2005.

The role of administrators who dominate the board rooms and have little interest in the process of participatory democracy is the fundamental problem.

Earlier this year at the BCTF Public Education Conference “Equity & Inclusion,” Doug Player expressed bewilderment that there was not more moral outrage from trustees—why has there been so little opposition to the decline of public education—productive or otherwise, even from those who were elected on the understanding that they would defend our schools? It is an urgent question. The role of administrators who dominate the board rooms and have little interest in the process of participatory democracy is the fundamental problem. We have to understand this role and the effect this has on decent people who would like to fulfil their role as elected representatives with more vigour.

A civil society should have the highest expectations of those they send forward to represent communities. However, how do we support them, what is our wider responsibility, and who should we send forward to do this job?

At a time when we need the best, we often have no one or those who are unsuitable. Should we settle for the lesser of evils (or as we say in CAPE, the evil of lessers), should we project our values onto people that reflect our hopes and beliefs but are not actually present in their politics? Should we try to please everyone,

should we make excuses, should we hope for the best when our experience has already endowed us with the basis for knowing better? Should we make the same mistakes repeatedly and watch our efforts fail everyone?

The first compromise is the worst—that of supporting candidates we know will not likely do the right thing at the board table. How many people have worked to get trustee candidates elected who they thought would at least be better than nothing and wound up with elected reps who once they sit at the board table, make Hitler sound like John Ralston Saul?

The next error is failing to provide the support humans need to do their best.

If you elected people and then hit cruise control, you will be very disappointed. Look around this province, and despite the clear assault on the funding, governance, and philosophical attributes of public education, we have had virtually no uprising against this tragic undertaking.

As progressive, independent-minded trustees will not be in the majority, they must have continuing support in order to build a program to defend our schools. Trustees have a host of responsibilities but it is crucial that those who choose to secure their election recognize their own role in backing up their candidates with ongoing community work long after election day is over.

There are a few elements that we have followed in CAPE and we encourage others to do likewise according to their own fashion. We have made a good start but are only a short way along our road.

- Build unity within the school community groups and oppose the divisive behaviour often encouraged by administration. There is no earthly reason for families and employees to be at odds and certainly, each school community has a duty to view their fate as tied to the collective well being of the other schools.
- Recognize the critical difference

between administrators and elected reps. It is the express duty of elected trustees to examine, review, modify, and create policy by which the district will be governed. The people have elected trustees to represent them—not to act as handmaidens for senior administrators who are chiefly political operatives for the Ministry of Education.

- Proudly sustain your non-aligned, independent status. Autonomy from wider party concerns frees you to act decisively and with principle. Remember, that regardless of who is in Victoria, we will always need community representation that puts neighborhood needs ahead of all other considerations. Do not diminish the merit of local political work—your efforts around school board do matter. School board politics are not just dress rehearsals for the real thing.
- You must develop a platform that becomes your program—a platform that you and your trustees are committed to for the mandate. Not some boilerplate convention but a living, breathing blueprint that will change the world for the better.

Trustees have a host of responsibilities but it is crucial that those who choose to secure their election recognize their own role in backing up their candidates with ongoing community work long after election day is over.

There is no excuse for asking your community to vote for a loosely developed series of mottos and platitudes. Argue the merits of your views with clarity and vigour—not everyone will agree with you but they will know what your presence at the board table will look like. Your community deserves this firm pledge and your trustees will have the advantage of a roadmap and a means to chart their way through

difficult terrain, safe in the knowledge that they will do what they were elected to do and that they will have the support of a platform to bind their work.

Finally, you need a small, vocal, energetic, organized group to support your trustees. This support will give them courage and strength; buy them drinks, hold their hands, help with the reading and research, organize events and responses in the papers, and attend board meetings.

Because, with the full force of loyalist trustees, senior administrators, and other helpful underlings raining down on them, most people simply cannot be expected to function for the best, and soon the progressive trustee either shuts up or learns to moderate their thinking to avoid being abused.

However, with a gallery of supporters there to buoy up their efforts, ask embarrassing questions, make unfortunate noises, your trustees are an unstoppable force and can bear anything.

We need school trustees who will speak out!

A new year brings new students, new hopes, and new opportunities. School trustees are all up for election this year on November 15.

Funding comes from the BC government but our trustees have significant responsibilities. Trustees make significant decisions about class size, composition, district policies, budgets, programs, resources, staffing levels, testing, and your working conditions.

Strong school trustees can work for us

Finding, supporting, and working with progressive trustees will make a huge difference to public education. Imagine what could happen when new trustees speak up and defend public education—not just quietly administer cuts.

Progressive trustees will:

- pressure the government for more money for public schools.
- oppose government directions that undermine public education.
- stop school closures.

Working outside the boardroom is the only way to do what is right. It is not so hard to vote the right way but it will be a minority vote.

Outside the boardroom and among your fellows, however, you can build the reality you cannot hope to vote into place. Have the spirit to organize in the community to secure support for your positions, supply analysis, and encourage others to participate by providing shelter. I think the lesson here is that as there are no super heroes in politics; we should plan and work co-operatively.

So we can now prepare for November and beyond. Our progressive trustees with the support they deserve, courageous and firm of conviction standing shoulder to shoulder with their neighbours, could even change the weather if they dared to do so. I believe that.

Now the question is: What do you believe?

Eden Haythornthwaite is a school trustee, Cowichan School District.

- represent your community to the government—not vice versa.
- reduce overcrowded classes.
- stop neglecting special needs.
- pressure the BCSTA to stand up for students and teachers and fight for increased funding.
- protect our most vulnerable children and work to fight child poverty.
- actively build community support for public schools.
- speak out against narrowly focused, inappropriate testing and ranking.
- respect and invite public, parent, employee group, and student participation in decision-making.
- work with trustees in other districts to get resources from the provincial government.
- lobby MLAs on behalf of your community's unique needs.
- resist privatization of our public schools.

You can make a real difference

Voter turnout for school board elections is low. A small number of votes can make a huge difference. Take five friends or family to vote.

Geoff Peters, BCTF Communications & Campaigns Division

Healthy schools are schools that stay open

By *Anne Jardine*

Given the Ministry of Education's many recent efforts to promote healthy schools, why has there been so little emphasis on the health reasons for keeping smaller schools open? When children can walk to their rural village school or their urban neighbourhood school, there are fewer carbon emissions from bussing those same children across town or down the highway to some larger town, and hence the overall atmosphere of the earth benefits.

The personal health advantages of walking are well documented. Instead of spending hours each week riding a school bus, children benefit from their daily walk to their local school, which will keep them more fit and active...

Non-renewable fossil fuels can thus be conserved and used for generations to come. In terms of revenues, the district saves some of the expenses generated by the daily operation, staffing, and maintenance of school bus fleets, as well as the fuel costs. By keeping neighbourhood schools, we contribute to a greener, healthier planet.

The personal health advantages of walking are well documented. Instead of spending hours each week riding a school bus, children benefit from their daily walk to their local school, which will keep them more fit and active and enable the younger children to share valuable time with the parent or other family member who may accompany them. Children may also choose the option of walking home for lunch, allowing them the possibility of a further bit of healthy exercise and the possibility of sharing lunch time with family members.

The overall benefits to physical and mental health may not show up

on a school district balance sheet this year, but will decrease costs in other ways over the long term—benefits for the health system when people stay healthier and need fewer medical services. By keeping neighbourhood schools, we contribute to a fitter, healthier population.

Communities stay stronger when they include local schools. Young families are attracted to live nearby. The vibrant life of a village or neighbourhood is enhanced by having its school at its heart. School-centred healthy social and cultural activities within the neighbourhood keep people from needing

to travel so much in the evenings to participate in arts, sports, or civic life. A healthy school, which offers activities and events within the neighbourhood, will decrease recreational travel, conserve resources, and reduce emissions. It also promotes more meaningful local relationships within and between families. When children live fully within their neighbourhoods, they can be more thoughtfully guided by their parents and other significant adults, they feel a greater sense of belonging and self confidence, and they take greater pride in their local institutions. Risky, self-destructive behaviour,

crime, and vandalism decrease when children feel connected to their local environment. In terms of revenue, the benefits accrue when fewer dollars need to be spent in replacing vandalized property, or deploying the services of the judicial and correctional systems. By keeping neighbourhood schools, we contribute to healthier, safer communities.

There are so many healthy reasons to support and sustain local neighbourhood schools. If “healthy planet, healthy people, and healthy communities” are used as filters for decision making, the value of a neighbourhood school is clear and obvious. The Ministry of Education needs to become healthy itself before it can begin to think in a healthy way. Promoting healthy schools is not only done by making decrees about smoking and healthy food choices. Nor is it sufficient to adjust the already overflowing curriculum by requiring 30 minutes of school time each day for physical exercise. The concept of a healthy school starts right in the neighbourhood where the students live. The Ministry of Education must seriously and proactively consider the health consequences of its current practice of encouraging and expecting boards to close local schools and bus children afar. In this new round of closures, the ministry is not giving due consideration to its own stated priority of healthy schools.

Anne Jardine is a retired teacher, Windermere.



Teacher voices

By Anna Chudnovsky

Moving back to the West Coast from Toronto after 12 years has been a big transition. The most obvious one is the weather. It's balmy here, a word you can only use for a short two-week window in Toronto. It's mellow here; nobody seems to be racing down the street quite like they are on Bay and

I've had to go from teaching a Grade 7/8 class in the inner-city of Toronto to getting phone calls at 4:30 a.m. and travelling all over the city, here in Vancouver, as a TTOC.

King. And of course, I've had to go from teaching a Grade 7/8 class in the inner-city of Toronto to getting phone calls at 5:30 a.m. and travelling all over the city, here in Vancouver, as a TOC. Oh, I've had to get used to the lingo here, too. I'm not a supply teacher, I'm a TTOC.

So what's it like being a TTOC? Well, surprisingly, I actually like it! I know, I

know, I'm supposed to dread the early morning phone calls, the awkwardness of walking into a new school every day, having to introduce myself to a different group of kids each day, having to slowly pronounce my last name, and teaching it to them. I'm supposed to be frustrated with the lack of control I have over the kids, to be complaining about the behaviour issues I face every day, etc., etc. But the truth is, and I don't know if I should keep it a secret or not, I am quite enjoying myself.

My first day as a TTOC was in a Grade 7 class. The kids were so self-assured, so articulate, and so charming. I actually felt like I was hanging out with friends. I mean, my god, they had seen the same movies I had seen, they had read some of my favourite books (I sometimes read teen fiction for fun), they were funny (they got my sarcasm), and they behaved very well. Now, during my last year teaching in Toronto, I had a kid light a bulletin board on fire, someone threw a desk out a window, and a cell phone was thrown in my face; so I've seen some pretty brutal behaviour issues. That said maybe I am easily impressed behaviour-wise, but still, these kids were great. During gym class, I was

the jailer in a pretty competitive game of Capture the Flag and I actually got them running out of jail screaming at the top of their lungs, "I love my freedom!" I mean, what's not hilarious about that?

It's hard to say exactly what is so great about this job. Maybe it's the new kids I meet every day and how they all seem to welcome me so warmly into their classrooms.

I also had the chance to work with globally developmentally delayed students at a high school in east Vancouver. Seeing the program that the teachers and assistants have created for these non-verbal, extremely delayed students was striking. The fact that they have expectations they can meet, schoolwork they can complete, and relationships they can count on is so significant for them and inspires great hope. It was a pleasure to see this program working, even for a single day. I've been in a Grade 4 class where kids took turns reading me the first



chapters of their "novels." They were well-written, holiday-related, and a riot to listen to. Kudos to this teacher who has eight- and nine-year-olds writing their first novels.

It's hard to say exactly what is so great about this job. Maybe it's the new kids I meet every day and how they all seem to welcome me so warmly into their classrooms. Maybe it's the chance to try out my repertoire of jokes on different people every day, allowing me to narrow in on my best material. Perhaps it's getting to know

the city in such an intimate way, because, of course, schools are places where you can see real communities being built and sustained every day.

So no, I don't mind the 5:30 a.m. phone calls. I don't mind trekking to who-knows-where on the bus in the rain. Somehow, spending time with Vancouver's kids every day in their classrooms—their homes away from home—is satisfying enough.

Anna Chudnovsky is a Vancouver TTOC.

Local bargaining and the protection of a collective agreement

By Steve Fairbairn

I started my teaching career in the BC public school system after a number of years teaching elsewhere in Canada. On the first day in my new school, I found myself in the role of staff rep. I filed 26 class-size grievances the second day of school. I listened to the administrator say, "It's for the school, we don't need to follow the collective agreement, nobody minds having more kids in their classes."

Amazing, two days in the public system and already the line was drawn—management wanted to make their job easier at the expense of the working conditions of their teachers, and at the expense of the learning conditions of the children in their schools.

The only thing stopping them was a locally negotiated collective agreement.

Two strikes, one lock-out, one lost collective agreement, and one poorly planned amalgamation later, and I am still fighting for fairness—for the rights of TTOCs and beginning teachers to be treated fairly, for improved learning conditions for the children in our schools, and for the right of teachers to be treated fairly and with respect by their employer, by the government, by the ministry, and by parents.

Because we have no local bargaining, no local collective agreement, nothing is stopping management from eroding the learning conditions in our local schools—the ones that are still open. School closures are another story.

Does anyone else find it funny how it is always the teacher who needs to give up their rights for the betterment of the system?

Twenty years in the work force and I am still amazed that teachers are being treated so poorly by the system (both under the NDP and the Liberals). Why is it that I have to fight with a school administrator or a district superintendent about the need for more special needs support in a school? Why is it that we teachers are the only group who

seem to be standing up and saying that "financial reasons" are not a bonafide educational rationale for a class configuration?

Aren't we supposed to be on the same side? Aren't we all supposed to be advocating for children?

Who really believes that we can provide a quality educational experience for every child in our schools under the current system with Bill 33? When we negotiated class composition parameters locally, we had more special needs support, more learning assistance, more teacher-librarians, and more shop teachers—we had more quality educational opportunities for our children.

After all my time in education, I have learned many things—one of which is that teachers need to be able to bargain directly with their school board if they want to be able to provide a quality educational experience for the children they teach.

School boards should want to negotiate these same things locally with their teachers. Trustees are supposed to represent all of the parties in education not just the will of the ministry, but also the needs of the children and employees in the communities they represent. They need to be able to negotiate face-to-face with their teachers if they truly want to fulfill their legal mandate to the people of this province.

Local bargaining is the only way we can actually improve the educational system for the children in our schools, and it is the only way we can negotiate fair and reasonable working conditions for our colleagues—from the newest TTOC to the teacher in the last year of their career.

We need to move back to a locally based bargaining structure in order to save quality public education in British Columbia.

Let's work together to have the next round of bargaining happen in each and every local in BC.

Steve Fairbairn is the president of the Fernie District Teachers' Association.

Send your local to winter school

By Glen Hansman

Every year for several decades now, the Canadian Labour Congress has put on winter school—a fantastic series of one-week courses for union activists spread over four weeks in Harrison Hot Springs. The labour education program at winter school affords participants an unmatched opportunity to immerse themselves in topical issues, to develop education skills, and to hone union leadership abilities.

Courses this winter include Collective Bargaining, Arbitration: To Go Or Not to Go, Duty to Accommodate, Facing Management, Unions in the Community, Women in Leadership, and Young Workers in Action. All the courses are meaningful, anchored in real life, and meet the needs of the activists in locals across many employment sectors.

In fact, one of the best parts of winter school is the unparalleled opportunity to mingle and learn with workers from across the province who have very different

working conditions and processes as unions.

Last year, several local presidents from the Lower Mainland took the Provincial Labour Law course together during winter school 2008's week three, and appreciated the chance to glean strategies from our classmates.

The labour education program at winter school affords participants an unmatched opportunity to immerse themselves in topical issues, to develop education skills, and to hone union leadership abilities.

"Locals unquestionably receive value for their investment at Harrison," says Marianne Neill, president of the Burnaby Teachers' Association about her winter school experience last year. "It's the place to go if you're looking for rigour and standards without high stakes evaluation and stress, skills and

knowledge that will give teeth to your advocacy work on behalf of teachers, connections with others who are doing similar work in the labour movement, a good game of competitive wolleyball, and a chance to give a public choir performance of a rousing labour song. There is homework, but that's part of what makes the program worthwhile."

Winter school isn't just for local presidents, though. BCTF activists on their local executives or in non-elected roles would also benefit from the week. If your local has not been represented at winter school before, or hasn't sent someone recently, perhaps you should consider sending someone this year.

Winter School 2009 runs its one-week courses beginning January 18, 2009, ending four weeks later on February 13, 2009. Check out the preliminary schedule for CLC Winter School 2009 at: pacific.canadianlabour.ca/en/pacific/education Glen Hansman is president, Vancouver Elementary Teachers' Association.

Provincial grievances

The following issues are in the provincial grievance process:

Class size and class composition

The grievances for 2006–07 and 2007–08 are moving forward. BCPSEA has objected on a number of grounds (e.g., that the thousands of violations should have been launched as separate grievances and that the BCTF cannot collect them into a provincial grievance). Arbitrator James Dorsey heard the arguments on the objections on September 2, 2008, and in a decision on September 24, 2008, ruled against BCPSEA on all of their objections to the grievances. Thus, the grievances can move forward to hearing the actual merits of our grievances.

We should be careful not to read anything regarding the outcome of the grievance into Dorsey's decision. He has simply decided that the merits of the grievance should be heard. Those hearings will take place in late November and into December if necessary. A number of our colleagues have volunteered to

act as witnesses representing the rest of those public school teachers whose classes are violating the *School Act* in 2006–07 and we are now in the process of identifying potential cases and witnesses to bring forward for 2007–08.

The BCTF has also launched a provincial grievance for this year (2008–09), realizing that violations of the *School Act* with respect to class size and composition will occur (although we certainly hope that all classrooms will be within the limits, as poor as they are). BCPSEA has also objected to this grievance on several grounds (some similar to the previous objections and that we were just anticipating violations and have no evidence that any have occurred). The BCTF has already met with the BCPSEA to attempt to resolve this issue.

Elimination of Salary Category 3

Vince Ready, acting as the arbitrator in the period following our political action of 2005, determined that salary Categories 2 and 3 would be struck from our

contract and that the minimum salary category would then be Category 4. Some boards on the advice of BCPSEA used the levels of compensation from Category 3 to incorrectly calculate TTOC pay (as well as some other issues where Category 3 used to be relied on, such as early retirement incentives).

Water travel to and from work

Some teachers are required to use ferries or water taxis to get to and from work on some small and/or remote islands. The Collective Agreement reached in 2006 contained provisions for reimbursing costs for a number of these and making arrangements for reimbursements for similar (analogous) situations not actually named in the original clause language.

We are in mediation with BCPSEA on the two above issues on September 29 and hope to reach a resolution in time for the October pay day. If not, then these too will move on to arbitration under arbitrator Judi Korbin.

George Popp, BCTF Collective Agreement and Protective Services

Members speak out on FSAs

HUNG UP from page 1

children undergo 90 hours of testing annually, some up to 1 to 1½ hours long). Schools, known as program improvement schools because they have failed the tests, devote 90% of instructional time to improving numeracy and literacy scores. There is no prep time. Lessons are scripted and teachers are expected to adhere faithfully to the script. In Bellevue, Washington, a few kilometres south of our border, teachers went out on strike this September. A key aspect of the strike was their resistance to the prescribed district curriculum that was posted on the web daily and that all teachers were expected to follow to the letter. Teachers in England are also challenging the testing agenda and chaos has ensued around the flawed marking process this year.

Here in BC, we see the proliferation of district- and school-based testing, school and district achievement contracts that are the same the province over, a tighter integration between the FSA scores and classroom evaluation and report cards, and the four provincial Superintendents of Achievement whose job it is to insure that accountability contracts are implemented.

Grade 10 teachers mourn the lessons and units they lost when Grade 10 exams were mandated. Grades 4 and 7 teachers feel inordinately responsible for the rank their schools achieve. Kindergarten teachers are watching the primary program, with its cornerstone of developmentally appropriate instruction and the critical role of play in that development, eroding with the endless requirements for intervention, “readiness” skills training, data-gathering, and risk assessment testing for five-year-olds. Principals are held to account if their schools scores drop. In my previous school, when our scores dropped due to an influx of ESL students and the simultaneous tightening of the criteria for excusing children, my principal held “brain breakfasts” on the days of the FSA tests.

We are at a crossroads. We have repeatedly asked the minister to administer the FSAs on a random sample basis and she has repeatedly refused. As the professionals responsible for the system, we now must ask ourselves if we want to walk down the road to narrow, superficial curriculum, scripted lessons, and the de-professionalization of teaching? Do we see education as a text to be delivered? Or, do we see education as an infinitely precious collaboration between the student and the teacher—a collaboration that requires, on the part of the teacher, a huge degree of professional skill and the autonomy to design instruction to meet the precise educational needs of each and every unique child?

We have always stood for a quality public education system. We know the critical role education plays in building a just and equitable society. We have worked to make sure that public education in BC is academically rigorous with a broad and deep curriculum. We have worked to make sure that every child in BC gets an education program designed for her or his individual needs. We cannot stand idly by and watch that system crumble under the weight of an ideological policy agenda that seeks privatization as an alternative to funding the public system. I know that, together, we can.

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

US state-wide testing opens the doors to privatization

By Steven Miller

Across the US, state-wide testing became the latest fad in the mid-1990s. States developed their list of standards for each course and students were tested yearly to see if they were really meeting the standards. This was when US teachers should have stopped “standardized testing” right in it’s tracks. It only gets worse if you don’t.

“Meeting standards” has been used for years to privatize public health hospitals in the US. Though we don’t have a system of national health care, most big cities had public health hospitals that were free to the poor. Over a decade ago, newspapers started publishing “report cards” to show how hospitals, both public and private, were “meeting industry standards.”

Since public hospitals had to take whoever walked in the doors (usually the sickest), they can never match the success rate of private hospitals. The next step was to close down the public hospitals and turn them over to for-profit corporations, which opened them as private hospitals.

The privatizing onslaught on public schools begins with state-wide testing, but it doesn’t end there. There are a whole series of stages that follow, each nastier than the last. The next one is that the tests suddenly become “high-stakes” tests. If students can’t pass the tests, they are not allowed to graduate.

Then each state was required to use these tests for George Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB). This unfunded federal mandate requires every public school to meet extremely detailed testing requirements (e.g., 95% of every nationality in the school must be tested) or the school fails the test. After three years of failure, the federal government withdraws its contribution for the

education of poor children. To get this money back, the school must turn over increasing amounts of its budget to private companies, which, presumably, can do a better job.

NCLB reinforces the apartheid education that exists in the US. Suburban schools in our country rank among the best in the world by every standard. Since they have relatively few impoverished children, the threat of withdrawing

This ever-expanding testing regime is sold to us as a way to identify which kids need help. Of course, any teacher knows this after two days with the kids.

federal money is insignificant. However, the large urban school districts, regularly dealing with 80% impoverished kids, cannot survive without the money. NCLB thus targets these schools for privatization.

Step Three is when our schools are forced to put in scripted reading programs. These programs have failed to meet federal tests to verify how effective they are. Nevertheless schools must buy them and implement them.

Last year, in Oakland, California, where I teach, an elementary school teacher was doing her scripted learning segment. A boy accidentally urinated on himself in his seat. The teacher naturally stopped the class to help. Her principal wrote her up for “going off the script.”

The latest stage is framed as “benchmark tests and pacing guides.” These are designed by the textbook companies and are imposed on the whole school district. The pacing guides determine how much time a teacher has to cover each topic in the textbook. This is followed with the test. If you teach to a “teachable moment”—like an historic presidential election—you are off the script and the kids will fail the benchmark test.

In Oakland, elementary schools have as many as six of these a year (plus two state-standard tests).

However, our district states that young students cannot be relied on to fill in the little circles on the computer sheet correctly. So the kids circle the pictures and then the teachers must “bubble-in” the forms for each kid—on their own time—at least eight times a year!

As the new school year begins here in Oakland, we now have 27 kids in Kindergarten for each teacher. Their day lasts 6.5 hours—with no naps! The extra time is deemed necessary so the kids can do scripted reading and learn how to take standardized tests.

This ever-expanding testing regime is sold to us as a way to identify which kids need help. Of course, any teacher knows this after two days with the kids. The lie is proven since if “helping” the kids was the goal, then money would follow. Instead it is actually withdrawn from these students under NCLB.

The real goal of testing is to open the door to privatization, quite similarly as to how it was done with public health hospitals. The privatizers are quite open about this. Frederick Hess is the education expert for the American Business Roundtable—the US version of the Canadian Council of CEOs. He writes in his book *Educational Entrepreneurship* (p 252): “There are steps that would make K-12 schooling more attractive for for-profit investment... For one thing, imposing clear standards for judging educational effectiveness would reassure investors...”

The testing regime violates every way that children learn. Every child has different issues and needs different educational support. Standardized testing makes this impossible. Perhaps the biggest tragedy is that by the time the kids reach high school, a large majority have never experienced what learning really is, they think that learning is testing, and they have decided that they don’t want to learn.

Steven Miller has taught in Oakland, California, for 24 years.

The true purpose of school rankings

By Charles Bingham

Spring has come, and the Fraser Institute has completed its annual ranking of public and private schools in BC. As might be expected, private schools get higher marks, by and large, than public schools on this report card. Who wouldn’t expect this? It should not surprise us when private schools teach more effectively than public schools.

And it surprises no one who reads the *Georgia Straight* that the Fraser Institute, the body doing the ranking, is a right-wing think tank. To be specific, the Fraser Institute’s grand mission is to prove that free-market competition is always more beneficial than government stewardship.

While the Fraser Institute claims that it publishes the rankings of public schools so that parents can make an informed decision about where they send their children to school, these rankings are instead intended to create dissatisfaction with public schools.

But back to the rankings: And if I am a parent, I fall into one of two categories. Either I send my child to a public school, or I don’t. In either case, the Fraser Institute has got rankings for my child’s school. If I send my child to a public school in my neighborhood, then I will find out how my school fares in comparison to other public schools in Vancouver and around the province. Indeed, I may not like what I read. I may find that other schools outperform mine. I may take my child out of a public school and put him or her into a private one, if I have the money. If I already send my child to a private school, I

See PURPOSE page 8



Members speak out on FSAs

PURPOSE from page 7

will probably be happy that my child's school out-ranks so many others.

On the surface, then, it seems like these school rankings have something for everyone. Well they don't. While the Fraser Institute claims that it publishes the rankings of public schools so that parents can make an informed decision about where they send their children to school, these rankings are instead intended to create dissatisfaction with public schools. They are aimed to show that private schools consistently rank toward the top of the 10-point scale, and that public schools rank from the top all the way to the bottom. The ultimate aim of the Fraser Institute's school rankings is not to encourage choice among public schools, but to establish dissatisfaction with public schools in general.

The ultimate aim of the Fraser Institute's school rankings is not to encourage choice among public schools, but to establish dissatisfaction with public schools in general.

Here's the news about the Fraser Institute's mandate for education. You can verify this on your own by going to the www.fraserinsitute.ca. The mission of the Fraser Institute "is to measure, study, and communicate the impact of competitive markets and government intervention on the welfare of individuals." More precisely, its mission is to

prove that government-sponsored endeavours such as public schooling should be abandoned. The institute even has its own definition of "educational freedom." You have achieved educational freedom as soon as you have taken your child out of the public school system. Once again, look at the website.

In the press we see school rankings, and we hear that they are controversial. For example, the Dean of Simon Fraser's Faculty of Education has criticized the rankings because they are too simplistic. But these arguments for and against rankings have not been based on a thorough scrutiny of the Fraser Institute's agenda where public education and privatization are concerned. We have not seen the logic behind these rankings.

We have not seen the lesson plans that the Fraser Institute offers teachers, free of charge of course. The aim of one such lesson is to teach students "the tragedy of the commons," that is, publicly owned land. We have not read the award-winning, thousand-dollar words in a student essay contest staged by the Fraser Institute: "If the developed world is truly committed to poverty alleviation, it must forsake aid and adopt trade."

So let's say I am a parent, and I believe in the public school system. Maybe I also believe in the preservation of public lands. Maybe I believe in aid as well as trade. Are the Fraser Institute school rankings for me, for my own edification? Well, that's what I'm told.

I might believe the edification story if the rankings were done by a group that believes in public schooling. The Fraser Institute's school

rankings are meant to create a horse-race type of situation, a situation that will put the good old steed, the public school—your neighborhood school—out to pasture.

Charles Bingham is a professor, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University.

The FSA doctrine

By Susan Ruzic

In Naomi Klein's bestselling book, *The Shock Doctrine*, Klein explains how the military conducted experiments in the 1940s using electric shock on human beings. They discovered that they could get people to do and say things they may not have voluntarily done otherwise. Since then, many governments around the world have used shock techniques to get their citizens to do things they may not ordinarily do. Several recent examples close to home include 9/11 whereby traumatized citizens willingly gave up some of their rights in the name of security. During Hurricane Katrina, the government took advantage of people in distress and managed to shut down all schools and then privatize the whole system. Today it is happening again with the subprime crisis and the mortgage meltdowns. Ordinary citizens are losing their homes and are being told that the government will bail them out by giving the big banks more of their hard-earned money. They are being told that we need to develop the oil sands so that the economy can be strong. And

ordinary citizens who put the environment as one of their main concerns look away in shock as they now see the urgent need to shore up the economy. Government is getting away with the agenda it had always intended to carry out.

Closer to home in BC, we are being shocked and awed with the underfunding of our public education system. Teachers are being hit with large class sizes and increased numbers of students with special needs. It is easy to delist students when you are not in the classroom and will not have to work with these students. People who do not work directly with children in the classroom are making huge deci-

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sions that impact on classroom teachers. As a result, the teachers are going home exhausted and in shock and distress. They are too tired to look around and examine what is going on around them. Who has the energy? Costs are soaring and bills must be paid. The teachers put up with it all in order to make ends meet. The costs in this province keep soaring. And the treadmill keeps running and running.

FSA tests are foisted on teachers as yet another part of this difficult job. Who has the will to complain especially when there is so much to do and not enough time to do it in? So the teachers endure them and hope that one day things will get better or that the government will change.

Here in British Columbia, we are lucky to have activist teachers who are fed up and angry with the learning conditions of our students. They work to find ways to help the classroom teachers. One of the strategies that has been suggested is to ask teachers to not prepare, nor administer, or mark the FSAs; to not put up with giving a form of assessment that is not authentic and whose results are misused by the Fraser Institute; to take a stand against a government who wants to use this information to select schools that need to be disposed of and recycled as private enterprises. The arguments against this action are fair, to take this stand right now targets only certain teachers as the FSAs are only given in Grades 4, 7, and 10. Will all teachers stand up in solidarity with their fellow colleagues who teach these grades? Why should they? Should we risk looking divided amongst ourselves?

During summer conference this year, Steve Miller, a teacher from California, told the participants the story of what has happened with the *No Child Left Behind* legislation in this state. California schools used standardized testing with several grades at first. This was working well with little resistance and as a result a few more grades were added. Very soon, the whole school system was using this standardized testing. Miller said that this year merit pay for teachers based on the results of test scores was introduced. Schools with poor test scores, often in rural and inner cities, began losing many of their qualified teachers to schools that were performing well in the test

scores so that they could earn their merit pay. The schools that were left behind are becoming exposed to privatization as the government can justify with test scores that these schools were clearly not working.

Therefore, it makes sense to conclude that if teachers in BC do not resist the FSA, and this current government is re-elected, that in the near future, we will most likely be given more FSAs to administer in other grade levels. So what affects some of us now, will likely affect all of us eventually.

What affects one of us really affects all of us. Even though many teachers are burned out, stressed, and tired, I think that teachers can see and understand the pattern that is unfolding around us by looking at the example of schools south of the border. As we value reflection in our students, we must take the time to reflect upon what is happening to our education system. Teachers are living the hardships of an under-funded education system. We have many examples in our own schools of what has happened when the Ministry of Education, without involving teachers, decides what is best for us, our students, and our schools.

Teachers collaborate professionally on behalf of our students everyday. We are very capable and concerned enough to join together to ensure success for our children. We know FSAs are not going to make our school good or bad. Many of us became teachers because we are nurturers; we want to teach our youth; we care about our communities; and we like to impart important knowledge. We want to make the world a better place. FSAs are not going to show how well we do this in our schools. Our children deserve better, we deserve better, and we can use our professional judgement to use assessments that are useful to both students and teachers. We know what is realistic and what is best practice. We can collaborate and decide to stop using tools that are not pedagogically sound. We can resist the FSA doctrine and we can bring about the change we want for our school system.

Susan Ruzic teaches at Moody Elementary School, Port Moody.

Sustained and dedicated effort required

By Rick Guenther

The Foundation Skills Assessment serves no useful purpose for teachers and students. Standardized tests can provide relevant information about student progress but only if they are administered and evaluated in a timely fashion, with due regard to the diverse lived experiences that students bring with them. The FSA does not meet these basic criteria of pedagogical utility. These assessments are not designed to inform teaching practice but to classify students, schools, and teachers into an arbitrarily determined hierarchy of winners and losers publicized in order to create artificial, denigrating, and inhumane comparisons.

The question is not, should we resist the malicious use of the FSA but rather, how should we resist? And the answer to this question must be informed by the knowledge that the FSA is a symptom of a much larger and more insidious problem, namely the audit culture that infiltrates what passes for thought in educational administration.

Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) web page

Once on the BCTF web site (bctf.ca), click the **Issues in Education** link.

Click on the **Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)** (bctf.ca/fsa.aspx).

The audit culture is about surveillance and control and owes its origins to the industrial revolution in which the methods of mass production were developed. Craftspeople, who possessed the broad range of knowledge and skills necessary to create useful objects and structures, could not produce the quantities that the captains of industry desired. So, efficiencies of scale were realized by fragmenting the creative process of a craft into discrete tasks, each of which only required semiskilled or unskilled workers to complete. However, if the individual parts were to fit together correctly consistency was required. This necessitated constant monitoring and quality control by overseers or managers and so the audit culture was born. Unfortunately, this myth of management has become incorporated into the neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies to the extent that it is too often inappropriately applied to human behaviour. The FSA is an example of this misapplication of the industrial model.

So, what should we do?

Perhaps we should throw ourselves against the barricades. A stand-up fight might work. But, what are the virtues and faults of this strategy? If we attack the FSA, in particular, are we intending to defeat the ideological hydra or only one of its heads? What might we gain and what do we risk? We have achieved various measures of success with previous actions, such as the last strike and the BCCT fee refusal, but those campaigns

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involved all teachers equally. Unlike our previous job actions, the risk of confronting authority to oppose the FSA is not equally shared. We would be asking the Grade 4 and 7 teachers to serve as the pointy end of the stick with the perhaps overoptimistic expectation that the rest will collectively act when necessary. The Grade 4 and 7 teachers who refuse may then be legally directed by principals or other district officials to administer the tests. Again, other teachers will not be directly involved. If the Grade 4 and 7 teachers continue to refuse they may be subject to discipline, with all of the consequences that discipline implies. Other teachers will not be subject to the same threat. Will our response be collective? In my view, we would seriously risk fracturing our own unions at both the local and provincial levels. And, job action in this matter carries other risks as well. We might lose what credibility we have with the public. We risk becoming an issue in the upcoming provincial election, allowing candidates to direct attention away from their failings and onto us. And, we risk the baleful glares of the Labour Relations Board and judiciary.

So what are the alternatives to a stand-up fight with the government? Since the FSA is a symptom of a much larger ill, of great complexity and subtlety, we should direct our substantial knowledge and expertise to the task of informing and convincing the public about the threats to public education that the audit culture represents. Public education exists to provide equitable opportunities to our children to become critically thinking citizens, not compliant and

docile consumers. We must convince people that the misapplication of specious paradigms and ideological beliefs to public education is simply wrong. We need to win hearts and minds and that task requires a sustained and dedicated effort. We are up to that task. And, that win will be far more substantial and robust than bloodying the nose of government.

Rick Guenther is president of Abbotsford District Teachers' Association.

What's at stake?

By Bill Hood

Teachers and educational academics feel strongly that testing and tests, when appropriately chosen and used, are an important part of the daily life of a class. Teachers also feel strongly that testing, even when used effectively, is just one part of a full process of evaluation and assessment of a student's progress. Teachers do not base their entire judgment of a student's learning, in any course or at any level, on just one test or activity.

Most teachers are strongly opposed to the provincial government's so-called *accountability/achievement* agenda, and its record of torn-up collective agreements, school closures, increased class sizes, reductions of school libraries, and reduced support for students with special needs. Most also agree that the government emphasis on standardized testing as the central tool in monitoring individual student progress is limited at best, and cynically dysfunctional at worst.

There is also a wide-spread genuine public concern that the publication of school scores from the FSA tests and subsequent school rankings based on these results is both unfair, and harmful. Virtually all teachers and educational experts object to the resultant blaming of communities that are already facing many challenges (from poverty, to geography, to other issues) for any low scores that may occur. I feel there is virtual unanimity on this point of view within the BCTF.

Teachers, like all trade unionists, also wish for any of our collective actions to have the support of as much of the membership as possible. No one person, or small group, should be picked off or unfairly singled out for any reason. In the matter of FSA tests, there is a genuine concern amongst some teachers that, because these tests

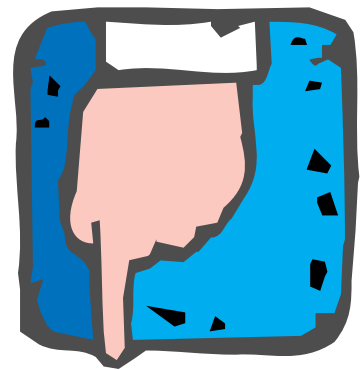
Teachers, like all trade unionists, also wish for any of our collective actions to have the support of as much of the membership as possible. No one person, or small group, should be picked off or unfairly singled out for any reason.

are given only to some students, the teachers of these students may be at increased risk—if we choose (as an entire union) to take a stand on this matter. However, this is precisely why we have a union. Grades 4 and 7 teachers should not feel vulnerable. There is the reality of support from their entire union. This is the whole point of solidarity which we, as trade unionists, believe in.

We all feel very strongly that the links built between teachers and parents are an important part of every student's educational progress. There has been a significant increase in support for our concerns about this program. It isn't a question of either/or. We need to continue our work with

parents about our concerns around the FSA tests, while we contemplate our complicity in their delivery.

So now we must decide how best to continue to advocate for students



...I do know that under this current FSA system there is a finger pointing at a school in each and every community that says, "You are at the bottom. You are to blame for your lack of achievement."

and families in our communities. It seems to me that the real issue here is not the FSA tests per se, although I see them as the thin edge of a wedge that values "data"—even that of questionable basis or limited value—over the day-to-day needs of schools and students. The real issue is that the publication of the results of the FSA tests leads to blaming and unfairly singling out communities, schools, and students.

The provincial government could make changes. It could make these tests a random sampling of districts' efforts, as they were originally introduced by a previous government. It could continue with individualized tests but only publish the results to individual families around the province. It can also, of course, continue with its current plan that urges school districts, and their schools, to use these snapshots of student performance as the cornerstone for planning and decision-making, even if the results are then misused and make things worse for many communities.

The government understands the effects of these different options. They are simply prepared to pay the price of sacrificing some disadvantaged students, schools, communities, or regions to achieve their political objectives. In the end, this is an economic and ideological choice for them. They save money by not having to use a more expensive but more effective and more complex assessment and evaluation tool and the FSA testing regime neatly fits their philosophy that says that there are nice simple answers for complex social issues.

As teachers, we don't always agree on philosophical matters and this is a healthy thing. However, at the most recent AGM, one of the key speeches that moved me came from a Prince Rupert teacher who talked about the number of schools closed and the impact the rankings have had on their community. Her story gave us each a window to see into a future that we may all face one day. I may not live or teach in Prince Rupert. I may not be a Grade 4 or 7 teacher. I may not be a parent or relative of kids in this community. But I do know that under this current FSA system there is a finger pointing at a school in each and every community that says, "You are at the bottom. You are to blame for your lack of achievement."

I want to stand along with colleagues I have never met around the province; we will no longer be a part of this FSA testing plan as it is currently organized and misused. We need to take this opportunity to say to the students and families currently being singled out: "You are not alone. Teachers from all over the province are standing beside you. This is not fair and we want

things to change."

I look forward to more discussion on this matter in the weeks to come.

Bill Hood teaches at Maquinna Elementary School, Vancouver.

Time to look for solutions

By Linda Naess

Most teachers understand the concerns about the government's accountability agenda and recognize that standardized tests such as the FSAs seriously undermine public education and teacher autonomy. We must continue to be vigilant and united in our opposition to this threat.

However, I believe we need to rethink our strategy. Refusing to administer FSA tests may be an illegal collective action, as we do have a collective agreement at this time. As well, a province-wide "yes" vote would require only some of our members, Grade 4 and 7 teachers, to make a stand with a promise that we will all support them. Most teachers are extremely uneasy both about taking illegal action and giving up Grade 4 and 7 teachers as "cannon fodder." Those teachers are the ones who will have to suffer the consequences of possible disciplinary action.

I think it is best if we deal with the FSA issue at an executive level. Our provincial leaders should continue to work with the ministry to offer alternatives to the FSA tests.

We have heard at numerous meetings and assemblies of the Federation that the issues that most concern classroom teachers are class size and composition. The composition of many classrooms makes it increasingly difficult to meet the needs of our students, both educationally and emotionally. The decrease in the number of non-enrolling teachers in libraries and special education puts even more stress on the classroom teacher. Bill 33 has barely addressed these issues and we need to focus our time and energy to improve both working conditions for teachers and learning conditions for our students.

It is essential that we continue to oppose the government's agenda, but any job action will result in emotional media frenzy. What we need is rational discussion. I think it is best if we deal with the FSA issue at an executive level. Our provincial leaders should continue to work with the ministry to offer alternatives to the FSA tests. Executives at the local level can work to educate trustees, administrators, and parents about the dangers of standardized testing, and the effects on teachers and students. All teachers must continue to advocate for teacher assessment and autonomy. We need to inform the public specifically what these tests do to our students, our schools, and public education. We need to better explain classroom assessment and evaluation, which is ongoing, not just once a year. Educating the public is what helped us in the strike of 2005, and we need to continue to do this, publicly and in our conversations with parents.

The Federation must deal with the FSA issue and put it to rest. It has divided our members and distracted us from other work of the Federation. The time has come to look for solutions, not to pursue actions that will divide and weaken us.

Linda Naess is president of the Prince George Teachers' Association.

We need a parent boycott

By Barry Dorval

Every teacher in the province agrees with the goal of eliminating universal FSAs. The strategic question is how do we achieve that goal. Will a teacher boycott strategy work? No. Not on the basis of my conversations with my colleagues, and this is why:

1. This action divides teachers into *activists*—those who support the teacher boycott—and *dissidents*—those who oppose it. Any strategy that divides teachers in this way is doomed to fail.
2. This action isolates Grades 4 and 7 teachers and there aren't enough of them willing to take this stand on behalf of their divided colleagues.
3. A teacher boycott would be political suicide. Sadly, most of the public don't fully understand our concerns. By refusing to administer the tests, teachers become the issue, not the FSAs. A terrible idea in an election year.
4. This strategy would also be legal suicide. The odds are overwhelming that a teacher boycott would be ruled an illegal strike. We know how defying a court order ends, right?

So, if a teacher boycott isn't the answer, what is?

Simply put, we must strengthen and refine our existing efforts to undermine the tests and support a powerful parent boycott.

So far we have tried to convince parents to withdraw their children by focussing on the damaging effects of FSAs on kids and education. This has born fruit and we must continue.

Despite these successes, however, the—I was tested and it didn't hurt me—holdouts remain. Interestingly though, these same people are passionate about their neighbourhood schools. To reach these folks we must expose the motives of the Fraser Institute. Its public record is clear; the Fraser Institute's goal is to undermine confidence in public education so as to promote market solutions to the problems they identify. The public must be made aware of the agenda of the organization that is attacking an institution they cherish.

We have had great success in convincing parents to request exemptions for their children. Wonderful, except that these requests are now being ignored. Time for some tweaking.

My son was in Grade 4 last year. I didn't REQUEST anything, I stated a FACT. My son will not write the FSA. Period. Guess what? He didn't write.

If a boycott is to succeed it must be carried out by parents...

And this year, neither will my Grade 7 daughter. I have the power because I exert it. Last year I shared my parental strategy at a small, PAC-sponsored FSA debate. At that school about one-third of parents (far more than were at the meeting) wrote similar letters. Their children didn't write the tests and the results for that school were rendered completely useless (even by ministry standards). The parent boycott worked.

The way to defeat this government's FSA policy is not by engaging in a suicidal fight where divided teachers become the issue. If a boycott is to succeed it must be carried out by parents who are passionate about protecting their schools. Our job is to empower them in that task.

Barry Dorval is president of the Vernon Teachers' Association.

Members speak out on FSAs



FSA: a parent's perspective

By Sharon Taylor

The Foundation Skills Assessment tests had little effect on us at first. It was stressful for the students and time-consuming for the teachers, but other than that, it was simply one more tool used by the system to see what children were achieving and when.

Then the Fraser Institute began publishing a ranking of schools based on FSA results, and the stress the children felt began to be shared by parents, especially in my city. The school my children had attended for years has been consistently one of the lowest-ranked schools in the province.

An "inner city" school, Marie Sharpe Elementary was already being held up in the local paper as a failing school. Having closed several schools in the district, the school board was under pressure to close this aging building and move the children to other schools. Now the pressure increased—the Fraser Institute said it was a failing school, and it was hard to argue.

The Fraser Institute claims to publish the rankings to give parents a "choice" about the schools their children attend. In our case, there is little choice—for one group of parents, Marie Sharpe is the only school offering French Immersion. For another group of parents, Marie Sharpe is the only school close enough for their children to walk to.

Marie Sharpe Elementary is a microcosm of what a test like the FSA tells us.

The FSA tells us that schools in neighbourhoods with high social capital do very well.

It tells us that schools in socio-economically strained neighbourhoods, do poorly.

It tells us that schools with large populations of ESL children, of behaviourally, intellectually, or physically challenged children, had better exclude those populations

from the test results, or they will risk being held up in provincial papers and in the Fraser Institute's FSA report card as "failing" schools.

At Marie Sharpe, my four children learned French and English, Shuswap and Chilcotin, and enough sign language to communicate.

My children's school remains a strong, caring place, set in a neighbourhood that has overcome a great deal in order to stand and grow together. But for all kinds of reasons, it may never rise in the Fraser Institute rankings, or overcome the stigma of being a low-ranking school.

They learned to make fry bread and maple taffy. They walked to the public library and to city hall and went bowling as part of their Math program. A Grade 2 class created a garden in memory of one teacher's son who died tragically early, and every year 7-year-olds bring his memory alive in the spring.

The test cannot measure the lives of the children. It cannot tell the assessors anything about what those children might have overcome in order to even arrive at school on any given day. The FSA cannot measure a school's spirit or heart or sense of community.

My children's school remains a strong, caring place, set in a neighbourhood that has overcome a great deal in order to stand and grow together. But for all kinds of reasons, it may never rise in the Fraser Institute rankings, or overcome the stigma of being a low-ranking school. Parents, teachers, and administrators will continue to argue and to worry.

Welcome to our school.

Sharon Taylor, Williams Lake.

What does social justice have to do with FSA?

By James Chamberlain and Jane Turner

Teachers are opposed to the FSA tests for many very good reasons.

- It's not an effective instrument to assess previous learning.
- It is an excellent instrument to assess socio-economic status.
- It takes up an inordinate amount of time and money.

FSA tests are just another way to unfairly "rank" students within society, especially those who do not share the same degree of privilege as their peers.

- The results are used to rank schools in the daily provincial newspapers.
- The rankings are misleading as they do not tell the story of the school.

For all of these reasons, the FSA tests are a social justice issue.

Teachers work very hard to ameliorate the effects of societal discrimination in our classrooms. Children who are not from the dominant cultural and economic groups are welcomed into our schools in the same way that privileged children are. "School ready" in the public school system means aged five before December 31 and breathing. Teachers work with all children, regardless of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, or whatever other distinctive feature they have going for them. Our public school system welcomes diversity and many schools make conscious efforts to celebrate difference. So how does this connect to FSA tests?

The ranking of schools in public space like *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* victimizes children who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who speak English as a second language, and for whom learning is difficult. It says publicly, "these kids don't measure up." Parents who have the ability to choose make decisions about where to send their children to school based on the rankings. Communities make inaccurate judgments about schools and the children who go there. You don't need to be a social justice activist to see how these outcomes will create a less equitable playing field for kids. The pernicious impact of the rankings is only made possible because of the FSA tests.

Teachers care deeply about the welfare of their students. They care about their academic achievement as well as their self-image and emotional stability. This is why the FSA tests, given to every student demean and belittle those who are already victimized enough. FSA tests are just another way to unfairly "rank" students within society, especially those who do not share the same degree of privilege as their peers. Posting FSA results publicly and rating schools is a perfect example of social injustice and we must remain vocal in our opposition to the tests and the ways in which they are misused.

James Chamberlain and Jane Turner are assistant directors, BCTF Professional and Social Issues Division.

The 600-pound gorilla

By Joanna Larson

As another school year begins, we as teachers will continue our attempts to encourage, enthuse, and inspire our students amidst a current political culture aimed at deconstructing public education in favour of privatization. A lack of appropriate funding, Bill 33, school closures, and Foundation Skills Assessment tests are all key components in this plan for privatizing our schools. As advocates for public education, we must be continually vigilant not to see them as separate issues, but as parts of the same political agenda.

Public education is one of the last venues where it doesn't matter who you are, or what your background is. When you walk through that door you will be entitled to the same opportunity as everyone else there with you. This is precisely what is at stake if we lose the battle to save public education in our province: equal opportunity for all—a value we can all share.

Last year, the report on child poverty put out by Campaign 2000 showed that one in five children in BC lives in poverty. The same month, Shirley Bond and the Ministry of Education claimed that the results of the FSA in our province showed that one in five children struggle to read. Is it possible these children are one and the same? Consider the example of Roosevelt Park Elementary School in Prince Rupert.

On December 5, 2006, CBC aired Mark Kelley's *Seven*. This particular episode followed Mark as he played teacher at Roosevelt Park, "British Columbia's lowest-ranked school." Thanks to poor scores on the Foundation Skills Assessment, Roosevelt had the dubious honour of placing last in the Fraser Institute's annual school rankings the previous year.

After airing, the show became extremely controversial in Prince Rupert. Over 90% of Roosevelt's students are Aboriginal, and many felt the program unfairly portrayed the school's problems as a First Nations issue. It happens that 50% of Prince Rupert students are of Aboriginal ancestry, and by no means do they all attend Roosevelt

Thanks to poor scores on the Foundation Skills Assessment, Roosevelt Elementary School had the dubious honour of placing last in the Fraser Institute's annual school rankings the previous year.

Park. A more accurate explanation for the problems facing students at Roosevelt is what Professor David Berliner describes as the 600-pound gorilla in the classroom—poverty.

UBC's Dr. Clyde Hertzman's research, through the HELP (Human Early Learning Partnership) project, identifies the neighbourhood around Roosevelt as one of the most vulnerable neighborhoods in the province. Coming from families struggling with unemployment and poverty, many children in this community do not enter school with the skills to succeed academically. Teachers struggle to teach five-year-olds who often have language and social skills closer to those of two- and three-year-olds.

It makes no sense to compare these students to those attending

elite private institutions unless your intent is to demean and demoralize the students and teachers at Roosevelt and other schools in low socio-economic neighbourhoods. Unfortunately, this is precisely what takes place each year as Minister Shirley Bond releases the results of the FSAs to the Fraser Institute so that they can publish their annual school rankings.

Schools such as St. George's, a private school in Vancouver, where according to their website "admission is highly selective and students are expected to meet rigorous entrance standards" consistently rank in first place. The tuition at St. George's is over \$14,000 a year.

Comparing this school to Roosevelt is, as teacher and author Mary-Ellen Lang points out, like comparing an NHL hockey team with the local men's pick-up team. I do not imagine a ranking such as this would improve their game either.

Minister Bond claims the tests are critical for parents and teachers, but critical for what, other than the FI rankings? Roosevelt never received extra funding or support for coming in last. They did watch a number of students leave their school, or new students in the community apply for cross-boundary applications to other schools based on a reputation already struggling even before what

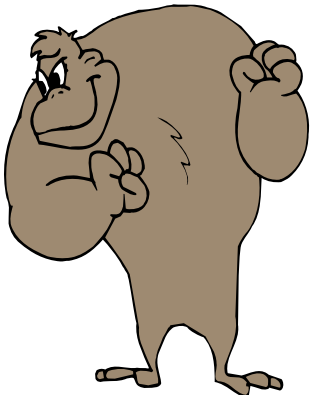
A more accurate explanation for the problems facing students at Roosevelt is what Professor David Berliner describes as the 600-pound gorilla in the classroom—poverty.

many believe was an unfair portrayal on *Seven*. In fact, classes are larger this fall and some have as many as seven and eight students with special needs.

Overcoming the challenge of having been labelled the "worst school in BC" is a struggle for those at Roosevelt. Families with the resources to go elsewhere have, classes have increased in size with more students with special needs, financial resources to provide support have dwindled, and programs have been cut. Roosevelt has the highest staff-turnover rate in the district.

Moving up a few spots in the latest rankings, Roosevelt is now considered "one of the worst" schools in BC. It is all but impossible to shed the worst label in its entirety when each year the FI rankings are published to remind everyone it is at or near the bottom. School's such as St. George's proudly publish their ranking results on their website, at the expense of schools like Roosevelt which is in far worse shape today than before the introduction of the FSAs.

Joanna Larson teaches at Seal Cove Elementary School, Prince Rupert.



Canadian jurisprudence—teachers and administrators

By Larry Kuehn

While no actions against students have been reported, a significant libel case for statements on a website was brought by some teachers in BC against a parent, with the support of the BC Teachers' Federation (*Newman v Halstead*, B.C.S.C. 2006).

The court found that the parent put defamatory comments on the web that "depicted teachers as violent, unprofessional, incompetent, bullies, and associated with pedophiles." She put labels on teachers as bad apples, bully educators, or least wanted educators.

The comments were found to be defamatory because they lowered the view of teachers in the eyes of a reasonable person and impaired their reputations. The damages ranged from \$15,000 to \$150,000 for the educators, plus \$50,000 in punitive damages. A permanent injunction was imposed on the defendant.

Educators would never consider students to be their friends in the real world, and it's not a good idea to do it in the virtual world either.

Another Canadian case involved a principal and superintendent who sued a parent and children's advocate for defamation for a "news release" on a website (*Ottawa-Carleton District School Board v. Scharf*).

The news release falsely alleged that the principal and superintendent violated a court order, placed the student in an unsafe situation, and were under criminal investigation. The plaintiffs were awarded \$30,000 in damages for false and defamatory content.

Regulating teacher online behaviour

Social networking has created some dilemmas for teachers beyond what is being said about them on websites or on *ratemyteacher.com*. The informality of social networking sites and even of e-mail can lead to crossing a boundary in relationship to students. It's not just that the medium disguises markers and dissolves boundaries, but also that the content is digitally saved and stored and subject to recall and redistribution.

An early *Facebook* case involved a school principal in British Columbia. A photo of him swimming in the nude had been posted among hundreds of photos of a family holiday. One of the parents at his school found the picture and put in a complaint to the school board. The principal was suspended. After an investigation the board determined that it was not a violation of standards sufficient to fire him and he was reinstated, with most of the parents at the school supporting him.

The BC College of Teachers (BCCT), in an article on its website called "Facebook 101," gives advice to teachers and administrators—don't do it. Educators "should also probably avoid making their students 'friends' online. Educators would never consider students to be their friends in the real world, and it's not a good idea to do it in the virtual world either. Breaking down the walls between a teacher's personal and professional life can undermine a teacher's authority and create a significant danger zone for both teacher and student." (BCCT, 2008).

The BCCT has in some cases required a teacher to take part in a workshop on boundaries to avoid other discipline.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) website



offers advice on electronic communications. It offers suggestions on dealing with electronic abuse of teachers, but also calls on teachers to "exercise professional caution" in their own communications. ETFO says, "unprofessional responses may invite disciplinary action by the Ontario College of Teachers or the school board."

As a warning to members, the National Education Association in the US recently reported on a number of cases of teachers being disciplined for material posted on *MySpace* or *Facebook*. An article in *NEA Today* (April 2008) quoted the advice from one of its state affiliates that online profiles "can be used as evidence in disciplinary proceedings, which could 'affect not only a teacher's current job but his/her teaching license' as well."

However, "Don't do it" doesn't do

it. Too many teachers are finding educationally productive uses of the social networking tools to ignore or abandon them. Finding a balance is key. Many of the exemplar stories from the NEA involve "offensive" and "unacceptable" photos and information on *MySpace* pages. Most really do fit the "what were

"Never put in electronic form anything that you wouldn't want viewed by a million people, including your colleagues, students, and supervisors—and your mother."

you thinking" category. The advice the NEA eventually comes to should be common sense in the digital age: "Never put in electronic form any-

thing that you wouldn't want viewed by a million people, including your colleagues, students, and supervisors—and your mother."

One effort to provide a specifically education-related space for the video aspect of social networking is *teachertube.com*. To promote safety on its site, it urges viewers to identify "inappropriate" videos. To sign up to load videos or to comment on them, users have to click a box indicating that they are an educator, presumably making it a safer place for teachers than *YouTube*. Of course, as the famous *New Yorker* cartoon showing a dog at a computer screen says, "On the Internet, no one knows you are a dog."

Larry Kuehn is director of the BCTF's Research and Technology Division.

Source: *Our Schools Ourselves*, v. 17, #4, Summer 2008

Vancouver Secondaries' struggle with class size

"People don't change when they see the light. They change when they feel the heat."

adage quoted in *The New York Times*

By Anne Guthrie Warman

The narrative arc of the failure of Bill 33/Section 76 of the *School Act* is, I think, exemplified in the story of Vancouver secondary teachers and their valiant attempts to get both their board and the provincial government to take their concerns about class and composition overloads seriously. In September of 2006, Vancouver secondary teachers along with teachers all around the province began the onerous and time-consuming task of meeting with administrators to consult about the class-size and composition overloads. At the end of the consultation period, we had over 1,300 violations in the class-size and composition limits outlined in Bill 33. We looked enviously at our elementary colleagues in VESTA who told the board at every step of the way to "re-organize classes" so they were in compliance with

consent language and as a result had fewer than 25 violations that fall.

Late in the autumn, we waited for the BCTF to take a position on what we saw as the most critical issue for

In September of 2006, Vancouver secondary teachers along with teachers all around the province began the onerous and time-consuming task of meeting with administrators to consult about class-size and composition overloads.

teachers in Vancouver and elsewhere. We were told that Bill 33 was "a baby step in the right direction" and that it would be addressed at the round table. VSTA table officers rightly felt they couldn't wait and began their own campaign to bring attention to the dire situation in Vancouver. Our campaign began with a news release to all media outlets, print ads in the local weeklies and ethnic papers, and I was interviewed on CKNW and for *The Tyee*. Both *The Province* and *The Vancouver Sun* carried stories with our point of

view presented and we held a press conference where teachers with some of the worst violations talked to the media.

This blitzkrieg got the attention of the Vancouver School Board, and at a finance committee meeting in December, they announced they were prepared to put 26.6 FTE temporary staffing into the system to address some of the size and composition issues. This temporary staffing, which provided a band-aid from January through June, was promptly taken back and we began at square one last fall. (My term "hokey-pokey" staffing went into the local's vernacular.) We began all over again with exactly the same outcome as the year before—1,329 classes exceeded the limits. At the zone meetings last fall, all over the province teacher reps spoke loudly and clearly about this issue and renewed their calls to the BCTF Executive to make this their priority as a campaign. We continued our campaign, this time with a full-page advertisement in the dailies and *The Georgia Straight* (with help from BCTF graphics and communications). The ad, with the headline, "What Could They Be Thinking?" outlined some of the most egregious examples such as: English 9 with 37 students (9 requiring IEPs),

Metalwork 11/12 with 27 students (13 requiring IEPs), and so on. The day it came out, I was called to the superintendent's office as he had received a furious call from Minister Bond disputing our numbers. They were, I assured him, correct, and further I said we found his comments to the board that "class size composition limits were appropriate for student learning" disingenuous. Further staffing was "found" and some of the worst examples were "fixed."

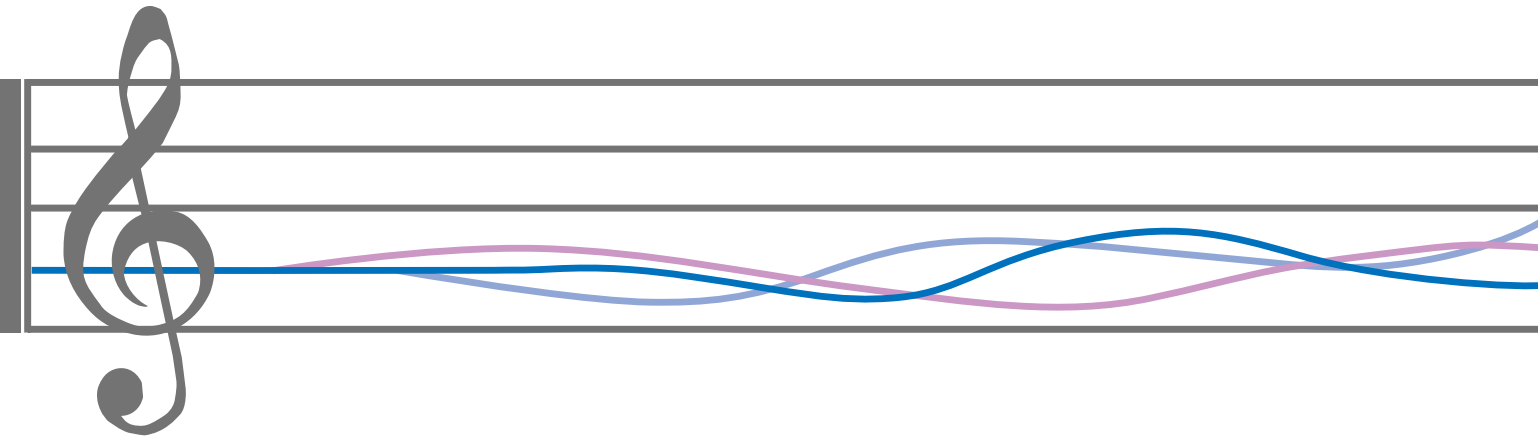
This September as we began our consultations, our board found they had a \$2.1 million surplus and proposed once again, providing 17 temporary positions. After my railing again about the hokey-pokey staffing model to the media, the board, the senior management (and

As we enter this election year, it is our contention that this failed promise of Bill 33, Section 76, needs to be our number one issue.

anyone else who would listen), the 17 positions were changed to continuing when it went to a vote at the board. Small victories—and so it goes.

As we enter this election year, it is our contention that this failed promise of Bill 33, Section 76, needs to be our number one issue. We are looking to elect a progressive board in Vancouver and our first question to prospective candidates is "How will you actively campaign to return class size and class composition to the levels of 2001?" Further, we need to state unequivocally in all our election work that the provincial government and boards of education must commit to staffing levels that keep class size and composition configurations within the limits specified in *The School Act* and provide sufficient resources so that meaningful decisions can be made at the school level when those limits are reached. All the BCTF polling with focus groups indicated that this is still the number one issue embedded in the public consciousness after our job action in 2005. We owe it to ourselves to make sure that we keep it there for this important election year.

Anne Guthrie Warman is president of the Vancouver Secondary Teachers' Association.



Deconstructing the “ Learning Through the Arts” trend in schools

By Renee Norman

A recent article in the *Teacher* newsmagazine on Learning Through the Arts™ projects at a BC school concluded: “The success that...students and teachers have had with this project shows that Learning Through the Arts [LTTA] continues to thrive in British Columbia schools.” A recent study commissioned by the Royal Conservatory of Music on the effects of LTTA in the schools suggests that infusing areas of the curriculum with the arts enhances student learning and engagement. Participation in arts activities also had a positive effect on achievement in other subject areas. The arts are a powerful way of learning, and this three-year study not only raises awareness of the arts, but provides meaningful Canadian data and research results that speak to what many of us already know.

Each of the arts disciplines (drama, dance, music, visual arts, literary arts) develops the skills and abilities of all children. In order for diverse learners to develop fully as responsible citizens of the world, experiences in the arts open up possibilities for creative and critical thinking, flexibility, self-knowledge, self-confidence, risk-taking, and open-mindedness. The arts assist us in constructing our world. As such, the arts can also be a potent medium for learning about social justice issues and engaging in activities that promote social justice. Research and writing in the arts over the last two decades by theorists such as Howard Gardner, Elliot Eisner, Maxine Greene, among others, have shown us that

the arts engage students actively in learning, promote cultural awareness, and enhance interpersonal skills and co-operative teamwork.

I agree with Dennis Tupman, former Vancouver performing arts co-ordinator, who comments that “there have been some good reports of the work [of LTTA].” But I am troubled, too, about the trend towards LTTA in the schools. Funds which go to LTTA projects in the

In order for diverse learners to develop fully as responsible citizens of the world, experiences in the arts open up possibilities for creative and critical thinking, flexibility, self-knowledge, self-confidence, risk-taking, and open-mindedness.

schools, are funds which do not necessarily go to arts materials, proper arts facilities and programs, or release time/incentives for teachers to complete accredited university arts courses. Tupman also comments: “Fund the schools properly so they can do this work in an ongoing way, and do it with trained, onsite teachers, who are always in the building and committed long term to the kids and the community.”

The enthusiastic way in which teachers in the newsmagazine article mentioned above responded to the opportunity to work with and learn from an artist and his craft, and the way in which the students took up the arts in their learning and representation of learning, confirm for me that

not only should arts education be part of classrooms and schools, but also that people are starved for arts education support. But I have questions about the delivery and structure for this support, and Tupman’s wise words about trained, onsite teachers resonate in my arts-supportive ears. What is being done to ensure that more training is provided for teachers in the arts, support that is longer lasting than a one-time project and readily available? Funds might be used for hiring specialist teachers, for hiring consultants who could work with classroom teachers, and for more programs (such as the innovative arts schools/programs in some districts) that would make places and spaces for students to work in the arts all year round. If arts education were as simple as a several session experience with an artist, (or a summer institute, or an all-day workshop), then all our schools would be arts-rich.

Prior to the cuts in arts education in the 1980s, the arts were championed by specialists in schools, by district consultants who worked with teachers, and by co-ordinators who had budgets and funds for resources, facilities, and programs. Now a private industry has taken up the arts; and while any focus on arts education is welcome, and there is value in working with artists, is a team of quasi-educators doing the work that certified teachers should be doing? What about teachers who are also artists, and teachers with some training in the arts?

Is LTTA doing the job in school districts that arts specialists could be doing in schools, in lasting ways? Why not release such certified teachers to work with other

teachers? Not only do they have arts expertise and background in child development, curriculum, and classroom management, but also knowledge about local and student needs.

Why not use the money going to LTTA to release teachers and/or provide incentives so they can complete the many fine music, drama, art, dance, literary arts courses available for credit in the province, and at the same time, upgrade their qualifications?

I worry that while teachers think LTTA is thriving in schools, like the teachers in the newsmagazine article, this program is a band-aid approach to arts education, a quick

Prior to the cuts in arts education in the 1980s, the arts were championed by specialists in schools, by district consultants who worked with teachers and by co-ordinators who had budgets and funds for resources, facilities, and programs.

fix, a way to say “we’re doing it” without really addressing long-term needs and issues, without providing arts education in-service and support within schools and districts that would truly put arts education at the centre of education, continuously, year after year.

Renee Norman is a professor of fine arts and language arts/literacy, University of the Fraser Valley, and formerly a public school arts education teacher.

References available on request.

Human rights for women—human rights for all

16 Days of Action against Violence against Women
November 25 – December 10

We celebrate Women’s History month during October. While it is important to look back and see our progress, it is imperative that we focus our activities on the many human rights challenges facing women around the globe and celebrate the leadership of women in defending human rights. It is a time to plan for, and carry out, events and actions to end violence against women.

The 16 Days of Action came from the 1st Women’s Global Leadership Institute in 1991. It begins on November 25, the International Day against Violence against Women and continues until December 10, which is International Human Rights Day. It also includes December 6, the anniversary of the Montreal Massacre. The theme for 2008 is Human Rights for Women—Human Rights for All.

Here are some suggestions for use in your local during 16 Days of Action against Violence against Women:

- Organize presentations and panel discussions on human trafficking, women in war and conflict, sexual violence as a form of terror, or a local issue of importance.
- View the video “Human trafficking” and have a panel discussion.
- Carry out vigils, rallies, or marches.
- Carry out postcard or letter-writing campaigns to MPs and MLAs, to increase their awareness of violence against women.
- Offer students opportunities to design pamphlets, art work, or written pieces expressing their concern about violence against women.
- Create banners, slogans, bookmarks, and/or ribbons with simple but effective messages.
- Contact BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses to link with their new Violence is Preventable program for elementary and secondary students—www.bcsyth.ca.
- Carry out the White ribbon Campaign in your district, using the White Ribbon Campaign’s Education and Action Kit. The kit combines in-class lessons with school-wide projects to raise awareness about violence against women, and to promote ideas about gender equality and healthy relationships. It is designed as a positive resource for both females and males. The kit can be ordered online at www.whiteribbon.ca for \$ 30 plus S&H.
- Contact your local women’s centres or transition houses to collaborate on community actions and events.
- Attend community events planned for December 6.
- Watch for more information, fact sheets, and possible local events coming from the BCTF Committee for Action on Social Justice.

Joan Merrifield, assistant director, BCTF Professional and Social Issues Division

La rentrée 2008, défis et espoirs!

Par Moh Chelali

Lorsque vous recevrez cette édition de votre journal, vous aurez déjà passé plus d’un mois de travail avec vos élèves. Quoique l’automne soit exigeant avec le début des classes, la mise en marche des programmes d’études et les premières rencontres avec les parents, réservez-vous de l’énergie et du temps pour vous relaxer et vous reposer.

Cette année est cruciale pour influencer les décisions politiques qui affecteront directement notre système d’éducation. Trois élections successives s’annoncent au niveau local, provincial et fédéral. Il va de soi que notre système d’éducation reste encore sous-financé, et menacé d’une privatisation rampante. L’introduction des vales de marché qui bafouent l’équité, la justice sociale et le besoin d’une éducation de haute qualité pour tous se précisent chaque jour un peu plus.

Vos représentant syndicaux se

sont réunis pendant l’été à l’université de Kamloops pour discuter d’un plan d’action au sujet de vos conditions de travail, de la composition des classes, ainsi que pour contrer l’agenda des tests standardisés qui sont devenus la norme pour les décideurs politiques à Victoria. Les classements du Fraser Institute continuent de créer une division artificielle et injuste entre les écoles des divers quartiers, régions de nos villes et villages.

Cet automne sera un automne important pour tous les membres de la Fédération compte tenu des élections et aussi du vote sur le test des Évaluation des Habilité de Base (FSA) du ministère de l’éducation. Réservez-vous un peu d’énergie aussi pour soutenir l’éducation publique. Assistez aux réunions d’information organisées par votre syndicat local afin de bien comprendre les enjeux et de participer pleinement au débat. Ce n’est qu’en démontrant une présence forte et articulée qu’on atteindra nos objectifs.

Il est important de vous tenir au

courant de la situation en visitant le site électronique de la FECB bctf.ca/Francais.aspx en lisant les bulletins et alertes disponibles en ligne en français et en vous rendant au babillard syndical de votre école et en étant présents aux réunions syndicales.

Enfin sur le plan des services en français nous avons de très bonnes nouvelles à vous annoncer en ce début d’année scolaire :

- La disponibilité maintenant de 15 nouveaux enseignants formateurs à votre disposition pour venir dans vos écoles et offrir des ateliers sur divers sujets et aspects pédagogiques, linguistiques et de justice sociale.
- Le développement de diverses ressources pour aider les enseignants du français langue de base.
- Le lancement d’un projet pilote de soutien au pair, projet pilote pour une année qui sera destiné aux enseignants de français à tous les niveaux.
- Le succès éclatant du déroulement de notre premier camp de formation professionnelle d’une

semaine au CLAN à Powell River; camp destiné aux enseignants de français de base et aux enseignants d’immersion.

- Lancement d’un projet de recherche sur la qualité d’enseignement (Quality of Teaching) portant sur divers aspects de la formation professionnelle.
- Préparation d’un projet de formation professionnelle de deux semaines à l’étranger en collaboration avec le ministère de l’éducation incluant les composantes d’enseignement du diplôme d’études en langue française (DELF) et du diplôme approfondi de langue française (DALF).

Bien sûr, je vous ferai parvenir via vos coordonnateurs de langue ou votre syndicat local plus d’informations sur ces services dans les semaines à venir. D’ici là, n’hésitez surtout pas à nous appeler si vous avez besoin d’aide, de conseils ou d’informations. Moi même ainsi que mon assistante Cécilia sommes ici à votre service!!

Moh Chelali, Directeur Adjoint, Programmes et services en français

SFU establishes new graduate program for English teachers

The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Simon Fraser University is offering a new Master of Arts for Teachers of English (MATE) at SFU's stunning new Surrey Campus. The MATE Program, now in its second year, is designed to provide English teachers in the elementary, secondary, or college system with an opportunity to pursue advanced studies in English literature.

As the only graduate program in Canada specifically for English teachers, MATE offers an innovative and accessible graduate degree program. "After consulting with a number of teachers who had struggled to complete our regular MA program, we thought what was needed was a special stream of our program that had teachers' needs and schedules in mind," says Dr. Tom Grieve, chair of SFU's English Department. "We developed introductory courses to get students up to speed with current approaches to literary study and with new research methods and core graduate courses in Shakespeare and 20th Century literature. The other graduate courses offer the same rewards and challenges as those in our regular program."

MATE offers a cohort structure, enrolling a select group of 12 to 15 students a year. Classes are kept small to encourage active commun-

ity building among students and between students and faculty. Courses are scheduled in the summer and in the evening, with online course components to supplement face-to-face instruction. Graduates will receive a significant increase to their base salary and can continue on to doctoral studies.

Thus far MATE has attracted applicants from a wide range of Lower Mainland school districts and colleges, from White Rock and North Vancouver to Chilliwack.

"The coursework is stimulating and challenging, and the structure of the cohort has generated a supportive and encouraging learning environment," notes Deborah Stellingwerf, a current student. A secondary school teacher at Pacific Academy for the last six years, Stellingwerf has a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature (honours) from SFU.

Adds Stellingwerf: "One of the things I appreciate the most is the willingness of the professors to accommodate the needs of working teachers when scheduling the classes and assignments."

Like Stellingwerf, other graduate students have chosen SFU's Masters of Arts for Teachers of English because of its intellectual engagement and breadth of scholarship. They were also attracted by the

program's potential to cultivate their interpretative, critical, and scholarly skills as well as to develop professional competency in literary analysis and in writing.

"After over 20 years of teaching, I have found the opportunity to reinvent myself as an English student to be stimulating, challenging, and exciting. The MATE Program has offered me a structure in which to read literature and to explore, discuss, and write about ideas," says Maureen Butler, a local college teacher.

"What I appreciate the most with MATE students," says Dr. Clint Burnham, now in his second year with the program, "is how they combine a willingness to learn new approaches to literature with a solid base of experience in the classroom. Theory meets practice, and the seminars are both thought-provoking and unpredictable."

During the two-year program, students will take professional development seminars and six graduate courses covering a broad spectrum of traditional and new areas of English studies. A graduating essay completes degree requirements.

For more information visit the MATE website: <http://students.surrey.sfu.ca/arts/mate>

– May Yao, myao@sfu.ca

Class-size and class-composition contest

Name the most ridiculous reason for certifying that a class is "appropriate for student learning."

This is a contest to find the most inappropriate reason given by a principal for putting more than 30 students in a class.

Section 76.2 of the *School Act* requires that the principal must provide, within 15 days after the school opening day, a report on the proposed organization of classes that is "appropriate for student learning."

Section 76.3 of the *School Act* requires that the superintendent must provide on or before October 1, a report to the Board and DPAC that includes "a rationale for the organization of any class in the district that has more than 30 students." The report must indicate that the organization of classes "is, in the opinion of the superintendent, appropriate for student learning."

Surely the intent of these requirements is to ensure that school and district administrators actually make a decision that every class with more than 30 students is really "appropriate for student learning," not just organized for administrative convenience. The rationales provided in the reports required by law should speak to the needs of students, ensuring that the learning conditions are appropriate for all the students in the class.

Some of the rationales provided in district reports last year included.

1. Blank (no rationale given).
2. Childcare worker.
3. Two peer tutors.
4. Other than student choice, there really isn't a particular rationale.
5. No alternative—all sections filled.
6. No other classes available to put students into.
7. Given the school demographics and financial resources available, the learning conditions in this

class are appropriate.

8. Some districts used a fill-in-the-blanks list of seven items. In one district—"Timetabling considerations" was used more than 350 times.
9. Suitable instructional grouping of students (62 classes on one district use this rationale or a slight variation of it).
10. Academic needs of the students are best met in this class (76 classes are given this identical rationale).

Tell us if you think you were given a more ridiculous reason by the principal for the claim that more than 30 students is "appropriate for student learning." Entries (without identification) will be published in a future issue of the *Teacher*. Send your entry to contest@bctf.ca.

– Larry Kuehn

Retirement: navigating new waters

By Brenda Dineen

I retired in June 2007 after 32 years' service in Burnaby as a teacher and a counsellor and I can say that retirement is like navigating a journey in new waters. Some parts are smooth-sailing and blissful; others are quite choppy and unknown.

A friend had suggested that retirement would feel like a continuous summer holiday, but it isn't really. When teachers start their summer holiday, they spend most of July unwinding, and then they fit family plans or travel into the remaining weeks. By the end of August, they get ready to start all over again.

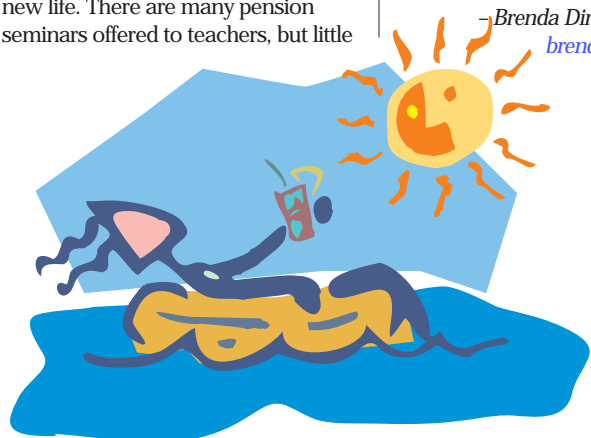
Retirement is something completely new. You no longer have all the structures and schedules that have shaped your life. What kind of life do you want now? You may find you want to create your own structures. You also no longer have your long-term identity as a teacher. Who are you now? What is important to you? With life expectancy much longer than

in previous generations, you may well have as many years in retirement as you did working as a teacher.

When you retire, you suddenly have weeks and months of time to design as you wish. You have the opportunity to create your life the way you truly want it! It's what you've been waiting for after all those years of working. It really helps to begin planning a vision for your retirement several years before you actually retire so you can make a smoother transition into your new life. There are many pension seminars offered to teachers, but little

is offered on how to make a successful transition into retirement. You need much more than a financial plan for your new life. You need to think about all aspects of your life: family, recreation, health, volunteering, hobbies, and learning new things. What do you want your new life to look like and feel like? How easily do you deal with change and transitions? Having family, professional, and personal supports are important as you shape answers to these questions.

– Brenda Dineen, Burnaby RTA
brendadineen@shaw.ca



Teachers' Pension Plan

Pensions in volatile markets

By Carolyn Prellwitz

As a BCTF member, you are a member of the BC Teachers' Pension Plan. You are fortunate to have this pension plan as it will likely be one of the biggest financial assets you will acquire over your teaching lifetime. Traditionally, members have not paid a lot of attention to their pension until just before retiring, but with the recent roller-coaster ride of the stock market, now is a good time to learn about the kind of pension we have and how it works.

The most fundamental fact to know about your pension is that it is partly deferred-wage and an important part of the compensation you receive in return for your work in the public school system. In this respect, your pension is a key to assuring a life with dignity and adequate income upon retirement. It is not a gift; it has been earned by you. Additionally, you are also contributing to the plan, so it is not just employer-funded.

The two major types of registered pension plans in Canada are defined-benefit (DB) and defined-contribution (DC) plans.

The Teachers' Pension Plan is a DB plan. This means the pension benefit is defined by a formula that provides a guaranteed lifetime pension based on your age, salary, and years of service. Having a formula is a huge advantage of a DB plan because it allows you, at any time during your teaching career, to get an estimate of what your future pension benefit will be. Another advantage of a DB plan is that your pension is not determined by your contributions to it or on the investment returns of your contributions.

How does a DC plan differ from a DB plan? In a DC plan, the employee's pension benefit is unknown until the date of retirement. The value of that employee's individual pension account upon retirement depends entirely upon how much has been contributed, what investment choices have been made, how well the funds have been invested, the performance of the stock market, and the fluctuation of interest rates throughout that employee's working career, and especially the interest rate at the time of retirement. A DC plan is simply an accumulation of money with no promised benefit and carries no certainty that the benefit will be paid out for the retired employee's entire life. The investment risk of a DC plan is born solely by the employee. An RRSP is like a defined contribution plan.

A DB plan, however, provides less risk and greater certainty to you as to how much pension income you will have in retirement. A DB plan, like our Teachers' Pension Plan, is a pooled resource so there is no individual investment risk. Our pension funds are in a diversified investment portfolio including Canadian and international stocks, bonds, real estate, and private placements. Such diversification reduces investment risk. Also, our plan invests in many passively managed accounts indexed to market averages. Such indexed investment vehicles not only produce reliable returns at low risk, they also minimize the various fees, commissions, and other costs that eat into returns.

The risks and responsibilities with providing a guaranteed retirement income to you as a retired teacher are shared equally between the plan members and plan employers. The plan fund is

reviewed by an actuary every three years to see if it has enough money to cover its current and future obligations. The next valuation will be done as of December 31, 2008. If the review indicates the plan has sufficient funding, then member contribution rates will remain the same; if the review indicates that the plan has a funding shortfall, then member and employer contributions will be increased.

So what has been the investment performance of the Teachers' Pension Plan? The 2007 Annual Report of the TPP, which was issued in July 2008, notes the following: The plan's Basic Account recorded a 4.0% annual return as of December 31, 2007, on its investment portfolio, which was above its 2007 benchmark of 2.0%. The five-year annualized rate of 11.2% was also above the 10.3% performance benchmark. Similarly the 10-year annualized rate of 7.7% was above its performance benchmark of 7.2%. For further information on the investment performance of the Teachers' Pension Plan and related investment reports, visit the TPP website at tpp.pensionsbc.ca or the pensions web page at the BCTF website at www.bctf.ca.

In all this, a key point to remember is: Your Teachers' Pension Plan gives you a guaranteed income for life as a retired teacher. It is one of the best kept secrets of your employee benefit package as an active teacher!

Carolyn Prellwitz is an assistant director, BCTF Income Security Division, 604-871-1921, toll-free 1-800-663-9163, extension 1921; cprellwitz@bctf.ca.

Pension seminars for all ages

Your Pension, Your Future and/or Thinking about Retiring

These two seminars are co-presented by BCTF staff and Pension Corporation staff. Preregistration is required. The time and the location will be confirmed by mail or e-mail. Check out the list of dates and locations on the poster in your school staffroom or go to the Teachers' Pension Plan website (tpp.pensionsbc.ca). You can also contact the plan by phone 1-877-558-5574 or e-mail TPPseminar@pensionsbc.ca.

There's more to it than money

The BC Retired Teachers' Association has developed a workshop for those of you about to retire.

The workshop is designed to compliment the Teachers' Pension Plan/BCTF Pension Seminar, but with limited class size to facilitate sharing and learning. It's a workshop—not a seminar.

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Retirement living brings with it life-altering situations and a wide variety of choices, some financial, some legal, and all connected with life-style. Achieving a workable balance when teaching days are over, and fulfilling dreams doesn't just happen. Having determined that it's time to retire, it's now time to concentrate on all the other aspects of your new life.

If a pension seminar is coming to your area, ask the BCTF local president to contact the BCRTA to book this highly acclaimed follow-up workshop.

BCRTA contact information: Website: www.bctf.ca/rt/a/. Telephone 604-871-2265; toll-free 1-877-683-2243.

New BCTF lesson aids

1 LA2018—The Begbie Canadian History Contest: Years Eleven to Fifteen sponsored by the Begbie Contest Society, 188 p. ©2008. This publication and LA 2017—"The Begbie Canadian History Contest: The First ten Years" attempts to enliven history, engage students in the historical method and give students an opportunity to practice critical thinking skills. The contest contains a large number of carefully selected primary sources that enable students to practise the skills historians (and citizens) need when processing information. Includes a detailed index to both volumes and strategies for using materials are grouped according to the different stages of the historical method. Grades 10 and 12. \$35

2 LA 3048—Calculus Manual 1: Function Definitions for Students by E.E. Engstrom, 87 p. ©Rev. 2008. The award-nominated calculus manual, which includes a CD Rom format, is reference material for single variable calculus. It is especially useful in the Advanced Placement Program Calculus course. Includes four chapters (with calculator computations). Grades 11–12. \$19.95

3 LA8013—Language Arts Activities for Grades 2 and 3 by Dianne Varty, 41 p. ©2008. Includes activities on creating a puppet play, teeny tiny book, extra large book, fall, winter, spring and summer story starters, paragraph outlines, story sequence and outline, book shapes and review, and poetry review. \$5.75.

4 LA 8018—Phonograms for Grades 1 and 2 by Dianne Varty, 62 p. ©2008. Blackline masters for paper or manila tag practice wheels for learning short vowel word families. \$6.75

5 LA 8561—Science Matters: Activities for Grades 2 and 3 by Dianne Varty, 55 p. ©2008. This resource guide Includes activities on solids, liquids, gasses and changes in matter, and student experiment templates, plant report template and notes, sea creatures report template and notes, science report and animals template and notes, and solar system report template and notes. \$6.50

6 LA 9188A—Lucy Maud Montgomery Novel Studies for Intermediate Students by Tina Drewes Barnetson, 115 p. ©2008. This teacher's resource includes novel studies on the following series: *Green Gables*, *Emily*, *Silver Bush*, *Story Girl* and includes nine other books and bonus material of novel study questions for Budge Wilson's "Before Green Gables," a prequel to the *Green Gables* series. Three questions are included in each chapter of the novel studies: (1) Looking for detail, e.g., what colour was the man's shirt? (2) General comprehension, e.g., What kind of problem did the main character face in this chapter? (3) Critical thinking, e.g., How do you think the main character can solve her problem? Grades 4 to 7. \$8.95

LA 9188B—Lucy Maud Montgomery Novel Studies for Intermediate Students by Tina Drewes Barnetson, CD Rom format of LA 9188A. \$6.95

7 EE208—A Nature Guide to Boundary Bay by Anne Murray and David Blevins, 214 p. 2006. Includes over 170 colour photographs illustrating the plants, animals and landscapes found in Boundary Bay, a premier birding area and wildlife destination in the heart of the Fraser River estuary. This book covers all of Boundary Bay and its watershed, including Burns Bog, North Delta, Tsawwassen, Ladner, Surrey, White Rock, Langley, and Richmond in BC and Blaine, Point Roberts, and the Drayton Harbour watershed in Washington State. Learn about nature in Boundary Bay, including where and when to go and what to see. Find out about bird migration on the Pacific flyway, life in the intertidal zone, nocturnal creatures, local nature destinations and much more. \$25.95

8 EE209—Teaching Green: The Elementary Years—Hands-on Learning in Grades K–5 by Tim Grant and Gail Littlejohn (editors), 256 p. ©2005. This book contains over 50 of the best teaching strategies and activities contributed to *Green Teacher* (the non-profit magazine) during the past decade. Almost all were updated and revised for this special 2005 anthology covering a wide spectrum of environmental topics and presenting a large diversity of practical projects and learning strategies. While the book focuses on helping kids develop a strong connection with the

natural world, there are many articles that focus on the social and global aspects of our environment. Milton McLaren, Professor Emeritus of Simon Fraser University writes, *The Elementary Years*...is a wonderful resource for teachers concerned with educating students about the place of humans in nature and our responsibilities to the planet and to each other. \$25.95

9 EE210—Teaching Green: The Middle Years—Hands-on Learning in Grades 6–8 by Tim Grant and Gail Littlejohn (editors), 256 p. ©2004. This book serves as a complete "green" teaching resource for those working with middle school-aged youth. Readers will find a wealth of kid-tested ideas contributed by educators from across North America and covering a wide spectrum of environmental topics, from biodiversity to resource consumption to green technology. The activities include practical projects, new learning and teaching strategies that engage adolescents in learning the fundamentals of citizenship for the 21st century. Other articles and activities provide opportunities for young people to develop and reflect on their values. \$25.95

10 LA 2015—Globalizing Connections: Canada and the Developing World, Roland Case, Editor, 139 p. ©2008. This Critical Challenges resource book provides a framework for analyzing the historical roots, contemporary challenges and Canadian responses to globalization in eight areas of human interaction. Includes detailed teaching activities to

introduce middle and senior school students to the idea of globalization and to help them analyze the global dynamics of various economic, political, environmental and social phenomena. Includes teacher instructions, student activity sheets, assessment rubrics, and detailed briefing sheets on the historical and contemporary development of five phenomena: catastrophic diseases, water use, food supply, human migration, and communication. Grades 7–12. \$36.95

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 Avenue, 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.

Lesson aid contest
Enter to win a \$50 Lesson Aids gift certificate by joining the new public e-mail list—Lesson Aids Service Alert at bctf.ca/cgi-bin/maillinglists [sub.pl](http://bctf.ca/cgi-bin/maillinglists) on the BCTF website. This list will get you connected to all the latest buzz about new lesson aids, services offered, contests, and lesson aids specials.



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PD Calendar

NOVEMBER 2008

2–7 Ottawa, ON. On Parliament Hill, get an insider’s view of Canada’s parliamentary system. Meet parliamentarians, and political, procedural and pedagogical experts. Explore key issues in parliamentary democracy. Develop and gather resources for teaching about parliament, governance, democracy and citizenship. Application deadline is April 30. For more information visit www.parl.gc.ca/teachers

5–7 Richmond. Making Connections—Systems for Success. Featured Plenary Speaker (Nov. 6) Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond (BC Children’s Representative) Making Connections 2008 is the 11th Annual Conference focusing on a systemic, positive, school-wide approach to creating a safe and caring school culture. Promising practices will include linking assessment to instruction, linking social responsibility with PBS, and implementing PBS in elementary, middle and secondary schools. For further information, contact Kathy Champion at: 604-668-6063 or by e-mail: kchampion@richmond.sd38.bc.ca or visit our website at: mail.sd35.bc.ca/~BC-PBS/

6 Vancouver. Healthy Schools: Improving Learning, Health and Literacy Conference. Featured “What Really Works in Promoting Health in Schools?” Dr. Lawrence St. Leger, International School Health Expert; “Engagement, Belonging and Connection: The Power of Learning Partnerships” Dr. Linda Kaser and Dr. Judy Halbert, co-leaders of the Network of Performance Based Schools. This is an important conference for elementary, middle and secondary educators focused on healthy lifestyles and improving physical activity to assist in students’ academic achievement, attitude towards school and learning and promoting a positive school culture. For more information and registration visit www.dashbc.org or call 604-583-6047.

8 & 28 Kelowna and Abbotsford respectively.. PITA’s Year of Professional Support program for early career teachers. Why prepare alone? Workshops to help you be more prepared and confident as you begin teaching. We provide practical strategies, ‘ready to go’ materials and web-Based help. These workshops illustrate good teaching and strategies that are useful to all teachers. To receive more details or to register go to www.pita.ca or contact Ray Myrtle president@pita.ca

13–14 Abbotsford. Seminars by Dawn Reithaug: Interventions for Reading and Behaviour: Functional Behavioural Assessment with Planning November 13, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.; Orchestrating Positive and Practical Behaviour Plans November 13, 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. (based on Dawn’s “red book”) and Three Tiers of Intervention for Reading November 14, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. (based on Dawn’s newest book to be released in Oct. 2008.) For more info, e-mail dreithaug@shaw.ca (for a brochure) or phone 604-926-4714.

27–29 Vancouver. 14th Annual Provincial Conference on Aboriginal Education, Strengthening Connections: Investing in Aboriginal Students. The conference is a major forum for networking and learning that drew 850 participants last year. Event information is available at www.fnesc.ca/conferences/index.php or e-mail conference@fnesc.ca. Hosted by the First Nations Education Steering Committee and BC Ministry of Education with Métis Nation BC and United Native Nations Society.

28 Abbotsford. Rock Talk...an Adventure Based Learning Workshop: Enjoy the day at Flashpoint Rock Gym, networking with like-minded educators. Learn all about the sport of rockclimbing, get an introduction to the basics of anchor setting and belaying, and learn climbing techniques (with lots of practice) from the pros at Flashpoint. All ropes, harnesses, helmets, climbing shoes provided. Fee of \$35 includes all handouts, coffee, and goodies, lunch, snacks. Contact Grassrootsadventure@gmail.com or phone 604.798.7366 for registration information, or visit www.grassrootsadventure.ca

introduction to the basics of anchor setting and belaying, and learn climbing techniques (with lots of practice) from the pros at Flashpoint. All ropes, harnesses, helmets, climbing shoes provided. Fee of \$35 includes all handouts, coffee, and goodies, lunch, snacks. Contact Grassrootsadventure@gmail.com or phone 604.798.7366 for registration information, or visit www.grassrootsadventure.ca

JANUARY 2009

22–23 Vancouver. The 22nd Annual Challenge & Change Conference. The 2009 conference will be held at the Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre. Dr. Martin Brokenleg will be our keynote speaker. For more information visit his website: www.ayn.ca For further conference info and details visit www.bctf.ca/bcaea/.

23 Abbotsford. PITA’s Year of Professional Support program for early career teachers. Why prepare alone? Workshops to help you be more prepared and confident as you begin teaching. We provide practical strategies, ‘ready to go’ materials and web-based help. These workshops illustrate good teaching and strategies that are useful to all teachers. To sign up to receive more details go to www.pita.ca or contact Ray Myrtle president@pita.ca

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13 & 20 Abbotsford & Kelowna respectively. PITA’s Year of Professional Support program for early career teachers. Why prepare alone? Workshops to help you be more prepared and confident as you begin teaching. We provide practical strategies, ‘ready to go’ materials and web-based help. These workshops illustrate good teaching and strategies that are useful to all teachers. To sign up to receive more details go to www.pita.ca or contact Ray Myrtle president@pita.ca

20 Mission. Snow Safety, an Adventure Based Learning Workshop: Enjoy the day at Hemlock Mountain 30 minutes east of Mission networking with adventure minded colleagues. Learn how to keep your students safe in winter alpine country, how to organize a school group at Hemlock Mountain, and receive tips on leading a successful school outing on the snow. The morning will include a moderate guided 2 hr snow shoe trek in the winter alpine backcountry. Lunch will include sharing curriculum ties by subject area, and outdoor adventure experiences and ideas. After lunch, we will explore the mountain on snowboards or skis on a full-access lift pass, with rentals and lessons available for those who need. All equipment rentals, lift tickets, lunch, lesson, costs included in your \$60 registration fee. Contact Grassrootsadventure@gmail.com 604-798-7366 for registration information, or visit www.grassrootsadventure.ca

Future October PSA days
BCTF procedure statement 30.A.14: That for the purposes of a province-wide PSA day, the BCTF supports the third Friday in October as the day on which all districts hold a professional day, except in years in which Thanksgiving Monday falls in the same week, in which case the fourth Friday would be the designated day. 2009–10: October 23, 2009
2010–11: October 22, 2010
2011–12: October 21, 2011
2012–13: October 19, 2012
2013–14: October 25, 2013
2014–15: October 24, 2014
2015–16: October 23, 2015


PSA PD Day
October 23, 2009


PD Calendar website:
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One school's journey with action research

By Liz Moore

As with every journey, travellers must first ensure that their vehicle is:

- safe—tested, inspected, and respected.
- comfortable—space for everyone, with plenty of room to “stretch.”
- fuel efficient—no one needs to paddle because the wind blew out of their sails.
- time efficient—no one falls asleep because “We’re not there yet.”
- affordable—suits everyone’s budget.
- reliable—gets you to where you want to go.

During the 2007–08 school year, educators from Sooke’s Journey Middle School (JMS) embarked upon individual action research inquiry projects. The vehicle JMS teachers selected for their journey was the BCTF Program for Quality Teaching. The BCTF places a very high priority on professional learning experiences that promote reflection on teaching practice among a community of learners.

The BCTF places a very high priority on professional learning experiences that promote reflection on teaching practice among a community of learners.

At Journey Middle School, teachers enjoy questioning, exploring, and problem-solving, and talking to colleagues about their students, their classroom, and educational issues.

They wondered about things going on in their classrooms and had some ideas they wanted to explore and changes they wanted to make.

Inquiry can best be described as “...a question-driven, self-directed

search for understanding.” PQT/Teacher Inquiry provided teachers with an opportunity to critically assess current practices, and to thoughtfully adapt elements of new programs and ideas into their classrooms and/or schools. The action research processes enabled teachers to rediscover and reflect upon the social significance of their teaching in relation to their own values and personal sense of meaning. With this approach to inquiry into teaching, new educational knowledge, based on the practitioners’ experiences, emerged and benefitted the teacher, their colleagues, their students, and the school community.

Through a collaborative action research process, the BCTF PQT/Teacher Inquiry provided JMS teachers with a framework for ongoing professional learning and growth. This in turn, influenced the basis upon which change occurred in teaching.

BCTF PQT facilitators and professional development staffer Nancy Hinds, facilitated a total of six sessions over the course of the school year. Their contribution was to offer the right methods and tools at the right time in the process. This was important as it put the group members first. They decided what the goals were, made the decisions, implemented the action plans, and held themselves accountable for achieving results.

While the six sessions were organic in nature and met the needs of each researcher, each session also had a primary focus.

The journey began in Session 1, where action researchers acknowledged each other’s quest, focused on common purpose, and created norms and guidelines.

The overall goal of the Journey Middle School action researchers was to investigate the heart of literacy for the middle-school learner by:

- formulating questions and designing classroom-based inquiry/action research that

would extend their own understanding of teaching practice through research on teaching approaches and choices.

- developing data collection and research skills, and collaborating with colleagues to deepen understanding and strengthen their teaching practice and learning.

The action research processes enabled teachers to rediscover and reflect upon the social significance of their teaching in relation to their own values and personal sense of meaning.

In order to establish a strong and effective collaborative learning community, guidelines were developed by the participants. These guidelines outlined the group’s expectations for how they would like to be together as a group. The guidelines established were:

- balanced opportunities to speak and listen
- a mechanism to keep on track
- to each have a voice
- a foundation of trust
- commitment
- honouring the process
- listening for understanding, be in the present
- keep it light
- a system of communication
- responsible for own learning
- punctual
- confidentiality
- professionalism
- practical
- celebration and product.

Sessions 2 to 5 focused on preparing the researchers for the action research processes, and included honing the question, reviewing ethical guidelines, methods of data collection, the organization, analyzing, and interpretation of data, and ways of reporting their findings.

Driving their research were questions that morphed and honed over time, such as: “How do you move a school from low trust to high trust? What role does student collaboration, such as peer editing and feedback, play in improving the acquisition of meaning in expository writing? How does a teacher kindle motivation in a reluctant learner?”

Between sessions, teachers took part in planned and impromptu meetings at the school. Teachers and facilitators used the list serve, e-mail, and phone calls to maintain momentum and to uphold the spirit of the process and keep it moving in a forward direction. In the last session, these “awesome action researchers” shared their joy of discovery and celebrated a successful and rewarding journey.

Journey Middle School is launching its second voyage this school year. As their facilitator I look forward to another wonderful year, learning and growing together.

Nancy Hinds, program director for the BCTF asks us to “Imagine a school where there is a spirit of collective effort to teach all students well, to study together, to work on problems of practice, and to explore students’ work...all focused on student success! ...and created through intentional (structured) conversation.”

Is this your school?

“Imagine a school where there is a spirit of collective effort to teach all students well, to study together, to work on problems of practice, and to explore students’ work...all focused on student success!”

Nancy Hinds,
BCTF program director

Liz Moore is a BCTF PQT/Teacher Inquiry facilitator, and middle school teacher in School District 69 (Qualicum).

For more information about the BCTF Program for Quality Teaching/Teacher Inquiry, contact Nancy Hinds, BCTF PSI Division, nhinds@bctf.ca, or 604-871-1840 or 1-800-663-9163, ext. 1840.

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Resources

- BCTF Program for Quality Teaching Action Research Guide, September 2008
- Province of BC. *Field-Based Research: A Working Guide*. Ministry of Education 2001.

Seven projects selected for 2008–09

“Consider how your local/ district may support teacher inquiry as a viable professional development/learning model?” This was the invitation to locals to participate with their school districts in a collaborative teacher inquiry process, around a topic of common interest. After a strong response to the invitation, seven projects have been selected from across the province. Coquitlam, Creston, Delta, Kelowna, Nanaimo, Surrey, and Vernon inquiry groups will be hosted this school year, and co-facilitated by BCTF Program for Quality Teaching/ Teacher Inquiry facilitators. Successful projects receive: facilitation and research support, materials on inquiry and mentoring, plus a \$5,000 grant for participant release, matched with \$5,000 contributed by the local/district

The BCTF would like to acknowledge a grant from the Province of British Columbia through the Ministry of Education, that made this expansion and renewal of the Federation’s flagship Program for Quality Teaching possible. Watch for reports on these inquiry projects in future issues of *Teacher* or at bctf.ca/Teacher Inquirer e-journal.

For more information contact Nancy Hinds, Project co-ordinator, nhinds@bctf.ca.

