Misrepresenting Aboriginal Peoples in Textbooks

By Daniel Shui, Committee for Action on Social Justice, Antiracism Action Group

The University of British Columbia’s Faculty of Education has deemed this school year the “Year of Indigenous Education” for teacher candidates, and for the first time introduced a mandatory course on Aboriginal Education in Canada for all undergraduate Education students. This is an important step toward not only making formal gestures that acknowledge the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, but toward a more significant, comprehensive recognition of their experiences. As a Social Studies teacher, I welcome these changes to the education program, but at the same time I look at the textbooks used in my field, and am troubled by the images used to represent Aboriginal peoples.

Because of their ubiquitous presence and use in the classroom, textbooks have become central to the content of education. Over time, a nation’s collective memories are constructed and reconstructed, interpreted and reinterpreted, and so they are temporal, dynamic, and also contested. In addition to the text, visual images play a role in manufacturing memory. Because visual images, like text, not only convey basic information, but also provoke inferences and connotations, teachers should encourage the development of critical thinking skills in their students when interpreting these images, as well as the text.

Aboriginal Peoples as Marginalized

Textbooks (at least in the field of Social Studies) tend to depict Aboriginal peoples from a Eurocentric point of view, as peripheral objects in history generally marginalized as spectators, separate from the historical narrative. However,
as the historical subjects Europeans are portrayed as the accomplishes, achievers, and makers of history.

both present their backs to the viewer, their attitudes unknown to us. The significance of this historic moment is represented as belonging to European history, while its significance to the history of the Aboriginal people in this country, is ignored.

Arguably one of the most recognizable and historically famous paintings in Canada’s history is Benjamin West’s “The Death of General Wolfe”, which depicts the titular British hero fatally wounded on the Plains of Abraham in 1759. Wolfe is surrounded by officers and a lone Iroquois male figure, who sits contemplatively and mournfully at his feet. This event is covered by many Social Studies teachers, and the painting is reproduced in several textbooks. The viewer’s attention is decidedly directed to Wolfe, our eye follows the concerned gazes of his companions, and falls on his illuminated face. In contrast to Wolfe, an anonymous Iroquois figure is placed in the bottom left corner facing Wolfe, his back presented to the viewer. He is represented wearing feathers in his hair, large hanging earrings, and naked above the waist. His posture is serene, less distressed than the Europeans, though not uncaring. He rests his head on his hand, and directs his attention to Wolfe, apparently meditating on the sobering moment.

It is certainly doubtful that an Iroquois person was present at the death of General Wolfe. Benjamin West was an admirer of the concept of the “Noble Savage,” and so included a representation of the “contemplative Native.” Representations of Aboriginal people such as West’s perpetuate this sentimental notion of Aboriginal peoples as somehow mystical in nature. This notion soothes European anxiety about Aboriginal “otherness,” and perhaps also allays guilt around activities associated with colonization, as it serves to dismiss the agency of Aboriginal peoples as well as rendering them as relatively innocuous—but ultimately, it is an imaginary image.

Aboriginal Peoples as Essentialized

Textbooks that account for the more distant past tend to present images of Aboriginal peoples that romanticize, overgeneralize, or even demonize them. Textbooks that survey the more recent...
history tend to glorify Aboriginal exoticism and spirituality. From such depictions, Aboriginal peoples are essentialized into a prescribed image.

As an example, a graphic photograph of a young man performing the Sun Dance as a rite of initiation is shown in some textbooks.

Although there may be a description of the Sun Dance for the Plains Peoples, images such as these may inadvertently perpetuate the stereotype that Aboriginal peoples are “primitive” or “savage,” if the text or teacher fails to discuss the images critically. Questions come to mind, and teachers can use these in the classroom to further deconstruct such images. Despite being historically and photographically accurate, does the image do more harm than good in terms of students learning about the Sun Dance? What impressions does this image leave? Do those impressions say more about what is represented, or ourselves? Whose voice is used to describe this sacred ceremony? How and why was this sacred ceremony captured in a photograph? Has this image been misappropriated?

By presenting these images without comprehensive explanations and descriptions, students may receive them with lazy minds, filing the traits and characteristics shown as exhaustive, as what defines Aboriginal peoples as “Aboriginal.” In turn, their perception of Aboriginal peoples may become superficial and static, and may fail to recognize the vastness and variability of their history and cultures.

Inclusion and Integration of Aboriginal Peoples

Despite the Eurocentric narrative, as a significant step forward in Aboriginal education, some textbooks include a greater amount of content on Aboriginal peoples and issues than previous. More importantly, is that these inclusions are integrated into the main text, as opposed to presenting them literally in the margins, to be treated as asides or curiosities. However, most important is that textbooks give voice to the Aboriginal peoples in the narratives told. A few also recognize the paternalistic and forced assimilative nature of the federal government, admitting a “historic mistake”:

“Relations between the Aboriginal nations and the government were paternalistic, with the government managing their children... the Canadian government felt that the only solution to future resistance was to force assimilation on these Aboriginal people. The government wanted them to become like other Canadians in customs and viewpoint.”

(Bolotta et al., 2000, p. 7)

“Tragically, the Native people’s historic contributions and achievements were undervalued and overshadowed by the growing and ambitious immigrant population.”

(Fielding & Evans, 2001, p. 18)

“In true ethnocentric and Eurocentric fashion, the French and English disregarded the cultures of the Aboriginal peoples...”

(Smith, McDevitt, & Scully, 1996, p. 33)

“The government was misled by ethnocentrism and racist assumptions. It believed that European culture was superior, and by adopting it, the First Nations would improve their lives.”

(Smith, McDevitt, & Scully, 1996, p. 110)

By seeking to acknowledge what has been omitted from our historical narratives, textbooks can begin to recognize the history of Aboriginal peoples, as opposed to dismissing, neglecting, or concealing it. Furthermore, although small and highly selective, the incorporation of personal accounts, literature, and art from Aboriginal peoples in textbooks provides a crucial voice from Canadian history that has for the most part been excluded and/or silenced. By presenting more varied images of Aboriginal peoples that both challenge the traditional images and provide a voice, textbooks, and in turn teachers, can take a step toward a greater understanding of Aboriginal history and cultures, and provide an important perspective on the historical and contemporary events and issues in Canadian society.
With the inspiring words of Arthur Solomon, an Anishnawbe spiritual leader, I encourage teachers to re-examining, re-evaluating, and reflect upon their perspectives and practices in the classroom:

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References


Porn and Sexting

By Kristin Quigley, Committee for Action on Social Justice, Status of Women Action Group

Our society’s commitment to free enterprise means that our children are immersed in a world that encourages consumption of goods and services almost from the moment they arrive in this world. Products are sold using tried and true advertising strategies, such as, promoting the idea that personal happiness can be purchased. We are surrounded by images and sounds that demand our attention. The most intelligent people find it difficult to resist the persuasive subliminal appeal put out by advertisers recommending the purchase of various products: cars, technological/electronic devices, clothing and food, etc.

Young children can’t escape from being faced with the “cultural ideals” (visually and verbally) which appear to be designed to lead to feelings of inadequacy. Little girls are encouraged to become princesses, while little boys are told to become heroes who are destined to save the world from disaster or “evil forces.”

By the time kids enter school they already have some unrealistic expectations—many believe that acquiring certain toys, clothes, and food will satisfy them or make them perfect. As children become “tweens” they have greater access to the ever-present media portraying some very definite images about how to achieve “perfection” and success in our culture. Girls are targeted to conform to look beautiful in ways specifically defined by our society so they can be accepted by others. Advertisers, selling clothing for example, increasingly display images with sexual overtones which some psychoanalysts suggest impose a “hypersexualization” on our children. Authors of a book entitled The Porning of America explain how pervasive this effect is on our children (Sarracino & Scott, 2008).

This hypersexualization continues to affect students as they mature, entering the intermediate grades and high school. The digital technology has unimagined potential that permits an egalitarian quest of sorts—the Internet permits users to freely navigate seemingly unlimited information. Most kids have access to the Internet, and they use it to explore. Many will inadvertently or purposefully find information that has sexual content. Studies indicate that young boys log onto porn sites regularly. Also, our kids are quite skilled at recording images and movies to send to their friends through the Internet and text messages. Young girls are learning how to get a boy’s attention. In addition to texting ideas, they may be inspired to send personal photos to their current “crush.” These issues were raised in a recent Doc Zone documentary entitled Sext Up Kids, which aired on CBC on February 23, 2012.

Let’s consider some of the ways this activity may affect our children. During recent years the media has published some reports which indicate our young people may encounter incidents, involving the Internet, with some devastating consequences. Some teens have been involved in situations that transformed into problems that cannot be easily fixed. It seems that our children are wrestling with the distinction between what is defined as personal or private information, as opposed to public information. We can also reflect on the plight of the teenage girl from BC’s Lower Mainland whose rape was filmed and instantly displayed on YouTube—such exposure will have long-term...
consequences despite the fact that the circumstances were beyond the victim’s control. Furthermore, none of us want any child exposed to sexual experiences that are coercive or violent. If we, as a society, do not want pornography to be a primary source of education for our children then we must ensure that sex education is reliably provided in other ways, such as, through our public education curriculum.

Helping our children understand how to determine the distinction between private and public information is essential. Especially in light of the myriad ways information can be communicated using digital technology. We want them to avoid making mistakes that have a seemingly permanent consequence. Young people in any society are driven to find out about love and sex. Let’s help them develop a better understanding of their sexuality that will lead to a general improvement in sexual health and authentic relationships for their generation. The BCTF offers a new workshop entitled Resisting Normalized Sexual Violence. Teachers looking for information to help their students can find details about the workshop, and access trained facilitators, through the BCTF.

We must continue to oppose the use of violence in all its forms. Despite the confusion generated by the media around violence, such acts remain unacceptable ways to resolve problems. It is clear that no one would ever want to see another incident like the murder of the 14 women at the Polytechnique in Montreal, Quebec. Therefore, BCTF’s Status of Women Action Group recommends that December 6th become a day dedicated to the consideration of non-violence in schools throughout our province. We also believe that further prominence assigned to this day would complement the existing National Day of Action and Remembrance on Violence Against Women, as well as the White Ribbon Campaign supported by the late Jack Layton.

What would your country look like if the government was 75% women?

This question launched the 1st Annual International Women’s Day 2-minute video contest, hosted by the Dancing With the Octopus: Women and Politics (DWtO) project. Women from Canada, India, South Africa, Turkey, Afghanistan, France, and Switzerland imagined and submitted their scenarios. The winning entry “What if...” was created by Victoria, BC’s Rebecca Hansen, and can be viewed along with the five top finalists at www.dancingwiththeoctopus.com.

Rebecca is a 13-year old with a bold vision and, from what I hear, she’s not the only one! Recently, friends and colleagues have been raving about the passion, intelligence, and willingness of their “tween” daughters to engage in leadership activities. So what happens to these girls as they move along into their later teens and twenties? Their confidence seems to take a major blow. The pressure to conform, the media’s portrayal of the unachievable perfect body image, fear of being a little too smart as they vie for boys’ affection and approval, and the message that women don’t count, have all emerged as explanations for why women past their early teens are reluctant to get politically involved. This could also help explain the rise in youth voter apathy.

Recent research shows that one out of every two human beings is a woman, in a perfect world one out of every two politicians would be a woman too! The U.N. calculates that a little less will do—critical mass to create change can begin to be achieved at
one in three. Here in Canada, we’re at one in four, tying us with Australia in 46th place for women in government, just behind Mexico, Iraq, and Sudan. Clare Beckton, Executive Director of Carleton University’s new program, Centre for Women in Politics and Public Leadership, maintains that the only way to get great decisions is by having both men and women weighing in equally. Neither perspective is better than the other, she maintains, but men and women do bring different things to the table for consideration. When both are present a balanced decision is more likely to be reached. How do we get there when women are so hesitant to step-up?

It is critical that we, as adults, plant the seeds of leadership and validity early enough that girls understand what’s at stake. Young women need to learn that they count, their vote counts and there is a place for girls in every conversation and political arena.

That’s where DWtO comes in—it’s a multi-media, non-partisan project inviting women of all ages into a creative conversation on how to get more of us elected and engaged in the political process.

Each of its eight ‘tentacles’ uses a different medium to playfully expose and deconstruct myths and obstacles that typically deter women—partisan nastiness, character assassination and judgment by the media, lack of privacy, travel, long demanding hours, fear of a family-work imbalance, and not feeling qualified, to name a few.

It appears that the absence of role models is a big factor—the stories of the strong women who helped to build this country are not typically taught in school. DWtO’s solution?—Let’s put women’s social and political contributions from the past into the public curriculum, and make it easy for overwhelmed teachers and unmotivated students to access.

The newest DWtO tentacle in development is an educational peer-to-peer online tool entitled Dancing Backwards: Let’s Get Canada’s Political Women into History. This replicable, accessible web-library resource will be made up of videos of very short, storytelling presentations—puppet shows, skits, slide shows, cartoon or graphic representations, etc.—created by both school-aged girls and boys. It will be fun, informative, and entertaining; role models as seen through the eye of the demographic that needs them most.

The hope for this project has been reinforced by positive feedback from educators, coupled with personal experience in the field from DWtO. By introducing young students to the history of women in politics, their stories and their contributions, more boys will view girls as intellectual partners after seeing the courage and accomplishments of our foremothers. Certainly young women and girls will show more interest in shaping their own world and will believe that they have the right and the wherewithal to do so.

www.dancingwiththeoctopus.com
Sandy@dancingwiththeoctopus.com
“BC’s hardest working” (bcshardestworking.ca) is a great resource for teaching on poverty, inequality, and social justice.

The recently released “Rich 100” list shows the combined worth of the wealthiest 100 Canadians surpassed $200 billion this year, with 11% belonging to the 12 British Columbians included in the list. Clearly, it’s been a great year at the top. For most of us, it’s a very different story. We’re working harder than ever before but still falling behind.

Launched in December, “BC’s hardest working” is a project that tells this story. Featuring profiles of 100 people from around British Columbia, it shines a spotlight on the working poor and those working hard to survive on income assistance in BC.

Anna Wong, for example, is a room attendant at the Sheraton Vancouver Airport, owned by the Lalji family, who are in 24th place on the Rich 100 list. While the Laljis are now worth $2.25 billion, an increase of 9.7% over last year, Anna makes just $16 an hour after working almost 20 years at the hotel. Despite seeing room rates at the hotel more than double in her time there, Anna’s wage has barely increased.

Anna’s story is hardly exceptional. BC has the largest gap between the rich and the poor, and the highest poverty rate in Canada. Over half-a-million British Columbians live below the poverty line, and most of them have a job in the paid labour force (sometimes more than one).

According to the latest Child Poverty Report Card from First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, 43% of children living in poverty in BC, that is 41,300 children, lived in families with at least one adult working full-time for the whole year, and the vast majority live in families with at least some paid work. Food Banks Canada’s survey HungerCount 2012 shows that 16% of households accessing food banks in BC this year had income from current or recent employment.

Clearly, having a job is not enough to protect people from poverty and hunger. Yet, the government continues to push their “Job Plan” as a solution when presented with the facts of poverty in BC. The sad reality is that a minimum wage job does not lift a person above the poverty line. Even with the increased minimum wage of $10.25 an hour, full-time workers living on their own in a large city in BC will still find themselves about $3,000 below the poverty line.

The rest of us are not faring much better. In the last 10 years, the average household income of...
Will you STAND for social housing?

By Jean Swanson and Dave Diewer
Coalition

Most teachers are lucky enough to be able to afford decent housing. However, many thousands of students live in families who can’t afford adequate housing—some are even homeless. Across BC the low estimates put the number of absolutely homeless people at around 10,000; hidden homeless (sleeping in a car or with friends) at almost 40,000, and at risk of homelessness at about 66,000. In addition, we need about 2,700 more units of social housing every year just to keep up with population growth. Indigenous people, migrants, and women are especially at risk.

The federal government isn’t funding new social housing, and the province doesn’t have an ongoing program for it either. The Social Housing Coalition wants to make social housing an issue for the upcoming May provincial election. Made up of mostly Lower Mainland groups like the Renters’ Union, ACORN, Carnegie Action Project, Streams of Justice, as well as provincial groups like the Council of Senior Citizens Organizations, the coalition wants federal and provincial governments to build at least 10,000 units of social housing a year for at least the next decade or so.

Visit “BC’s hardest working” at bchardestworking.ca

WCTF Social Justice Newsletter, Winter 2013
While 10,000 units would cost about one percent of our BC Gross Domestic Product, it would create about 13,000 direct jobs. The BC government has a number of capital projects that are finished (like the BC Place roof) and spending money on housing would be a good way to keep the economy spinning. Plus, several studies show that it’s cheaper to end homelessness than to maintain it.

As a way to generate popular political pressure for more social housing, the Social Housing Coalition is holding province-wide STANDs FOR HOUSING for one hour every Saturday at 12:00 p.m. So far STANDs have been happening in Kamloops, Port Alberni, Vancouver, Surrey, New Westminster, Burnaby, and Victoria, with others poised to start in Campbell River and Smithers. The Coalition hopes they will become contagious and spread throughout the province.

The idea of a STAND is based on the action of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, an association of Argentine mothers whose children “disappeared” under the military dictatorship between 1976–83. They stood in a city square every week for years and their white scarves became an international symbol for peaceful protests against profound individual and collective loss.

The first STAND in Vancouver began in October 2007. Community Advocates for Little Mountain (CALM) held a STAND every Saturday on the corner of 33rd Avenue and Main Street to protest the destruction of social housing and forced dislocation of a meaningful community.

In February 2008, Citywide Housing Coalition (CHC) expanded the STANDs within Vancouver to over a dozen locations, and over the ensuing months CHC and CALM organized STANDs across the province. At one point there were 75 STANDs throughout the province on a single day, and BC teachers played a significant role in that action.

Now we are asking people from around the province to take up a STAND for social housing.

Raising public awareness of the housing crisis in our province is fundamentally an educational effort; and mobilizing for a political solution through the provision of social housing is a social justice effort. On both counts, teachers have a vital role to play. So here is how you can get involved in a tangible way.

All you need is a handful of people willing to gather on a busy corner in your community from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. on any Saturday beginning now. The Coalition will provide STAND kits with a banner that says “Social Housing Now,” eight red scarves, and leaflets explaining the housing crisis and the demands for social housing.

If you would like to order a STAND kit and organize a STAND, please e-mail Dave Diewert at ddiewертt@shaw.ca.

Will you STAND for social housing? We hope you will.
“Keep your coins, we want change!” On October 17, 2012, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, students in 22 schools around the province hosted events and activities in their schools and local communities to raise awareness about poverty and inequality in BC.

From Vancouver, Burnaby, Surrey, Richmond, New Westminster, North Vancouver, Hope, Quesnel, Summerland, and Telegraph Creek, students came together on End Poverty Day to take action. Instead of doing food bank drives, they asked for a long-term solution that addresses the root causes of these issues.

“The whole goal of this was not to ask for donations but to help raise awareness about poverty issues and hopefully motivate the government to do something about this,” says Gurpreet, a student from Princess Margaret Secondary in Surrey.

Students organized a range of activities to get the message across in their school—including information tables, reading groups, letter-writing to politicians, and more. Students collected hundreds of signatures for the call for a poverty reduction plan for BC. In Surrey, students co-ordinated the “Sole Challenge,” where students and teachers gave up one thing that they may not have if they were living in poverty—make-up, cell phone, food, or shoes. Seeing so many people walking around the school without shoes on sent a powerful message.

Some of the students also took part in the Welfare Food Challenge, which meant they had only $26 to eat for the week, the amount left over after taking all other expenses away from the $610 that a single, employable person receives on welfare. Students went hungry in order to raise awareness about the inadequacy of BC’s welfare rates.

Students were motivated by their concern about the shameful levels of poverty and homelessness in British Columbia. Paul, a high school student at J.N. Burnett Secondary in Richmond, asked people “to feel some sympathy for those who are in that position...some are just not as lucky as others.”

This day of action was launched by students in the leadership classes at Princess Margaret Secondary in Surrey. In fall 2011, these students organized a poverty awareness week (see the Winter 2012 Social Justice Newsletter) and last year they challenged schools around BC to join them, which led to the success of End Poverty Day 2012. The day of action was co-ordinated by the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, which provided a support package full of resources for schools that got involved.

These Surrey students also produced a short, powerful video called This is what inequality looks like in BC, which has now been watched by over 2,000 people. Check it out at bcpovertyreduction.ca/learn-more/videos.

The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition is calling for the government to commit to a poverty reduction plan for BC, and has the support of over 375 organizations representing over 300,000 people in BC. BC is falling behind. All but two provinces have either poverty reduction plans or are in the process of creating them.
process of adopting them, and the success of these plans is already clear across Canada.

Poverty has a profound impact on the health and well-being of children and families. When children go to school hungry or poorly nourished, their energy levels, memory, problem-solving skills, creativity, concentration, and behaviour are all negatively impacted. As a result, these children may not reach their full physical, social, and intellectual developmental potential.

A comprehensive approach needs to boost the incomes of those living in poverty, but also build the social infrastructure, public services, and assets that are vital to providing a path out of poverty and improving quality of life—social housing, universal childcare, education and training, and community healthcare.

There is nothing inevitable about poverty and homelessness in a society as wealthy as BC’s. Most other places in Canada are saving lives and money by tackling poverty head-on. On End Poverty Day, students raised their voice and said “It’s time BC did too.”

For more information, please visit bcpovertyreduction.ca.

To get involved in End Poverty Day 2013, please e-mail Trish at trish@bcpovertyreduction.ca.

The Ismaili Centre, Burnaby, was opened in 1985 by the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney in the presence of His Highness the Aga Khan. An image of the entrance to the building can be found at theismaili.org/imagedetail/2782.

Upon entry into the Ismaili Centre, Burnaby, I was struck by the peace and tranquility of the building, and generosity of the people who were there volunteering. I was immediately issued a name tag and urged to become comfortable in the beautiful surroundings. Minutes later the volunteers began to bring out wonderful snacks, sandwiches, and healthy beverages. Guests were invited to circulate in the large room.

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After an introduction by a member of the Ismaili Society, the welcome address was given by Mohamed Manji, President of the Ismaili Council for Canada. Manji welcomed UBC President Professor Stephen Toope, who was invited to give the inaugural lecture of a series of lectures at the Ismaili Centre. Toope’s topic was “Pluralism and Pragmatism: The Role of Universities in Developing Human Potential.”

Toope was appointed as the 12th president and vice-chancellor of The University of British Columbia on March 22, 2006. He began his second five-year term in July 2011. Toope is an International Law scholar who represented Western Europe and North America on the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.
from 2002–07. Toope’s academic interests include public international law, legal theory, human rights, international dispute resolution, and family law.

I enjoyed Toope’s discussion of the work of Mike Byers, researcher on the icebreaker Amundsen. One of Byers’ jobs is to look for multi-year ice. Toope said that he views the icebreaker as a metaphor for a university—“a microcosm of the world.”

There is no need to summarize Toope’s lecture since the transcript can be found at president.ubc.ca/files/2012/01/inauglecture2012jan31.pdf. There is also a summary provided by the The Ismaili Society at theismaili.org/cms/1329/around-the-world.

However, one part of the lecture struck a strong chord for me. It was Toope’s commitment to promotion of education and social justice for Canadian First Nations’ peoples. For those readers without adequate time to read Toope’s complete lecture, I find the following remarks especially worthy of note:

I can think of no more vivid, concrete, and current provocation than Attawapiskat. Attawapiskat is the First Nations reserve in northern Ontario that declared a state of emergency this past October. Where people are living in shacks with mould on the walls and using plastic buckets for toilets. Where in 1979, thirty thousand gallons of diesel fuel leaked under the local elementary school and the school remained in session. Finally closed in 2001 because of ongoing health problems suffered by students and teachers, the school still has not been rebuilt and students sit in temporary portables. And the story continues, with floods, sewage overruns, and evacuations into short-sighted solutions that become long-term living conditions...

This situation is partly a legacy of colonization, and partly of Canada’s Residential School System. Aboriginal people in Canada did not have complete rights until 1982, and those living on reserves were not covered by the Canadian Human Rights Act until 2011—last year. Church and state’s attempts to “civilize” and “assimilate” Aboriginal peoples was in fact a systematic eradication of their identity— their languages, cultures, and communities—through separation of families, forcible repression, and routine abuse. The last of the Indian Residential Schools closed in 1996, but the effects on individuals, their families, and their communities are intergenerational, and continue to this day, and the loss to our society as a whole is incalculable.

This is a chapter in our history of which a majority of Canadians remain entirely unaware. Universities have come to understand that we play a role in that ignorance, and must play a role in its remediation. It is also our responsibility to help bring about reconciliation between Canadian society and its institutions, and Aboriginal communities.

In November, UBC hosted a dialogue on the history of Indian Residential Schools in Canada. The two-day-long event was held in the First Nations House of Learning, a traditional longhouse situated on our Vancouver campus. University administrators, students, and residential school survivors gathered in a circle to speak, and to listen. In the centre of the circle sat a child’s empty desk, with a blanket laid over the back of the chair. The desk was there to represent the children’s lives that were lost, and those that were so profoundly damaged. As I looked at it, I suddenly understood that this simple school desk, which to me symbolizes education and all its opportunities, represented something utterly different to residential school survivors, and to their children and their children’s children. Many cultures place a high value on formal and particularly western education, and we see those cultures well represented on our campuses. But what about those cultures for whom “education” actually meant eradication? For whom “pluralism” meant assimilation or annihilation?

It is worthwhile to note that in the federal budget, released on March 30, 2012, only $275 million was allotted for Aboriginal Education and Training, an amount falling far short of the $500 million that many Canadians had hoped for.

After Toope completed the delivery of this wonderful lecture, he was thanked by Samira Alibhai, President of the Ismaili Council for British Columbia. Manji presented Toope with a painting entitled the Bismillah Whale, by Sherazad Jamal. Toope ended the lecture by answering several questions from the audience. Tours of the beautiful Ismaili Centre were available for guests to the building.
UNICEF is a leading advocate for children, helping them to build a world where the rights of every child to survival, protection, development, and participation, are realized. Ensuring Canadian children are brought up with an understanding of their rights, and how to respect the rights of others, creates more equitable societies with engaged citizens. UNICEF knows that to transform the world we need to reach every child, and Canadian children are no exception.

Rights Respecting Schools is a UNICEF Canada initiative that uses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to enhance an inclusive and respectful school culture for children and adults. Rights Respecting Schools work with UNICEF educational staff to identify how the CRC can be used as a curriculum connected framework to augment existing initiatives. From what is taught and learned in the classroom, to how students participate in school life, to administrative and policy decisions, to initiatives addressing diversity, bullying behaviour or special needs, Rights Respecting Schools reinforces provincial and territorial efforts to create a learning environment in which both children and adults feel respected and act responsibly. For an overview, including how easy and rewarding it is to use the Rights Respecting Schools initiative, watch our three-minute video here rightsrespectiveschools.ca.

Research demonstrates that students attending Rights Respecting Schools have improved self-esteem and are more engaged in their learning. They are also found to have a more positive attitude towards diversity and enhanced moral understanding, leading to a reduction in prejudice and bullying, and support for global justice. In Rights Respecting Schools, relationships (student-student and student-teacher) are improved. Teachers also report greater self-esteem, enhanced job satisfaction, and decreased levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion.

UNICEF Canada is now working with 15 Rights Respecting Schools across Canada, reaching over 4,400 students and close to 400 teachers, administrators, and support staff. Four are here in BC including the very first Canadian Rights Respecting School, Cape Horn Elementary in the Coquitlam School District. On our website you can watch how two of our newest Rights Respecting schools are bringing rights into their classrooms.

To ensure that the growth of Rights Respecting schools across Canada is successful and sustainable we are increasingly working with local partners to support local schools. If you think your school could be interested in becoming a Rights Respecting School, if you would like to support Rights Respecting Schools in your region, or if you would simply like to know more, please contact Sophie Cooper, by e-mail scooper@unicef.ca, or by phone 1-800-308-3248, ext. 8820.

Our Global Classroom program continues to support teachers in bringing global citizenship, including children’s rights education, into all classrooms. For more information, including engagement tools and free to download classroom-ready resources, visit unicef.ca/en/teachers.
THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

in child friendly language

Every child in Canada and around the world from birth to 18 has rights. Rights are what you should have or be able to do to survive, thrive and meet your full potential. All rights are equally important and are connected to each other. You are born with these rights, and no one can take them away.

UNICEF Canada wants to support you and your school as you explore rights, respect and responsibility for yourself and others here and around the world. UNICEF Canada’s Respecting Rights and Responsibilities (RRS) initiative uses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention) to make sure everyone feels included and respected. It includes giving you meaningful opportunities to voice opinions about your school, and to make it the best school it can be!

Article 1 Everyone under 18 has these rights.
Article 2 All children have these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what their parents do, what language they speak, what their religion is, whether they are a boy or a girl, what their culture is, whether they have a disability, or whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.
Article 3 All adults should do what is best for you. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children.
Article 4 The government has a responsibility to make sure your rights are protected. They must help your family protect your rights and create an environment where you can grow and reach your potential.
Article 5 Your family has the responsibility to help you learn to exercise your rights, and to ensure that your rights are protected.
Article 6 You have the right to be alive.
Article 7 You have the right to a name, and this should be officially recognized by the government. You have the right to a nationality. Do you belong to a country?
Article 8 You have the right to an identity – an official record of who you are. No one should take this away from you.
Article 9 You have the right to live with your parent(s), unless it is bad for you. You have the right to live with a family who cares for you.
Article 10 If you live in a different country than your parents, you have the right to be together in the same place.
Article 11 You have the right to be protected from kidnapping.
Article 12 You have the right to give your opinion, and for adults to listen and take it seriously.
Article 13 You have the right to find out things you share with others, by talking, drawing, writing or in any other way unless it harms or offends other people.
Article 14 You have the right to choose your own friends and join or set up groups, as long as it isn’t harmful to others.
Article 15 You have the right to choose your own religion and beliefs. Your parents should help you decide what is right and wrong, and what is best for you.
Article 16 You have the right to privacy.
Article 17 You have the right to get information that is important to your well-being, from radio, newspaper, books, computers and other sources. Adults should make sure that the information you are getting is not harmful, and help you find and understand the information you need.
Article 18 You have the right to be safe and paid fairly.
Article 19 You have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, in body or mind.
Article 20 You have the right to special care and help if you cannot live with your parents.
Article 21 You have the right to care and protection if you are adopted or in foster care.
Article 22 You have the right to special protection and help if you are a refugee if you have been forced to leave your home and live in another country, as well as all the rights in this Convention.
Article 23 You have the right to the special protection and care that you need as a child.
Article 24 You have the right to protection from harmful drugs and from the drug trade.
Article 25 If you live in care or in other situations away from home, you have the right to have your basic needs met. You should not be treated as an adult or be made to leave home if it harms or offends other people.
Article 26 You have the right to help from the government if you are poor or in need.
Article 27 You have the right to food, clothing, a safe place to live and to have your basic needs met. You should not be treated as an adult or be made to leave home if it harms or offends other people.
Article 28 You have the right to a good quality education. 
Article 29 Your education should help you use and develop your talents and abilities. It should also help you learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people.
Article 30 You have the right to practice your own culture, language and religion. Minority and indigenous groups need special protection of this right.
Article 31 You have the right to play and rest.
Article 32 You have the right to protection from work that harms you, and is bad for your health and education. If you work, you have the right to be safe and paid fairly.
Article 33 You have the right to protection from harmful drugs and from the drug trade.
Article 34 You have the right to be free from sexual abuse.
Article 35 No one is allowed to kidnap or sell you.
Article 36 You have the right to protection from any kind of exploitation (being taken advantage of).
Article 37 No one is allowed to punish you in a cruel or harmful way.
Article 38 You have the right to protection and freedom from war. Children under 15 cannot be forced to go into the army or take part in war.
Article 39 You have the right to help if you’ve been hurt, neglected or badly treated.
Article 40 You have the right to legal help and fair treatment in the justice system that respects your rights.
Article 41 If the laws of your country do not provide better protection of your rights than the articles in this Convention, those laws should apply.
Article 42 You have the right to know your rights. All adults should know about these rights and help you learn about them, too.
Article 43-54 These articles explain in more detail the protection and help set out in the Convention.
A warning for schools along oil pipeline routes

By Gwen Barlee, Policy Director, Wilderness Committee

With controversy heating up around two major tar sands pipeline projects headed for the Pacific Coast, British Columbians are becoming increasingly concerned about the possibility of an oil spill. Of course, nobody wants to see an oil spill happen anywhere in BC—but what would the impact be if a pipeline burst or began leaking toxic fuels right next to a school?

This frightening prospect has been raising eyebrows among parents and teachers in the Lower Mainland recently, after a lawsuit was launched by a Nevada mother against Texas-based pipeline company Kinder Morgan. This is the same company behind the newly proposed Trans Mountain pipeline, which if approved would carry 890,000 barrels of tar sands diluted bitumen per day from Alberta, through densely populated areas in Metro Vancouver to a terminal in Burnaby.

The US lawsuit alleges that Kinder Morgan failed to adequately monitor and repair a pipeline that was leaking jet fuel into the ground beneath a school playground over a decade ago. According to the plaintiffs, evidence suggests that this leak contributed to a number of childhood cancer cases at the school, including the death of a 10-year-old cancer victim.

The tragedy in Fallon, Nevada is exactly the type of tragedy we need to prevent from happening here in BC. The potential risk to BC schools was highlighted by teachers, environmental advocates, and citizens in November 2012, in the midst of a series of “public information sessions” hosted by Kinder Morgan—some of which were held at elementary and secondary schools.

One of these information sessions was held at Stoney Creek Community School in Burnaby, which happens to be located next to the pipeline route. The existing Trans Mountain pipeline (which has been operating since the 1950s) runs parallel to the school’s playground and directly underneath the adjacent organic community garden. The newly proposed project would run a second pipeline alongside that one.

In light of the new Kinder Morgan proposal, the Burnaby Teachers’ Association (BTA) has brought up an important point—despite the pipeline’s proximity to several Lower Mainland schools, teachers in the region have not received any health, safety, or evacuation training to be able to respond to a possible oil spill emergency. While schools have detailed plans for what to do in the event of an earthquake or a fire, there’s no real procedure to follow if a pipeline leak were to be detected in the area.

The fact that there’s no plan in place doesn’t mean that oil spill incidents haven’t happened here before. In fact, just last year there was an oil spill at Kinder Morgan’s Abbotsford tank farm that released toxic fumes into the air near Auguston Traditional Elementary School. Students were kept inside as a precaution, and the building’s outdoor air intake was...
The Jellyfish Project

By Dr. Dan Kingsbury and Bronia Kingsbury

The Jellyfish Project is a unique educational initiative focused on generating awareness among youth about the declining health of our world’s oceans and our environment at large. Through the power of music and live performance, students become engaged in the environmental conversation and are given information on how to become active participants in the sustainability movement.

Available free of charge to all Canadian middle and high schools, a typical Jellyfish Project presentation begins with a high energy show by Mindil Beach Markets, a popular rock band from the Sunshine Coast, BC. Mindil Beach Markets’ ability to adapt their sound has allowed them to play with acts ranging from Nazareth to Bedouin Soundclash to Del the Funky Homosapien. Though their sound is laced with elements of funk, hip-hop, and reggae, at the heart of this heterogeneity is a true passion for rock and roll. The performance grabs the students’ attention, earns their respect, and serves as a perfect segue into the band’s extremely important environmental messages.

Delivered through a polished and captivating slideshow, including images, animations, and videos, the band members present a stunning portrayal of the environmental crisis our planet is currently facing. Students are educated on topics such as overfishing, plastic pollution, and climate change, and are empowered with the knowledge of sustainable seafood choices, responsible consumerism, renewable energy, green career options, and the power of the Internet and social media for global action and change.

Band members Daniel Kingsbury and Rod Campbell are trained by former US Vice-President and Nobel Laureate Al Gore, as certified “Climate Reality” presenters climateralityproject.org. The initiative has earned support
from The Vancouver Aquarium’s Ocean Wise program, Youth for Environmental Stewardship Society (YesBC), and dozens of schools in Western Canada. Mindil Beach Markets is scheduled to present The Jellyfish Project to approximately 6,000 students in 18 schools this spring as part of their nationwide tour of their new album It Might Take Long. Available March 5, It Might Take Long is the band’s second full-length release. During the tour, 20% of the proceeds from the new album will be donated to the Ocean Wise program! To check out the band, please visit mindilbeachmarkets.com; to learn more about The Jellyfish Project, visit thejellyfishproject.org.

In addition to The Jellyfish Project’s school presentation program, three complimentary programs are available under the Jellyfish Project umbrella:

1. **The Jellyfish Project:** Ocean Health, Our Health, Our Future…” is a sustainability learning resource, developed by Dr. Dan Kingsbury, for Grades 4–12, and will be available this year. It’s about teaching young people to be aware, to care, and to be in action because their future will be the most impacted by environmental collapse. Why the jellyfish? Jellyfish thrive in the warm and acidic conditions spawned by global warming, and overfishing has reduced their predators—as a result their numbers are increasing. When everything else is dead in the oceans, all that will be left will be jellyfish, minnows, and bacteria. So jellyfish are a profoundly powerful symbol of the fragility of the world’s oceans.

The main themes covered in the learning resource’s four units are:
- jellyfish
- overfishing
- climate change
- ocean warming and acidification
- plastics in our oceans
- sustainable seafood
- alternatives to pesticides and other toxins
- our environment, our health
- drinking water
- fighting global warming at the farmers market
- the car your family drives
- classroom action project.

![Image of a polluted beach](image-url)
A multimedia introduction is READY NOW! Request yours and join the conversation.

2. The “Green Angel Program” was also developed by Dr. Kingsbury to train people to be ambassadors of the sustainability movement by becoming Green Angel consultants. The training itself is free. Dr. Kingsbury firmly believes that sharing the sustainability conversation with others is the key to change, and that one-on-one communication is very powerful.

A Green Angel consultant’s role is to visit a client’s home to perform a “Home Safety Toxic Tune-Up,” and discuss the toxic and carcinogenic substances that may be in the client’s personal and home care products, cosmetics, food they eat, and the effects these chemicals have on the body and the environment. Alternative product and energy ideas are suggested, and an action plan is created to begin the process of “tuning-up” the home so that it becomes a greener environment in which to live, ultimately benefiting the community as a whole. This training is available to people over the age of 16. This is a self-directed, self-employed position.

3. The “Green Angel ACTION Project” is a 3–6 week classroom action project designed to complete the learning resource “The Jellyfish Project—Ocean Health, Our Health, Our Future...,” but can be a stand-alone project independent of the resource. Students learn about toxins and carcinogens found in common home products and on ingredients lists; how to optimize energy and waste efficiencies; water quality; and food safety. The project involves room-by-room audits of the students’ homes, a home survey, and a student report sharing the results of the audits and survey in the neighborhoods of those involved in the project. The central idea is that by sharing the sustainability conversation, one home at a time within the community, homes can become safer and less toxic.

For more information on The Jellyfish Project, and any of the programs listed above, please contact dankingsbury@thejellyfishproject.org.
CampOUT is a community-based outdoor summer camp held in the Vancouver area for queer, trans, and allied youth ages 14–21 from across BC. In affiliation with the University of British Columbia, the camp provides opportunities for these youth to develop leadership skills, build self-esteem, inspire each other, foster hope and resilience, and connect with resources to support their health and well-being (physical, mental, social, sexual, educational, and spiritual). CampOUT provides a supportive space for youth to “be themselves.”

Many queer and trans youth face considerable challenges—recent media attention, for example, has profiled cases of homophobic bullying leading to suicide. CampOUT is a timely and essential youth program—contributing to a social movement that helps to empower youth, both while at camp and when they return to their home communities. As such, it is a powerful influence both on the individuals involved and on the wider fabric of Canadian society.

The inaugural camp was held in 2010. Participants frequently described their experiences at camp as life changing, reporting that “CampOUT showed me that I am not alone;” and speak passionately about the skills they had developed: “I will be kinder and more respectful to everyone around me, and I will be confident enough to stand up for myself and others,” and “I will bring a new resolution to help those with privilege realize the importance of being allies.”

Our campers come from Vancouver, North and West Vancouver, Burnaby, Richmond, Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, New Westminster, Maple Ridge, Delta, Surrey, Victoria, Campbell River, Courtenay, Comox, Duncan, the Gulf Islands, Forest Grove, Prince George, Kamloops, Kelowna, Winfield, Cranbrook, Penticton, and Whitehorse!

UBC’s mission includes fostering leadership, developing global citizens and responsible members of society, valuing diversity, being an agent for positive change, and striving to secure an equitable future for all. UBC’s strategic plan includes a commitment to community engagement and enhancing community well-being. These are all values and qualities encapsulated by CampOUT’s vision.

CampOUT is guided by a Community Advisory Committee comprised of community leaders of all ages who work as volunteers and share their expertise and experience in advising the university. Committee members become involved through past involvement with the camp, connection to the University, and community partners like the BC Teachers’ Federation, Out on Screen, or Qmunity. As we do with the camp leaders and camp participants we seek to build a diverse committee to ensure that the camp activities address the needs of the diversity of communities we work with and for.

**Remarkable facts about CampOUT:**

**CampOUT is ACCESSIBLE:** Financially—CampOUT participants are asked to pay a $25 registration fee to demonstrate their commitment to attending the camp. This fee can be waived upon request. Travel reimbursements are available for campers. We have had campers coming from as far away as Whitehorse and we were able to refund their airfare. We are committed to accommodating any disability related needs of campers, leaders, and volunteers.

**CampOUT is DIVERSE:** Queer, trans, questioning, two-spirit, and allied youth in BC have vastly different experiences from one and other based on their communities, families, cultural experiences, support
CampOUT! is:

• A summer camp for queer, trans and allied youth aged 14–21.

• A chance to engage with imaginative, critical, fun, and innovative programming as well as a wider community of people!

• An opportunity to develop leadership skills, build self-esteem, inspire each other, foster hope and resilience, and connect with resources to support health and well-being.

• Only $25, thanks to the generosity of community partners and donors! Travel bursaries available.

Get Involved:

Apply online to be a

• CAMPER (ages 14–21)

• CABIN LEADER (ages 19–25)

• or COMMUNITY RESOURCE VOLUNTEER (ages 26–126!)

DONATE NOW and be part of the community that makes CampOUT! possible.

Go to campout.ubc.ca or phone: 604.822.8298 (1.877.678.CAMP)

“I never imagined there could be a place with so much love and support…”

– Camper, CampOUT 2012
systems, school, and community resources. CampOUT ensures that all campers, leaders, and volunteers reflect the diversity of the applicant pool. Youth from all over the province and all different walks of life are included. CampOUT is inclusive of Queer, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Asexual, Straight Allies, Pansexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Two-Spirit, Intersex, Questioning, and curious youth (to name a few).

**CampOUT is UNIQUE:** While most initiatives for queer and trans youth are urban, CampOUT is an opportunity for these youth to have a safe and fun experience in the great outdoors. Building community in nature is an experience like no other. The trust, honesty, humour, and openness that can be cultivated in a camping situation is empowering and inspiring in a unique way. CampOUT makes this type of community building possible for youth that may not feel safe or inspired to attend other camps.

**CampOUT is MAKING IT BETTER:**
No one should have to wait years to be treated with respect. With the support of community partners, we are making daily realities better for all youth by providing access to diverse community building and practical skills and resources to bring home to their communities.

**CampOUT is a COMMUNITY PROJECT:**
UBC relies on community leadership, expertise, involvement, and donations to be able to house CampOUT and cultivate it as a sustainable project.

**CampOUT is a NURTURING and STRENGTHS BASED ENVIRONMENT:**
Campers and Leadership alike are encouraged to share their skills with the community at camp to build self-esteem, inspire each other, and foster hope and resilience.

Out in Schools, in partnership with Canadian Heritage, present the 2nd Annual Nation-wide Rise Against Homophobia initiative. This unique video contest is a fun way to engage students in social justice and compliments current school curriculums.

$2,500 will be awarded to the winning video!

$1,000 will be awarded to 2nd and 3rd place.

Visit outinschools.com for more details.
2010–11 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
Gurpreet Mahil
Daniel Shiu
Amar Sull

Workshops
• Bafa Bafa/Rafa Rafa
• Socializing justice: Taking action against racism
• Responding to racism: From reflection to praxis.

Status of Women Action Group
Carol Arnold
Gail Chaddock-Costello
Kristin Quigley
Jody Tetreau

Workshops
• Assertive communication skills
• Thirsty for change: The global water crisis
• Resisting normalized sexual violence against youth.

LGBTQ Action Group
David Butler
Vanessa Liston
Joe Winkler

Workshops
• Breaking the silence: Understanding and acting on LGBTQ issues in schools
• From silence to action: How to be an ally on LGBTQ issues.

Antipoverty Action Group
Amy Dash
Debbie Sabourin
Sue Spalding

Workshops
• Poverty as a classroom issue
• Teachers can make a difference for children living in poverty.

Peace and Global Education Action Group
Dan Hula
Shannon Rerie
Deidre Torrence
Karen Whyte

Workshops
• Bringing global education into the classroom
• Creating cultures of peace.

Environmental Justice Action Group
Michelle Hamilton
Jennifer Jury
Shannon Lanaway
Shelley Serebin

Workshops
• Linking thinking: Integrating environmental education into all classrooms.

Important SJ dates to celebrate
March 21 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
April 22 Earth Day
May 12 World Fair Trade Day
June 21 National Aboriginal Day

Please note: The BCTF is not responsible for the content or links found on any external web site. Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author.
School of Allies
Strength in Diversity

COMMITTEE FOR ACTION
ON SOCIAL JUSTICE (CASJ)
ACTION GROUPS

Aboriginal Education
Antiracism
Environmental Justice
LGBTQ
Peace and Global Ed
Antipoverty
Status of Women

I'VE GOT YOUR BACK!
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