

# TEACHER

Newsmagazine of the BC Teachers' Federation

## Ungagged: Bill 42 ruled unconstitutional



GEOFF PETERS PHOTOS

**By David Denyer**

Bill 42, the "Gag Law," brought in by the Campbell government in May 2008, defined election advertising very broadly to include transmitting to the public, by any means, a message that takes a position on an issue with which a party or candidate is associated. The law imposed severe restrictions on such adver-

tising for a total of 88 days before a provincial election and threatened harsh penalties. The BCTF challenged the bill along with the Nurses' Union, CUPE-BC, and the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators.

A recent decision by Justice Cole of the British Columbia Supreme Court removed the restrictions imposed by Bill 42 during the 60-day pre-campaign period. The provisions of Bill 42 remain in effect during the 28-day campaign period beginning on April 14.

The Office of the Attorney General attempted to argue that the provisions of Bill 42 were not as impairing as they might appear. Facebook and other social networking tools were claimed to be inherently more democratic and hence could be used to influence campaigns. Likewise the discretion

invested in the chief electoral officer could limit what advertising was captured. Neither of these arguments was accepted. Justice Cole expressed great concern with

*...on balance, the disadvantages of the 60-day pre-campaign period were viewed as far outweighing any possible advantages and constituted an unacceptable limitation of freedom of expression.*

restricting advertising 60 days prior to the 28-day campaign period, especially since this time period encompassed the Throne Speech and Budget.

Limiting third-party spending

during the 28-day campaign period was justified, in Justice Cole's opinion, in order to ensure "the voices of political parties and candidates are not drowned out."

However, on balance, the disadvantages of the 60-day pre-campaign period were viewed as far outweighing any possible advantages and constituted an unacceptable limitation of freedom of expression.

Contrary to the advice of many media sources and political pundits to let the matter drop, the attorney general applied to the BC Court of Appeal for a stay of the Supreme Court decision. On April 3, 2009, the attorney general's application was dismissed.

The BCTF has relaunched its television advertising campaign to raise awareness about issues facing BC's public education system in the context of the government's recent budget. The "When Will They Learn?" ads, originally aired in January and February before the gag law's spending limits began, will run again for the first two weeks of April until the actual campaign period begins. The ads can be viewed at [WhenWillTheyLearn.ca](http://WhenWillTheyLearn.ca).

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

### On the inside

Anyone worried about declining activism in the union would have taken heart from two recent events that are covered in this edition. Both the New Teachers' Conference and the Annual General Meeting were attended by large numbers of younger members who impressed us all with their energy, enthusiasm, and willingness to participate.

The concept of professional autonomy and its preservation in an age of hyper-accountability and a mandate-heavy school landscape is explored by many who have contributed to this issue. Various perspectives and experiences are

offered and members are encouraged to continue the discussion in future issues of *Teacher*.

The political realm in education is never far away and writers for this edition continue to document the bleak future for funding, the saga of seismic upgrading, and the effort to promote social justice.

From work stress, through health and safety, and a host of other items, this edition vividly presents the wide involvement of teachers in their work and in society.

To round out this edition our resident cruciverbalist has created another challenging crossword.



Is your old school about to be demolished?	3
Paths to professional autonomy	4
AGM '09	8
New teachers' conference	9
Funding: Reading between the lines	10
Free the children	16

## President's message



Irene Lanzinger

While most teachers in BC enjoyed a well-deserved spring break, almost 700 delegates gathered in Vancouver for the 2009

Annual General Meeting of the BCTF. It always amazes me that so many teachers give up their holidays so willingly, even enthusiastically, to make critical decisions on behalf of their colleagues. I sometimes worry that no one will show up but the delegates always arrive. You can depend on teachers to care about what is happening in their union and in public education.

This AGM had many important issues to consider. We decided to leave the premier's Learning Round Table. The round table was set up as part of the settlement of the strike in October of 2005. It has only ever been a public relations exercise for the government. At the last meeting, the minister of education stated that BC has the most comprehensive and transparent data

collection system for class size and composition.

As a math and science teacher, I like data more than most people. The problem is, that is all the round table has ever done—collect data. The process has never produced any additional resources to lower class sizes or provide more support for students with special needs.

We will continue to meet with government, partner groups, and other allies to press the need for greater funding for public education, but not at the round table. If the round table could not produce a single extra dollar for resources to help students in three-and-a-half years, there is no reason to expect anything to happen there in the near future.

The AGM also made the decision to continue our campaign to eliminate the census administration of the Foundation Skills Assessment test. We will be calling on government to implement a two-year moratorium on standardized tests including the FSA and Grade 10, 11, and 12 exams.

We will also be asking government to establish a Testing and Assessment Task Force to analyze the educational value of existing local and provincial assessment instruments and to examine models of testing and assessment that enhance student learning. We are very willing to discuss with government and others, how to develop assessment tools that help our students learn and honour teachers' professional autonomy.

In addition to these critical decisions, the delegates at the AGM debated many other significant issues—bargaining, ethical investing of our pension fund, and the difficult issues facing teachers teaching on call.

Over the course of the four days at the AGM, I had the opportunity to speak with many teachers. I was particularly pleased to see a large number of younger delegates. Some of them were attending the AGM for the first time, and some are already well on their way to becoming experienced activists in the BCTF. They are energetic, intelligent, principled, and enthusiastic. We can rest assured that our future will be in good hands.

## Readers write

### AGM wins praise

Congratulations to the BCTF on a very successful and lively AGM. I would especially like to thank one of the conference organizers, Mary McClure, for making this experience so successful for me on a personal level. As a first-time delegate, I was met with understanding and a willingness to accommodate a delegate with a hearing impairment. As a first-time speaker at the microphone I was met with patience, support, and encouragement by BCTF staff, members from around the province, as well as from my own local.

For several years I was asked if I would be going to the BCTF AGM. I always had one excuse or another for not attending. Truthfully, my actual reason for not attending was a hesitance because of my hearing loss. I was fearful I would not be able to hear the speakers and, therefore, would not be able to make decisions during the voting process. I could not come up with a valid excuse this year because my children are of an age that they don't need me as much (I'm beginning to understand the meaning of "Empty Nest Syndrome") and my husband has been working overtime. I very much enjoy being immersed in union issues and decided this year I would go and take what I could from the experience. I had called Mary McClure a few days before the AGM and asked her if there was any accommodation available to a hearing-impaired individual. She said that she would look into it and assured me there would be something in place for me. When I arrived at the conference she introduced me to Brian in the sound booth. He set me up with a system that allowed me to hear every word spoken into the microphones. It was

as easy as that.

It was thrilling to know that I could still participate in the democratic process of the BCTF AGM. I wonder if there are other members who are hesitant to attend conferences because of physical problems. I urge anyone who has ever hesitated due to a physical challenge to raise the issue with the organizers, come to an AGM and, like me, "take what you can from the experience." I am sure you, too, will feel the excitement of being a part of the BCTF AGM experience.

**Tammy Neuman**  
Surrey

### Cartoon concerns

In the Jan./Feb. issue of the *Teacher*, there was a cartoon poking fun at creation theory. I'm guessing that the cartoon was intended in light fun, without the desire to marginalize creationist adherents. At times I've seen cartoons poking fun at evolutionary theory, so I know the joking goes both ways and isn't necessarily ill-intended. But is the BCTF magazine the place for it?

It felt like my professional union, which fights for dignity and respect for so many people, didn't consider my position worthy of the same. I think the cartoon sent a confusing message: On the one hand, is the BCTF's strong advocacy of inclusion and tolerance, and on the other is it poking fun at creationist beliefs.

As we hear often, teachers are influential forces. And the BCTF is an influential force among teachers. It didn't feel good to be slighted by that influential voice. Worse, I fear the cartoon could have the unfortunate effect of making some educators feel more empowered to tease or slight students or colleagues with a creationist bent. I would expect the BCTF to lead the

way in respecting diverse opinions of human origins (even while underscoring the teacher's obligation to teach the curriculum in its entirety, evolutionary theory included). The cartoon really surprised me, coming from the BCTF.

I'm sure readers realized that the creationist position was misrepresented in the cartoon. It was admittedly a funny notion, God creating fossils to confuse humans. But I couldn't shake the feeling that my creationist beliefs were being construed as nonsensical, uneducated, and untenable. I hope that, whatever theory of origins we adhere to, we can learn enough about what the other sides believe to see that intelligent, open-minded people could conceivably camp in

I would love to be respected in my community of professionals as a curriculum-upholding Creationist. I'm sure it wasn't intended, but I felt that the BCTF worked against that end by publishing the cartoon.

**Sharlene Tenant**

Surrey

Why are my union dues paying for such a biased, offensive little rag such as this 'teacher' publication? I was angered by the very distasteful comic that was published in the Jan./Feb. 2009 issue mocking creationism. In the same issue that celebrates International Women's Day, discussions about ranking schools being abusive, a huge spread on social justice, we find such a narrow-minded, intolerant comic. If it was a joke mocking and poking fun at the colour of a person's skin, or their sexual preferences, would it be printed? Obviously not. Yet this publication, which is supposed to represent ALL of us in the profession can print

such a bigoted, prejudiced picture as this. It reminds me of the comics of Jews in pre-war Nazi Germany. Why attack the beliefs of so many of our colleagues, the silent majority, who have beliefs and moral values in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Do you see the double standard? Are we going to mock Buddhism, Sikhism, or Scientology next? It appears that it is ok to practice and believe in anything as long as God is not involved.

**Gayn Linton**

Prince George

### No need for elites

"Teachers are being undermined," says former SFU Dean of Education Dr. Paul Shaker in *The Kamloops Daily*, Feb 27. Shaker says teachers are under attack from parents as well as from government and the 'institute.' Seeming to support his point, *The Kamloops Daily*, March 10, 2009, reported that in a very small poll "Kamloops parents say FSA tests are not harmful to students." Was this wording deliberate, meaning that as well as knowing their children, parents are now experts on students and tests? Shaker said that we're caught in a debate "where no side sees where the other is coming from." Nine year-olds hearing their school is 'worst' aren't strong enough yet to shrug it off. They don't know it's irrational for schools to be competitive, or that it's an injustice to use their grades for something other than a measure of their own progress. Shaker said of ordinary (not elite) schools. "They're schools where kids can learn how to help—to learn how to give as well as to get." Canadian schools in the past century have done well without differentiation by institutes, without elitism. What needed fixing? I'm glad I taught in schools which they'd now call 'worst.' Every day students saw kids who really struggled, and we learned about courage, worth, friendship, suffering, and compassion. The differences we saw in one another helped that learning happen. Our diversity also yielded good academic achievement. Canadian children (in unranked schools) growing up during the last century achieved for Canada our advanced technology, education, ethical integrity, arts and culture, research, peace initiatives, healthcare, wealth, and civic order! It diminishes us all to allow separations according to ideas about 'worst' and 'best' schools. It's a trend toward the weakness of elitism. Parents—you can help. Talk with kids and teachers, visit schools often. Drive a carload of kids to a local pond study on Saturday, and enjoy! If parents hear elitist talk about 'worst' or 'best' schools, I hope they'll say, "Hey, that's elitist talk." Or, "Kids, please don't tease that our school is best!" (Retentive adults might hear and think it's serious!) If kids ask what retentive means, tell the truth: it means

having easy answers. Holding onto things not known to be true which often aren't. In other words, it means not really paying attention to what's real. Kids already know about easy answers, and how often they're wrong.

**Daryl Clayton**

Kamloops

### Student safety comes first

I echo Jim McMurtry's assertion that as educators we have a duty to ensure that a student's right to be safe and free from harassment/discrimination trumps a parent's cultural/religious values. In the same way that children are being "shunned or abused" for failing to meet strict religious dress codes, many are also experiencing violence, shaming, and rejection because of their sexuality.

I recently attended a BCTF conference in Abbotsford on "Faith and Sexuality" that examined this same tension, and subsequently attended a research symposium by the BC Centre for Safe Schools and Communities. Some very important points for educators surfaced:

1. Statistically you can assume that some of your students will not be heterosexual (11% of BC secondary school students recently identified themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or unsure and these results varied little by region).
2. Homophobic language is the most common form of verbal bullying in high schools and is also the least responded to by adults and other students.
3. Gay or lesbian kids with parents who are negative about homosexuality are eight times more likely to commit suicide than gay kids whose parents are simply neutral.
4. 68% of lesbian/gay youth who reported a lack of adult support at school never or almost never felt safe at school. In contrast, 76% of lesbian/gay youth who perceived that adults at school were supportive reported feeling safe most or all of the time.
5. 80% of students who reported being the target of homophobic bullying identified as straight.

I fully acknowledge that this topic is sensitive and difficult for teachers, but there are many developmentally appropriate books and videos from K-12 to help you get started. While we must be sensitive to the myriad of religious and cultural values that exist in our province, we cannot allow our fear of rocking the boat to prevent discussion, awareness, and response to homophobia. Our schools must be a beacon of acceptance—especially for students who get the opposite message at home.

**Steve Mulligan**  
Vancouver

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# Is your old school about to be demolished?

## Lessons to be learned from Charles Dickens Elementary in Vancouver

**By Noel Herron**

From the outside, Charles Dickens Elementary School in east Vancouver is the very picture of a modern and appealing contemporary school building with a circular sweeping entrance and decorative wooden beams slanting outwards from its roof and on three sides.

The building from both the front and sides looks lovely—the back is another matter entirely.

On top of that, this is the first elementary environmentally sustainable-LEED school building in the city with several cutting edge features to confirm this.

As school trustees at the time of construction approval five years ago, we were very proud of the latter accomplishment. But I wonder, despite our misgivings, if we really knew what was in store for this exceptional school-community when the building was

completed. (Dickens has been recognized as a lighthouse school within the VSB.)

Appearances can be deceptive and when one visits this newly constructed school, speaks to the staff, examines the options that this divided school-community faced five years ago (when compelled by

**...Victoria in effect was bluntly saying to one and all: heritage features be damned, build your school the cheapest possible way.**

Victoria's unyielding "area standards" requirements to demolish the 95-year-old structure that had a cherished place in the community), a vastly different picture now emerges.

At the centre of the controversy that raged for over two years prior

to demolition—was the asinine and very costly, (as we now have witnessed) rigid requirement by the Ministry of Education that forces boards of education to accept the lowest bidder when new buildings go out for tender.

In the case of Charles Dickens Elementary, this led to the demolition of the old school.

It should be noted that many European jurisdictions allow their municipalities to accept bidders up to and including the median-priced submissions. This does not tie the hands of municipalities/school boards, and the flexibility allowed produces superior construction.

Not in BC. We stubbornly go the cheaper route when we rebuild our schools or start new school construction in this province and we make no allowances for flexibility. That is, unless your school happens to be in the premier's Point Grey riding.

And we pay a price for this short-sighted policy with shoddy construction; leaking buildings with schools shrouded in tarpaulins; plus the inconvenience and disruption, of daily teaching-learning activities for students and teachers.

Victoria's policy invariably leads to cheaper (and often disastrous) construction sites stemming from cost-cutting measures by successive builders as evidenced by the history of False Creek Elementary School. Renovated twice at a cost of over \$2 million since it was built in 1977, False Creek school is but one example of poor planning.

And more recently, yet another example is found in General Gordon Elementary School in 2003 where the VSB reached an out-of-court settlement with the construction company that left a string of messy and incomplete projects in its wake.

Just as you should not judge a book by its cover, so the same should apply to new school buildings.

In the case of the 95-year-old Dickens building, it was very clear from the start that by forcing the Vancouver Board of Education (and thus the Dickens school-community) to accept the bottom bidder, Victoria in effect was bluntly saying to one and all: heritage features be damned, build your school the cheapest possible way.

The rigid constraints of the ministry's official design sheet tie the hands of architects seeking to

provide communities with a core building with a life expectancy of 90 years. With smaller classrooms, which reflect smaller class sizes, other spaces rated as a percentage of the gross space such as storage, health, administrative spaces, halls, and stairs are equally squeezed leading to awkward and ungracious structures.

And today, as a result of this squeezing at Dickens, we see the sad results. Apart from a larger, brighter gym and healthier air flow, the following items were noted:

- Not a single heritage feature of the 95-year-old former building remains.
- Classrooms are 25% smaller than in the old building, based on downsized standards.
- The teachers' staffroom, which doubles as a meeting room, is 30% smaller.
- The principal's office, used for parental interviews and to meet members of the general public, is a stamp-sized (8' x 10')—you have to see it to believe it.
- The school's music room lacks soundproofing and thus is totally dysfunctional.
- Hallways are 30% narrower.
- Storage space has been reduced by 80%.
- Cupboards have toppled off the wall in one room.
- The children will be without a school playground for at least two years until the project is complete (this now forms an unappealing, crater-pocked, landscape at the back of the school).
- The school lost its external covered play area—astonishingly, Vancouver doesn't have enough rain to qualify!
- Two classrooms leaked badly eight months after opening, leading to leakages in adjoining rooms.

**But note, as we approach the May provincial election, two schools in the premier's riding, about to be renovated, will not only retain their old buildings and heritage features, but will be given added considerations, thanks in part to a new \$30 million deal.**

With BC now embarking on a \$1.3 billion shovel-ready, school upgrading, and school construction plan—announced in the February 2009 budget—you can add millions more to this estimate, plus the hundreds of millions already allocated to correct the leaky-school syndrome as Victoria stubbornly continues to insist that school boards accept the lowest bidder.

This double whammy is a disgraceful waste of taxpayer's money.

But note, as we approach the May provincial election, two schools in the premier's riding, about to be renovated, will not only retain their old buildings and heritage features, but will be given added considerations, thanks in part to a generous \$30 million deal.

Some school communities are more equal than others in this province.

Last month, Vancouver trustees approved four schools for seismic upgrading. Prior to this, due to persistent parental pressure and insidious comparisons with the favoured treatment accorded two schools in the premier's Point Grey riding, Victoria was forced to allocate a 15% increase in the previously approved construction budget for these four schools.

Charles Dickens school did not receive this added 15% consideration (at the time of construction) on what now passes for the seismic upgrading program under the BC Liberals.

If further confirmation of the politicization of this process is needed, Victoria has made it very clear that control of the upgrading of the Point Grey schools will be directed by the Ministry of Education, thus, in effect overriding the authority of the Vancouver board.

It is very clear from all of this that the era of the leaky-school syndrome and of bad construction is far from over in BC schools and that raw politics still dominate the selection of schools for seismic upgrading in this province.

The lessons to be learned from Charles Dickens Elementary School in Vancouver are indeed many, varied, and timely.

If only we pay heed to them. Noel Herron is a former Vancouver trustee.

For additional information on Victoria's design sheet go to: [www.bced.gov.bc.ca/capitalplanning/resources/areastandards.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/capitalplanning/resources/areastandards.pdf)



GEOFF PETERS PHOTOS

Charles Dickens Elementary School above, and below, the crater-pocked landscape at the back of the school.

## Judicial Council decision

A member from local 61 filed a complaint with the Judicial Council against another member, Lisa Miller, on February 23, 2005 alleging that Miller breached Clause 5 of the *BCTF Code of Ethics*. The allegation was that Miller sent an electronic message critical of the member to some parents of students in the member's class. Miller argued that she was simply relaying a message on behalf of others. In the alternative, she argued that she was acting in the capacity of a parent and in such a capacity was exercising her freedom of speech.

The Hearing Panel held that Miller had sent the message, that it was framed as a message from Miller and, despite being a parent, her conduct must be in compliance with the *BCTF Code of Ethics*. The Hearing Panel also held that Clause 5 did not violate Miller's right to freedom of expression. Since she did not follow the process outlined in clause 5, Miller was in breach of the Code of Ethics. An Appeal Panel

upheld the decision of the Hearing Panel. The penalties imposed were the following:

1. Miller was reprimanded for violating Clause 5 of the *BCTF Code of Ethics*.
2. Miller's right to hold office in the BCTF or any of its subsidiary bodies, including local associations, was suspended for a period of one year, commencing 31 days after the issuance of the decision.
3. The panel's findings would be published in the next appropriate issue of *Teacher Newsmagazine*.

This report is published pursuant to BCTF Procedure 31.C.08, which states:

That upon expiration of the 30-day period for appealing or upon the conclusion of an appeal a finding of guilt may be published in the *Teacher*. The Hearing Panel/Appeal Panel shall write the words published including the offense, the finding and the penalty, but not the source of the original complaint.

### 70 years ago

Canada enjoys a Christian civilization. For this reason, euthanasia—the permitting of "mercy deaths," as the term is popularly understood—stands little chance of being legalized, for several decades at least. Painless death, if deliberately inflicted, even upon sufferers from painful and incurable diseases, is abhorrent to our Christian conscience. Yet, strangely enough, those same consciences do not deter us from keeping a large section of the population little better than half alive, or the hapless victims of preventable disease. In a word, we do not recognize that the question of public health is, in a measure, a moral issue.

— April 1939, *The BC Teacher*

### 50 years ago

Is a "good teacher" one who stuffs her students full of facts, who loads them with homework, who forces them to memorize huge chunks of

her subject? Or is it one who inspires in pupils an appetite for learning, who makes them intellectually curious, who gives them a life-long zest for improving their minds? Very few teachers can do both of these at the same time. My own teachers who crammed me with facts were dull and spiritless creatures, while the ones who maintained my interest in a subject were less concerned about memorization and repetition.

— April 1959, *The BC Teacher*

### 30 years ago

With each one of those students you've got to know at what point do you say "no" and make him/her do it him/herself. That's a hell of a responsibility. In fact, of all the functions of a teacher, that is the most important single one—teaching a kid how to do things for himself or herself when he/she is ready. Identifying that point in every child every minute of the day is a lot of pressure. The basic thing behind all

anxiety and stress is uncertainty. It's not being sure what to do next or, alternatively, you've tried something and it doesn't work. Then what do you do? Most of the time you aren't thinking of most of the decisions you make—you couldn't! Yet, at the same time, that is producing in you a very high stress level.

— March/April 1979, *The BC Teacher*

### 10 years ago

One of the most contentious issues at this year's AGM related to the role of teachers as advocates for social change. Some locals proposed continuing a distinct Status of Women Program, rather than have its work woven into the Social Justice Program. They lobbied hard and held every leadership candidate accountable for articulating a clear position on the issue. However, when it came to the vote, delegates opted for the integrated program.

— April 1999, *Teacher Newsmagazine* Chris Bocking, Keating Elementary School, Saanich



## Life as a test

By David Denyer

A recent editorial in a Kamloops newspaper on the FSA opened with the phrase, "life is one big test," from our first breath to our last "when our heart fails the final exam." Aside from the fact that this statement would have qualified for the deep-thoughts segment of past episodes of *Saturday Night Live*, this arid, depressing view of existence would appear to lie at the core of those who advocate for test-based accountability.

In pursuing this line of enquiry, Warwick Mansell of the *Times Educational Supplement* sought to understand why senior policy makers in education assumed that, without a rigorous accountability regime, teachers would become a bunch of self-interested slackers. From the interviews he conducted, he found that they had no evidence that teachers, if left to their own devices, would abandon their students. Instead, they simply assumed this would happen and passed it off as fact. So where do these assumptions (and that is what they are) have their roots?

Much economic theory is based on people being driven by financial incentives, bonuses, and financial rewards that supposedly feed their self-interest. Merit pay, school performance bonuses, and pay-by-results crop up as ideas all too often in education (most recently in the announcements coming from the Obama administration in the USA). The economic model, on which these assumptions are based, dates back, at least to Adam Smith, and maintains that the operation of market forces is simply a reflection of human nature.

Rather than accept this assertion as a given, which has been the case in economics for the last 250 years, what does current research say about people's motivation and values? New breeds of researchers are making their mark in challenging what have been the accepted theories and doctrines. A number of these people are "crossovers" who have developed expertise in often widely diverse disciplines. One such

person is Pete Lunn, a neuroscientist turned economist, who is forging a new direction known as behavioural economics.

Behavioural economists are intent upon discovering what people's motivations truly are. Not unexpectedly, they are far from the selfish/self-interested stereotype favoured by traditional economics and devotees of free market capitalism.

"The prevailing economic wisdom that people do only what they are paid to do, that our aim is to take what we can and give as little as possible, is not supported by evidence and certainly not by wisdom. It is highly damaging and there is a job to be done to change it."

In contrast, the behavioural research reveals people's motivations to be far more complex than conventional economic models suppose. We seek to be treated fairly, respected by our peers, and have security. We take pride in a job well done, and, yes, maximize our own personal success. A visit to any school will confirm the commitment teachers bring to the job. Working countless hours, often in the evenings and weekends and undertaking numerous tasks other than those directly related to the classroom, demonstrate the value teachers place on their work and its importance for our society. They do what they can to counter the impact of deprivation and social exclusion. They wrestle daily with the problems poverty brings; caring for children scarred by family breakdown, inadequate parenting, material and emotional poverty, and neglect. And all this in often resource- and support-deprived conditions, being paid a fraction of their worth, and judged publicly against a misconceived, archaic notion of human nature, which has its roots in an equally archaic economic model that is hundreds of years old. It is clear, given this mind-set, why any form of professional autonomy struggles to survive. How can asserting autonomy, in an environment dominated by a view of human nature as purely self-serving, be seen as anything other than an excuse to avoid being accountable? Accountability, as Warwick Mansell observes, works to shift responsi-

# Paths to prof

bility for performance away from the student to the teacher. Although commenting on the accountability saturated system in the UK, his critique should give us pause:

"To put it another way, hyper-accountability assumes, implicitly, that pupils have a right to high grades (or at least to perform as well as others have done, given their statistical starting points), and that if they have not received them, the failing is entirely their teacher's. So, instead of pupils getting the message that their hard work will lead to success, and to take responsibility for their actions, they are given the signal that it is down to the teacher to deliver that achievement for them."

"This thinking, I believe, is doing untold harm to our education system."

That politicians and policy makers are making far reaching decisions based on assumptions for which there is not a shred of empirical evidence should give us all great concern. Blindly pursuing political opportunism and attachment to ideology generate nothing but social dysfunctionality and threaten the very institutions that are vital to sustaining a democratic society.

*David Denyer, assistant director and Teacher editor, BCTF Communications and Campaigns Division.*

## Teacher professional autonomy and public education: The practice of educating citizens, not consumers

Diane McNally

Public school teachers in British Columbia agree that true professional development is much more than learning skills in a top-down manner of delivery. Though there may be occasions when teachers choose (and "choose" is the key word) to seek out skill development, most often teachers pursue professional development that holds intrinsic meaning for them and deep implications for their professionally considered practice.

However, the global trend to the rising power of neo-liberal market forces ideologies in the interest of corporate welfare and corporate hegemony has reframed education in business terms, and has reframed education as a marketable product while moving it away from consideration as a social good fundamental to a democratic society.

This larger context has implications for teachers professional autonomy and the professional development of teachers. In British Columbia, teachers have seen seemingly non-stop increases in government bills, data madness manifesting in terms of ever-proliferating demands for "accountability" to the detriment of teachers' practice and student learning.

The narrow "accountability" mindset is directed to production of compliant and uncritical thinkers.

BC teachers are resisting the top-down business model of education and teacher "skill development" because teachers are deeply committed to protecting their profession as one that fundamentally supports development of citizenship, not compliant consumers, by facilitating critical thinking, educationally sound curriculum choices, and social justice education.

Teachers in British Columbia have experienced the top-down control version of managed "professional development" when they are "expected" to attend presentations promoted by school-level management and are "expected" to teach in certain ways.

Such external expectations that replace teacher choice in professional development and professional autonomy in practice are underpinned by the control mechanisms of judgments of individual teachers (now judgments of individual schools, but teacher level Fraser Institute rankings are only a matter of time, and attached to that, teacher merit pay), and ever more lofty targets developed annually in an endless striving that can never be good enough. In Greater Victoria, a school trustee was heard to say in a public meeting that all children could be above average in performance measures if teachers taught them properly. This fantasy is directly associated with support for the call for ever-increasing data submissions from schools to the District, all to the end of proving that teachers aren't good enough, and that management can fix that through top-down control of teachers' professional development and constant challenges to teachers' professional autonomy.

The neoliberal glorification of promoting private delivery over public institutions, efficiency over diversity and respect for the individual and social justice, and promotion of competition for students by public schools, along with school-based financial agony (better known as school-based budgeting with the "flexibility" to decide what to do with not enough money) are presented by ideologues as increasing efficiency and effectiveness. Teachers are continually assaulted by the flavour-of-the-year skill fixes that emanate from the

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Is "efficiency" what we have in mind for our classrooms? Is "efficiency" the objective of the dedicated teacher who enters a classroom filled with all the variables students bring? And what notion of "effectiveness" does a professional hold?

Certainly not teaching to any test in order to demonstrate marketability for the school, while letting all the engaging opportunities that professional judgment would embrace, drift away in the stultifying climate of "data collection."

Professionals are dangerous! Professionals resist and subvert the control agenda aims of education managers; so the professionalism of teachers is structurally attacked and undermined. Professionals resist the coercion of nominative "leaders" masquerading as consensus-building at the school level in regard to teachers' professional development and autonomy in practice.

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Among the qualities needed in a democratic society that teachers strive to develop in student citizens are considered use of individual freedom and personal liberties, personal choice in the context of society, and autonomous participation in personal and social life.

The current obsession with accountability and data collection violates these fundamentals of democracy. Democracy and autonomy aren't theories—they are practices that professional teachers demonstrate in their own lives and choices, and that they transmit to students in authentic ways. The professional teacher creates an environment that allows individuals to follow paths that are individually fulfilling for them, above economic focus. Professional teachers expect to, and do make such choices for themselves as they make professionally fulfilling choices in regard to their practice and professional development.

*Diane McNally, first vice-president, Greater Victoria Teachers' Association.*

Recommended reading: John West-Burnham, *Education and Democracy*, University of Manchester monograph.

## Professional autonomy

By Eric Bonfield

Teachers enjoy teaching in an environment where we feel independent, self-directing, and able to exercise our judgment to meet the diverse needs of our students. As professionals, we feel oppressed when a single view of what it means to be a good teacher is imposed on us and we fear the loss of the rich variety of ways to educate individual students in our care. A dynamic and inherent tension between the public ethos that constrains our practice with standards, statutes, codes, and discipline exist on one hand as

# Professional autonomy

constraints. On the other hand, our creative and responsible risk-taking motivates and inspires us to meaningfully respond to the relational context that defines our practice.

This tension or contradiction between constraint and creativity is amplified when teachers as professionals become reflective practitioners. Teachers who reflect-in-action, question the definition of the task, the theories that they bring to it, and the measures of performance by which they are controlled. Teachers question these things because they can often include unsubstantiated public pressure, and school board, principal, or colleague decisions. Teachers challenge how these decisions become embedded expectations of their teaching practice as exemplified in the Surrey book-banning case. This form of critical thinking about teaching practice includes being critical of school- or district-wide patterns of selective inattention to the neediest students.

The idea of reflective practice can help to demystify the tension and contradictions that we feel as teaching professionals. As professionals, we claim specialized knowledge of teaching that is value-laden and evaluative in its orientation and as such is potentially coercive. The scope of our professional judgment is limited by uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and conflict. When research doesn't apply or sustain our practice needs, then the teacher can't legitimately claim to be an expert, but only prepared to reflect-in-action.

Teachers regard their teaching environments as unique and the application of standard theories or techniques are sometimes not useful. In the minutes that a teacher problem-solves with a student, they construct an understanding of the situation as they find it and therefore reframing it is essential. It is this act of reframing the problem and its solution as a reflective activity that transforms and buttresses our professional autonomy. The emerging picture of the professional teacher is one who balances the tension between the con-

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straints, values, and principles of society, with the autonomy necessary to foster responsible and relational risk-taking as reflective practitioners.

A useful tool appropriate to resolving the tension between freedom and responsibility, as autonomous professionals, is the establishment of appropriate forms of ethical interface. While significant aspects of professional practice should be guided by teachers reframing problems through reflective practice, a professional community is useful for creating, maintaining, and developing methods, standards, and norms for its ethical interface. Professional conversations are important to the

process of interpreting and understanding the unique and particular of practice over the universal claims of theory.

While it is important for teachers to guard against arbitrary restraints on their professional autonomy, it is equally important that teachers tolerate the statutory and ethical constraints imposed upon them as professionals. We are responsible to our profession and to ourselves as individuals, to encourage and nurture a dialogic understanding of our practice that recognizes the work that we do as theoretically guided and idiosyncratically inspired. Authentic professional conversations help us to support our interdependence as creators and guides to our independent practice as teachers. Our professional autonomy is built upon the language that we speak together that redescribes what we do as teachers and validates our self-conception and public persona as a distinct vocation worthy of professional status.

*Eric Bonfield, second vice-president, Surrey Teachers' Association.*

## Professional autonomy and coercive collaboration

Middle-school prep time, teaming, and ETS assessment for learning

**By David Futter**

The middle-school model contains many tensions for teachers and teacher autonomy. The principle of common planning time contains the idea of team collaboration. The issue is to maintain the balance between team collaboration and teacher professional autonomy. The current trend toward the use of assessment for learning methodology in decision-making has increased the pressure on teacher professional autonomy.

Middle-school teams meet to make decisions over curriculum, students' learning, and other team business. The smooth running of teams often requires that teachers come to a consensus or agreement over the decisions made in team meetings. In many cases, this process is the best scenario; however, there is the potential for coercive conduct or parameters to be put in place to develop "consensual" team decisions.

The new impetus of assessment for learning, of learning, and as learning, brings a new philosophical approach to decision-making. The appeal of assessment for learning is for more meaningful assessment and feedback to students and to reflect the current focus on a cognitive approach to learning. Assessment for learning is an attempt to move away from the positivistic approach of simply measuring learned skills and knowledge. The use of this new approach to assessment when required as a means of co-ordinating practice within a team and between teams in a middle

school has the effect of trying to standardize practice and force teachers to apply the same methodologies and assessment procedures in order to produce data—data that can be used to make team decisions.

As Lorna Earle has written, teachers understand that assessment has many purposes and goals. An individual teacher's use of assessment for learning, of learning, and as learning has professional autonomy embedded within it. The shift to team use of this approach belies the professional judgment of the teacher. It implies that the teacher's assessment contains too much subjectivity and we must have standard practices in which to make the judgments. It is usually at this point that the mantra of "best practices" is parlayed to

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coerce teachers into using the same evaluative procedures. The example of the school-wide write is a case in point. Teachers are to utilize the same topic and then mark together to ensure consistency. The performance standards are the benchmarks to guide assessment and the results should provide indicators of which the team will focus on in the coming school terms. It is a return to the old positivistic approach. So much for teacher autonomy in determining the instructional approach, direction, and assessment of students as guaranteed in the *School Act*.

The middle-school format of organizing students and teachers into teams can heighten the current management craze of directing teachers' practices, and is an infringement on their professional autonomy. Hidden within this practice of co-ordinated assessment of learning, for learning, and about learning, is a philosophy of education that is at odds with the rhetoric of progressive education. It is not about what is best for students, but what is best for administrators' control of teachers. The right wing ideology of accountability is the only collaborative goal here.

*David Futter teaches at Rockheights Middle School, Victoria.*

## Professional autonomy: Key to student success

**By Lise Tétrault**

When I first began my teacher training in the mid-1970s, I do not recall exploring the concept of "professional autonomy." Perhaps this is just a lapse in memory given my age! What I do recall is being taught that, as a teacher, I would be responsible for making decisions about how my students should

learn the curriculum content required by the Ministry of Education. I also remember the many hours spent learning about how students learn and how I, as a professional teacher, could apply this knowledge to my teaching in order to ensure that all my students would become successful learners. It is only within the last six years that I have actually been working as a teacher in the public school system. Now I recognize that professional autonomy is all of the above and more.

During the 1980s and 1990s, I was hired to do educational work for community organizations. I worked as a facilitator/trainer/counselor in settings where I was responsible for a variety of educational programs within the community. In all of these settings my employers not only encouraged me to make decisions about the learning needs of the people I was serving, they expected me to make decisions that would facilitate the learning for all the people we were serving. My effectiveness as a professional educator was directly dependent upon being given the time and the resources to develop programs that enabled people to become successful learners. For 20 years, I worked outside the public education system and came to believe in myself as a professional teacher.

For the past six years, I have worked as a middle-school teacher within the BC public education system. I find myself in a setting where I need to make decisions on a daily basis about the learning needs of my students, and plan how I am to meet those needs. My work as a teacher is far more demanding than the educational work I did during the 1980s and 1990s. Prior to becoming a middle-school teacher I assumed that schools would be

*How can such a coercive and prescriptive system promote and support the professionalism needed to meet the diverse learning needs of students?*

places where teachers would be given the time and the resources needed to meet the learning needs of students. Imagine my surprise as I find myself in a situation where: my professionalism is being curtailed and prescribed by an administrative system that seeks to cut back my already limited preparation time to half of what most middle-school teachers in BC are receiving; the system would mandate the assessment tools I should use to measure student progress; and, further, would prescribe the nature of my discussions with colleagues as I assess and plan for the learning needs of my students. How can such a coercive and prescriptive system promote and support the professionalism needed to meet the diverse learning needs of students?

Middle-school research has clearly demonstrated that professional autonomy is vital to the success of middle-school learners. The research further demonstrates that schools that provide insufficient planning time or seek to control teachers' planning time, limit the learning success of their students.

Teachers in these schools report that the consequences of not being treated as professionals include reductions in time available for communication with parents, for reflection upon the day's lessons in order to plan the most appropriate next step, for consultation with colleagues to learn from one-another's best practices, and collaboration with colleagues who teach the same students to ensure a consistent approach with students who may be struggling.

*Becoming a reflective practitioner and exercising my professional rights generates benefits. I have learned that when I stand firm in doing what I believe is right for my students, they become more successful learners.*

Becoming a reflective practitioner and exercising my professional rights generates benefits. I have learned that when I stand firm in doing what I believe is right for my students, they become more successful learners. The teaching profession expands the body of knowledge that informs individual teachers. Parent/teacher partnerships are strengthened. The community benefits from having more engaged citizens. Encouraging and supporting teachers in exercising their professional autonomy benefits us all.

*Lise Tétrault teaches French immersion at Shoreline Community School, Victoria.*

**“** The significance of active teacher autonomy in professional development opportunities cannot be overstated. In one study of teacher development, Sandholtz, (1999) found that experiences that provide teachers with autonomy, choice, and active participation were critical to effective professional development. Further, in many "collaborative" endeavours, the framing of research questions, data collection measures, and reporting of outcomes are dictated by those outside of classrooms who are often in positions of power (Erickson & Christman, 1996). Not only has teacher professional development been dictated by bureaucrats' voices within school systems, but also by those outside of schools within the higher education research community.

**”**  
- Burbank, M., & Kauchak, D. (2003). Collaborative action research: A new model for professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, p. 503, 19(5), 499-514.



## Teacher professional autonomy and accountability

By Paul Shaker

During March, I was invited by the Coalition for Public Education to tour British Columbia and keynote forums on education in four of our cities. The audiences included citizens at large, politicians, media, and officials from the member organizations of CFPE. As a topic, I chose to speak to these three questions:

- Why do we, educators, find ourselves at odds about education and accountability with many others in politics, media, and public life?
- Why are our motives continually questioned and our professional judgment overridden?
- Why is the foundational institution of public education subject to threats to its survival?

Continuing along these lines, in this article I wish to focus on how the issue of accountability interacts with our professional autonomy and identity.

In our recent book, *Reclaiming Education for Democracy* (Routledge, 2008), there is a lengthy discussion of the conflict between "advocates and authorities" regarding our public schools. I define authorities as expert practitioners and scholars in the profession. The "advocate" ranks include politicians, journalists, think-tank denizens, and other laypersons who self-appoint as spokespersons on education. In BC, obviously, Peter Cowley and The Fraser Institute are archetypal examples of this category. The editorial page of *The Vancouver Sun*, the leading proponent of Cowley's Report Card, is another. The "advocates" are hostile to teachers and our public schools for a variety of reasons. Some honestly believe the system is too closely held and would benefit from an infusion of "market competition." They may honestly adhere to notions about the magic of markets—even in light of the crashes of 2008. Some openly favour private schools and want to

see them receive increased tax dollars. Others are serving hidden agendas, such as boosting the fortunes of political parties that are antipathetic to teachers by weakening the progressive lobby that educators comprise. Another hidden agenda for some is the hope that they can profit from making public education dollars accessible to them through business activity. For others, their careers are tied up in promoting the free-market ideology as researchers and consultants.

Those with hidden agendas who seek to influence education from outside the profession are not compelled to honour the standards for ethical behaviour that apply to teachers. They have obligations as citizens, but these are little codified and unenforceable. They need not see education as a public good, for example, or the relationship between society and students as a sacred trust. They may not accept that our schools should function in a zone of protection, insulated from partisanship. They are not obliged to work toward equity and multiculturalism. If they choose to exploit our schools for political or financial gain, the only rules that pertain are those of the market—*caveat emptor*. Clearly, the difference in worldview and role between such persons and education

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professionals sets the stage for a good deal of conflict.

Once again, there are those whose advocacy is honourably motivated, with whom I may simply disagree. Here, the important factor to contemplate is their expertise. How much should their honest, but ungrounded opinions count for?

As the debate ripens in the public square, other unfortunate phenomena surface. I characterize these as the questioning of our motives and the overriding of our professional judgment. A continuing example of the former is the

# Paths to prof

repetitive criticism of teachers that they object to school rankings because they wish to be free of accountability. The discussion rarely goes beyond this insulting allegation as if it were true, *prima facie*. The question of whether the arbitrary and unscientific applications of test scores may not be a fair or accurate form of evaluation typically is not posed. Nor is the larger and graver issue: are our teachers actually such a scurrilous lot that they close ranks and protect their interests at all costs? I find this implication to be more than insulting. Non-professional persons typically make such allegations

**To amplify this explanation, I would assert that, for all our faults, educators as a group embody an emergent cultural change that threatens the dominant order. That is what it is to be progressive.**

without full awareness of the significance of what they are claiming. As a group, if we are putting our self-interest ahead of those we serve, we should be put out of our classrooms.

I also place in this category the minister of education's penchant for calling educators "irresponsible" as was done in December 2008 when a strong majority of teachers voted to boycott the FSA until school rankings were halted. The minister went on to allege that these actions were politically motivated to serve the opposition party. I was the recipient of the minister's wrath in an identical fashion when Shirley Bond labeled me "irresponsible" for my public admiration of the principled stance of Katherine Sihota in her act of civil disobedience with respect to testing that she thought was improperly conducted in Sooke. This name-calling is an *ad hominem* attack that does not provide a basis for policy debate and reformulation. Such methods of demeaning those who disagree are fair enough in politics, I suppose, after all, politics is not a profession.

As we know, the conflict has progressed and the Labour Relations Board has overridden the professional judgment of teachers with respect to resisting FSA/school rankings. The entire event signals the difficult position of professions in society. The teachers have expressed themselves repeatedly, and with one voice, in opposition to the abuse of the FSA and the politicians who govern our public schools have turned a deaf ear while attacking our character. Our motive is the welfare of BC's students. Educators are attending to the studied view of experts in testing and measurement. It is not educators who in this narrative are "irresponsible" or partisan. The critics and advocates should look in the mirror.

Finally, why is our institution, the public school system, under constant assault, and teachers, who are on one level among the most trusted of professionals, frequently besieged and disrespected? One straightforward explanation is that educators, as well as artists and liberal religious folk, are the bastions of progressivism in an era of conservative, free-market ascendancy. There are hopes the pendulum is swinging away from neoliberals, free marketeers, and

fundamentalists of all stripes, but if so we are emerging from a long, cold, ideological winter—particularly in our neighbour to the south. In this narrative, we are caught in a partisan battle that we cannot avoid; few of us could bear to be educators in an environment dominated by the philosophy of the political right. This includes the dominance of economics over spirituality in educational goals; a narrow form of unbridled and test-driven competition in schools; limited opportunity for students that is distributed along class and racial lines; and a skeptical view of the nature of children and learning that is characterized by concepts such as "the empty vessel" and "original sin."

To amplify this explanation, I would assert that, for all our faults, educators as a group embody an emergent cultural change that threatens the dominant order. That is what it is to be progressive. When a person makes the commitment to work in a human service profession that is modestly compensated, he or she is making a statement of values—a commitment to personal meaning and humane association at a cost in material earnings. I think we are so suffused with meaning in education that we tend to take this experience for granted. We never have to ask the question of whether our work is constructive and humane. Alternately, we don't go home at night with feelings of guilt that we cleverly exploited the unwary for our personal profit or served to advantage some group over another as a paid hack. The service role is true for many others in society, but teachers are the largest, most visible representation of such alternative values. As such, we are a threat to the materialist model that a person's value is measured by their pocketbook and one's success is synonymous with how much they earn. How many of us were told when they entered education as a career that they were wasting their talents? I was.

But the earth has shifted under our feet in the past year. The free market has failed and a new order of politics is emerging. The values teachers represent offer a promising alternative to the era that is ending and the pendulum of accountability is swinging back on those who launched it.

Paul Shaker, PhD, is professor and former dean of education at Simon Fraser University. See his television program featuring BC educators at [www.youreducationmatters.ca](http://www.youreducationmatters.ca)

For other publications visit [www.paulshaker.com](http://www.paulshaker.com)

## A beginning teacher speaks about professional autonomy after spending a year teaching in England

By Debra Swain

A conversation in the staffroom of my school with beginning teacher Caitlin Kyle, clarified for me why teachers in BC are so adamant about protecting and enhancing their professional autonomy. Kyle spent last year teaching in London, England as a teacher teaching on

call. There were many striking differences between her experiences as a pre-service teacher in British Columbia and her year teaching in London schools. She agreed to work with me to write about some of her experiences.

The UK National Curriculum is heavily prescriptive. Teachers are expected to follow strict guidelines and to submit detailed lesson plans to their administrators for every subject. While the lesson plans describe step-by-step procedures for delivering the curriculum, Kyle found them limiting and frustrating to deliver. Lessons would usually include a 5-minute introduction, a 15-minute lesson on a concept delivered by the teacher, and 15 to 20 minutes of independent seat work, often from a worksheet provided by the national curriculum. Math lessons followed the same format for every concept. Kyle had been taught to integrate the learning outcomes to meet students' needs and interests. There was little opportunity for her to exercise this kind of judgment in the UK system.

Fortunately, Kyle was contracted for a period of time at a progressive primary school. She described her first-hand experiences with one class where she was able to use her skills in hands-on learning and integrating curriculum as follows:

**My experiences teaching in London, England, for a year, and arriving back to Canada amidst heavy discussion about the disadvantages of FSA testing and how teachers in BC must hold on to their professional autonomy have only strengthened my position on these issues.**

"Retaining professional autonomy is something that I feel very strongly about, particularly because I have taught in a system where it is not as highly valued or respected. My experiences teaching in London, England, for a year, and arriving back to Canada amidst heavy discussion about the disadvantages of FSA testing and how teachers in BC must hold on to their profession-



Caitlin Kyle

# Professional autonomy



Caitlin Kyle's classroom while teaching a unit on Canada.

al autonomy have only strengthened my position on these issues. I have realized how lucky we are in BC to have a curriculum that is left open for some interpretation, and teachers are allowed to teach as they see fit, integrating subjects and topics that interest students and planning for more creative instruction. In many classrooms that I visited while teaching on call in London, the majority of student work was very worksheet-based, heavy on seatwork, and giving students little opportunity for creative thought or hands-on instruction.

During my experiences, I had a moment of clarity when teaching a Year 2 science lesson (equivalent to Grade 1 in BC). The class had been learning about electricity, and the task for that day's science lesson was to create a simple circuit with a battery, two wires, and a light bulb. I feel passionately about hands-on instruction and allowing students to learn by doing, so that day I decided I would take a risk. Rather than going to the normal method of instruction I had observed in many schools where the teacher demonstrates and students copy, I decided to give students the materials and let them figure it out for themselves. I placed students in pairs, handed out equipment, and explained that they needed to figure out how to light up the light bulb.

Student reaction was overwhelmingly positive. My class was transformed. I watched as every single student was extremely engaged in the task at hand, and suddenly there were little to no classroom management problems and I was free to circulate the room and observe the students working. Rather than passively receiving information or copying a teacher demonstrating, my students were learning by discovering things for themselves. No one became frustrated because they couldn't figure it out. All students stuck to their task and allowed natural curiosity to take over.

This was an incredible first-hand experience of how professional autonomy, allowing for more creative instruction, can be a tremendous factor in student success. However, I was lucky because the school I was teaching in at the time was one where creative planning and instruction were not only valued by the teachers, but also appreciated by administration.

I also implemented these strategies while teaching a unit on Canada that my class presented at an assembly. This allowed me to not only teach a subject I was comfortable with and passionate about, but also allowed my students to learn about a topic that they wouldn't otherwise. By integrating

subjects, I found a place for it in the curriculum, and creatively planned a successful unit. While my experience at this particular school was very positive, I have also seen the tremendously negative affects of professional autonomy being taken away from teachers. It was frustrating to teach in a system where curriculum was forced upon teachers and where students become less engaged with resulting lower achievement. I sincerely hope that in BC we never get that far."

Kyle and I spoke of many other differences between the BC and UK education systems. We both believe that the BC education system is superior in many ways and that there is much to protect. The BCTF works to defend teachers' professional autonomy so that we can continue to teach to our students interests and needs, while meeting the prescribed learning outcomes. As a profession, we need to work together to ensure our views are heard on the issues of prescriptive curriculum and high-stakes testing. Our students deserve an education system that is responsive to their needs and interests, and that will prepare them for what ever future lies ahead.

*Debra Swain is a member of the BCTF Program for Quality Teaching and Teacher Inquiry Committee and a learning support teacher at Sundance Elementary, Victoria. Caitlin Kyle is a teacher teaching on call, Victoria.*

## The professional model

*By Viva Moodley*

Can you imagine what a bureaucratic nightmare the \$4 billion educational system would be if it were not for teachers?

Teachers give the system a human face with how they act toward students, parents, and colleagues. Teachers resist the bureaucracy imposed on them by the educational system. As professionals, we are always cognizant of our students' needs, which come first in our minds.

One of the clauses in the collective agreement that teachers use in making decisions is that of Professional Autonomy. In our collective agreement the clause reads:

*"Article F.4: Professional Autonomy  
F.4.1 Teachers shall, within the bounds of this Agreement and consistent with the requirements of the prescribed curriculum, have individual professional autonomy so long as it is consistent with effective*

educational practice.

"This autonomy may be exercised in determining the methods of instruction, and the planning, presentation, and evaluation of course materials in the classes to which they are assigned."

There have been many attacks on the professional autonomy of teachers, e.g., class size, but teachers continue to make professional decisions every day. This article remains a powerful tool provided that teachers do not shy away from utilizing it.

A number of years ago, I went to the principal in my school requesting that he make decisions for me, the content of which escapes me right now. His reply was that the board paid me a lot of money to make that decision. I've never looked back. It was a seminal moment for me when I came to the realization that as a professional these were my duties.

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I found an article that crystallized this issue for me in a report presented to the BCTF Annual General Meeting in March of 1995 called, "BCTF Task Force on Changing Roles and Responsibilities of School Personnel." See below.

The question one should ask is, Which kind of school would I like to work in—a hierarchical/bureaucratic model or a professional model? For me there is no hesitation, I am not a teacher technician but a professional.

It remains up to teachers to exercise their professional autonomy. I guard mine jealously.

*Viva Moodley teaches at Oaklands Elementary School, Victoria.*

## BCTF Task Force on the Changing Roles and Responsibilities of School Personnel, 1995 AGM

### The hierarchical/bureaucratic model

- Formal authority of administration emphasized
- Administrators set direction, teachers follow
- Teacher compliance with rules an objective
- Teacher loyalty to administration promoted
- Constant monitoring of teacher compliance
- Top-down restructuring and management
- Teacher jobs routinized, limited skills required
- Students processed and credentialled
- Standardized student project an objective
- Layers or regulations and overseers
- Little investment in professional development
- Collegial consultation not important
- Teachers accountable to management
- Change, innovation, controlled
- Individual risk-taking discouraged
- Teachers not regarded as professionals
- Teachers treated as rule-directed employees
- Teachers given influence but little authority

- Decisions made by those furthest from action
- Increasing use of non- and paraprofessionals
- Growth in administration
- Teacher salaries and benefits under attack
- Working conditions considered unimportant
- Collegiality not encouraged

### The professional model

- Teachers trusted as professionals
- Teacher knowledge, skills acknowledged
- Teachers accountable to their profession
- Atmosphere of critical inquiry
- Collective, collegial dialogue
- Teachers have real authority
- Professional discretion allowed
- Focus on student needs not rules
- Teachers responsible for whole school
- Teachers/parents working relationship
- Students active participants in learning
- Students prepared for active citizenship
- Collaborative school culture
- Collegial decision making
- Conflict resolution styles implemented
- Control relinquished by administrators
- Restructuring is bottom-up
- Teachers well-paid, trained, qualified
- Teacher differences honoured
- Administration supports teachers
- Workload, health, burnout considered
- Morale, job satisfaction important
- Professional development important
- Teachers support need for coordination

FSA testing that some see as a tool to destabilize the entire public school system and demoralize those who work in it.

I see this very clearly in my work with student teachers. These novices enter the classroom with the basic goal of delivering a lesson, often unaware of the routines, procedures, and habits that the sponsor teacher has set up to make the class function effectively. These routines are a silent but crucial underlying structure in our classes, not unlike the other layers at the school, district, and provincial level which likewise assist with structuring our experience. We may not, in some cases, even know they exist, but they are the legacy of educators before us as they built a system to support their work.

In my career, I have been able to operate fairly autonomously, but certainly there have been times I've felt constrained in my ability to operate as I've wished. This is no different I think from most professionals; we have a Code of Ethics; we have obligations as employees; and there are expectations on us as teachers to act and behave in the public eye in a proper manner. We can debate the details, but the macro structure is a much longer discussion should we want to change that one. Generally, I've found most administrators amenable to discussions around how I perform my task. I've tried my best to build the relationships in good times such that when difficult discussions are needed the trust is there.

If there were to be a threat to autonomy, I believe it would be the dangerous trend of speaking of autonomy in the reflexive manner we often use. What typically happens is a reference to autonomy when freedom has been threatened, a knee-jerk reaction that is too passive and reactionary. Such a strategy takes away our strength as a knowledgeable voice, which can articulate positive, proactive measures that strengthen a fully funded public education system as an integral part of a democratic society.

To preserve the autonomous nature of our profession, what we need to do is claim more of the landscape and dictate the way it will be discussed and described. In the words of Ted Koppel, "those who name it and frame it, claim it."

landscape and dictate the way it will be discussed and described. In the words of Ted Koppel, "those who name it and frame it, claim it." It behooves us as professionals to continue creating a powerful, forward-thinking vision of ourselves and the task we do, at zone meetings, RAs, AGMs, and in our own staffrooms. This work is not easy, and will come from the work of all teachers in meaningful dialogue with one another about this important topic.

Ron Sherman is a member of the BCTF Program for Quality Teaching and Teacher Inquiry Committee and teaches at Adam Robertson Elementary School, Creston Valley.

# REGENERATION

## Regeneration, energetic debate, and demonstrable action at this year's AGM

**By Susan Fonseca**

One of the rites of spring for BCTF members is our Annual General Meeting. This year was the 93rd time that teachers representing locals around the province have dedicated part of their spring break to conducting the business of the Federation. Each spring, the AGM develops policy, sets the BCTF fees for the following year, and elects the new Executive.

Almost 700 BCTF members represented their locals, and it was truly heartening to see the new energy and generational change on the floor this year. As many long time stalwarts announced their impending retirements, a new generation of delegates was taking their place at the mics.

At the first evening session, Jim Sinclair brought greetings from the BC Federation of Labour, Barry O'Neill brought greetings from CUPE, and Connie Denesiuk spoke on behalf of the BC School Trustees Association.

After several amendments (and amendments to the amendments), the AGM adopted the Leadership Report that established the priorities for the Federation for 2009–10 to be:

- To ensure that each member has a copy of their collective agreement.
- To actively involve members in preparations for the next round of bargaining including the training of bargainers, with the intent to improve working conditions, salary and benefits, and health and welfare of teachers, and undertaking actions that will provide a greater scope for bargaining at the local level.
- To enhance the professional lives and ensure the professional rights of teachers by strengthening and

- supporting professional autonomy, professional development, and the influence of teachers on education policy and practice.
- To achieve equity in our schools by:
    - supporting the full implementation of employment equity provisions of the collective agreement.
    - participating in action plans on social justice initiatives launched by our community partners.
    - strengthening our social justice networks.
  - To advocate for increased funding for public education and an end to privatization.
  - To engage members in an education and consultation process regarding the strengthening of their pension plan and soliciting member input into major issues facing the plan.

**Almost 700 BCTF members represented their locals, and it was truly heartening to see the new energy and generational change on the floor this year. As many long time stalwarts announced their impending retirements, a new generation of delegates was taking their place at the mics.**

Between the nine sessions on the floor over the four-day meeting, teachers met in their various caucuses—Aboriginal, Feminist, Teachers Teaching on Call, Social Justice—to discuss their issues and strategies to support proposed resolutions.

Teachers strongly supported the Executive's recommendation to withdraw from the premier's Learning Round Table. Speaking to the recommendation, President Irene Lanzinger stated that after 12 meetings of what has essentially been a PR exercise for the government, there has been "no progress, in fact things are worse than in 2005." Given the government's "gag law" under Bill 42, it made sense to make this public statement demonstrating teachers' widespread frustration with the futility of Bill 33 just before a provincial election.

On Monday, guest speaker Joy MacPhail spoke about the international work she has been doing since retiring from BC politics, emphasizing that, "Illiteracy of the population is becoming a weapon for those who would oppose democracy and that is why I am visiting these countries and fighting so hard to make education a top priority." With respect to the home front, she recounted how when she had challenged Gordon Campbell on his short-sighted tax cuts after first forming government and how that would impact public services, he had told her, "Don't worry your pretty little head about it, Joy."

When she had raised the government's lack of commitment to funding Bill 33 and how this would still result in oversized classes, she was told in the legislature that "that would never happen." Finally, she encouraged teachers by affirming that "Democracy can only prevail and be entrenched through a strong education system. The community looks to teachers for strength and guidance...to keep the democratic process healthy."

This encouragement to speak out hit a strong chord with the AGM, and delegates enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to "Take it to the Streets" in a lunch-hour demonstration on Monday. We picked up our box lunches and demonstration signs and headed out to our assigned downtown street corners to "Burma shave" the

public and talk to passersby about inadequate funding for public education. At every busy intersection, people took our *Numbers Tell the Story* leaflets and cars honked in support of our message of underfunding for public education.

This was not only a rare opportunity for fresh air and exercise for AGM delegates, but a concrete reminder to us all that the public genuinely welcomes our message as the professionals who deliver this important service for their children and grandchildren. We returned even more energized and determined to work hard to expand our message to the public.

*Susan Fonseca is president of the Langley Teachers' Association.*

## Key decisions of the 2009 AGM

In setting course for next year, the 2009 AGM made a number of decisions on future directions. Prominent amongst these was a vote to leave the Learning Round Table, which has failed to provide any support or resources needed to improve the teaching and learning conditions in BC classrooms. Related to this decision, a recommendation was adopted asking locals to undertake an audit of specialist services and staffing resources needed for September 2009 to support the submission of needs budgets to the provincial government.

The campaign opposing the census administration of the FSA will continue with a call upon the government to implement a two-year moratorium on all standardized tests including the Grade 10, 11, and 12 provincial

exams. Additionally, the government will be asked to establish a Testing and Assessment Task Force to examine existing provincial and local assessment instruments and practices.

Bargaining was a major item of discussion affirming the need to re-establish full, free, and local collective bargaining. A planning framework was approved that involves an examination of benefits, prep time, and strategies, with a timeline for a report back to the Winter 2009 RA.

Teachers teaching on call were active in voicing their concerns on availability of work, call-out procedures, and the reasons for retired teachers returning to work as TTOCs. The BCTF will investigate and make recommendations for addressing these issues, with a report back to the 2010 AGM.

Full, equitable provision of Kindergarten programs based on sound, early-learning principles and a broad-based curriculum, dovetailing with community childcare and government services, was recommended. The frequency, scope, and quantity of IRP and Prescribed Learning Outcome revisions will be examined by the BCTF, and recommendations brought back to the Fall RA. In addition, the protection of teacher autonomy was highlighted in motions advising members not to be engaged in any action or decision that impinges on the professional judgment of teachers, particularly in regard to pedagogical practice, assessment, and reporting.

The need to further enhance responsible investing of the Teachers' Pension Plan was affirmed.

It was also resolved that the BCTF investigate possible alternatives using technology systems that

would reduce the use of paper at all major BCTF functions with a report back to the 2009 Fall RA.

The AGM delegates elected the new BCTF Executive Committee for 2009–10: President Irene Lanzinger (Vancouver), 1st Vice-president Susan Lambert (Burnaby), 2nd Vice-president Jim Iker (Burns Lake), Members-at-large: Michelle Davies (Central Okanagan), Rick Guenther (Abbotsford), Glen Hansman (Vancouver), Jill McCaffery (Mt. Arrowsmith), Teri Mooring (Quesnel), Fred Robertson (Vancouver Island North), Christine Stewart (Vancouver), and Robert Tarswell (Princeton).

**BCTF Honorary Life Memberships** were awarded to: Susan Crowley (Prince Rupert), Veronica DeLorme (Prince Rupert), Chris Johns (Cranbrook), and Ken Novakowski (BCTF executive director).

**The GA Fergusson Memorial Award** was presented to Elsie McMurphy (Saanich) and the **Stewart Schon Health & Safety Award** was presented to Lynne Sinclair (Surrey).

**Recommendation 21(a)—Membership fee** was passed:

That for the 2009–10 membership year, the fee for those who are members under By-law 1.1(a) shall be 1.45% of the actual salary of the member, allocated as follows:

- 1.31% General operating fund
- 0.07% Collective Bargaining Defence Fund
- 0.04% Public Education Defence Fund
- 0.02% Provincial Bargaining Fund
- 0.01% Contingency Fund

except that the fee for active members who are teachers teaching on call shall be 0.36% of the actual salary of the member allocated in the same ratio as above.

—David Denyer



Above: 2009-10 Executive Committee (back l-r) Glen Hansman, Christine Stewart, Robert Tarswell, Teri Mooring, Fred Robertson, (front l-r) Jill McCaffery, Jim Iker, Irene Lanzinger, Susan Lambert, Michelle Davies, Rick Guenther is missing from photo. Middle: The Stewart Schon Health & Safety Award was presented to Lynne Sinclair pictured with Stewart's wife, Kathy Town, and Irene Lanzinger; the GA Fergusson Memorial Award winner Elise McMurphy. Top: Delegates voting.

GEOFF PETERS and ALISTAIR EAGLE PHOTOS

## Table talk and unfinished business at the AGM

By Paul Steer

For any teacher who attends their first AGM, there is one part of the total sensory experience that is even more commonplace than the sound of the chairperson's gavel on the side of the rostrum—it's the constant, ineluctable sound of what most delegates and all chairpersons refer to as "table talk." On the first Saturday evening session of the Annual General Meeting, table talk begins about 6:45 p.m., as delegates file into the ballroom and settle in at whatever table their local has been assigned. And it doesn't stop until the final gavel falls on the 7th or 8th subsequent sessions on Tuesday afternoon or evening. Talk. That's what comes second most naturally to teachers.

Clearly, table talk is definitely not a problem in the minutes leading up to the Call to Order, which is usually signified by the chair ringing one of those black-handled school bells formerly used in one-room school houses across North America. (It's true that many of these bells are still used by Boards of Education as uninspired retirement gifts for teachers who then book September ocean cruises for the express purpose of flinging these bells, finally and permanently, into the seamless depths).

But a wise chairperson who presides over the BCTF Annual General Meeting knows that theirs is the mediator's role, and that no amount of bell-ringing, gavel knocking, verbal prompting, reminding, or scolding will ever eliminate table talk completely. In fact, table talk is as necessary to the success of the AGM as public education is to the success of a society.

It's true, the AGM could be arranged very differently to minimize table talk. Seating could be arranged so that delegates sit on chairs in rows behind tables, all facing the same direction. This silent, yet powerful arrangement is often used at meetings of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, where delegates from BC, Canada's western-most educational jurisdiction (except for the Yukon), usually end up seated in the back-row, staring at the backs of everyone else's head. Could this have been an unconscious factor in our collective decision to leave the CTF, (at least for now)? Does our seating assignment at CTF AGMs remind us too much of being students seated in rows at school?

Another arrangement might involve seating delegates in concentric circles like they do at the premier's annual Teachers' Congress. Individual delegates are seated according to a pre-determined, seemingly random plan. Circles, powerful and symbolic constructs, can be very effective in promoting communication, but also very effective in stifling it. And at the congress, many are very aware of how little table talk there has been there.

With seating taken care of, attention could focus on the agenda, the idea being to replace the usual business of Executive Committee recommendations and local resolutions, finance, and leadership reports with more speeches from distinguished guests, inspirational videos featuring some of the candidates running for elected BCTF office, and other, mainly visual—stuff. These elements can be powerful limiters of table talk, especially when they are presented immediately after lunch or dinner.

Each of these changes would

probably need the full attention of most of the governing bodies of the BCTF to bring them into effect and each one would have its own potential to come to awful fruition in a variety of unexpected ways. Perhaps it's best not to consider any of them.

But the main question is—doesn't table talk interfere with the conduct and business of the meeting? Look at all of the unfinished business the 2009 AGM didn't deal with? Half a dozen or so Executive Committee recommendations and over three score more local resolutions either referred back to the EC or beamed up to the Representative Assembly via the saving use of an Omnibus motion, usually moved by the chairperson of the Reports and Resolutions Committee.

I put the question to Truls Asdal, chairperson of the committee, who laughed heartily and offered this assurance: "There's only so much business that the AGM can conduct each year in the time allowed for it, and there's no way to limit or restrict the number of resolutions coming forward, so the committee tries to make sure that what needs to be dealt with is dealt with."

So there isn't actually a direct connection between table talk and the amount of AGM business that eventually gets done.

"Not really."

"In fact, when a resolution comes forward and is projected onto the overhead screens, it often triggers a lot of discussion among delegates along the lines of, 'What's this one about? Many delegates decide how they're going to vote based upon what they hear in the debates and discuss with other delegates at their tables."

"You mean, not every delegate prepares for the AGM by studying the reports and resolutions document for weeks and weeks ahead of the AGM?"

More laughter.

For many delegates attending the AGM, table talk is actually an educational experience. As teachers engage in their second most natural activity, it is still possible for the business of the AGM to continue to be dealt with—in the "fullness of time" as the politicians are wont to say.

From this, teachers attending the AGM can be confident that even though they may be engaging in off-task behaviour—table talk—and have the sound of the chairperson's amplified gavel ringing in their ears, that they're not wasting their time: just positioning themselves to engage in that which comes to them most naturally—learning.

*Paul Steer is 2nd vice-president, Delta Teachers' Association.*

## Tutors can't replace teachers

Of course, peer tutors can't replace teachers. Why then did a local bring a motion to the 2008 BCTF AGM reminding us of that obvious reality?

The Surrey Teachers' Association identified a problem. They said that "many schools have come to depend upon peer-tutoring programs as a means of coping with a chronically underfunded public education system." Some schools seem to be using tutors to replace the hiring of adequate numbers of teachers and/or special education assistants.

They wanted you to ensure that if you use peer tutors, that the use is justifiable on the educational merits and is ethically defensible. As well, their use must be demonstrably based on sound pedagogical principles.

That's the message the STA and the AGM was sending to all members.

*—Larry Kuehn*

# New teachers' conference

By Moh Chelali

"Teaching from the heart and building for the future" was the 2009 theme of the BCTF new teachers' conference. More than 350 new teachers and student teachers attended this year's conference. New teachers represent the renewal of our profession and their needs and interests are of utmost importance to our society.

The BCTF designs this conference to welcome, support, and guide new teachers entering the profession. It is one of the finest professional development events that one can attend. The conference is always popular because almost all the presenters are active classroom teachers and they volunteer their time and energy to share their passion and knowledge with their colleagues. The needs of beginning teachers are different as they enter the era of teaching in the digital age. Beginning teachers not only require initial assistance, advice, and information, but also need ongoing support during their first few years of teaching.

This conference was designed to explore best teaching practices, current challenges, research, and innovation. It is always the BCTF's goal to offer workshops that are interactive, collaborative, practical, analytical, and cover a range of teachers' needs from elementary to secondary. They are also designed to cover different subjects and topics.

The 2008 conference featured presentations on BCTF services and interests such as wellness, pensions, communication, the collective agreement, research, classroom management, integrating students with special needs, student assessment, teaching and learning with technology, and working with parents.

Who are the best teachers of teachers? Teachers of course—just ask them about their own learning. Who inspired them to become teachers? Who helped them when they became teachers? To whom do they constantly turn for advice?

Where do they get many of their ideas? The most common answer is almost universal—other teachers. And this is why the whole theme of the BCTF conference was teaching from the heart and building for the future.

Most attendees affirmed that they have gained a great deal of advice, instruction, strategies, and practical ideas that they can use directly in their classes. Teaching is a never-ending story—it is a journey of passion and hope.

Beginning teachers teach from the heart—they are the new guides not only to teach but also to stimulate and motivate. They know how to instill in the minds of the citizens of tomorrow the love of learning and the passion of education and social justice.

*Moh Chelali, assistant director, BCTF Professional and Social Issues Division.*

## Why did you choose to be a teacher?



**Vikki Cheng**  
Delta

I chose to become a teacher because since I reached an age where I could make decisions on my own, divine providence continuously pointed me in this direction.

As I considered my career options during my many years of university experiences, my lucky stars shaped me into an emotionally stable, introspective person. Through the years, many people commented on my suitability for this career... confirmation that this was a good fit.



**Michela Chicanot**  
Burnaby

Enseigner c'est "avoir le courage," le courage de faire une différence, le courage de prendre des risques, le courage de s'affronter soi-même et les défis. Tout cela je l'ai appris à braves les enfants. Ils n'ont donné le courage de faire face à n'importe quelle situation. C'est cela, l'enseignement a cheminement qui ne fait jamais et un beau voyage remplis de belles surprises.



**Amanda Schmidt**  
Surrey

Ever since I was in Kindergarten, I have looked up to my teachers and loved school. I can still remember when my Kindergarten teacher asked me, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I immediately said, "A teacher, just like you!" Since a very young age I have stayed in touch with my teachers. Seventeen years later my dream came true. I got accepted into the education program at UBC. Currently, I am a teacher on call in the Surrey district. I am finally living my dream and working with children of all ages. Teaching is the most rewarding profession.

**Robin Kimmie**  
Princeton

I can't say why I chose to be a teacher, it was always what I was going to be. But now that I am a teacher, I know why I love it so much. Everyday, the children teach me how to appreciate and live in the moment. They push me to learn more about education, myself, and those around me. They remind me to be present and to value the things that really matter.

**Simmy Mukhija**  
Comox Valley

I didn't choose to be a teacher, it chose me. For many years my friends and family told me I would be a great teacher but I tend to go against the grain. Overall, working with people is where I excel. I am extremely interested in building strong relationships, promoting health and wellness, and being an advocate for education. In the end, teaching was the perfect fit...and it chose me.

**Walter Rosin**  
Burnaby

Through high school and university, I worked at a day camp and as a swim instructor. I enjoyed those years teaching and working with youth. After graduation, I worked as an engineer, but I found this occupation unfulfilling. After some soul searching I decided to pursue a profession in education. I believe that as a classroom teacher, I can make a direct impact on the future lives of young people and improve the community where we live.

**What was the funniest experience in your first year of teaching or practicum?**



**Tracy Godfrey**  
Chilliwack

I was starting a new "family life" unit in Health and Career Education 8, which encompasses sex education. I was sitting on a stool in front of the class introducing the unit to them, while holding copies of the worksheets we would be completing. I am very expressive and use my hands a lot while speaking and a male student at the back of the room burst out laughing. I inquired as to what was so entertaining and he informed me that one of the double-sided sheets in my hands had a diagram of the male reproductive organs and my expressive nature was causing the "penis" on the paper to bob up and down! I had a good laugh with the class and no longer hold onto sheets when talking—you never know what's on the other side.

**William Gogag**  
Smithers

My funniest moment in teaching was during my first year. It's the second week in the first semester. The last bell had rung and I was about to take attendance, every student had stopped talking except for one student who by now knew what I expected of every student. I had tried every tool from my toolbox of teacher training to get this student to stop talking but this student was a social butterfly that could connect with any student that he sat beside. On this day I had waited, looking directly at the student and thought to myself what do I do, at that moment I couldn't help but start to smile and then snicker and then I started to laugh, at that moment one of the quiet students stood up and pointed at me and directed the noisy student "look at what you did, you made Mr. Gogag laugh" and the noisy student stopped talking to take a look. From that day class would start with the anticipation of the noisy student making me laugh but how could I laugh when the student who was noisy would stay focused on me every class? Laugh when there is nothing to smile about and who knows what it might cure.

**Jennifer Johns**  
Cranbrook

My first year of teaching was in a Grade 1 class. One day, near the end of the day, a boy came over and said "Miss Johns, there's a poop on the carpet." I, of course, denied the possibility that such a deposit could have been dropped, but, as I investigated further, sure enough, there it was, in all its glory. After explaining the day's exciting events to my colleagues, they welcomed me to the profession and said I had been officially initiated. I never did figure out which pair of pants the special deposit had been shaken out of!

**Robin Kimmie**  
Princeton

We were in the gym. One of the students was asked to leave and sit in the corridor that connected the gym to the hall. When I went to speak to him he was hanging upside down off of the water fountain, head back, mouth wide open wailing. I knelt down beside the upside down wailer just as a wide-eyed parent peered through the window. At that point I started to laugh and wonder how I had come to this place in my life.

# Reading between the lines

What the Ministry of Education doesn't tell us about education funding

**By Margaret White**

On March 3, 2009, Minister of Education Shirley Bond stated in a letter to the editor of the *Castlegar News*, "Over the next three years, the education budget will increase another \$114 million bringing the total education budget to \$5.23 billion at the end of 2011-12."

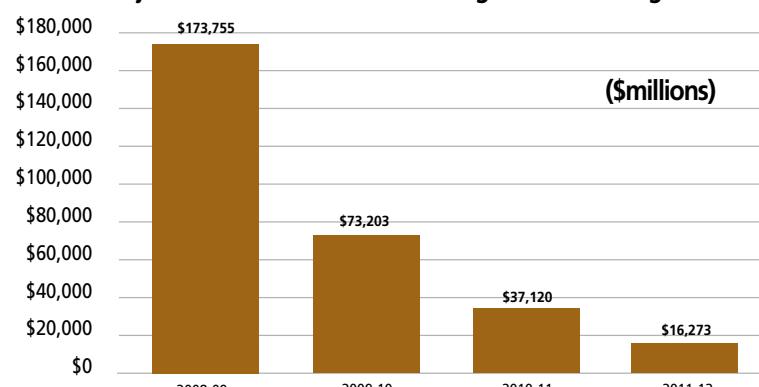
What the minister doesn't say is that the year-to-year increase in funding for education programs fell from \$173.7 million in 2008-09 to \$73 million in 2009-10, with plans to cut funding increases in half for each of the following two years. The ministry's three-year plan shows year-to-year funding increases for education programs dropping to \$16.3 million by 2011-12.

What does the future hold for K-12 funding?

The three-year plan in the *2009-10 Operating Grants Estimates* manual reveals the ministry's plan to freeze operating grants in 2010-11 and 2011-12. This means none of the minimal funding increases planned for education programs in these years will go to K-12 operating grants.

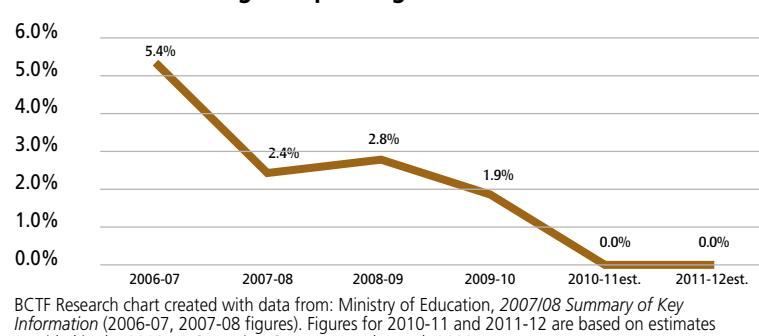
Chart 2 shows the percent change

**Chart 1: Projected annual increase in funding: Education Programs**



BCTF Research chart created with data from Ministry of Education. Briefing Material for 2009/10 Estimates for Education Partners Group, February 18, 2009. Figures calculated for the 2008-09 increase from data in the Budget 2008 Ministry of Education Service Plan, p. 22

**Chart 2: Percent change in Operating Grants and estimates to 2011-12**



BCTF Research chart created with data from: Ministry of Education, 2007/08 Summary of Key Information (2006-07, 2007-08 figures). Figures for 2010-11 and 2011-12 are based on estimates provided in the 2009-10 Operating Grants Manual, March 2009, p. 1.

in operating grants since 2006-07 is decreasing steadily to zero by 2010-11. This will leave districts with no additional funds to cover cost pressures such as inflation, negotiated salary increases, and other downloaded costs. For example, in 2010-11 negotiated salary increases will total at least \$50 million. With no increase in the district operating grants, many boards of education will face severe shortfalls.

How much did the 2009-10 operating grant increase since 2008-09?

The Ministry of Education announced an increase of \$84.4 million in total operating grants for 2009-10. But the amount allocated to districts in the 2009-10 operating grant estimates increases by \$66.2 million since 2008-09, after accounting for the \$12.6 million Summer Learning allocation in the 2008-09 recalculated operating grants. The remainder of the \$84.4 million increase reported in the media is in the \$71 million holdback for 2009-10.

Districts will receive some of the holdback funds after the September 30 enrolment count. In 2008-09, about \$47.5 of the \$84.5 million holdback was released to districts after the September 30 enrolment recalculation. But boards must plan in April and submit a balanced budget by June 30, based on the

\$53.6 million increase in the 2009-10 operating grants estimates. No funding increase for 34 school districts in 2009-10

Over half of BC school districts, mostly in rural areas, will receive no increase to their 2009-10 operating grants. Many of these districts faced budget challenges or shortfalls in 2008-09 due to inadequate funding. For example, in a recent Columbia Institute study, the Kootenay-Columbia district reported a \$2.18 million shortfall for 2008-09, resulting in a \$1.9 million reduction in education services.

Not enough to cover labour settlement costs

Labour settlement costs make up a key component of the operating grants. These are costs that the provincial government has negotiated and is committed to fund. A recent report by the Columbia Institute showed that in 2008-09 all but two school districts faced a decrease in discretionary funding because the \$122 million increase in the 2008-09 operating grant was not sufficient to cover the \$137 million increase in labour settlement funding. Some secretaries-treasurers reported that their district used up surpluses to cover the shortfall while some reduced services and/or other expenditures.

For a copy of the report, go to: <http://tinyurl.com/da2c7z>

The same situation will arise in 2009-10. The \$84.4 million increase in the operating grant is not enough to cover the \$100 million increase in labour settlement costs. This amount falls at least \$16 million short. The amount of the shortfall depends on how much of the holdback is released during the school year and whether the funds can be applied to increased labour settlement costs.

Boards of education that used existing surpluses to deal with a shortfall in 2008-09 will not have those funds to fall back on in 2009-10. Districts that reduced educational services to make up for a shortfall in 2008-09 will face more drastic cuts in 2009-10 and subsequent years.

Inflation erodes education funding

The minister of education has also stated in the media that education funding has increased by almost one billion dollars since 2001. While it is true that funding in current dollars increased by about this amount, it is inflation-adjusted dollars that really count. Boards of education make decisions based on

the real purchasing power of their budget allocations.

Using the Bank of Canada inflation calculator, \$4.40 billion is needed in February 2009 to purchase goods and services that cost \$3.79 billion (the amount of the 2001-02 operating grant) in February 2002. In constant (inflation-adjusted) dollars, the \$4.47 billion in the 2008-09 operating grant represents an increase of about \$70 million dollars since 2002. This falls well short of what is needed to

**The enrolment decline in recent years provided an opportunity for the government to address unmet needs in the education system. For example, they could have ensured all classes met legislated limits for class size and composition, and met more fully the needs of special education students. Instead, funding increases over the past decade barely kept pace with inflation.**

cover negotiated salary increases that the government is committed to fund and the cost of new initiatives and other downloaded costs.

The enrolment decline supplement does not solve the problem

The Minister of Education conveys the message that funding is especially generous, considering the decline in student enrolment over the past several years. For example, student enrolment is expected to decline by about 7,000 students in 2009-10. This is an average of about 115 students per district, and about 5 students per school. Districts say schools have fixed costs that are not easily adjusted in the short-run, when enrolment declines from year-to-year. For this reason, the ministry provides an enrolment decline supplement to some districts. But is it enough?

The basic enrolment-based funding decreases by \$37.5 million in 2009-10, based on projections for a decrease of 7,000 students. While the enrolment decline supplement is supposed to cushion districts from reduced funding due to lower enrolment, the total enrolment decline supplement for 2009-10 is \$12.5 million dollars.

Many districts do not qualify for the full supplement because the

allocation is based on the percent decline in the student population, not the decrease in the actual number of students. Vancouver and Abbotsford, for example, are projected to lose a significant number of students yet receive no enrolment decline supplement in 2009-10. Only 5 of 60 districts receive the higher supplement for an enrolment decline greater than 4%, even though some districts lose more students than the districts receiving the supplement.

The ministry also allocates \$14.5 million for funding protection in 2009-10. However, this grant combined with the enrolment decline supplement is not always enough to make up for shortfalls due to an enrolment decline and other cost pressures.

Provincial block funding not enough to cover cost pressures

According to a background document prepared by the Saanich Board of Education, provincial block funding increased by \$673 million since 2001-02. This was \$250 million short of covering formula-cost pressures such as distributed learning, GAAP funding, targeted literacy, arts and special needs, summer school, course challenges, special needs increases, and labour settlements. After accounting for savings resulting from the enrolment decline since 2001-02, the report estimates a shortfall in funding to maintain services of \$132 million. (Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/cn7d7x>)

The future does not look good for public education

The enrolment decline in recent years provided an opportunity for the government to address unmet needs in the education system. For example, they could have ensured all classes met legislated limits for class size and composition, and met more fully the needs of special education students. Instead, funding increases over the past decade barely kept pace with inflation. Little was left to cover increased labour settlement costs, new education initiatives, or to adequately address the needs of vulnerable students. This leaves public education in a precarious financial position as the Ministry of Education plans to freeze operating grants after 2009-10, leaving school districts to deal with the unfortunate consequences.

Margaret White, researcher, BCTF Research and Technology Division.

References available upon request.

## Philosophers' cafe for secondary school students

**By Kit Krieger**

"It is like a pot-luck dinner. You never know what people are going to bring and what it is going to taste like." This was the metaphor that Yosuf Wosk used to describe the concept of the philosophers' cafe, a phenomenon initiated by Wosk ten years ago in Vancouver and thriving worldwide.

Wosk, an old friend, a rabbi, and director of Interdisciplinary Studies at SFU, is interested in promoting philosophers' cafes in BC schools. I spoke to Wosk recently and asked about an evident contradiction between the elevated concept of philosophy and cafe conversation. He asserted that he defined philosophy in the popular sense, as the "love of wisdom" rather than in the academic sense. Influenced by the street conversations he heard when

he lived in New York, Wosk sees the philosophers' cafe as a throwback to the medieval itinerant scholars who traveled from community to community to stimulate learning. As a rabbi, Wosk is also influenced by the Jewish study house (*bait ha-midrash*).

I attended a model cafe for teachers who expressed an interest in bringing the philosophers' cafe into schools. Participants were told only to show up at an appointed hour. Upon arrival we were told that we would be given a topic and were invited to engage in discussion. Participants could choose to participate or to listen. Respect was the only rule. "Should we lead with the heart or with the head?" was proposed as the topic and a lively and rich discussion followed.

A moderator introduces the topic, reviews the few rules, keeps the

speaking order, and makes comments designed to clarify, probe, stimulate, and summarize. Peter Raabe of the University of the Fraser

**Influenced by the street conversations he heard when he lived in New York, Wosk sees the philosophers' cafe as a throwback to the medieval itinerant scholars who traveled from community to community to stimulate learning.**

Valley moderated the demonstration session I attended. He has moderated philosophers' cafes in North and West Vancouver since 2000 and teaches facilitation in Coquitlam. Raabe sees the cafe as a

means of applying philosophy to everyday life. He believes that those who deeply examine values and beliefs are less likely to 'blindly' follow tradition, slavishly obey the dictates of authority figures, or act only on our feelings.'

Wosk sees the cafes as the antithesis of the university. Knowledge is deemed to reside throughout the community and not in a particular institution or specialist/expert group. There is "no preparation required, no homework, no tests, no mandatory attendance, no curriculum, and no control," said Wosk. The philosophers' cafe is deeply democratic and a response to institutions of higher learning that are inaccessible to many citizens for economic, geographic, or other reasons. His hope is that participants think deeply, listen and learn, but his comments indicate that he is

content with good conversation.

Young people participate in cafes that take place in the community, but Wosk thinks there may be some potential for cafes structured for students alone. Teachers or students can serve as moderators. The only requisites are some folks, a place to talk, a seating plan that presupposes no source of authority, and an interesting question or problem to discuss. The moderator can provide a topic, or one can be generated by the group.

The Philosophers' Cafe website ([www.philosopherscafe.net](http://www.philosopherscafe.net)) features information about the concept, a schedule of philosophers' cafes throughout the Lower Mainland, including a list of discussion topics. Kit Krieger, retired West Vancouver educator and BCTF past president.



# Of social justice

## Staying vigilant on social justice issues

By Glen Hansman

Many argue that teacher unions in the United States have been, and continue to be, deep disappointments, and not only to teachers, for whom they have, in general, failed to win adequate working conditions, including adequate salaries and appropriate class sizes. By focusing on "traditional union issues" such as salaries, the argument goes, American teachers' unions have ignored pressing professional concerns such as discretion over curriculum content and the means by which its study is assessed, have failed to mobilize America's teachers, and failed to persuade the American public that quality public education is worth paying for. Additionally, few American teacher unions emphasize social justice work—focusing instead on improving the "quality" of the teaching profession, and only secondarily (or not at all) on the inequities in schools and in society.

In contrast, the struggle for social justice is a common theme among Canadian teacher unions—particularly the BCTF. This is something we should be proud of, but also be vigilant about. As an organization, we are less likely to endorse aspects of so-called "professional unionism" (such as peer review and high-stakes accountability based on standardized test scores), focusing instead on educational quality issues (such as professional development, class-size limits, support for students with special needs, and the strengthening of these by including them in collective agreements).

**...few American teacher unions emphasize social justice work—focusing instead on improving the "quality" of the teaching profession, and only secondarily (or not at all) on the inequities in schools and in society.**

Our emphasis on education quality and advocacy of social justice leads us to resist some educational reforms, particularly standardized testing, on the basis of the inequities they exacerbate. The social justice model that we have fostered is linked to a tradition that views unions as part of a broad movement for social change and progress, calling for participatory union membership, education reform based on serving all children, collaboration with parents and community organizations, and a concern for broader issues of equity throughout society. We are the most vocal in endorsing a political platform of social justice, promoting curriculum and sometimes using legal resources to combat racism, poverty, gender bias, and homophobia.

That does not mean that our record on diversity issues is as good

as it could be, and it does not mean that there isn't still work to do. Implementation in every school district of the Employment Equity for Aboriginal Educators' language is happening much too slowly, as is the implementation of the provincial codes of conduct standards that are designed to link the *BC Human Rights Code* to every classroom. Many of the gains that women have made over the years are beginning to be eroded, and many of our students and colleagues are living below the poverty line. We still need to look to the margins to make space for the voices that are being ignored.

At no point should we de-emphasize our social justice initiatives or soften our resistance against conservative agendas that undermine teaching and public education. We need to keep working together to keep social justice a priority in our union.

Glen Hansman, president, Vancouver Elementary Teachers' Association..

## Social justice rocks the valley

By Gail Chaddock-Costello

The first regional conference to focus solely on social justice issues "rocked" the University of the Fraser Valley Campus on February 20 and 21. With 23 presenters covering 30 workshops, including a keynote address delivered straight from the heart by Alex Sanchez and a panel presentation on Social Justice 12 teaching strategies, the conference delivered a full menu of topics that appealed to both the youth and adults who attended.

We were thrilled to have Alex Sanchez, best selling author on the topic of homophobia, speak about his newest book *The God Box*, which expertly explores what it means to be both religious and gay. In a quiet, unassuming manner, Alex spoke of his own life, growing up as both a child of colour and a child who was gay. Even though he spoke softly, you could have heard a pin drop in the theatre as we all hung onto his words, which often brought listeners to tears. His personal journey, including his high school fears of standing up for a fellow student being bullied on the suspicion of being gay, as well as segments of poignant e-mails he frequently receives from young men and women who seek his advice and thank him for letting them know they are not alone, was both heart wrenching and inspiring.

Today, his writings are Alex's way of standing up as a public voice for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning) individuals who continue to feel marginalized in many areas of society.

One gay participant commented, "even if you were a person who believed being against gays was OK, there are so many choices at this conference, you could fill up your entire schedule and never have

to hear the word homophobia." He meant that as a compliment regarding the range of topics, but it was "that" word, "that" section of the SJ12 curriculum, which made it too controversial for the Abbotsford Board of Education. Their decision not to allow the Social Justice 12 course to be offered in Abbotsford in September 2008 was the spark that ignited the youth-organized Rally in the Valley Conference

**"I am not an extraordinary person. It simply happens that I've been given a talent and opportunity to do something extraordinary. Each of you, every single one of you, has that same opportunity to do something extraordinary in your schools."**

— Alex Sanchez

organizers decided to address the wide range of topics covered in SJ12, including several sections dealing with homophobia. We felt it was important that full scope of socially relevant and sometimes controversial issues discussed in the course be mirrored in the conference offerings.

The diversity lead to success as the mood remained upbeat and energized. Many people commented on the positive, welcoming atmosphere—youth were engaged and participating in a wide variety of topics—and adults were talking and learning in sessions lead by youth. It was an opportunity for people of all ages to learn from one another.

A Langley Social Justice 12 teacher, Michael Carlyle, registered his entire class and rented a bus to bring them to the conference. Their assignment? To present what they learned in the sessions they attended to their classmates next week. A teaching strategy in action—how to open minds, expand awareness, and share that knowledge with others. Creativity and involvement seem to be a hallmark of the SJ12 teachers and of the SJ12 students.

The conference provided opportunities for networking, book signings, sharing great food, animated conversations, asking and answering prickly questions, and exchanges of contact information, all facilitated by the smorgasbord of offerings: Creating Cultures of Peace; Discrimination; What Language is that Anyway?; Animal Welfare, Starting a Gay/Straight Alliance; Volunteering Globally and Youth Challenge International; Genocide in the 20th Century, The Civic Mirror and more—all aimed at raising awareness and awakening our social consciousness.

Always leave them wanting more and we did—more to fill their minds and just as importantly, the regional connections to find the answers when and where they needed them.

Gail Chaddock-Costello, first vice-president, Langley Teachers' Association.

To view a 10-minute video about the conference, contact James Chamberlain, [jchamberlain@bctf.ca](mailto:jchamberlain@bctf.ca). To learn more about Alex Sanchez' books go to [www.alexsanchez.com](http://www.alexsanchez.com).

## Health and safety

### Class size/composition and your health and safety

By Karen Langenmaier

The more people you stuff into a classroom, the less are the chances that teaching and learning will occur.

We are all painfully familiar with the broken promise that is Bill 33. The following are a number of health and safety factors that teachers could use in their ongoing argument to reduce class size and composition:

#### Ministry of Education area standards

This document dated 01/2003 found on the Ministry of Education website—search "area standards"—lists allowable floor space for Grades K–12. Interestingly they use class-size limits of 25 in their calculations. The document defines instructional room areas, stages, ancillary rooms, electives, industrial education, home economics, and science labs. The document states that the area of a classroom including ancillary space (cloakrooms, seminar, work and storage rooms directly accessible from classroom) shall not be less than 75 square metres. In shops, science and home economics labs this floor space does not include workstations.

One might extrapolate the square meters per person with the ministry's class-size limit of 25 and apply that to class sizes in violation of Bill 33 and use this as an argument.

#### Indoor air quality

The guidelines published by the American Society of Heating Refrigeration and Air-conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), on which most public buildings and WCB base their indoor air quality recommendations, state that each person should receive a minimum of 15–20 cubic feet per minute (CFM) of fresh air. So that means for those of you who like to visualize, that if you have a class size of 34 students with one teacher and two SEAs there would need to be 555–740 cubic feet per minute of fresh air entering and distributed evenly through your classroom. This also means that 555–740 cubic feet per minute of stale air has to be exhausted and not re-breathed. If you meet this minimum standard, whatever moulds, viruses, bacteria, dust, or toxins in the classroom would have a chance of being diluted enough to keep everyone healthy. If you have too many students, you would need to have so much fresh air supplied that the ventilation system would sound like a jet engine (see noise levels below).

To measure whether your classroom is receiving adequate fresh air, CO<sub>2</sub> testing would show that when your classroom was fully occupied and the CO<sub>2</sub> monitor was placed where the students were, the ASHRAE standard of 1,000 parts per million (ppm) of CO<sub>2</sub> in the air would not be exceeded. If the levels do exceed, this means that the classroom is not receiving adequate fresh air which compromises attention, behaviour, health, and learning.

#### Noise levels

The American National Standards Institute standards for noise are:

- For core learning spaces with internal volumes of 20,000 cubic feet or less, one-hour steady-state background noise levels should not exceed 40 dBA (e.g. gymnasiums).

- If the noisiest one-hour period during which learning activities take place is dominated by transportation noise, the maximum noise limits are increased by 5 dBA (e.g. schools under construction or renovations).

Noise levels can be measured under different conditions to determine whether during instructional time the noise levels exceed the standards. Another factor to keep in mind is not only the duration of noise levels above the standards but also the frequency. This means that while the noise levels may not last a full hour, you could be damaging your hearing if the excessive noise levels occur frequently. Have your hearing tested at the beginning of each school year as baseline data.

#### Tripping hazards

The floor space argument of the first point does not include transient furniture such as desks and chairs. However, desks, chairs, wheelchairs, backpacks, purses, clothing draped over furniture and large shoes all contribute to possible tripping hazards. The more people you have in a room, the higher are the risks of tripping.

The joint health and safety committee at your school should do an inspection during instructional time to determine this risk and make recommendations to reduce these risks. One of the recommendations could be to reduce class size.

#### Risk of potential behaviour problems

One of the most common recommendations written into the IEPs for students with special needs is that they require a controlled small group environment with few distractions. A class of 30+ students with limited support creates an environment that could trigger behaviours that disrupt the learning for those students and their peers.

There is the potential of violent behaviour if the distractions become overwhelming for the students. Recommendations to reduce the number of students with special needs or class size from the school-based team and behaviour specialists could prevent violent incidences.

#### Refusal of unsafe work

Whenever any worker believes that their work environment is unsafe to themselves or others they have the right and obligation to refuse unsafe work.

#### Physical and mental stress

There is no doubt that at the best of times teaching can be stressful. Adding in a large class of students with multiple needs, with limited support and options, creates stress that can have serious repercussions both physically and mentally. Consult your doctor, look after yourself, and work through your site-based health and safety committee to make recommendations to improve your workplace.

Class size and composition are health and safety issues. The BCTF health and safety program through the Collective Agreement and Protective Services Division provides information, training, and support to all members.

Karen Langenmaier is the BCTF's health and safety officer for prevention.



## By Charlie Naylor

In Canada, a major cause of stress affecting workers is the inability to find or the unwillingness to provide an appropriate work-life balance. Simply put, the research evidence suggests that unless work-life balance issues are addressed then individuals, organizations, employers, and society all pay the price.

"Stress and work-life conflict are intertwined, and the latter has been documented as both a cause and an outcome of job stress. Stress is one of the more commonly documented outcomes of demanding work. Job stress is increasingly recognized as a determinant of employee health and productivity." (G. Lowe, 2006)

One form of stress that impacts people in health, education, and social services is *compassion fatigue*, a concept described as "the most recent term to describe the emotional reaction of a helper to another person's trauma." (M. Hamilton, 2008). Compassion fatigue may result in physical or psychological symptoms as well as behavioural changes when work is emotionally demanding. Similar to Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), compassion fatigue could negatively impact school counselors, or any teacher whose continued empathic engagement with students led to the teacher or counselor's vicarious traumatization. Burnout, related to compassion fatigue, is a "state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion or dissatisfaction with one's work situation" and often emerges gradually over time, which implies that stress is more likely to affect older teachers.

While much of the literature states that stress is a growing problem in workplaces, and that teaching is among those occupations with high stress, the BC government refuses to recognize stress in its allowable WorkSafeBC claims categories, unlike Alberta, which in Section 24(1) of the *Alberta Workers Compensation Act* explicitly includes "physical, psychological, and psychiatric" disabilities.

With government and WorkSafe-BC absent from dealing with the consequences of teacher illness and disability linked to stress, the void in terms of support has been filled by the BCTF.

Teachers, through their union dues, have essentially paid for their own disability claims, although the last collective agreement included an amount to cover Salary Indemnity Plan (SIP) costs. Data from the BCTF indicates that:

- Over 60% of SIP costs for claims linked to psychological/psychiatric disorders are linked to teachers over 50, while only 39% of BC teachers are aged 50 or older. Older teachers are significantly over-represented in SIP claims.
- 24% of SIP claims were from male teachers, while 76% were from women. 31% of BC teachers are men and 69% women. Women are making a greater proportion of claims than might be expected related to their numbers, but this

is consistent with findings from a wider literature.

- For those male teachers who claimed under the SIP, 65% of claimants were aged 50 or over, while 16% were aged 35 to 44. For female teachers, 51% of claimants were aged 50 or over, while 26% were aged 35 to 44. The higher numbers of women teacher claimants aged 35-44 may be an indicator of the "sandwich generation" effect on women teachers.
- Of 18 categories in the BCTF Rehabilitation Program, one category, psychological/psychiatric disorders, represents 43% of total claims and 47% of the program's total costs.
- Some BCTF locals, especially those in southern Vancouver Island, appear to have high SIP claims compared to the number of teachers in the locals.

### So what should be done?

While workload intensification and competing work-life balance appear to be major factors in causing stress and illness, government-initiated efforts to address workload appear minimal in BC. While government cost-avoidance for stress and work-related illness was legislated by the BC government in 2002, the costs to individuals and to society are enormous. BC teachers accessing the SIP will already have used any available sick leave, may have accessed professional medical and other healthcare services, and likely incur costs for prescription drugs. Canada, like many other countries, shows huge increases in the prescription of antidepressants, with one recent study reporting a rise of 43% in four years (J. Currie, 2005). While the pharmaceutical multinationals profit from stress and depression, and taxpayers foot much of the bill, a better use of taxpayers' money could be to target prevention rather than provide pills.

In the BC education system, the correlation between age (teachers over 50) and disability payments (43% of all disability claims linked to psychological/psychiatric disorders) requires urgent attention, perhaps by offering reduced workload or by developing early retirement incentives as options to support the transition of older teachers into retirement or less stressful work, and to reduce the prevalence and costs of disability.

While the issue of stress-related illness is complex, the paucity of prevention measures at federal and provincial government levels reflects a systemic apathy that should be challenged. Instead of individuals and society paying huge costs as consequences of stress, the factors causing stress could be addressed by reducing workloads, providing incentives for early retirement, and supporting a variety of work-life balance options.

*Charlie Naylor, BCTF Research and Technology Division.*

For the full BCTF Research reports on stress in Canada and among BC teachers, see:

- <http://tinyurl.com/dd49zt>
- <http://tinyurl.com/cwc6ow>

## New BCTF lesson aids

### 1 LA EE213 Teaching Green: The High School Years: Hands-On Learning in Grades 9-12

edited by Tim Grant and Gail Littlejohn, 229 p., ©2008. This illustrated resource book offers teaching strategies that promote learning about natural systems and foster critical thinking about environmental issues, both local and global. It contains new approaches to learning, strategies for living sustainably, and numerous activities that promote interdisciplinary learning. In addition, the book provides suggestions for greening individual subject areas, developing integrated learning programs, and replicating exemplary programs already created by innovative schools and communities. Containing contributions from 55 educators from across North America, the book's strength lies in its diverse content. Topics include measuring the ecological footprint of a high school, creating an indoor "living system" that cleans water, using lichens as bio-indicators for monitoring air quality and using green technologies to help green school campuses. Includes accessible background information and suggestions for many practical projects and activities. \$25.95

### 2 LA 8623 Visual Arts: Vincent Van Gogh

by Sheila Ann Chmilar, 30 p. ©2008. Includes seven art lessons on Vincent Van

Gogh which are linked to the BC Ministry of Education visual arts and English language arts IRPs. Also included is an Internet research assignment and a three-dimensional replica project of Vincent Van Gogh's bedroom where he stayed in Arles. Recommended by the BC Art Teachers' Association. \$4.95

### 3 LA 9775 Dansez en Francais: French Dances for Classroom and Community

by Marion Rose, book and CD, ©2009. This book and CD includes a vibrant collection of dances rooted in French culture that have proven popular in school classrooms as well as at community celebrations. The book is intended to be used with students from Grade 3 to adult, although many of the descriptions include adaptations for younger dancers. Dansez en Francais continues in the style of the Step Lively series, with a CD included in the front cover and June Harman's charming illustrations helping to bring the dances to life. As an aid to research and curriculum connection, there is an extensive bibliography, discography, and list of related online resources. The dances cover a range of styles, including Renaissance classics, a Quebecois quadrille, repertoire from the Bals Folk that are wildly popular in France today, and recent inventions based on ancient French melodies. The music has been

selected from recordings made in France, Quebec, BC, and the US and features such instruments as the diatonic accordion, viole à roué (hurdy gurdy), cornemuse (bagpipe), and various Renaissance instruments. All come with a written score that is well within the reach of beginning to intermediate instrumentalists. \$39.95

More curriculum resources and information are available at [www.bcalmer.ca](http://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](http://bctf.ca/lessonaids).

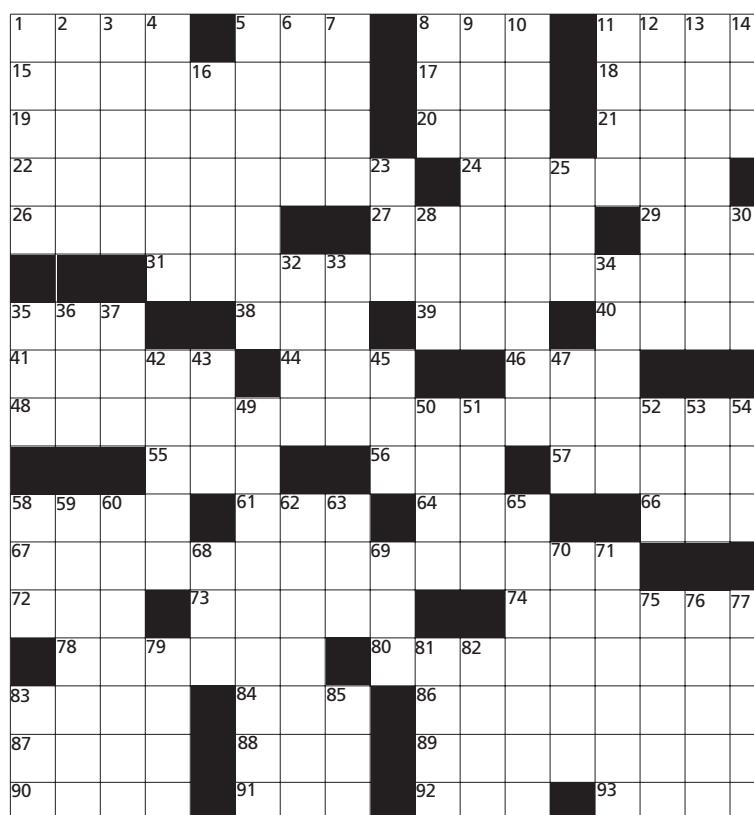
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Join our new public e-mail list—Lesson Aids Service Alert. Go to [bctf.ca/cgi-bin/mailinglistsub.pl](http://bctf.ca/cgi-bin/mailinglistsub.pl) on the BCTF website to join.

This list will get you connected to all the latest buzz about new lesson aids, services offered, contests, and lesson aids specials.

## CROSSWORD

by Brian Porter



### ACROSS

- Turkish university
- mo replay
- Peak
- Chimneys (Scottish)
- One fond of her/his own views
- Scrooge word
- Ample (phonetically)
- Saxophone sound in Salsa music
- Kind of floe
- As well
- Start of a WB Yeats quote
- Throw open
- Violent (Latin)
- Part two of quote
- Unit of mass (abbr)
- Part three of quote
- Monk's title
- Hither's partner
- Afghanistan event
- A ticket to here will put you on the Isle of Wight
- Interior highway?
- Sooner than
- "66" e.g.
- Subtraction by addition for public schools?
- Jeb's state (abbr)
- According to Wilde, group always disarmed by compliments
- Velvet Fog
- A pair of oxen
- A nat'l union with a local at the BCTF

- Heavy follower of "Won"
- Part four of quote
- An obese blues singer without a roof over his head?

- Limb
- "Child" in Uganda
- Palindromic island off the Georgia coast

- Former Toyota model
- Part five of quote
- End of quote

- Little Bo Peep lost her sheep when they went on the \_\_\_\_\_
- "It will do \_\_\_\_" (of benefit - two words)

- Orcs, e.g.
- Sports governing body, in short (*and perhaps shorts*)

- Wearing a crown
- Six pack from Washington State, familiarly

- Fish without scales
- Laugh syllable
- San Diego Historical Society (abbr)

- You've \_\_\_\_\_ Part of Virginia Slims' slogan
- What a 15 across might pen

- Ruckus
- Children's relief agency
- Hall, Durham County

- Burt's ex

- Sandwich cookie
- Gail intro
- Gaps
- Epilepsy medicine (short form)
- One word hit from "The Big O"
- Not so fortunate
- "Proud Family" episode "Romeo" (two words)

- Released "Pong" in 1972
- Responsible for "We don't see things as they are. We see them as we are."
- Jackson of the NBA
- Bilko's rank (abbr)

- Member of the school board (abbr)
- Marcus \_\_\_\_\_ American theatre pioneer

- Latin legal phrase (two words)
- "\_\_\_\_ in unum Deum"

- Describes McCartney, Lennon, Harrison and Starr collectively
- Fabled bird
- Covenant house?

- Tigger's farewells
- Colin Powell, a former director of this company
- Stately tree

- Carter's discovery 1922
- Mexican/French fast food outlet?

- Presidential prerogative
- Eyong \_\_\_\_\_ 2008 South African footballer of the year

- Austin Straubel Airport (less formally)
- Flightless bird

- Vietnamese holiday
- Celtic and Rangers are members of (abbr)

- Not entire
- "\_\_\_\_ your \_\_\_\_" (dependent on)

- Imitate
- Excavation

- Lennon's descriptor for one of 56 across
- Dentist to Wyatt, Virgil and Morgan

- Lon \_\_\_\_\_ of Cambodia
- San \_\_\_\_\_ County California

- Consents on line
- Harold \_\_\_\_\_ director "Keeping up Appearances"

- Individual who dresses darkly
- Walks in water

- Former president of Central Okanagan local of the BCTF
- Hankering

- Robert Heinlein song and short story in short
- To's company

- \_\_\_\_\_ de mer

Puzzle solution will appear in the May/June 2009 Teacher.

# Their first day at university

By Karen Larsen

Parents sending their offspring off to the first day of university say they experience some of the same angst associated with the first day of Kindergarten. I sent over 400 teenagers off to what was, for most, their first day at university and I felt a sense of relief when the last bus pulled away from RE Mountain Secondary School in Langley.

REMESS teachers accepted a challenge—to investigate ways of improving the school's transition rate for students going from high school straight into post-secondary. REMSS teachers don't have all the answers, but we decided to act on one idea—take the teenagers to a post-secondary campus and immerse them in campus activities.

As part of the school's "Health and Careers" day, Grade 10, 11, and 12 students skipped high school, with their homeroom teachers leading the way. The Grade 10s visited Kwantlen Polytechnic University's Langley and Cloverdale campuses, with a focus on apprenticeship trades. The Grade 11s went to BCIT's Richmond Aerospace centre, where they were introduced to a variety of programs. The Grade 12s were hosted by the University of the Fraser Valley, and were given a choice of an academic focus at Abbotsford or a trades focus at Chilliwack.

Each post-secondary institute arranged workshops aimed at secondary school students, a private campus tour, and an opportunity to speak with post-secondary students and instructors. At UFV, physically going into a dorm room was a unique opportunity that the

students really appreciated.

This REMSS initiative was modeled after a similar event held at Langley Secondary School in 2008 and is linked to the ministry-mandated requirements of Graduation Transitions 12. GT 12 replaces the Graduation Portfolio requirement found in the original 2004 graduation program. In GT 12, students are expected to complete transition activities that are relevant to and support their career, life, and learning goals.

It may take a few years to measure whether or not the field trips, which are planned to continue year after year, actually do increase the number of students who transition straight from secondary school to post-secondary. However students, parents, and teachers indicated the time was well spent.

According to Grade 12 student Thomas Ivey, as a result of the visit he will apply to the theatre program at UFV, "I was not certain if I wanted to go to university, but now I have made up my mind." His classmate, Dan Gamble, went to the UFV Chilliwack trades campus and says that as a result of the personalized tour one action he will take is "...put in my application and take the exam."

Rana Swiss, also from the class of 2009, noted that "this tour really helped me out because UFV was one of my top choices of schools." Swiss felt that taking part in the criminology workshop and walking around campus made her "more serious and excited about going to UFV." Grade 12 student Colin Fee says he needs to "pay more attention in high school classes" so that



## Pension seminars

### Thinking about retirement

If you are within five years of retirement, this free seminar, jointly presented by BCTF staff and BC Pension Corporation staff, is for you.

### Your Pension/Your Future

Your pension benefits will be explained to you in plain language to help you understand how choices/decisions you make today can impact your pension income in the future.

Preregistration is required: online at [tpp.pensionsbc.ca](http://tpp.pensionsbc.ca); e-mail [tppseminars@pensionsbc.ca](mailto:tppseminars@pensionsbc.ca); phone: 250-356-2466; toll-free 1-877-558-5574.

### There's more to it than the 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.

Attend a pension seminar and you will realize that "there's more to it than money" and who better to share experiences with you than retired teachers?

Retirement living brings with it life-altering situations and a wide variety of choices, some financial, some legal, and all connected with life-style.

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.bcrta.ca](http://www.bcrta.ca). Telephone 604-871-2265; toll-free 1-877-683-2243.

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his marks will be good enough to get into the Science program at UFV before he transfers to pharmacy at UBC.

When asked about her trip to BCIT Aerospace, Grade 11 student Marlana Friesen reflected, "the whole experience was really cool—it was my first visit to a post-secondary campus." Her classmate, Leeanza Fee agreed, "I did not have a highlight during my visit, because I loved all of it."

**REMESS teachers don't have all the answers, but we decided to act on one idea—take the teenagers to a post-secondary campus and immerse them in campus activities.**

Rajan Gill, a Grade 10 student, said that going to the campus and "seeing the environment you will be working in relieves a lot of stress in the transition towards university." Shelby MacKenzie found horticulture intriguing. She noted that before the campus visit she and her Grade 10 classmates wouldn't have considered it as a career option because, "until today, I didn't even know that horticulture existed."

REMESS parents applauded the initiative. Debbie Vaughan (parent of a Grade 10 student) noted it was,

"an extremely valuable experience that encourages a feeling of excitement to attend a post-secondary institution."

Classroom teachers willingly gave up a day of regular classes because they saw value in the field experience. Physics teacher John Hantke accompanied his Grade 10 homeroom to Kwantlen Polytechnic University, "it's all about exposure" he commented, "...students were exposed to careers that they didn't even know existed." He added that students were presented with "a plethora of things they can do (as a career) with skills that can be learned in a classroom."

Ashley Bakker teaches English and knows, from personal experience, how difficult decisions about the future can be for Grade 12s, "especially without support from well-informed adults. Many students enter university with no real understanding of class size and structure, choices available, support offered, social dynamics, and pressure. The post-secondary field trip allowed students to see firsthand what their experience will be in university."

And here's hoping that their first day at university will lead to a second, third, fourth, and more.

*Karen Larsen teaches career education at RE Mountain Secondary School, Langley.*

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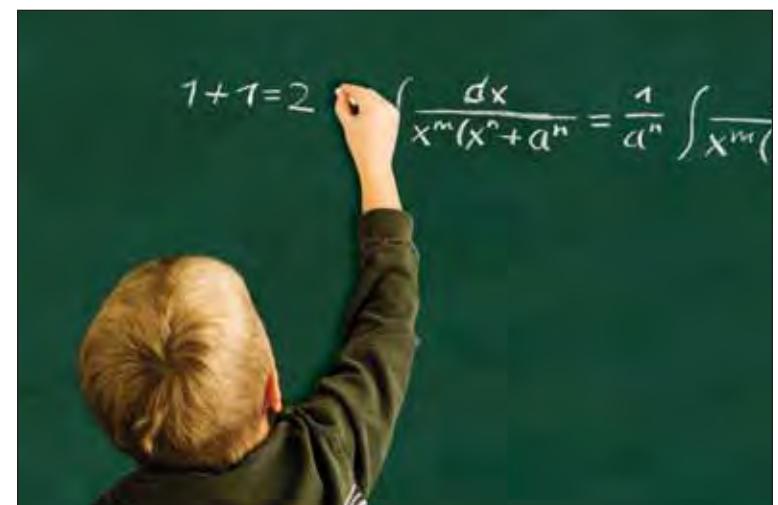
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# Darfur Now

A story of hope in the midst of one of humanity's darkest hours

Two young, recently graduated, actors and social activists are touring the country talking to senior students about the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. Their presentation is sponsored by Participant Media who works closely with the charity Free The Children. The goal is to highlight the tragedy of Darfur and lead students to think of taking a

more active role as concerned citizens in their schools and communities.

*Darfur Now* is a story of hope in the midst of one of humanity's darkest hours—a call to action for people to end the catastrophe unfolding in Darfur, Sudan. Using clips from the film, Angela Wallace and Caustan De Riggs bring light to

the situation in Sudan through an hour-long presentation, and will show students how they can work to make a difference and become involved in humanitarian relief.

To bring the presentation to your school, contact Elektra Simms, Tour Co-ordinator, at 647-259-3473 to enquire about dates in your area.



## Free the children Building a school in Asia or Africa

When all is said and done, more is said than done.

**By Don Standing**

After the Craig Kielberger presentation at the February Pro-D last year, I started thinking. Often times, we teachers see a good thing and then try to get the students involved; but what about us? Why don't we, as adults, do something on our own?

It occurred to me that we could "adopt a village" through the Free the Children Foundation. We could raise \$5,000 and fund the building of a school in Asia or Africa. What a natural fit, thought I. Virtually, everything that one reads indicates the only way to break the cycle of poverty (and, some would say, of terrorism) is education. What a great thing for us to do!

Originally, I thought that the staff at Ballenas Secondary in Parksville, BC could do that, but I reconsidered. However, over 700 adults are employed in SD69. Surely, thought I, 500 of us could donate \$10 each and there's \$5,000. If School District 69 can do this once, then maybe we can do it again next year. Maybe we can challenge other districts on the island or in the province to do this. Imagine the impact that we could have on literally thousands of lives for generations to come—and all for only \$10.

So that's what I set out to do. I started out by asking every member of my school staff to contribute \$10—teachers, administrators, and CUPE members. Many contributed more: over \$800 from 50 people! With this success I began my campaign in earnest—I e-mailed the principals of all other district schools. I spoke at staff meetings at

other schools, I appeared at PAC meetings, and I e-mailed board members.

As the money started coming in, I set up a fundraising page with "Free the Children," for people to contribute online and receive income tax receipts for their credit-card donations.

My plan was to ask everyone once for their contribution. The answer was almost invariably yes. If

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people didn't have the money on them when I asked, but indicated they wished to be part of this, I'd come back the next day and ask again, and the next day, and the next if needed.

Since I started, "Free the children" have updated their costs. It now costs \$8,500 to build a school, stock it with supplies, provide clean water, and educate staff.

I ask one person in every district in the province to accept this challenge.

Imagine teachers building schools. Imagine the changes we can make in the lives of thousands, maybe tens of thousands. Imagine how we can change the world.

Imagine.

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For more information, go to: [www.freetheworld.com](http://www.freetheworld.com)

## Teach outside the box

**By Larry Kuehn**

Teachers in British Columbia are not alone in opposing standardized testing. Expanding testing has become a tool used globally to control from a distance what is happening in classrooms.

Teacher autonomy to choose the best methods of assessment for a particular class of children, or a particular student, is threatened by these developments. However, the good news is that resistance is growing to the distortion of education by standardized testing.

Researchers and union officers from 13 countries around the Americas came together in February in Mexico City to share their experience and analysis of standardized testing. The BCTF International Solidarity program was one of the funders that facilitated this international examination of testing issues.

The workshop was called "To Teach Outside the Box." The box is the way that standardized testing is used to narrow curriculum and limit the ability of the teacher to shape instruction in ways that recognize the diversity in our classes.

Through country reports, the group found a high level of similarity between what was happening in all the countries of the Americas, from Argentina in the south to Canada in the north. Despite working in different countries with different cultural traditions, languages, and social and economic contexts, increased standardized testing is the reality.

This similarity in experience leads to the question of how this commonality is produced.

The researchers from Latin America are clear on the mechanism. It is the World Bank and its regional affiliate, the Inter-American Development Bank, that impose the requirement of standardized testing as a condition of loans for education.

For those of us in Canada, one

factor is the spillover from the testing mania that has consumed public schools in the United States through the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The Fraser Institute and the rest of a chain of right-wing think tanks have also had an impact on public understanding. They have confused the public into thinking that the quality of education can be determined by standardized tests and a market approach of ranking schools.

Everywhere, computer technology contributes to the expanded testing as it becomes cheaper and cheaper to collect data and "mine" it.

As two researchers, Johnsen and Taylor, have noted, "accountability systems are ultimately the power of this technology used by the experts to insure the compliance by teachers and students. The expert beyond the classroom—hierarchically superior to the teacher—manipulates the system to control for improved test scores."

While the phenomenon of increased standardizing testing has grown, resistance has grown with it. And some teacher unions are looking at going beyond resistance to trying out alternatives to testing.

Some of the resistance is at the level of ideas. The "Outside the Box" workshop framed the choices that face public education. It said "Standardized testing is based on not recognizing the cultural, ethnic, gender, and social diversity of our peoples....We are not expecting, nor do we want, for students to be turned into standardized 'products.' We want to enrich them with education and turn them into powerful individuals at the service of the society they belong to."

The resistance of others has taken a very concrete form. BC teachers, of course, voted to boycott the administration of the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) and carried out a campaign to encourage parents to withdraw their children from the assessment.

In Los Angeles, teachers refused to give a district-wide exam that was a part of the testing regime that sees even Kindergarten students being tested for more than 30 hours during the school year.

The Alberta Teachers' Association engaged in a campaign of lobbying the members of the legislature to eliminate the Grade 3 exam, the equivalent of the Grade 4 FSA test in BC. Amazingly, the legislature passed a motion calling for an end to mandatory testing of Grade 3 students. The motion was moved by a Conservative MLA—who is a former teacher.

A teachers' union in Argentina has created a project to develop alternatives to standardized testing. They got approval from government to work with about 20 schools. These schools are excluded from the government tests and union researchers are working with teachers on other ways of evaluating how well the schools are doing. The hope is to expand an alternative approach to all schools after the pilot projects.

In one state in Mexico, the teachers were so opposed to the testing coming from the federal ministry of education that they blocked the truck delivering the tests.

Seven primary and intermediate teachers in Korea were fired for giving parents and students the option of not taking standardized tests. They said the tests "create unnecessary competition among students" and impose "a heavy, stressful burden."

Education International (EI), the global teacher union organization, has supported these Korean teachers. The EI General Secretary Fred Van Leeuwen said that, "Teachers have a professional right and duty to speak out about testing regimes they believe to be harmful."

That's a message that applies not just to Korea, but everywhere.

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