Violence Against Women: Worth more than a conversation

by Trish Mugford, Vancouver Secondary teacher and Status of Women Action Group member, CASJ

Sexism pervades our curriculum because it permeates our lives. A gender-equity lens is a powerful tool to address what is often an unacknowledged undercurrent of sexist values.

For the past few decades, it seems there has been an implicit assumption that we have arrived at—or are at least fast approaching—a society in which women are finally acknowledged as equal to men. I can think of several personal examples to the contrary. In my secondary school graduation write-up, I dedicated “all girls who shouldn’t take chemistry” to Mr. G. He was one of my favourite teachers. I once declared, “I am skiing like a girl today,” after an embarrassing wipeout, and it was the guy with whom I was skiing who called me out. As the years went by, once I started looking, I noticed that there were sexist values embedded in every aspect of my so-called progressive Canadian culture. A real eye-opener for me was participating in a discussion with students on the value-laden words they still associate with sexual behaviour. Females are called “sluts” or given even more demeaning labels, while males are called “players,” “studs,” and at worst, “dogs.” Women may not wear a scarlet letter, but its imprint remains.

As part of the Be More Than a Bystander program, members of the BC Lions visited our school and shared personal stories of their own past contributions to perpetuating potentially violent attitudes and behaviour towards women. Following the presentation, a Grade 12 boy asserted, “My mom loves it when men whistle at her. In our culture, it’s a compliment!” Several students agreed that it didn’t matter what boys want anyway because “girls always get to say no.” These kinds of conversations are shocking, unexpected, and difficult to navigate, but also incredibly important. For the girls in this class to be able share their perspectives, for a teacher to create an environment in which their contributions can be heard, processed, and respected by everyone, and for change to happen, teachers face an extremely daunting task. ✅
Stories are a beginning, not an ending. As the inquiry into our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women continues, we wonder, “How will this help?” When women brave the consequences of telling the truth about sexual harassment and abuse, we ask ourselves, “Will they be believed?” As an avalanche of #MeToo stories is unleashed and powerful men in politics and pop culture are toppled, we wonder, “Is this enough?” We ask ourselves these questions because of the seemingly undefeatable counter-narrative, which comes from a culture where an American president laughs off accusations of sexual assault as mere locker-room talk, attacking the credibility of his victims by declaring them too ugly to grope.

A growing number of famous men are being exposed for behaviour ranging from harassment to rape. These men at the top come from somewhere; prevailing and continuing rape culture allows these men to thrive and their predatory sexual behaviour to flourish. We know that their counterparts are also present in every part of society. As some of these men face exile from their previous powerful positions, we are left with more questions than answers. How do we move from accountability and punishment to healing and redemption? How do we shift our discourse from “times were different then” to “times are different now”? We must advance beyond our culture of blame—putting victims on trial, shaming, humiliating, and successfully repressing women’s stories. We must also, at some point, take action that goes further than simply blaming men and ending it there.

As a recent and powerful uprising of women speak about their experiences, and as violence against women becomes a topic of international discourse, the essential follow-up question is, “What next?” Like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the journey is far from over. Uncovering the terrible truth is only the first step. Healing is only possible when we invite dialogue that includes listening and telling, reflection and change. We must all take action if we wish to embrace a future where women will no longer need to say, “Me too.”

WHAT CAN WE DO AS TEACHERS?

1. Think critically, ask questions, and check in with ourselves and each other. What biases do we have that we may be ignoring? To say we don’t have biases merely proves that we are unwilling or unable to be honest with ourselves. We cannot solve problems we don’t think we have, nor can we support student learning meaningfully without acknowledging our own deeply embedded sexist values. We may have to dig less than we expect to find them.


3. Discourage language, attitudes, and behaviours that implicitly or explicitly demean women.

4. Avoid falling into saying “All violence matters” as a way of diluting “Violence against women matters.” The #MeToo movement is not about ending it there.

RESOURCES


Be More Than a Bystander: A partnership between the BC Lions and the Ending Violence Association of BC in which sports icons raise awareness of the need to break the silence on violence against women. Look under the “Prevention Programs” tab on the website www.endingviolence.org.

We Can BC: Started in Bangladesh, the We Can End All Violence Against Women campaign has spread to India, Nepal, Afghanistan, and now BC. The campaign seeks to create networks of changemakers who are committed to speaking out to end violence against women. Visit the website at www.wecanbc.ca.
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN CANADA:
The numbers tell the story

**ONLY** 30% **OF SPOUSAL VIOLENCE** IS REPORTED TO POLICE.*

**3491** WOMEN AND THEIR **2724 CHILDREN** SLEEP IN SHELTERS ON ANY GIVEN NIGHT DUE TO VIOLENCE IN THE HOME.*

**IT COSTS CANADIANS $7.4 BILLION** EVERY YEAR TO DEAL WITH THE AFTERMATH OF SPOUSAL VIOLENCE.**

**SEXUAL ASSAULT** IS THE ONLY VIOLENT CRIME IN CANADA THAT IS NOT DECLINING.**

**THE RATE OF PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS IN CHILDREN WHO WITNESS VIOLENCE IN THE HOME IS TWICE THAT OF CHILDREN IN NON-VIOLENT HOMES.**

**WOMEN ARE APPROXIMATELY FOUR TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE VICTIMS OF INTIMATE PARTNER HOMICIDE THAN MEN.**

*www.homelesshub.ca **www.canadianwomen.org
May you live in interesting times,” reads as an old blessing, but is understood as a curse. The curse in these interesting times is that social injustices can be normalized, seen as inevitable, and even presented as necessary. The blessing is that there are organizations and grass-roots movements working to eradicate poverty, racism, discrimination, heterosexism, ableism, classism, environmental destruction, and a myriad of social injustices. In subtle and overt ways, schools are a part of movements seeking to make changes in the world. As Joel Westheimer says, our classrooms are laboratories for a more just society. From the act of teaching kindness after a conflict at recess, to tackling racism in our institutions, teachers are inevitably working towards a better world.

At the school where I work, our hope is that the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network is an organization that can support this work and provide us with inspiration and opportunities to collaborate with like-minded colleagues. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Associated Schools Project Network (UNESCO ASPnet) has existed since 1953. It is a global network of more than 10,000 primary, middle, and secondary schools and post-secondary institutions in over 180 countries. The objective is for UNESCO schools to focus on inclusive, innovative, quality education with the goal of peace and understanding.

The UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network provides a forum for schools at all levels to support and promote UNESCO’s main pillars of learning:
• learning to know
• learning to do
• learning to be
• learning to live together.

ASPnet schools work in four key curricular areas:
• diversity and intercultural learning
• peace and human rights
• education for sustainable development
• the United Nations’ priorities.

Our school has been a candidate school for two years, working our way towards membership in the network. Delivering on the ASPnet curriculum expectations has been straightforward. As in all schools in BC, Trafalgar Elementary School has always taught towards ideas of peace, human rights, sustainability, and intercultural learning. UNESCO ASPnet provides support in the forms of national teacher and student conferences, national video conferences, teaching resources, and provincial and national co-ordinators.

An exciting opportunity to build ties with schools across Canada and around the globe
Introduction by Barb Ryeburn, BCTF Assistant Director, Social Justice

Earlier this year, the BCTF took on the role of provincial co-ordinator of the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet). Three schools in BC currently participate in this global network of schools that share the goal of building the defences of peace in the minds of children and young people.

In her article, “UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network: A tool for teaching in interesting times,” Ashley House shares some of her experiences teaching in an ASPnet school.

For more information about ASPnet and how to become a member, visit the Canadian Commission for UNESCO ASPnet website at www.unesco.ca/en/home or contact Barb Ryeburn, BCTF ASPNet Co-ordinator, at bryeburn@bctf.ca.
Being a candidate school is not without its challenges. A significant challenge lies in knowing and documenting the depth and heart of what is happening in our classrooms and schools that already reflects UNESCO priorities. Additionally, the crux has been carving out the time as a staff to collaborate and discuss our work so that we can share a common language and understanding of what this project means to our community. As all teachers know, the need for time and space together is a constant in pedagogy, and therefore vital for ASPnet.

The work we do at Trafalgar Elementary School for ASPnet will be familiar to you, as it takes place in many BC schools. Some examples include:

- celebration of national and international UN days
- national and international pen pal projects
- sustainability education in lessons, modules, and projects centered on our school garden
- a UN Ambassadors Club with a weekly discussion of UN initiatives
- a Model UN where students represent different nations participating in a mock UN assembly
- poverty awareness lessons, modules, and activism
- novel studies and discussions about Truth and Reconciliation in Canada, as well as an upcoming national video conference on the work of one classroom with Project of Heart
- a school-wide Climate Change Soirée to share the work we have been doing with sustainability education.

**Typography of Poverty**

*by Todd Patrick, BCTF Assistant Director, Social Justice*

The CASJ Antipoverty Action Group has developed the Typography of Poverty poster series to provide teachers with a visual resource to aid them in their discussions about the systemic dynamics of poverty. The resource was developed with secondary school students in mind, but can be adapted as needed. The poster series describes the multifaceted manifestations of poverty, and is intended to help students understand that poverty is not a simple issue. This resource allows for an inquiry to begin to take place around how these different dimensions of poverty affect the solutions. Complete with suggestions for using it in the classroom, this poster series will help classroom teachers reach a deeper understanding of poverty with their students. The Typography of Poverty poster set is now available for download on the BCTF website on the Social Justice Antipoverty Resources page. A hard copy can be ordered from the BCTF by sending an email request to socialjustice@bctf.ca. Please include your name, mailing address, and the number of sets requested.
Growing income and wealth inequality in Canada and British Columbia has produced continuing high levels of child poverty. In such a wealthy country and province, high poverty levels are an affront to social justice. Child poverty is also a violation of children’s right to a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development as promised in Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Yet, the evidence in First Call’s 2017 BC Child Poverty Report Card once again reminds us that one in five (153,300) BC children are poor; that half of the children living with lone parents (mostly mothers) are poor; and that, due to systemic discrimination and disadvantage, children who are Indigenous, new immigrants, visible minorities, or affected by disabilities, are overrepresented in these poverty statistics. The evidence also tells us that the majority of poor children live with working parents.

Poor families of various types and sizes, whether with parents who work or are on social assistance, are struggling to raise their children on incomes that average $10,000 to $12,000 below the poverty line.

Poverty affects children all around the province, with 85% of BC’s poor children living in urban areas, including 50% of them in Metro Vancouver. Yet, it’s also worth noting that children living outside urban areas had a 23% poverty rate, much higher than the provincial rate of 18%.

The negative impacts of poverty on children’s health, education, and overall opportunities are far-reaching and well researched. Teachers are on the front lines observing the impacts of poverty on their students and their ability to learn, to take risks, and to fully participate in school activities. The impacts of hunger and poor nutrition, insecure and inadequate housing, and chronic financial stress at home are often visible, but may also be hidden due to the stigma attached to poverty.

Social exclusion as a consequence of poverty accumulates over time, depriving children and youth of opportunities to try new things, build diverse social networks, and establish a sense of belonging.

Knowing these facts, why do we tolerate such high rates of child and family poverty? It’s not like we don’t know what the solutions are. First Call’s Child Poverty Report Card calls for a comprehensive, legislated provincial poverty reduction plan and makes 21 public policy recommendations that teachers can support.

Our new provincial government now has a minister responsible for poverty reduction, and efforts are underway to shape the promised provincial plan. They have taken some initial steps to raise welfare rates by $100 per month, restored bus passes for people on disability assistance, restored tuition-free access to adult basic education and English language classes, implemented post-secondary tuition waivers for youth from foster care, and are cutting MSP premiums by 50%, among other actions.
In this age of digital media and instant, unfiltered news, we are bombarded with negative images and proclamations about the dire state of our world. It is important to talk with our students about current events and political and societal realities. Students who are victims of abuse, trauma, and injustice need to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. Attempting to protect students with rosy stories of privilege denies many of them the space they deserve in our classrooms. While it is important to bring these topics into the classroom, they can be overwhelming, discouraging, and anxiety inducing. Therefore, it is imperative to teach our children how to cope with this information. In my opinion, the key to this is hope—not blind hope, but informed, calculated hope: a belief that students’ actions, and ours as educators, can make a difference.

Approaches to ensuring that our social justice learning holds a message of hope and agency

- Talk about events and actions that instill a sense of pride to combat the overriding messages of despair and failure that are often sent out to youth, especially those from vulnerable or equity-seeking groups.
- Prompt youth to identify sources of hope in their own lives.
- Allow space for youth to explore their own hopes, dreams, and strengths, as well as what they can do to achieve their dreams.
- Organize times for students to practise gratefulness, actively recalling positive experiences on a daily or weekly basis.
- Celebrate achievements of people from diverse lived experiences and social backgrounds.
- Incorporate activities focused on building resilience, such as identifying and building social support networks.

Quotes about hope to discuss in the classroom

“Hope is part of our discourse, part of our orientation toward the future, part of how we sustain ourselves in our daily work.”
—Dale Jacobs, 2005

“Hope must be rooted in practice, in the struggle. If not, if there is inaction, you get hopelessness and despair.”
—Paulo Friere, 1994

“Hope will never be silent.”
—Harvey Milk, 1978
Instead of Soldiering on: Supporting critical thinking about the social studies curriculum

by Shannon Moore, Vancouver teacher and Peace and Global Education Action Group member, CASJ

The U-shaped discussion is a tool that I use with my Social Studies 11 class in order to trouble some of the dominant narratives in Social Studies, particularly those centered around war and conflict.

Before we begin exploring historical themes in Social Studies 11, the students and I use the following five positions along a continuum to answer the question, “Should we study World War I in this class?”

Position 1: WWI offers nothing of value to learn and should absolutely not be taught in secondary school. The curriculum should focus on current issues upon which students might enact change.

Position 2: To avoid normalizing conflict, the curriculum should focus on peace studies rather than war.

Position 3: It is important to learn a few thoughtfully chosen elements of WWI that are relevant to current society.

Position 4: WWI should be taught in schools because it warns students about the dangers and failures of war, which will help prevent further wars.

Position 5: WWI is the most important part of history to learn in school.

To ignite this discussion, the students write personal responses to the central question. We then survey the overall attitudes in the class by either asking the students to stand in front of one of the five positions arranged along a U-shape in the room, or by placing the written responses in front of the positions. This preview grants space for students to recognize their own perspectives, acknowledge if there is a dominant perspective in the room, and consider the societal factors that may have contributed to any dominant perspectives.

Students are then assigned one of the five positions for the discussion and work collaboratively to generate and research ideas that support their perspective. This preparation time allows students to preview the historical elements of WWI, and also promotes critical and creative thinking surrounding perspective and significance in history.

Before the U-shaped discussion begins, many of the students fiercely defend the significance of WWI. Although the majority of the students know very little of the particulars of WWI, most assume and fiercely defend its importance. I begin by asking students how and why they have become invested in this perspective without yet knowing anything about WWI. By encouraging students to question the factors that have contributed to their very automatic response, I challenge students to confront their own unconscious biases surrounding historical significance. This is particularly important as we move towards inquiry-based learning in social studies. If students have preconceived ideas about historical significance, their inquiry projects risk parroting dominant narratives rather than inviting new stories and perspectives.

One of the main objectives of this U-shaped discussion is to question the curriculum that is deemed important to learn. While an argument could easily be made about the historical and national significance of WWI, this discussion invites students to begin with the question of significance rather than the assumption, and to consider how curricula, like history, are selectively culled. What is taught in classrooms is not neutral because all curricula promote particular narratives. For example, very different narratives of Canada are constructed if one celebrates the Canadian military’s role in capturing Vimy Ridge or critiques the discriminatory enlistment practices in WWI that excluded Indigenous people, African Canadians, and Japanese Canadians. As an additional outcome, students develop an understanding of how focusing on certain narratives and including or excluding specific events and people results in the construction of specific narratives of Canada or Canadians. Such questioning of narrative, perspective, and significance is critical in historical learning.
All too often, historians and pedagogues declare what knowledge is necessary for Canadians to know and students to learn. Such assertions are often made absent of discussions of bias and curricular consequence, and behind the veil of a supposedly neutral, capital-T Truth history. Yet, there is no singular knowledge or historical narrative from which to draw our course content. People readily recognize the messaging of curriculum when it is something they disagree with, and alternately suggest a supposed neutrality when the curriculum aligns with their world view. For example, some might protest, claim bias, and argue disrespect when a teacher challenges the “they fought for our freedom” narrative of WWI, but raise no questions or concerns when the “freedom” narrative is followed. Both are historical perspectives of WWI, and both are equally political. As pedagogues, both the content on which we focus and the methods we employ inherently convey message. This unintended messaging of education is the hidden curriculum of content and method.

While this U-shaped activity focuses on WWI, what follows is often a very thoughtful discussion about the purpose and consequences of learning about war in general. Through thoughtful exchanges, students challenge the idea that learning about war has resulted in a more peaceful society. Students begin to consider the hidden messaging of curriculum by questioning how centering war and moments of conflict in our classrooms may inadvertently teach them that war is “natural.” In turn, we might ask how this messaging might influence students’ responses to current government actions, such as choices surrounding military spending and action.

The discussion also invites consideration about the focus on historical events in the social studies curriculum, which might contribute to a lack of knowledge about current issues and produce citizens who passively consume history rather than actively responding to current issues. Often students representing Position 1 will suggest that it is more important to learn about current environmental issues, disparities in wealth and living conditions, and human rights injustices, as they are more significant to this generation, and are issues upon which they might be able to enact change.

Within the debate, students in Position 3 introduce particular aspects of WWI that they deem significant, leading the class to question which pieces surrounding WWI are important. Through this contemplation, students also consider how particular events might contribute to more or less favourable understandings of Canada, which can lead to discussions of identity. For example, how might focusing on conscientious objectors, pacifist movements, or the marginalized groups who were excluded from war, rather than on the stories of soldiers, politicians, battles, and weaponry communicate very different things? These discussions may lead students to consider how highlighting certain narratives over others can extend our discussions of significance and the subsequent messaging and consequence of the stories that are labeled as such.

By encouraging students to identify the dominant perspective as well as their own, taking an active role in deciding the focus of our learning, recognizing that our curriculum is not neutral and has messaging, and considering how particular stories might construct an image of Canada and Canadians, my hope is that the conversations that begin in this U-shaped discussion echo throughout our history units.

For more information

The Big Six: Historical thinking of concepts by Tom Morton and Peter Seixas.
Provides a far more fulsome and sophisticated discussion of engaging perspective and significance in teaching historical concepts.

Life in Classrooms by Philip Jackson
The original source of the term “hidden curriculum.”
War Toys to Peace Art

by Katherine O’Connor, Victoria teacher, Member-at-Large of the PAGE PSA, and Peace and Global Education Action Group member, CASJ

A newly updated resource with a beautiful focus on peace in the classroom—and the world!

In 2006, Susan Ruzic and Steve Fillipoff created an incredible resource filled with lesson plans, examples of real-world scenarios, and data sets to draw from when teaching with a focus on peace and hope for our world. The lessons still ring true, and they are as necessary and relevant to today’s world as they were 12 years ago. Peace and Global Education Action Group member Katherine O’Connor has updated this teaching resource with the most recent data and current events available.

Take a look at this resource for lessons you can use in your classroom, including:

• updated versions of your favourite lesson plans originally written for this resource
• French and English posters of the Convention on the Rights of the Child using child-friendly language
• a new section on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals
• sample lessons from the BCTF’s resource on the Israel-Palestine conflict
• new data on world military spending and how that money could be used to save lives
• information about a peace initiative that UNICEF is promoting
• information about the BCTF peace and global education posters and workshops available to members
• a list of new and current resources.

This resource is available online from TeachBC at teachbcdb.bctf.ca, or by ordering a hard copy from the BCTF at socialjustice@bctf.ca.

Show Racism the Red Card

by Todd Patrick, BCTF Assistant Director, Social Justice

Developed by CASJ’s Antiracism Action Group, Show Racism the Red Card was adapted with permission from the 1996 resource that was first created in the United Kingdom. This resource made use of the high-profile status of professional soccer players to help tackle racism. Show Racism the Red Card contains activities and lessons that teachers can incorporate into their discussions about racism and allyship. It also includes background information and a bibliography for further reading.

A contest has been developed in co-operation with the Vancouver Whitecaps Football Club, which also participates in the Show Racism the Red Card initiative. Details can be found on the Antiracism Dates, Advocacy, and Actions web page. The newly revised Show Racism the Red Card booklet is now available for download on the Antiracism Lesson Plans web page. Hard copies can be ordered from the BCTF by sending an email request to socialjustice@bctf.ca. Please include your name, mailing address, and the number of items requested. Visit the BCTF Antiracism web pages at bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=1763.
The Every Teacher Project (ETP) is an unprecedented body of research on LGBTQ issues coming from the Manitoba Teachers’ Federation, supported by a number of member-organizations from coast to coast. The recommendations toolkit is available online in its entirety and can be printed as a PDF. Many teachers want to take action, but it’s difficult to know where to start. This is a great resource.

There are also several resources that the Committee for Action on Social Justice (CASJ) LGBTQ Action Group has developed over the years, as well as workshops that can be booked through the BCTF.

Recommendation 1
Use inclusive language that communicates that LGBTQ students, staff, and family members, and specifically trans students are welcome, and integrate them equitably into school life.

It is so important that students who identify as belonging to equity-seeking groups see themselves as part of a school community. The language we use on a day-to-day basis can either create welcoming communities or put up barriers to inclusion, full participation, and equity. The BCTF workshops “Reach Out, Speak Out” and “Creating a Gender-Inclusive School Culture” are available as professional development opportunities. There are also several BCTF posters that can help identify and promote welcoming and safe spaces.

Recommendation 2
Create and/or help students form a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) on site.

The brochure “10 Steps Towards Creating a Gay-Straight Alliance” can be printed for free from the BCTF website. This resource is tailored to secondary schools, but there is also an elementary school brochure for younger students.

Recommendation 3
Make support for LGBTQ inclusion visible by posting and updating displays (bulletin boards, library books, themed events), resources (books, posters, flyers, pamphlets), websites, social media, and policies.

There are many teacher-created posters available to print from the BCTF website in the section on social justice, or by request.

Recommendation 4
Provide clear support and resources for LGBTQ-inclusive classroom projects.

The BCTF LBGTQ web pages have a number of workshops aimed at developing LGBTQ-inclusive projects, such as Sexual Health Education Part Two: Sex, Sex, Sex, which was designed to help Physical and Health Education teachers implement curricular competencies, as well as LGBTQ-inclusive resources. These are applicable to multiple curricular areas and all grade levels. There is also a list of age-appropriate stories and novels, and a comprehensive collection of resources for teachers on TeachBC at www.teachbc.bctf.ca.

Recommendation 5
Provide professional development opportunities on LGBTQ-inclusive education, and especially on gender diversity and support for transitioning students.

BC educators who self-identify as belonging to equity-seeking groups and their advocates have developed the workshop “Creating Gender-Inclusive School Cultures,” which was created specifically to help support transitioning students. In addition, the workshop “Reach Out, Speak Out” gives educators strategies to help make their classrooms, hallways, schools, and districts welcoming and truly inclusive for students.

Recommendation 6
Create opportunities for teachers to dialogue.

There are BCTF initiatives in place to help fund teachers’ dialogue as teachers work together to build inclusive school communities:
• Program for Quality Teaching
• Local Social Justice Grants.

Every teacher needs to be working towards LGBTQ-inclusive schools that fully communicate that LGBTQ students, staff, and families are integrated equitably into the school culture.

For more information, visit the LGBTQ pages of the BCTF website: bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=6106.
BRYAN’S STORY: An elementary perspective
I grew up in Burnaby, attended Burnaby schools, and have spent my career teaching in Burnaby. In both roles, as a student and as a teacher, I’ve struggled with how to address or respond to homophobic commentary or behaviour that escalated to homophobic bullying. I grew up in an environment where being out was dangerous and people rarely addressed hateful comments directed at sexuality or perceived sexuality.

As a teacher, I was conflicted about responding to those situations. I didn’t want to draw attention to myself or draw criticism for taking a position, yet I felt that addressing homophobic behaviour or introducing sexual orientation as a topic in the classroom was, in and of itself, coming out, an admission of my sexual orientation, and a forwarding of the “gay agenda.” I really wanted my career to be defined by my accomplishments and to avoid becoming dismissed as the “gay teacher.”

My perspective changed significantly in light of the public response of the Burnaby Parents’ Voice movement. I suddenly felt an obligation to provide students with a different perspective than was being reported. It wasn’t because I felt personally attacked by the dialogue that was taking place, but I was genuinely concerned for any student who sat in a classroom questioning his or her sexual orientation or gender identity. I worried that they would hear the negative messages and the contempt with which certain words were used, and not feel like they could respond or receive support. I nervously raised the topic and took tentative steps towards opening the classroom dialogue, well aware of the potential for controversy. I was surprised to discover that I didn’t have to say much; students were relatively comfortable voicing their views and responding to each other. They engaged in respectful conversation and posed questions that indicated their genuine curiosity. Our local policy and, more recently, the direction from the BC Ministry of Education that all BC school districts include Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) in their codes of conduct, have encouraged me to do more.

In my new role as the SOGI Support Teacher for Elementary Schools, I help teachers recognize the importance of including SOGI content to create safe, inclusive learning environments. I provide them with access to tools to start SOGI conversations in their classrooms, and share ways that they can seamlessly integrate SOGI content into a variety of existing curricular contexts. Teachers can start conversations in classrooms by using relatable anecdotes, and by sharing picture books, read-alouds, videos, and novels that depict LGBTQ characters. These can then often be linked to other curricular objectives so that SOGI content is embedded in their practice rather than made a distinct, separate curricular topic. These SOGI-connected lessons expand opportunities for students to see themselves and their families represented in the curriculum.

DAN’S STORY: A secondary perspective
My journey with SOGI education began over eight years ago. It was my second year working for the Burnaby School District, and I was an English teacher at Moscrop Secondary School. A student approached me after school one day and asked if I would help start up a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) club at the school by being the sponsor teacher. My immediate reaction was to say no. At the time, I was not out at work and was fearful of being outed through this role. While I was confident in my skills as a teacher, I wasn’t confident that my sexual orientation would be openly accepted by my peers, students, and administrators. Torn between doing what may be best for me, and what was best for the students at my school, I said yes. Forming a GSA wasn’t about me; it was about the students at my school who needed a club that I wish had been available to me when I was in secondary school.

Looking back at that moment, I am reminded of how much fear and anxiety I had about being myself at work. It’s not that something specific happened to make me feel this way; it was something unspoken. It is this same unspoken
fear that others, just like me, still feel at school, be they colleagues or students. It is precisely because of this fear that we as educators need to ensure that we actively work to make our classrooms and schools safer and more welcoming places for all students, regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, or background.

When people ask me about what I do in my role as a District SOGI Support Teacher, my answer always hinges on a few basic principles. First, I support students. Sometimes this involves helping with conflict mediation, other times it involves one-on-one conversations when students need personal support. Second, I support staff. A major part of my job is providing education and building capacity within colleagues about SOGI education. Oftentimes I help with offering curricular connections and giving teachers the tools and knowledge they need to make their classrooms safe and respectful spaces for all. Finally, I support the district. Through providing education, running district events, and shaping district policy, the work done at the district level is equally important.

What has made Burnaby schools so successful with championing SOGI education can be summed up in five key steps, which we refer to as the Burnaby Schools SOGI Model.

**BURNABY SCHOOLS SOGI MODEL**

**Step 1: SOGI Policy**
In June of 2011, the Burnaby School Board unanimously passed Policy 5.45—its Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Policy. While the policy itself was contentious, sparking debate about its importance, it started an important conversation about making our schools safer for all.

**Step 2: SOGI District Committee**
Without action, policy simply becomes another document collecting cyber dust on a website. Luckily, in the Burnaby School District, a joint district committee was formed with a seat at the table for all members of the educational system, including students.

**Step 3: SOGI District Support Teacher**
In 2014, the district created a part-time position dedicated exclusively to district SOGI work. The following year, the district added a second part-time SOGI Support Teacher to support secondary schools. Currently, Burnaby is the only BC district with two SOGI Support Teachers (elementary and secondary)—a full 1.0 FTE. The two-position model is beneficial in that it provides an opportunity to collaborate, to share responsibilities, and to learn together.

**Step 4: SOGI Educator Network**
One of the most invaluable keys to the district’s success is being a part of the SOGI Educator Network. One of the biggest takeaways from the network was the SOGI 1 2 3 Learning Module videos and presentations that were created at www.SOGIeducation.org. Through the generous funding of the ARC Foundation, a series of six learning burst videos and four learning modules were created. The videos all focus on a different SOGI education topic, and they include the voices of everyone who was part of the pilot project last year. These resources have now become the standard for all members of the network in educating and training staff across all districts—the building blocks of SOGI education.

**Step 5: SOGI District Events**
The Burnaby School District has created many events to illustrate our commitment to creating inclusive and welcoming communities of learning, and to show our support for district students and staff.

- **Annual Student Breakfast:** In recognition of the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHAT), this event gives students an opportunity to come together in a show of solidarity and support against homophobia and transphobia, and to hear keynote speakers share their stories, engage in team-building activities, and deepen their understanding about LGBTQ+ topics.
- **Diversity Dance:** The dance is sponsored by our secondary school GSAs and our district SOGI committee, but is open to all district secondary school students (8–12) who support diversity of all students. Organized almost entirely by students, this event is unlike any other.
- **Vancouver Pride Parade:** For the past six years, the Burnaby School District has been a part of this event, submitting a float that proudly showcases our dedication towards inclusivity and respect for all. The float is organized by the district SOGI committee and includes all its members.
CampOUT!

by Anna White, Camp Director for UBC’s CampOUT!, housed in the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Social Justice

UBC’s CampOUT! is a social justice leadership summer camp for queer, trans, Two-Spirit, and allied youth ages 14–21 from BC and the Yukon. CampOUT! provides a supportive space for LGBTQ2S+ youth to develop personal, interpersonal, and group skills, create support systems, and foster resilient community development.

What does camp look like?
We get on a boat together and embark on a journey of self-discovery, community-building, and learning. We also encounter discomfort—being away from what is familiar, getting bitten by mosquitos, unlearning harmful language, and unpacking our privilege. CampOUT! creates opportunities for embodied learning about key skills for being community members:
• balancing our needs with those of others, while working towards a common goal
• engaging in courageous conversations
• taking risks
• navigating social interactions
• accepting ourselves while striving for ongoing growth and learning.

Grounded in the theoretical framework of the Social Change Model of Leadership (Komives, 2009), CampOUT! creates positive and meaningful social change by addressing the root problems youth are facing. Research shows that the health and wellness of youth increases when they have strong support systems and feel connected. We facilitate those connections. Our intergenerational leadership team is key to the sense of belonging that campers experience at CampOUT! The diversity of age, race, identity, and experience creates an opportunity for youth to connect with a wide range of “possibility models.” We break down stereotypes that are reflected in the media, and in turn, campers’ imaginations are set free. Campers make powerful connections that impact their lives in positive ways after they leave camp.

Who comes to camp?
Youth who identify as queer, trans, Two-Spirit, intersex, asexual, lesbian, gay, genderqueer, or questioning are welcome. Some are children of gay parents, or siblings of LGBTQ2S+ individuals. Other campers are learning to be better allies to queer, trans, and Two-Spirit communities. Some campers experience struggle around their identity and/or orientation, while others are less conflicted around their identity and are simply looking for a celebratory space that welcomes them for who they are.
How much does it cost?
In order to bring campers from all walks of life and from all around the province, we commit to making the camp as financially accessible as possible. It costs us over $500 per camper to run the program, but we only ask for a $30 commitment fee. Travel reimbursements are available, and we connect youth with service providers to support travel arrangements.

The funds to run the camp come from community supporters, foundations, and corporate donors. Every dollar raised goes directly to camp programming and travel costs. Campers have dubbed donors as their “fairy godparents” who make their camp dreams come true.

Quotes from Campers
“I learned to be careful with assumptions or expectations because things are never what they really seem.”

“I learned bravery, patience, and self-care. Oh! And leadership.”

“I learned how to accept myself and trust others! I learned how to be thorough and respectful about consent. I learned about other smaller towns in BC.”

“Attending camp helped me to feel not alone in my struggles and that there are people out there like me. I feel more proud and not ashamed to be transgender.”

When is camp?
July 5–8, 2018

How to apply to camp: The 2018 leadership applications will be online February 1–March 1, and camper applications will be online February 15–March 30. All forms can be found at campout.ubc.ca.

Acknowledgements
Thank you to the community partners on our advisory committee: Trans Care BC, Out in Schools, PeerNetBC, Qmunity’s Gab Youth Program, The BC Anglican Diocese, Love Intersections, and last but certainly not least, the BC Teachers’ Federation for their ongoing support of this project by spreading the word and hosting our Community Advisory Committee meetings. Thank you for supporting us in creating a space for so many queer, trans, and Two-Spirit campers to grow their curiosity, confidence, and connections.
The Centre for the Comparative Study of Muslim Societies and Cultures has been established at Simon Fraser University (SFU) to encourage academic discussion and public understanding of the cultures and societies of Muslim peoples in the past and present. As Muslim societies and cultures have increasingly become the focus of public and academic attention, the variability and flexibility of Muslim practices and perspectives remain absent from the discussion, leaving the public largely unaware of them. The centre has worked to redress this imbalance by broadening the discussion to introduce more comparison and complexity in the study of Muslim societies and cultures from Africa, through the Arab and Persianate worlds, and into Asia and the West.

Through a variety of programs, lecture series, colloquia, and public engagement, the centre works to enrich the discussion around this topic. In partnership with other SFU departments, it strives for an in-depth, interdisciplinary approach to discussing both contemporary topics and themes through antiquity within Muslim societies and cultures and the Muslim diaspora. For example, topics from this year’s lecture series include discussions of Iraq’s 20th century wars, the army and revolution in Egypt, the Balfour Declaration, the Boko Haram in Nigeria, and the current situation of their former female captives and Lebanese in the Americas. These lectures are free to the public and are followed by a question and answer period with the respective presenters.

The centre has organized film festivals, art exhibits, and concerts, and created residencies and visiting professorships to foster interdisciplinary approaches to learning. It is always looking for ways to expand its ability to continue to provide a space for academic discussion and research. It has also established links with different community groups and local associations to engage the public. Furthermore, it has solicited contributions of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish language material for SFU’s research library. The centre strives to be a hub of resources for anyone interested in the study of Muslim societies and cultures.

The centre encourages the academic study of Muslim societies and cultures through an established Middle East and Islamic Undergraduate Concentration in History at SFU, as well as by offering several graduate-level scholarships annually.

Stay in the Loop

A weekly digest is available to provide information concerning events, positions, and other material related to the centre’s mission. If you are interested in joining our mailing list, please contact meiconbc@sfu.ca.

If you have any ideas you would like to discuss with us, or if we can be of any assistance to your activities and your mandate to educate the public, please do not hesitate to contact the centre’s director, Dr. Amal Ghazal, at aghazal@sfu.ca.

For events, updates, and more:
Facebook: www.facebook.com/CCSMSC.SFU/
Twitter: @CCSMSC_SFU
Website: www.sfu.ca/ccms.html
BCTF Regional Social Justice Fund 2018 Conferences

by Todd Patrick, BCTF Assistant Director, Social Justice

This year, the BCTF is sponsoring two regional conferences.

APRIL 7

On Saturday April 7, 2018, the Surrey Teachers’ Association (STA) is hosting Reclaiming Common Ground: A cross-border social justice conference. This event for classroom teachers will include workshops offered in all six BCTF CASJ action group areas: LBGTQ, antipoverty, status of women, environmental justice, antiracism, and peace and global education. The STA has invited our teaching colleagues from across the border in Washington and Oregon to participate in the conference. Naomi Klein and Seth Klein will be the keynote speakers—a rare opportunity!

We teachers are facing various attacks on our school system profession and practices. Public education as a common space—the foundation of a democratic society—has lost ground over the past 10 years. It’s time to reclaim the space that’s been lost to the voices of hate, bigotry, and neoliberalism. It’s time for teachers to re-engage in their important role in the process of social transformation.

This is a great opportunity to reach across the border and connect with colleagues who care about social justice!

Registration information can be found by typing “cross-border social justice conference” into your Internet search engine.

APRIL 20–21

On April 20–21, 2018, the Haida Gwaii Teachers’ Association (HGTA) is excited to be hosting a Regional Social Justice Conference titled The Justice of Place: Indigenous ways, social justice, and teaching.

On the Friday, teachers, students, community members, and Elders will share their knowledge through workshops on a variety of topics, including reconciliation, Indigenous sovereignty, Indigenous ways of being, antipoverty issues, environmental justice, women’s rights, antiracism, gender and LGBTQ equity, violence prevention, and trauma-informed approaches to teaching and learning. On Friday evening, there will be a social event for teachers at the Haida Heritage Centre.

On Saturday, place-based learning will occur with visits to the communities, the Haida Heritage Centre, carving sheds, and North Beach, followed by a shared meal and accommodation on North Beach in the Hiellen Cabins.

More details and registration information can be found on the Haida Gwaii Teachers’ Association website: www.haidagwaiiteachers.com. You can also contact Stephen Querengesser, Local President, Haida Gwaii Teachers’ Association, at 250-637-1805 or hgta@bctf.ca.
2016–17 Ed May Social Responsibility Fund recipients

Each year, the BCTF awards approximately 18 grants of up to $2,000 for classroom and school-based projects related to social justice through the Ed May Social Responsibility Fund. The following articles describe some of the Ed May projects carried out during the 2016–17 school year.

North Island Secondary School Social Justice Expo: Compassion and action for a better world

*by Nimfa Casson, Antiracism Action Group member, CASJ*

What is the North Island Secondary School (NISS) Social Justice Expo?

The NISS Social Justice Expo is an event that showcases students’ breadth and depth of research on social issues that matter to them. This is an annual school activity intended to help our students develop a keen awareness of social justice issues and their causes, and hopefully give them the tools necessary to successfully participate in finding probable solutions through local or global service-learning projects.

This event is organized and set up like a science fair for social-justice projects. Students are involved in an inquiry-based approach to learning where participants will formulate guiding questions, locate and access resources, investigate the answers to the questions, build new understanding of the topic, and finally present the project at the expo in a creative and effective format. The event participation is open to all students in the district. As an incentive, a panel of evaluators is created to view the projects, interview participants, and select the best entry from both junior and senior categories.

Developed in 2012 as an assessment tool in a project-based Social Justice 12 class, it has now become a part of the school culture. Events and activities are developed to raise awareness of various issues based on the concept of balance, social equality, and individual freedom. The Social Justice Expo has become a constant, annual, and much-anticipated event in the school.

Examples of past issues researched by students include immigration, teen pregnancy, gun violence, discrimination, basic human rights, fair trade, poverty, racism, education, human trafficking, globalization, women’s rights, civil and political rights, social and economic rights, the sex trade, genocide, genetically modified organisms, the environment, sanctuary schools, and intergenerational trauma related to residential schools.

For the first few years of this event, BCTF Local Social Justice Grants and the Ed May Social Responsibility Fund were accessed in order to provide display materials, teacher coverage, and incentives for all participants.
Truth and Reconciliation Day 2017

by Cindy Wong, Burnaby teacher

The gentle aroma of sage filled the air, coupled with the quiet anticipation of students as they filed into our multipurpose room one-by-one, each experiencing cedar brushing by an elder or honoured guest. We acknowledge formally that we are living, learning, and teaching on unceded territories here at Moscrop Secondary (École Secondaire Moscrop) on our second annual Truth and Reconciliation Day.

This was a day of learning, discussing, and celebrating Indigenous cultures of Canada. Our school community gathered together to acknowledge the legacy of residential schools, consider the impact of colonization on Indigenous cultures, and reflect on issues that continue to impact citizens of Canada.

Throughout the day, students had the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the history, culture, and contemporary lives of Indigenous peoples in our nation. We were honoured to have guests from many walks of life with us that day who shared excerpts from their life’s journey with us.

The day began with an assembly that featured pow wow dancers, contemporary Indigenous music, and a keynote address by the MLA from our parent community. As the day progressed, students attended various workshops focusing on personal storytelling and youth activism, Indigenous art, Aboriginal law, an introduction to the First Peoples of Canada for English Language Learners, and other topics. The day culminated in an assembly at which our district Elder and a local spoken word poet were the special guests.

This event will carry a long-lasting impact on our school community. Students and staff regarded this day as a significant opportunity to deepen our cultural ties, strengthen our identities as part of our Canadian experience, and walk away with a deeper understanding of Aboriginal world views. This event provided us with an opportunity to create dialogue around the enduring effects of colonization in Canada, including its impact on communities today.

We look forward to continuing this annual Truth and Reconciliation Day event and strengthening our communities in the years to come.
Canada is Moving Towards Effective Corporate Oversight with New Human Rights Watchdog

by Emily Dwyer, Co-ordinator, Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability

Introduction by Barb Ryeburn, BCTF Assistant Director, Social Justice

At their April 6–7, 2017 meeting, the BCTF Executive Committee passed a recommendation from the Committee for Action on Social Justice to join the Canadian Network for Corporate Accountability (CNCA). The CNCA is comprised of 30 environmental, human rights, religious, labour, and solidarity groups from across Canada who work together to advocate for policy and law reform to ensure that Canadian resource extraction companies respect human rights and the environment when working abroad.

For over a decade, the CNCA has called for policy and law reform to prevent and remedy business-related human rights abuses. The Canadian government’s January 17, 2018 announcement creating an independent ombudsperson to investigate claims of harms linked to overseas business activities is a major policy breakthrough. If properly implemented, this promises significant advancement in respect for human rights by Canadian companies.

Independent investigations and public reporting
Canada’s new ombudsperson will be tasked with investigating complaints from around the world, and will be founded on the principles of “advancing human rights and assisting Canada in fulfilling its international human rights obligations.” The ombudsperson will be mandated to investigate, make public findings on allegations of harm, issue recommendations to remedy and prevent harm, and monitor the implementation of those recommendations. The Canadian government is committed to creating an office that is independent and ensuring that the ombudsperson has “all the tools required” to fulfill its mandate. Public reporting will help ensure stakeholder confidence in the process, and help inform communities, regulatory bodies, and investors.

Redress and withdrawal of government support
When harm is found, recommendations will be issued to companies regarding remedy and harm prevention. If recommendations are not implemented, or in cases of serious human rights violations, the ombudsperson may also make recommendations to the Canadian government to withdraw government support. Canadian government support to overseas extractive operations is extensive. It includes political backing from embassies and trade commissions and financing projects through loans and equity ownership—to the tune of billions of dollars per year. With the new ombudsperson, Canadian companies that do not properly address human rights issues risk losing that support, including support through Export Development Canada (EDC). Making access to government services and program support contingent on respect for international human rights will be an essential part of Canada fulfilling its international human rights obligations. For the EDC itself, the public reporting and recommendations of the ombudsperson will likely increase the pressure on that crown corporation to respond to criticism that its due diligence processes repeatedly fail to weed out companies with serious allegations of human rights abuse.

Recommendations for policy and law reform
This new office can help identify legal and regulatory gaps in Canada and advise the government of
policy and legal reforms to prevent and remedy future corporate misconduct. Currently, Canada lacks an effective regulatory framework and is falling behind other countries that are adopting corporate accountability legislation. As a result, Canadian companies have not been constrained from engaging in practices that have led to egregious human rights abuses, largely impacting women and Indigenous peoples, with impunity. As a home country to companies operating around the world, Canada is failing to meet its duty to protect against human rights abuse and to provide access to effective remedy to those harmed.

Requirements of an effective office
The office’s credibility will depend on its independence and its capacity to access the information needed to issue public findings. The ombudsperson will require the power to summon witnesses and compel the production of documents free from government interference. Armed with these tools, the new ombudsperson can serve as the foundation of an effective corporate accountability framework that deters companies from engaging in harmful activities and points to effective remedy when harm does occur.

Marked improvement over existing mechanisms
Taking a lesson from the ineffectiveness of existing non-judicial mechanisms in Canada, the ombudsperson will not be hamstrung by a dependence on “good-faith” voluntary company participation or an institutional culture that defines success as “getting the parties to the table.” For the new ombudsperson, cooperation by the company will no doubt be helpful, welcomed, and as the Minister of International Trade emphasized in the announcement, expected. It is not the foundation of the office, however. The ombudsperson—if all parties agree—may seek dialogue-based solutions, but the office’s raison d’être goes far beyond that.

Cornerstone of a corporate accountability framework
The ongoing crisis at the Canadian-owned Media Luna mine in Mexico, where yet another mine worker was murdered recently, highlights the urgent need for the establishment of a Canadian Ombudsperson on Responsible Enterprise with the mandate and tools to do the job. January’s announcement helps give some comfort that communities like those impacted by the crisis at the Media Luna mine might soon have somewhere to seek redress. In that sense, the new office will help fill the significant gaps in access to remedy identified by the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, during its June 2017 official visit to Canada.

Beyond mere remedy for harm already done, which is correctly constituted, this new office could move Canada towards the adoption of an effective corporate accountability framework. Its creation can be viewed as the beginning of a shift in orientation of Canadian policy: from a narrow focus on helping Canadian companies to manage risks in their international operations, to a strong focus on the rights of impacted communities, Canada’s international human rights obligations, and the Canadian government’s commitments to a feminist and human-rights-based foreign policy.
Earlier this year, I spoke at a BCTF event for the World Environmental Education Congress, sharing some of my experience bringing equity and inclusion into environmental work and education. Prior to becoming a teacher, I was active in the environmental movement, working closely with Indigenous, racialized, and low-income communities to protect their water, land, and air.

The environmental movement has long been criticized for failing to include the diverse voices that make up communities impacted by environmental destruction. I see the field of environmental education repeating some of these mistakes. The idea that “environmentalism” means protecting the environment for the dominant class—reflecting lifestyles of white, male, and other privileged groups—has long directed the activities and messages of the environmental movement, ultimately shaping how the mainstream understands environmental stewardship.

In recent years, however, the environmental movement has been taking steps to change the conversation from simply stopping clear-cuts and preventing pipeline spills to a more in-depth conversation that includes the stories of those most impacted—predominantly non-white and low-income individuals. In other words, the environmental movement is trying to be more equitable and inclusive.

But is environmental education following the trend?

Based on the resources I have found and conversations I have had with peers, I think that it has been easy for environmental educators to fall into the same trap as environmental activists—unintentionally ignoring the experiences of marginalized and frontline communities. While it may not be our intention to erase these stories, our intention becomes meaningless if the outcome is still the same: exclusion and erasure. This often happens because, as environmental activists, we see ourselves as doing such selfless work. In doing so, we may consider ourselves to be champions of social responsibility whose area of focus does not involve notions of equity and inclusion.

I try to reflect on my own practice and ask if I am actually reproducing this problem as an environmental educator. I teach Earth science and junior science, so environmental stewardship has become an increasing area of focus in my classroom. Regrettably, the understanding that marginalized communities are hit first and worst—and are sometimes even thrown under the bus—sometimes doesn’t make its way into the science curriculum.

The revised curriculum, however, not only encourages us to explore social and personal responsibility in our classrooms, it mandates us to do so. My students have learned about Indigenous communities impacted by pipelines and tar sands in my Geology 12 and Earth Science 11 classes. We have discussed the health impacts of industrial mercury poisoning on members of the Grassy Narrows First Nation when learning about bioaccumulation and biomagnification in Science 9 and Science 10. In these same courses, we have learned about the impact of climate change on marginalized groups when studying the carbon cycle. During these classes, concepts of race, colonisation, and class, along with the intersectionality of these concepts, naturally emerge.

Bringing equity and inclusion into environmental education means prioritising stories that are otherwise forgotten, erased, or excluded. It means not simply talking about carbon in the atmosphere and the destruction of coral reefs, but also reflecting on the fisheries and economies being devastated by this habitat destruction. It means not only talking about the megafauna that are going extinct, but also considering the low-income farmers whose lands are being destroyed, the forced migration resulting from the climate catastrophe, and the ensuing need for affected communities to adapt to new environments.

The revised curriculum lends itself to a cross-curricular approach to teaching, learning, and fostering social and personal responsibility. Traditional environmental science and education may not necessarily include social issues, but excluding such issues does just that...excludes! In developing more inclusive classrooms, we need to be actively carving out space to ensure that inclusion happens. It may not come naturally. We will likely need to put effort into changing our practice to ensure it does.
Change is Good—Encouraging Engagement in Your Union and Making Space

by Ken Bisset, Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows teacher-librarian

A year and a half ago, I faced a personal dilemma: Do I continue doing something that I find extremely satisfying and truly enjoy, or do I move aside and make space for someone else to bring new skills, experiences, and ideas to the position I hold? I thought long and hard about my decision, but I knew deep down what it would take to do the right thing. I decided not to run in our local spring elections.

The position I’m talking about is the Local Representative (LR) to the BCTF Representative Assembly (RA). If you’ve ever attended the BCTF Annual General Meeting (AGM) during spring break, being an LR is like attending three additional mini-AGMs throughout the year. LR s receive reports from many committees, including the executive, finance, and pension committees, vote on recommendations and resolutions that guide the BCTF between AGMs, and represent members from all over the province.

Originally, I ran for an LR position to become a member of our local executive, but soon found the fall, winter, and spring RAs were something to look forward to. I enjoyed meeting colleagues from other parts of the province, getting to know the members of the BCTF Executive Committee, and learning about the internal workings of the Federation. It was “cool” to have the inside track on information regarding the union and teaching profession.

After four years, I came to the conclusion that it was time to move aside and let someone else have a go. I made this decision not because I wanted to stop being an LR, but because I didn’t want to deny the experience to someone else. Debate had risen in our local regarding term limits, and after much discussion, soul searching, and talking to colleagues at the very meetings I loved attending, I decided to step aside and make space. I knew that it was easier for an incumbent to win an election and that the best way to ensure change would be to vacate a space in our local.

One of the key factors in my decision was the importance of diversity. I’m a white, heterosexual, fifty-year-old male. If I really believe in the social justice causes I claim to support, then I needed to not only talk the talk, but also walk the walk. I enjoyed the time I had in my role, but it was important to allow for change and diversity and to be a good ally.

Some may claim that it is not sound to replace someone with experience with a member who has none. I would argue that fresh ideas, perspectives, and progress do not come from complacency. A union is only as strong as its members. If we neglect to encourage engagement and participation from all our members at all levels of the organization, then we are weaker for it. That’s not to say that experienced members don’t need to share their experiences and knowledge, but by making space and then mentoring the newbies, a good leader is ensuring the future of the BCTF and its locals. I am the perfect example. When I attended my first local RA, I had no experience. But with the guidance of those with experience, I became more confident and skilled. This is the way with any new job or role.

I have moved on and made the space I believe necessary, but continue to be a staff rep in my school. I also decided to apply for a position on the board of directors of the BCTF Assistance Society, and I am now the vice president of that board. This work has turned out to be some of the most rewarding of all my areas of engagement within the union. Would I be doing what I am now if I hadn’t vacated the position of LR? Maybe not, but that’s my point. I took the experience I gained as LR, made space for someone new by stepping aside, and have been able to use that experience in doing something just as fulfilling in a different area.

Having leaders in our movement with a variety of experiences working across the province makes us stronger and bodes well for a brighter future for teachers and their union.
Statement of Principles on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

The BCTF is a democratic union that recognizes the importance of encouraging and supporting involvement by all members, while recognizing that some members have historically been marginalized. For the Federation to be at its best, all members must see themselves reflected in its goals, structures, and practices. The BCTF will strive to identify and eliminate barriers to participation through programs, procedures, by-laws, and policies supported by specified resources and education.

The BCTF supports equity, diversity, and inclusion within the union, the workplace, and in broader society and acknowledges that:

1. Discrimination and harassment must not be ignored and must be challenged and rectified.
2. Not all discrimination is deliberate or visible. Inadvertent, hidden, and systemic discrimination must be identified and addressed.
3. The marginalization of certain groups must be specifically recognized. These groups include, but are not necessarily limited to women; racialized workers; Indigenous people; people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, questioning, or two-spirit; people with disabilities; and those whose participation is impeded because of economic circumstances or family status.
4. Equal opportunity to participate in the Federation does not mean treating all members the same. Within a democratic framework, promoting the engagement of members of equity-seeking groups is a valid and necessary approach to reaching equal outcomes.
5. Federation programs and policies designed to eliminate barriers must not only do so, they must be widely seen to do so.

2017 AGM
The Statement of Principles on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion was one of several Executive Committee (EC) recommendations aimed at increasing equity and inclusion within the Federation that was carried at the 2017 BCTF Annual General Meeting.

What actions has the BCTF taken to fulfill its commitment to equity and inclusion? Below is a sampling of some of the supports that the BCTF has developed for members.

1. **Equity and Inclusion web pages: bctf.ca/EquityAndInclusion.aspx**

   The Equity and Inclusion web pages provide access to a variety of resources to help develop more inclusive spaces in classrooms, schools, communities, and locals. Click on “Equity and Inclusion” under the “Social Justice” tab on the BCTF website to find:
   - information on BCTF Equity and Inclusion policies
   - resources to help raise awareness of barriers to inclusion and strategies to overcome them
   - tools to create more inclusive spaces
   - resources that delve deeper into these issues.

2. **Posters**

   To request free copies of these BCTF Equity and Inclusion posters, send your name, mailing address, and a list of requested items to socialjustice@bctf.ca.

   1. Privilege
   2. Inclusive meeting self-reflection

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 PRIVILEGE

- is a special right or advantage available to only a particular person or group
- is a good thing
- is not about guilt
- is important to acknowledge
- is experienced by everyone
to varying degrees
- is difficult to see

Achieving equity and inclusion involves:
- engaging in uncomfortable but necessary discussions
- making space for those who have less privilege
- being open to learning more*

   *visit the BCTF Equity and Inclusion webpages at bctf.ca/EquityAndInclusion.aspx

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Inclusive meeting self-reflection

- Has language been respectful of diversity?
- Did all participants have opportunities to contribute?
- Was space provided for communicating with a variety of styles?
- Were appropriate accommodations provided allowing full participation?
- Were those directly affected by an issue provided space to speak the most?
- Did allies speak in support of—but not on behalf of—members of equity-seeking groups?
- What can I do to make this meeting more inclusive?
- How have I contributed to inclusivity so far?

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*visit the BCTF Equity and Inclusion webpages at bctf.ca/EquityAndInclusion.aspx
3. Professional development
The following BCTF Equity and Inclusion workshop and PowerPoint presentations are featured on the “Tools” page of the Equity and Inclusion web pages.

Creating Inclusive Spaces: Applying an Equity and Inclusion Lens to your Local, Schools, and Classrooms
Available as a SURT or PSI workshop, Creating Inclusive Spaces provides teachers with strategies to help contribute to more inclusive environments. Participants are introduced to barriers to inclusion based on race, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, and physical ability, and explore strategies and resources available on the BCTF Equity and Inclusion web pages to address these barriers. Through an inquiry model, participants begin thinking about specific actions they can take in their classrooms, schools, locals, and communities.

BCTF Zone Meetings Equity and Inclusion PowerPoints
The PowerPoint presentations, facilitators notes, and handout packages from the Equity and Inclusion activities presented at the 2016 and 2017 BCTF Zone plenary sessions are now available for use in locals. These presentations address the topics of privilege, inclusive meetings, and unconscious bias. For copyright reasons, the Fall 2017 Zone presentation has been modified with a new activity that introduces the concept of bias.

4. Strategies to monitor the BCTF’s progress towards achieving equality and inclusion
You may have noticed that some BCTF surveys and event registration forms have included equity census questions. These questions ask respondents to specify their age and gender identification, and to indicate if they are a member of a visible minority, an Aboriginal or Indigenous person, or a person with disabilities. These surveys are anonymous. None of the information provided is linked back to the individual member.

The BCTF has begun asking members equity census questions for two main reasons. These questions are included in surveys sent out to large groups of teachers in order to develop an estimate of the percentage of BCTF members who identify as belonging to equity-seeking groups. Equity census questions are also included in BCTF event registration and feedback forms to provide an indication of the percentage of BCTF members and event participants who identify as members of equity-seeking groups. Comparing the results from these two types of surveys provides an indication of the degree of inclusivity of BCTF events, and the extent to which members of equity-seeking groups have access to leadership opportunities.

The information provided by these surveys assists the BCTF in assessing the steps we are taking to improve equity and inclusion within the Federation. It also informs future equity and inclusion initiatives. While participants always have the option of selecting “prefer not to disclose” when responding to an equity census question, we hope that you will keep the goals of these questions in mind the next time you fill out a BCTF survey or event registration form.
2017–18 Committee for Action on Social Justice (CASJ)

• advises the BCTF on social justice issues
• reviews and promotes social justice workshops
• liaises with community groups and NGOs
• develops policy on emerging issues
• reviews and develops materials for classroom teachers
• develops and supports networks of social justice contacts in the following action group areas: Antiracism, Antipoverty, Status of Women, LGBTQ, Peace and Global Education, Environmental Justice
• co-ordinates the work of the six action groups.

Antiracism Action Group
Maryam Adrangi
Ryan Cho
Nimfa Casson
Linda Frank

Workshops
• Bafa Bafa Rafa Rafa
• Creating Inclusive Spaces: Applying an equity and inclusion lens
• Incorporating Antiracist Strategies into BC’s Revised Curriculum
• Responding to Discrimination in the Workplace and the Classroom

Antipoverty Action Group
Leon D’Souza
Annie Ohana
Richard Pesik
Kati Spencer

Workshops
• Help End Child Poverty in BC’s Classrooms, Schools, and Local Communities
• Poverty as a Classroom Issue

Status of Women Action Group
Mary Lawrence
Trish Mugford
Sheena Seymour
Sonja van der Putten

Workshops
• Assertive Communication
• Stamping Out Cyberbullying
• Promoting Healthy Youth Relationships: Educating against gender-based violence.

Environmental Justice Action Group
Sue Ghattas
Julie Johnston
Heather Kelley
Shelley Serebrin

Workshops

Peace and Global Education Action Group
Shannon Moore
Katherine O’Connor
Deidre Torrence
Randy Wedel

Workshops
• Bringing Global Education into Your Classroom
• Creating Cultures of Peace
• Strategies for Discussing Controversial Issues

LGBTQ Action Group
Heather McDonald
Lizzie Midyette
Sean Moores
Nichelle Penney

Workshops
• Creating a Gender-Inclusive School Culture
• Reach Out, Speak Out on Homophobia and Transphobia
• Sexual Health Education Part One: One Size Fits All?
• Sexual Health Education Part Two: Sex, Sex, Sex!

Important SJ dates to celebrate

March 8  International Women’s Day
March 22  World Water Day
March 31  Transgender Day of Visibility
April 4  Refugee Rights Day
April 11  International Day of Pink
April 22  Earth Day
May 22–25  Aboriginal Awareness Week
June 21  National Indigenous Peoples Day

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Learning is connected to land, culture, and spirit.

We—the two-legged, four-legged, finned and feathered, plants and rocks—are all related.

We must always practice reciprocity through acts of giving and receiving.

Learning honours our Ancestors, Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Descendents.

It respects and embraces ceremony, protocol, and teachings that are connected to the sacred medicines including tobacco, cedar, sage, and sweetgrass.

Important teachings emerge through stories.

Learning involves developing relationships, respecting distinct cultures, and honouring the perspective of others in our communities.

The deepest learning takes place through lived experience. It requires exploring our identities, learning from our mistakes, and having gratitude for our gifts.

Learning is a journey that takes courage, patience and humility. It is about striving to become a better human being and living with balance in body, mind, heart and spirit.