

Teacher

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Childcare-Let's make it happen

Early childhood programs in BC, a vast wasteland



Childcare advocates protest childcare cuts at the BC Legislature during the Throne Speech on opening day of the third session, February 13, 2007.

"Up to 80 Strong Start Centres will open in underutilized school spaces over the next year." (Speech from the throne, February 13, 2007)

by Noel Herron

The simultaneous announcement of the expansion of the BC Liberals' much-vaunted early childhood initiative, erroneously labeled "Strong Start," and the sharp cutbacks in the established provincial network of Child Care Resource and Referral centres for young

...when it comes to planning and implementing a comprehensive continuum of quality care, learning programs, and initiatives in early childhood, BC is close to being in the Dark Ages.

children in the same Throne Speech, highlight the disarray and confusion around the provincial government's approach to a crucial area of public policy in this province.

In response to an uproar from the childcare community, Linda Reid, minister of state for childcare, in a recent back-pedaling e-mail message to resource and referral programs, promised to reinstate part of the

funding. But \$5 million is still being cut and layoff of workers and centre closures are still going ahead in parts of the province.

Additional cuts for childcare operating funding will force operators to raise parent fees and a cap on capital funding for new spaces guarantees that families will languish on waitlists for existing spaces.

Given the conflicting announcements by various ministers over the past three years, the recent disbanding of the interministerial subcommittee on early childhood, the fragmented ad hoc approach to the use of federal funds awarded last year by Ottawa, the slashing of funding to provincial resource centres that helped families find childcare spaces, and the current jurisdictional split between Tom Christensen's Ministry of Children and Family Development, Linda Reid's Ministry of State for Child Care, and Shirley Bond's Ministry of Education, we now find ourselves in early childhood disarray.

By comparison with jurisdictions in Britain and France, and closer to home—in Quebec and Ontario, it is no exaggeration to say that given three decades of research and practice in this area, when it comes to planning and implementing a comprehensive continuum of quality care, learning programs, and initiatives in early childhood, BC is close to being in the Dark Ages.

It is ironic that the self-same speech from the throne that

boasted about the progress in working for preschoolers and about making BC "the most literate jurisdiction in North America" pointedly contained the following statement:

"It is widely recognized that early learning experiences and development play a major role in the child's later academic success. Currently, approximately 25% of children (in BC) are not ready to learn when they enter kindergarten."

...one in four kids arriving in BC schools, by the Ministry of Education's own admission, is ill-prepared for formal schooling.

The launch last year of pilot "Strong Start" programs, (there are 15 currently in operation according to Susan Kennedy, the provincial co-ordinator, who works out of the Ministry of Education), is a good start.

However, closer examination of these programs, of which there is little or no information on the ministry's web site, and no written evaluation available, indicates that they are simply three-hour drop-in programs for parents or caregivers. As Kennedy was at pains to stress, they are "not preschool or childcare programs."

While there are many models for early childhood programs in existence, "Strong Start,"

modeled on a Toronto School Board program, should be viewed as merely a marginal intervention in the comprehensive early childhood continuum needed in BC. This was forcefully underlined by the hundreds of angry childcare protesters in front of the legislature in Victoria when the House resumed sitting.

And school boards, or rather newly-named boards of education under Bill 20's "expanded mandate," are now responsible for "Strong Start" programs if they avail themselves of the measly \$20,000 in funding (with \$30,000 in start-up funding). According to Kennedy no decision on ongoing funding has been made, so school boards beware!

The "excessive demands" placed on some of these "Strong Start" centres, as noted by Kennedy, highlights the current crisis in childcare in BC. This essential component of any worthwhile, quality, early childhood program, was forcefully rejected by the BC Liberals during their first mandate and by Stephen Harper's Conservatives with the latter's \$100-a-month cheque to preschool parents—called a housekeeping allowance by some critics—in lieu of childcare. It seems clear that ideological rigidity forms the basis for these rejections.

But what about preschool education programs in this province with one in four kids arriving in BC schools, by the Ministry of Education's own

See *CHILDCARE* page 3

President's message



Jinny Sims

We have teachers teaching and students learning under very challenging conditions. Despite having a record surplus, this government has not allocated the necessary resources for our schools. Education funding has not kept up with inflation. While we have seen some improvements to class size this year, teachers know that we have thousands of classrooms where class size and class composition have no educational justification.

At the same time, as teachers are struggling to meet the needs of students under very difficult circumstances, this "liberal" government is moving ahead with their own agenda to dismantle a publicly funded public education system. Instead of giving teachers the tools they need, they have chosen to use the legislature to hammer teachers and public education. In a matter of days the government used Education Week to introduce Bills 20, 21, and 22. Not one of these bills gives teachers the resources they need to deliver education programs that meet the needs of students. Not one of these bills addresses the fact that we have an unprecedented number of school closures, or that we have thousands of children who have a four-day school week because of underfunding. Not one of these bills addresses the need for improvements to class size and support for students with special needs, nor do they address the need for specialist teachers (teacher-librarians, learning assistants, counsellors, ESL, etc.)

Instead of giving teachers the tools we need, this government has chosen to target teachers and locally elected school boards. They have created further bureaucracy, as there will be new superintendents of achievement. How bizarre. Just give the professionals the necessary resources.

We know what is happening in our schools. We must continue to talk about the impact of underfunding, the need for specialist support for all our students. There are many who will try to distract us, but we must continue to use our voice to advocate for our students, for our profession, and for a publicly funded public education system. We are not alone.

Jinny

Life insurance options for retired teachers

In planning for my retirement, someone reminded me to check converting my group life insurance to individual life. Having no idea what this might mean, I asked around and have found out some information that seems unknown to most of my colleagues. This information needs to be made available to all teachers where group life insurance is in force.

Upon retirement, the group life insurance coverage ceases. Teachers may continue the coverage individually by paying the premiums. In my district, if a teacher wishes to go the conversion route, there are two options and no medical is required for:

1. Term to age 65, then it expires and there are 31 days to convert. For a \$190,000 policy, the premiums are \$161.68 a month.
2. Estate master is a whole-life policy. For a \$190,000 policy, the premiums are \$814.53 a month, fixed for a lifetime. This policy pays dividends annually either (a) by cash, (policy stays at \$190,000) or (b) by keeping it in the policy (cash value of policy increases).

The most favourable of these options in the first and if it helped only a few ill, terminal, or poor-health teachers' families, it would be worth it.

Teachers need to be made aware of the conversion option so that they can consider whether or not converting would benefit them. Information is available at Human Resources departments and at the Group Life office.

Olwen Harris
Howe Sound

Thanks to Olwen Harris for bringing up an important issue to consider prior to retiring. The life insurance options available to teachers upon retirement are discussed at all pension seminars. As well, information on life-insurance conversion is provided in the seminar reference book. Options vary depending on the local a teacher is in, but all locals have plans with conversion packages.

In addition to the options mentioned by Harris, there is also a conversion package for the optional-term life provided in most locals by Industrial Alliance Pacific, and this option is considerably cheaper for many members. The conversion information for both plans is available at either BCTF or local school board offices, and many teachers phone to ask for this information.

As well, the Retired Teachers' Association offers three different life insurance options, which can be checked by contacting the RTA at 604-871-2265, toll free 1-877-683-2243, or online at www.bctf.bc.ca/rta

Arnie Lambert
BCTF Income Security Division

Cuba sends thanks

It's been a bit more than three years since we first had teachers from BCTF in Villa Clara, Cuba, and ever since our relationship with you people has grown stronger.

Thanks to BCTF we were hosts twice of very fruitful courses with teachers from the English Department at ISP Fèlix Varela and from the schools all over our province, that were conducted by wonderful teachers from Vancouver.

Thanks to BCTF we established very heart-felt connections with teachers belonging to this Union who have helped us set up a great project with SFU, aimed at promoting the teaching of French here in variety of ways.

Thanks to BCTF, we have at our disposal in our department lots of great books and teaching materials both in English and in French, as well as a computer lab with a local net, with Internet available and everything, as well as printers, copiers, CD burner, and a lot of players.

In other words, our links with BCTF and especially with excellent people like Yom Shamash, Hilary Spicer, and Jacqui Birchall, just to mention a few of them, has been an invaluable gift that we have received here that has added quite a bit to the improvement of the quality of the teachers of foreign languages that we are forming here, and most important of all, this connection with you people has been an example of sincere human relationship between people from two different countries, one a developed country and the other one trying to develop and trying to overcome a long blockade imposed by the USA.

For all I have said so far, would you pass our most sincere gratitude to the people from BCTF, and to make it more personal, would you thank professor Larry Kuehn, whom I met in Vancouver and had the kindness of attending the welcome gathering that you organized for me there last October?

Thank you, Yom, once more. And thank you, BCTF

Dr. Alfredo Camacho Delgado
Foreign Languages, Instituto Superior Pedagógico "Félix Varela," Villa Clara, Santa Clara, Cuba

Vanoc considers schools for dormitories

Here we go again! I find it simply astounding that after our provincial government has deemed our teachers and schools an essential service, Vanoc is again considering using four secondary schools as Olympic facilities.

Since the designation of essential service can be so easily dismissed I believe that it would be far better and cheaper to temporarily close a hospital. After

all, these buildings are already equipped with rooms and beds.

Tammy Neuman
Richmond

All students should be able to access all programs

Although seniority doesn't always equate with wisdom, I did spend 52 years teaching in two provinces and the NWT.

Through the years, I found some things didn't work—for example, corporal punishment. I used it twice—both times it was a mistake that I made in my first three years of teaching.

I grew to distrust standard tests as well, as a high school student my "successful" teacher in Grade 12 at Stonewall Collegiate taught to the provincial exams, but, even worse, put enough pressure on marginal students, that they quit before the finals, which kept his success rate high. He threatened to block my entry to Normal School if I took a correspondence course, which I did over his objections and which gave me my best Grade 12 mark of 82%! (Yes, I did write the finals and got through his subjects in the low 50's!)

But, it was the front page article in the March issue of *Teacher* that inspired me to comment on two related issues.

First, I totally agree with John Young's campaign to make all school programs available to all students in our public schools. No one should have to beg for charity to participate in any school programs!

Second, I am not impressed by the obsession with homework in so many schools. If it can't be taught during regular hours, then do what has to be done to publicly fund what has to be taught. Homework is discriminatory to students who have trouble finding a place and a time to sleep and enough to eat, never mind a place and time to do laid-on homework!

These are two issues that relate to poverty as far as I am concerned. Seniority doesn't always give you wisdom, but it does give you perspective!

Don Olds
Retired, Fraser-Cascade

Data from FSA can be helpful

I often read the *Teacher* with interest, but was disappointed in the cover article in the March 2007 issue: "The accountability scheme: Penalizing poor children." I share reservations about the uses to which test scores are put (Ungerleider, 2003a; 2006), am opposed to ranking schools based upon such data, and in favour of social policies that eliminate inequalities to complement the work of public schools (Ungerleider, 2003b), but the article does a disservice to the poor, to teachers, and to public schooling.

The assertion that the FSA tests do not accurately assess the learning ability of students living in poverty is insupportable and insulting to those learners and their teachers. The tests assess literal, critical, and inferential comprehension in reading, writing for a variety of purposes, and mathematical knowledge capacities that all parents want their children to acquire and capacities that teachers are adept in developing in all learners.

In the article, the claim that the impact of standardized testing on children living in poverty is more severe than it is on many other students is bolstered by the assertion that students living in poverty learn to write, plan, predict, and organize differently (than, presumably, students who are not poor). The article implies that the poor exhibit deficiencies in these areas that prevent them from performing well on standardized tests such as the FSA. Nonsense. That a significant number of poor students do well on the FSA and other similar assessments is a tribute to their teachers.

The promise of a democratic society is that the conditions into which children are born can be ameliorated, if not eliminated, by public schooling. The subtext of the article is that public schools and teachers do not make a difference, but they can and do. When used properly, data from FSA and other assessments can help identify schools that are consistently more successful in helping children learn. By identifying such schools, we can learn what they are doing to deliver on the promise of public schooling in a democracy.

Charles Ungerleider
Faculty of Education UBC

Sexual minority forgotten again



In the ongoing battle for human rights the sexual minorities are forgotten again. Opening our parachutes to diversity (Patrik Parkes, *Teacher*, March 2007) makes one more step in the noble cause against racism. It praises those who look past the superficial differences of race. However, the only prejudice the article sees is racism. I would like to add to the points made in "Opening our parachutes to diversity" that teachers also need to open their parachutes to a diversity that includes people who

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are not heterosexual. One of the difficulties of the gay rights movement is that heterosexuals look the same as everyone else. There are also a lot of heterosexuals. In fact, most people are heterosexual, so heterosexuals tend to speak, act, and think like everyone is heterosexual. This is not the case. To extend human rights to the forgotten members of the movement, we must remember to include them in all our discourses both in the classroom and out even though their presence might not be known.

Duane Lecky
Victoria



Parents pay taxes

As much as I agree that teachers have the autonomy to choose how we teach, why would we as teachers want to denigrate parents and their interest in their children's education? Seems like Mr. Corren (Jan./Feb. 2007 *Teacher*, "A censor? Who, me?") has a large chip on his shoulder, which is not helping support communication between educators and the partners of education.

Teaching is hard enough without needlessly dumping on parents who, too, have legitimate interests in and concerns about education.

In fact, some of us are both teachers and parents!

Oh, in case we forget, parents also pay the taxes from which come teacher salaries.

Steven C. Faraher-Amidon
Delta

I was surprised by Jim McMurtry's statements in the March issue of *Teacher*, in response to my letter in the previous issue. As he defends the Corren agreement, McMurtry seems to be arguing that whatever governments and courts legislate is reflective of society's views and ought therefore to be accepted by all Canadians. This is contrary not only to union history but also to common sense.

If McMurtry really holds such a position, I would have to assume he voted against the majority regarding the recent BCTF illegal job action, which was denounced by both government and court. Any student of history is aware that governments, courts, and societies have often erred greatly.

In reality, McMurtry knows this himself, since within the same letter he feels free to criticize any government that would legislate against his own view: "I think it is timorous for the same government and school boards to permit some parents to dispense with parts of the curriculum, particularly instruction that promotes sensitivity toward people with a different sexual orientation."

It is inappropriate for McMurtry to label the deeply and conscientiously held convictions of British Columbia parents as "bigotry and hate."

If the BCTF truly affirms diversity within a pluralistic society, as it professes to do, then the BCTF should be at the forefront of fighting for parents' rights to preserve their children from teaching they deem morally objectionable. Anything less would be hypocrisy.

Richard Peachey
Abbotsford

Retirees struggle with tax bills

It was refreshing to read Marc Lee's article on aging and the BC healthcare system but as a retiree, I am more concerned about age discrimination of working people who think that we elders are "troughers." The latter are actually those who are working teachers and striking—threatening for higher and higher wages (let's not kid ourselves with talk about "working conditions") so that they can build their own retirements while retirees struggle and juggle to meet the demands of higher and higher tax bills. I hate to say it, but, "Just wait you guys."

Murrie Redman
Retired, Sunshine Coast

Boards of education spear catchers?

My friend, Ken Douglas, a teacher and municipal and regional politician, referred to school boards "as designated spear catchers for the provincial government." This description was based on the fact that unless a political body has the ability to control the financing of their responsibilities they have virtually no influence on the system.

The new provincial proposal to create "Boards of Education" appears to provide the possibility to meet their parochial desires to control teachers but no control to be able to improve the teachers' ability to enable students to expand their abilities.

Each Board of Education may now have the ability to become narrower designated spear catchers of the partners involved in education.

John Ward
Retired, Cowichan Valley

Appalled and disgusted with union

As a rank and file BCTF member, I was appalled to hear that the costs of holding the AGM each year amount to \$1,000,000 or more, and that it was cancelled at the last minute, which will cost us over \$250,000 more to boot. This adds insult to injury! All this has come to my notice due to the information I received because of the present dispute the BCTF has with its office workers. Furthermore, I would like to see a break down of the per capita costs for delegates to attend this annual meeting. Does the union pay for air tickets for delegates as well as road costs and other travel expenses? If so, what can a delegate claim? What does it cost to accommodate and feed each delegate? As for the salaries that BCTF office workers get, I was also very disturbed by the "sweet deal" these folks have managed to glean for themselves, and their spouses. It is quite out of line in my opinion, and the BCTF needs to bring this "fat cat" mentality into line with what ordinary teachers earn in the trenches. I am disgusted!

Rupert Gruen
Kelowna

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admission, ill-prepared for formal schooling?

We are truly looking at a vast wasteland.

Thousands of kids arrive in Grade 1 with their variations in oral language, vocabulary, and comprehension so great that it is difficult for classroom teachers to narrow the gap between children who are more or less ready to learn in a formal setting.

Compare BC with the early childhood infrastructure in Ontario for the past decade where carefully researched and proven programs for 4- and 5-year-old preschoolers with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy are now an integral part of the public school system in that province.

BC, with the highest child poverty rate in Canada, currently does not have a single pre-kindergarten class for 4-year-olds in our public schools funded directly by Victoria. Yet both the research and practice strongly support structured and developmentally appropriate intervention for poor kids, and indeed for all other kids, at this key juncture in their early lives.

The continuation of limited and discriminatory admission to all-day Kindergarten programs (only ESL, First Nations, and children with special needs are funded) is also an affront to equality of educational opportunity.

And handing out books to preschoolers and developing parent guides, while welcome in themselves do not an early childhood program make. Neither does the recent, one-off, grant of \$12 million to the BC School Trustees Association for promotion of preschool programs by school boards constitute a substantial initiative.

Unwilling to make a major, comprehensive, and long-term investment in early childhood education programs, the fragmented and sometimes overlapping policies of two separate ministries under the BC Liberals undermines the future of thousands of children about to enter our public schools.

In his recently released and excellent book on early child-



hood education entitled, *Building Blocks*, subtitled: *Making Children Successful in the Early Years of School*, researcher Gene Maeroff of Columbia University, notes "that students may have a lifetime of troubles awaiting them if schools don't get it right at the beginning."

BC has yet to get it right at the beginning.

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

Some facts and comments on daycare

- Since 2002, the provincial government has cut \$50 million in support of daycare in BC.
- As part of the workforce, women contribute 5% of the Gross National Product—over \$50 billion annually to the Canadian economy. The economy would be damaged if women were forced to withdraw from the workforce.
- The crisis in BC daycare is highlighted by the huge wait lists of children—over 1,500 in some areas of the province.
- Canada ranks last in a recent OECD study on early education and care.
- The newly elected Conservative government cancelled the federal Liberals' national early learning and childcare program.
- Last year BC received \$86 million from Ottawa but can-

celling of the national agreement eliminated \$455 million transfers to the province (\$152 million a year).

- Canada has some of the highest childcare fees in the developed world.
- In February 2006, the Washington-based Committee for Economic Development, an economic and public policy organization that represents top corporate executives, produced a position paper outlining the economic benefits of high quality, early childhood programs.
- Dr. Clyde Hertzman, BC's leading early childhood researcher, has "mapped" BC's 59 school districts and found that 25% of preschoolers lacked readiness when they entered the public school system.
- Last year's BC Budget was ironically called "the children's budget" by the provincial government.
- On January 5, 2007, BC announced cuts to Childcare Resource and Referral Centres totalling 77% next year. More recently these cuts have been reduced to 36%.
- BC's new Strong Start initiative is a three-hour drop-in program for children who can come with a parent or caregiver during the day.

Sources: The Committee for Economic Development (Washington), Canadian Education Association, Coalition of Daycare Advocates of BC, Report on Education from the Deputy Minister of Education (Victoria), Office of the Minister of State for Child Care (Victoria), CCPA Budget Analysis



Looking back

70 years ago

The 1937 Convention of British Columbia Teachers' Federation will be of historical importance for the announcement, authorized by the Honourable the Minister of Education, that a system of high school accrediting will come into effect. The present system of university admission results in the almost automatic admission of a disproportionate number of candidates who are unfitted for university study and whose high school teachers know them to be unfitted for work of university grade. For judgment in this connection, the teachers' intimate knowledge of a pupil, based upon his record of at least four years of high school studies, provides data that no external examination board can possess.

— April, 1937, *The BC Teacher*

50 years ago

Coke puts you at your sparkling best. You taste the difference...even the bubbles

taste better. You feel the difference...there's life, there's lift in Coke. Free booklet "Refreshment Through the Years" now available to schools...tells the exciting story of Coca-Cola from beginning to present. This booklet tells the story of a need...of a search...of the growth of an industry in your community. Also available at no cost...a 30 minute 16 mm sound colour film "Refreshment Through The Years." [Full page advertisement, complete with picture of smiling, animated young people.]

— April, 1957, *The BC Teacher*

30 years ago

Under the heading "The Myth of Smaller Classes in Schools," the Economic Council of Canada trumpets that "the study disproves the belief that smaller class sizes will improve the efficiency of the school system," and that this has "important implications for educational policy-makers." This, of course, is irresponsible nonsense. The report disproves nothing, nor

does it in any way contest the findings of some 60 studies, conducted in North America in the last 25 years, that show class size as a highly important factor in education.

— March/April, 1977, *The BC Teacher*

10 years ago

Delegates arriving at the hotel were met by a group of protesters worried that the meeting intended to pass a motion that would lead to teaching homosexuality to their children. A demonstration by gay and lesbian youth on Sunday during the noon break was intended to encourage delegates to support the efforts to eliminate homophobia in the schools. Delegates voted overwhelmingly to do what is necessary to make schools open and accepting for all students and teachers whatever their sexuality.

— April, 1997

Teacher newsmagazine

Chris Bocking, Keating Elementary School, Saanich

Legislation for privatization

by Peter Owens

March 26–30, 2007, was Education Week and the provincial government used the opportunity to introduce three Bills—20, 21, and 22—aimed at public schools and public school teachers. The common themes are centralizing power in the ministry, increasing the education bureaucracy, treating education as a commodity to be purchased, and targeting teachers.

The government announced the creation of a whole new level of bureaucracy to enforce its will. Provincial superintendents of achievement, appointed by and responsible to the minister, have the power to direct the activities of school boards. Government directives must be obeyed and the minister has the power to remove boards or trustees who do not fall in line.

Boards can offer “specialty academies” and charge fees if the school planning council wants it. Students may be reimbursed for other educational services that the minister approves. Previous changes to the *School Act* made it possible for students to sign up for courses online or in private institutions without their parents or teachers being informed.

Teachers will have their name and current status with the BC College of Teachers published on a web site for public viewing. College members will be expected to pay for the costs of the online registry. District superintendents are now obligated “to report conduct that breaches college standards, if it is in the public interest to do so.”

There were no announcements about funding to improve learning conditions for our students. There were no announcements about improvements to Bill 33 to make it effective. There are still almost 10,000 classes with four or more students with special

needs in them. There are still over 3,100 classes with 31 or more students. Our students are still waiting for support.

Bill 22

Code of Conduct

Every school must have a ministry-approved code of conduct for students.

Government access to teachers

One provision in Bill 22 allows the government to use the teachers’ college to send its message directly to teachers. It states, “The college must distribute information requested by the minister to the members at the time and in the manner requested by the minister.” The government (taxpayers) must reimburse the college for costs.

We are not aware of any other professional college that can be used this way.

Introducing vouchers

In what appears to be a semi-voucher system, the legislation has provisions for the minister to reimburse students for expenses incurred for educational activities “if the student or child demonstrates a standard of achievement, satisfactory to the minister.”

On the face of it, students may be able to pay to participate in activities that cost money in the hope that the government will reimburse them for all or some of the costs.

School district business companies

The government is still tinkering with the rules for the school district business companies. These are companies the government encouraged school boards to establish for raising funds.

One district, so short of funding that its local schools only open four days a week, operates a pre-school in Poland five days a week. Another district has opened private schools in China where students can get a BC Dogwood certificate.

None of the school district business companies have made a profit.

Bill 21

Targets teachers

The BC Liberal government, on March 27, 2007, introduced legislative amendments to the *School Act* and the *Teaching Profession Act* (Bill 21) to pave the way for a discipline registry and an employment registry.

The BC College of Teachers is required to create an online registry accessible to the public. That registry must include:

- the member’s name.
- the current status of the member’s certificate (practicing, non-practicing, etc.).
- a record of any suspensions or cancellations of the certificate.
- a record of college discipline including the reasons why discipline was taken.

Reprimands may be removed from the registry after five years. There are no provisions for the removal of suspensions or cancellations.

The college is required to publish the names of disciplined members along with the reasons they were disciplined.

The college is also required to create an employers’ registry with a list identifying members and their employers. The information in this registry is available to all school boards.

Bill 20

Centralizes power in the ministry

March 26, 2007, the provincial government tabled Bill 20, the *School (Student Achievement Enabling) Amendment Act*, 2007. This is an omnibus bill acting on many aspects of the Throne Speech aimed at public education.

Bill 20 includes the following amendments to the *School Act*:

- Creates superintendents of achievement who may

inspect board records, enter schools, and interview employees and students.

- Establishes boards of education and mandates that boards prepare an achievement contract with respect to student performance, plans for improving student achievement, early learning programs, and literacy.
- Provides for the appointment of a special trustee if a board does not comply with an administrative directive to meet its obligations under an achievement contract.
- Requires boards to establish district literacy plans for the community.
- Adds an appeal level.
- The legislation provides the ability for parents who are “dissatisfied with a board ruling, such as the suspension of a student,” to appeal to the superintendents of achievement.

Private public schools

The legislation defines special academies and allows for students to be charged fees to attend the academy. The school planning council has the power to approve charging fees, meaning that possibly as few as three parents and the principal can make the decision. It also allows for fees to be charged for some courses and materials. This not only infringes on the autonomy and responsibility of school boards, but paves the way for publicly funded schools to be operated as private schools with fees.

The legislation broadens the minister’s capacity to create provincial schools.

The three bills together provide for the gradual dismantling of public education. The legislation encourages privatization by allowing the establishment of academies that can charge fees and the possibility that parents who pay for educational services can be reimbursed. The increasing bureaucracy and loss of

direct services to students will drive more parents to seek other alternatives. Parents will be able to shop for educational services from private sources and shop for teachers through the online registry. There is an increase in the monitoring and control of school boards and teachers.

Public schools worth protecting

Public education in BC has been at the forefront of education in the world. It achieved that level by teachers, school boards, parents, and the Ministry of Education, working together to provide the best education for our children. Teachers in BC have not been asked for, nor have they had, any input to these proposed changes. On April 2, 2007, the minister of education issued a bulletin pointing out that BC students performed among the best in the world in 2003 but expressed concern that student performance since has “levelled off and, in some cases, even declined.” She then goes on the say, “It is clear we cannot continue to do things the way we have always done them and expect to get different results.” There is no acknowledgement that what put us at the top were the services we offered before her government removed protections for students from our collective agreement. The turn for the worse has come about since this government came to power, stripped our collective agreement, cut services, and increased its bureaucratic fixation on accountability. The minister is right however, that the government cannot continue along its path of undermining public education and expect the results to improve. It is time to work with teachers, parents, and school boards, not threaten them with more superintendents and administrative directives.

Peter Owens is assistant director and editor of Teacher newsmagazine, BCTF Communications and Campaigns Division.

BCTF Advantage

I can hardly wait

by Laurence Greeff

Three years ago, the BCTF initiated direction to establish an affinity program for members. The Finance Committee of the BCTF was given the responsibility to examine the possibility of the affinity program for our members and to report to the BCTF Executive. The Finance Committee took on the task knowing the positive value of an affinity plan to members.

What value you may ask?

An affinity program is designed to use the economic and collective strength of the group to benefit the individual. In the case of our membership, the benefit of belonging to the BCTF should be rewarded with individual benefits that give advantage to our members.

Historically, this notion has always been part of the labour movement. Collective union power has been effective in setting up credit unions, retail stores, insurance programs,

and a host of other services that have helped the individual member. Ontario teachers have for the last five years had an affinity program that has been well received by their members and has grown well for them. Teachers in England and the United States established similar programs and have used the power of the collective to great advantage for their members.

The National Union of Teachers in England have an affinity program that provides lower prices for a range of retail products, lower travel costs, and have provided mortgage and financial service products at a competitive advantage for their members. American teachers who belong to the American Federation of Teachers have a program called AFT Plus, which enables their members to use the collective strength of the union to help them get reduced costs for a varied range of products and services. (Check out these web sites: [Edvantage](#) for Ontario teachers, [AFT Plus](#)

for American teachers, and [Countdown](#) for the National Union of Teachers in England).

The Finance Committee approached the task with its usual enthusiastic deliberateness because whenever you develop an affinity program for members, it must have specific criteria that reflects our values; it should be cost neutral, follow social and ethical guidelines, be customized so that it reflects our members needs, and have a revenue stream that will benefit us.

We made our recommendation to the BCTF Executive Committee and in doing so, we reiterated the fact that an affinity program must be voluntary and give an advantage to our members. The Executive Committee approved that we set up a customized affinity program with BCAA and OTG Financial.

In January 2007, we began working with the Group Affinity Division of BCAA to design a customized program that offers

members on a voluntary basis: competitive travel opportunities, a range of insurance programs, and retail services. BCAA is a registered society serving over 700,000 British Columbians with a range of services from travel to insurance needs. They have impeccable credentials as a membership-driven organization that provides good services to its members and they have the capacity to assist us in developing the program on a cost-neutral basis.

A change in the direction at OTG Financial has caused them to forego participation in the financial services aspect of the program. Their decision has opened the door for us to investigate other possibilities and we hope to bring forward a recommendation on which companies can best work with us to provide the range of financial services we need as members.

The executive recommendations set up an affinity program subcommittee to develop the move to implementing the affinity program. Carole Gillis (Kamloops teacher), Drusilla Wilson (Maple Ridge teacher), Rob McLaren (BCTF treasurer), Patti McLaughlin (Salary Indemnity Plan administrator) and myself constituted the subcommittee and we had an initial meeting to develop the critical

path to implementation. At various stages of the implementation process, we will be reporting to the BCTF Executive Committee, the Representative Assembly, and the AGM to update members on the progress of the implementation plan.

Our launch is set for October 2007, and we know members can hardly wait. Focus groups reacted positively to the introduction of an affinity plan and members have been very excited about getting involved in the program. They say, “Anything that will help us reduce costs will be a benefit.”

On the BCTF web site, you will see the logo *BCTF Advantage*. As part of our drive to the much anticipated launch and to help members connect with the *BCTF Advantage*, we are holding a draw for two tickets to a very exciting destination! All you have to do is give us your input for designing the travel offers in the *BCTF Advantage* program by filling out the survey form available on-line and at the AGM, to be eligible for this great giveaway prize.

Laurence Greeff, a Langley teacher, is chairperson of the BCTF Finance Committee and a member of the affinity subcommittee to implement the BCTF Advantage program.

The BCTF hits the road



by Yvonne Eamor

A school in Terrace has \$6 left in its learning resources budget. In Cranbrook, two suicide intervention programs have already been implemented—for an elementary school. And a trustee in Prince George says the school board is afraid to dip into its surplus for fears it won't have the money to pay for more unexpected downloaded costs.

These were just some of the stories the BCTF heard on a province-wide tour that succeeded in placing the public spotlight on the shortcomings of Bill 33 and the lack of funding for public education. At each stop, the BCTF executive heard virtually the same message: the legislation isn't working; resources are lacking; public education needs to be fully funded.

President Jinny Sims told a Victoria news conference that, "we have thousands upon thousands of students sitting in overcrowded classrooms. We're hearing the same thing everywhere we go: passing legislation without funding is worse than having no legislation at all."

Victoria math teacher Tara Ehrcke helped author a report on the implementation of Bill 33 in her school district and she says it's very clear. "There are significant violations of Bill 33 in middle and secondary schools. We don't think this is the spirit of the legislation."

Resource teacher Joanne Finnegan notes the erosion she has seen over time. "It's a culmination of not enough assistance time, not enough psychologists, too many students over too many areas, the needs of kids are going up, and larger classes. It's a frustrating experience and I can't see an end to it. I can't do my job to the best of my ability."

Greater Victoria Teachers' Association President Debra Swain says there have been some gains under Bill 33, "but not enough. We wanted to give the whole process a chance and we took a wait-and-see approach to see if there was a difference. But, we've been through the first round and it's simply not enough."

Sims says, "No amount of training or experience prepares you to teach a class of 26 with six identified and seven who would've been identified if the government hadn't changed its special needs criteria, and then another five students in the grey area. I could take you around British Columbia and show you where such situations exist and where the classrooms are."

Janice Neden is a Kamloops teacher and president of the local Learning Assistance Teachers' Association. Over her 29-year teaching career, she's seen the role of learning assistance teachers undergo dramatic change. "Initially, the focus was on direct instruction. Now it's become more of a significant portion of time dealing with a growing government bureaucracy. We spend

lots of time with IEPs, meetings, and a lot of notetaking. The support I can provide is not enough to meet the needs of teachers or students. A teacher's teaching environment is the student's learning environment. You can't separate them."

Neden says her job is like "a triage. You take the ones most at risk. The number of students I can work with in a given day is nowhere near the number who deserve my attention. I have to prioritize."

What she sees down the road is worrisome. "We're losing experience we can't afford to lose. New teachers coming in need a lot of mentorship to fulfil the demands of this role. What I see is more accountability on the horizon, and more demands to fulfil the bureaucracy. What is missing is the focus on students."

Speaking in Kamloops, BCTF First Vice-president Irene Lanzinger says the provincial government talks about putting students first, "and we agree with that. But to do that, we need the resources to do the job. We need reasonable class limits and reasonable class composition. When you have students with special needs, sometimes they take a lot of your time. There are other kids who need extra time and help, but they don't have the label of special ed."

Kamloops Thompson Teachers' Association President Mark McVittie is dealing with another issue: Bill 33 is having a detrimental affect on students in north Kamloops. "This area represents only 20% of the district, but it has 45% of the elementary classes with more than three students with special needs. Students in north Kamloops are not less important than the students of south or west or Barrier or Clearwater or other areas, and they should have the same resources and same access to services."

In Cranbrook, counsellor Chris Olson finds that society is presenting problems of its own and legislation isn't helping the province's teacher-counsellors. "Students are finding life so much tougher than we did when we were in school. They're coming to us with more problems, and those problems are of a more severe nature than we were seeing even five years ago. An elementary counsellor has had to implement two suicide intervention programs for Grade 2 students. That would've been unheard of just a few years ago."

When critical incidents occur, Olson says the school becomes "the hub of the community and that's when support comes out for those students. While that's a small part of the role we play, it's becoming a progressively larger part of our job." But there are no extra resources to help out.

BCTF Second Vice-president Susan Lambert says "when the workload is so great that teachers can't attend to the individual needs of kids, it's a crushing anxiety. In some classes,

students are receiving three minutes of attention an hour. Is that the type of class you want for public education?" She says the "system is in a fiscal crisis and needs attention."

During a visit to Williams Lake, Lambert heard more stories of how Bill 33 has failed students. "It's a recipe for the serious erosion of quality public education," she says. "It's an empty boast that the government is spending more money than ever on education. It has no meaning and it's superficial window dressing."

Cariboo-Chilcotin Teachers' Association President Sheila Wyse says the tour gave her the opportunity to focus on local funding issues and other problems. "I'm hoping that our trustees will now pick up on it and see they need to speak out, as well. I think they were a little nervous about the BCTF tour so it was good that it has opened a door and we'll continue to talk more."

"It's absolutely atrocious today that we are not providing for students with special needs."

Wyse says the lack of funding "is like being asked to make a choice between being hit with a stick or a baseball bat. The trustees need to go back to the provincial government and say the way education is funded now isn't working."

Lanzinger met with a number of Prince George trustees to discuss BCTF concerns. She told them, "teachers are not seeing the improvements they were promised. They still have untenable workloads." The trustees were interested in teacher morale, and Lanzinger said, "until we resolve the working conditions issues, we're going to have a problem around morale. Teachers are tired of fighting. Morale is high when teachers feel they do a good job, when they can go home at the end of the year and say, 'I didn't reach every kid and every day wasn't perfect, but I did a good job with that group.'"

Lanzinger feels the trustees learned something. "I think they went away with a greater understanding of where teachers are right now. They didn't ask for the meeting to tell us what they thought, they asked for the meeting because they wanted to hear the perspective of teachers."

She also heard from Prince George learning assistance teacher Bonnie Lamb who spends more time on paperwork and less time with students. "You know you can give so much more to students if you have time in front of those students, working with them in specific interventions. But there are just not enough hours in the day anymore."

Lamb cautions, "If you don't support students now, especially in the early intervention, you'll be supporting them later when

they're on welfare. It's short-sighted not to educate your population."

Lanzinger concurs, "the government needs to improve legislation, and needs to guarantee support for specialist teachers."

Another meeting with trustees took place in Terrace, where financial woes forced the board to choose between a four-day week or school closures (the four-day week was implemented). Parent Laurie Mutschke says it's difficult for kids to switch gears after a three-day weekend. "And a kid who is unsettled could be sitting next to my kid and could be the one disrupting the class, taking time away from the classroom teacher. If a child happens to be away for illness, rather than missing two days, it could be four days."

Grade 7 teacher Cathy Lambright told the local media that "the majority of my colleagues teach classes with more than four kids with special needs. There are just too many children with special needs who require services. It's difficult to look around at the faces of students who need support to read, and know they're not able to get that support."

Lambright points out that if the government's goal "really is to be more literate, then we need to give them more support. I'm from a school that has \$6 left in its learning resources budget. We'll have to fundraise and go back to the parents and ask them for more money. Every time we lose funding for whatever reason, it impacts on every one of those little faces in my room. I see those faces at Safeway, at Wal-Mart, and some are now having their own children and when they don't have the opportunities to grow because we haven't been able to help them, shame on us."

Lanzinger says to "truly put students first, we have to have the resources to make sure every child gets what they need. We're pushing for good public policy, so that truly, we can put students first. We'll fight forever until we get it."

The BCTF president who didn't let fog stop her participation in a Nanaimo news conference (she had to contribute via cell phone), says the tour underscored the fact that public education is suffering. Sims says, "It's absolutely atrocious today that we are not providing for students with special needs. We have a government that has a growing surplus, yet they're not spending the funds needed to address our students' learning conditions."

Sims takes a personal look at the situation when she considers her grandchildren. "I have three beautiful grandkids going to school in 2007 and I see their learning opportunities are less than what my daughter had when she was in a similar class 24 years ago. That's the dose of reality that comes home."

Yvonne Eamor is the BCTF's media relations officer.

TOC
Spotlight

by Lori Pratt

I don't even notice the small scalpel they are using to take me apart, piece by tiny piece, until I'm mid-stride across the front of the classroom, well into a groundbreaking analysis of the feminist implications of the Industrial Revolution on modern Canadian society, thinking I have all of them in the palm of my hand, when one of them suddenly pipes up, "Ms. P., I have a question."

For a split second, the letters of his name teeter on the brink of my memory like black bowling pins in a bubble gum-pink alley, but luckily my Super-Sub ability to pluck the correct name from the attendance Scantron doesn't fail me.

"Yes, Johnny?" I ask, rather pleased with myself. I am a confident woman with an excellent memory who has just inspired discourse in a perfect stranger, a teenager no less. Strike!

Titters from the class. Something is wrong.

"It's Victor, actually."

"Oh." I wince. Still, I am a confident woman who opens channels of communication with her stunning insight. "Yes, Victor?"

Victor makes a show of draping himself casually over the back of his chair before he speaks again. He fixes on me with a steady stare the one glittering eye that his long Goth bangs don't cover. His tone is serious, intent, earnest.

"Why does your left eyelid have 92 eyelashes, but your right one has only 89?"

The faint sound of a lawn being mowed 12 blocks away wafts through the open curtains. No one is looking at Victor. They are all looking at me. My mind is now reeling through the list of possible answers to Victor's insolence. No, that's too sarcastic. Might do damage. No, that one is too light for such an infraction. No, that one is too heavy. Nah, I wouldn't want to mark that one. That one is not immediate enough. That one is too authoritarian. That one invites a response. Too cliché. Too confrontational. Humorous. Ambiguous. Too...

Got it.

"Victor, come sit up here at the front so you can focus more on what I'm saying rather than what I look like."

Victor slouches to the front, deflated. It doesn't matter. My lecture has been on pause too long. When my mind unfreezes, it can't remember where it left off. It flops about for awhile, like a fish on a dock, struggling to get back into the water but knowing intuitively that this is the last gasp. I sigh.

Victor has won.

"Take out your books. Turn to page 40. Your teacher wants you to do questions one through seven, odds only."

Lori Pratt is a teacher on call, Vancouver.



BCTF focus-group testing

Six focus groups were conducted in Prince George, Vancouver, and Victoria on behalf of the BCTF at the end of January, 2007. Groups were made up of approximately 10 randomly chosen individuals. In each centre, one group was conducted with the public and another with BCTF members.

The groups with teachers focussed on their experiences with Bill 33, provincial funding for education, and the impact of the government's accountability schemes. The public groups looked at perceptions of education overall, education funding, class size and composition, as well as the government's accountability schemes.

The following report is from Viewpoints Research Ltd. who conducted the research groups.

The first task in each group was to draw a picture reflecting the participants' view of public education.

Perceptions of public education

Teachers

Most teachers drew pictures reflecting their own experience in the classroom where they are overwhelmed by large classes, too many unsupported students with special needs, insufficient resources, time consuming reporting requirements that keep them from interacting with students, and frequent changes to the curriculum. Teachers also saw themselves as being under close critical scrutiny by government, parents, and the media who don't trust teachers or value their professional experience and expertise.

Public

Participants in the public groups had a generally positive view of teachers. They expressed concern that too many young people are poorly behaved, sympathizing with teachers and blaming parents for this situation. Many participants said that student/teacher ratios in many classrooms are too high. Several parents reported that courses like music, art, and physical education have been virtually eliminated from their children's schools and that school libraries have been closed.

The job the government is doing

Teachers

No teacher felt that the government is doing a good or a better job in education. Many expressed frustration at the media and the public for accepting the government's rhetoric and public announcements that education is going well or improving in the province.

Public

Most in the public groups thought the government is doing a poor job when it comes to education. The fact that teachers went on strike was an indicator to some that the government is doing a poor job. Several participants said that the government doesn't want to take responsibility for education. No one believed the assertion that education funding is at an all time high. When participants learned the provincial government is now investing about \$200 less per student in BC schools than it did in 1990, the public was concerned but not surprised. School closures seemed to be the most compelling evidence of inadequate education funding. There was widespread concern when participants were told that the decline in the number of teachers is more than twice the decline in student enrollment. Everyone concluded that the government's first responsibility in education is to properly fund schools.

Fundraising and school fees

Teachers

Participants agreed that fundraising has increased, and parents and students are expected to raise money for basic school supplies.

Public

Parents were concerned about the high cost of school supplies and worried that the increasing reliance on school fees is increasing the disparity between schools in lower income and higher income areas, thereby reducing equality of opportunity in the public school system.

Bill 33

Teachers

Teachers were aware of Bill 33. Many hoped the legislation would improve class size and composition and have been disappointed. Secondary teachers were frustrated that the law does not allow them to refuse larger classes. Teachers reported that many of the students with special needs in their classrooms do not have the additional support they need. To meet Bill 33 commitments, school districts have cut specialist teachers, reduced janitorial services, cut administrators and given those that remain tasks previously done by teachers, taken more international students, cut back on courses, and increased wait times for assessment.

In the review of Bill 33 teachers want the BCTF to ensure class size and class composition limits are properly funded.

Public

Class size and composition

Parents and the public favoured lower class sizes. They also opposed the government canceling the teachers' contract. No one had heard about Bill 33, although many were aware that teachers went on strike on issues related to class size and composition. No one denied the importance of specialist teachers. Librarians were singled out as being essential to schools and students; high school counselors and reading specialists were also specifically named. Most participants were aware of the prevalence of students with special needs and ESL students in classrooms.

Accountability

Teachers

There was no support among teachers for the government's accountability schemes, including standardized testing. Teachers concluded that standardized testing means teachers increasingly teach to the test and that these tests take teachers' time away from students. Teachers concluded that while some districts, schools, and

administrators take the tests very seriously, many others do not. Some teachers reported that standardized tests create significant stress and self-esteem problems for many students.

Teachers concluded that most principals have a plan for their school and administrators use mechanisms like school planning councils and school growth plans to advance their own goals for their schools.

Public

Everyone concluded that teachers offer a more comprehensive assessment of students than does standardized testing.

When presented with arguments against standardized testing there was only limited opposition to testing Grade 12 students. Some concern was expressed about testing discourages Grade 10 and 11 students from staying in school.

No one said it would be inappropriate for teachers to urge parents to withdraw their children from standardized tests in Grades 4 and 7. They shared teachers' concerns that this testing might be stressful to students and hurt young children's self esteem.

School rankings

Teachers

Teachers were offended by the Fraser Institute's use of standardized tests to rank schools saying there is a direct correlation between test results and the socio-economic status of students in schools. Some teachers reported that parents take school rankings seriously, while others said that, when it came to their children's school, parents paid little attention to rankings.

Public

Awareness of the institute's ranking of schools was fairly high. Some people saw the rankings as a tool which parents can decide to use to help them make decisions about their children's education. Most participants agreed that the value of the Fraser Institute's rankings is limited because it uses only the results of standardized tests to determine its rankings and no weight is given to arts programs, extra curricular activities, sports programs, or "school spirit."

BCeSIS

Teachers

Teachers did not like or want to use this system. They had concerns related to BCeSIS's potential to violate the confidentiality of student records, the capacity of the system to track and monitor teachers and the major technical and programming problems they had either experienced or heard about with BCeSIS. All of the teachers' concerns around confidentiality were increased significantly when they learned that a private organization, not government, maintains the system.

Public

No one in the public groups had heard of BCeSIS. When the system was explained to participants they had a strong, negative, emotional reaction to it. Many participants expressed concern about the confidentiality of student information and several worried about what would happen if academic and demographic information were linked together in this data bank. Like teachers, when the public participants were told BCeSIS is being managed by a private organization, concerns about privacy and the misuse of information increased significantly. People were worried that the information might leave the province, especially if BCeSIS is managed by an American organization.

Freedom writers are pure inspiration for teachers and teens

by Janet Nicol

The Freedom Writers Diary: How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change Themselves and the World Around Them, by The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, Broadway Books, New York, 1999

"For many, it's the start of a new day, but for me, it's the continuation of a nightmare. Every day before I leave my mom me percina with the sign of the cross, praying that I come home safely."

So wrote a freedom writer—one of Erin Gruwell's "unteachable" Grade 9 English students in 1994. *The Freedom Writers Diary*, a collection of journal entries written by Gruwell's students over a four-year period, reveals why some mothers were moved to pray for their child. These powerful testimonials describe students' daily struggle to simply survive, let alone graduate secondary school in racially divided and poverty-plagued America. The book has recently enjoyed a well-deserved reprisal following the release of the movie *Freedom Writers*, starring Hilary Swank as Ms. Gruwell and a dynamic cast of young actors portraying the diverse and spirited students who find hope in Room 203. Both the book and movie are pure inspiration for teachers and teens.

In 1994, rioting in Los Angeles followed the verdict of the Rodney King trial. This set an ominous tone for Gruwell's first year teaching at Wilson Smith High, a recently desegregated public school in Long Beach. The tensions students endured at home also occurred at school—and in Gruwell's classroom. But after many setbacks, Gruwell changed teaching tactics. She began to listen to the students' stories and to teach from their perspective. Students poured a litany of obstacles they faced into their diaries: racism, poverty, sexual abuse, gun violence, drug and alcohol addictions, and cruel peer pressure (including the abusive ritual of initiation with hazings). Gruwell respected the privacy of the journals (sharing was optional) and she did not grade students for this ongoing assignment. It all paid off—her

simple strategy opened a door to a whole new classroom relationship between teacher and students.

Next, Gruwell selected reading books she believed her students could identify with, including Holocaust literature such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and Elie Wiesel's *Night*. Students discovered parallels with their own lives. She also guided them to study freedom movements, and so the students dubbed themselves *freedom writers*. Gruwell brought in guest speakers and conducted field trips connected to themes of racial tolerance, compassion, and freedom. As the media got hold of the changes going on in Room 203, the publicity allowed Gruwell to tap into the community's economic abundance. She fundraised for projects including a class trip to New York and sponsored prominent speakers, such as Zlata Filipovic, who wrote a diary from war-torn Sarajevo when she was a child. All these achievements—and more—are chronicled by the students in *The Freedom Writers Diary*.

Gruwell fought with the school district to keep the same 150 students in her four English classes, from Grade 9 to graduation. This unconventional request was difficult for school board officials to argue against, given the turn-around of the students and burgeoning media publicity. Gruwell reflected in the epilogue: "Although I'm not an expert on the subject, I've always felt that all kids yearn to rebel. Understanding this rebellion nature, I encouraged the freedom writers to use a pen as a means of revolution."

The students of Room 203 moved on, and so did Ms. Gruwell, who is teaching her methods at the university level. She leaves the public school system as a brilliant *shooting star* and not a seasoned veteran who nevertheless made an important difference in many students' lives and illuminated the power of the teaching profession.

Janet Nicol teaches at Killarney Secondary School, Vancouver.

For more information about the freedom writers, visit www.freedomwritersfoundation.org.





Intensive French classroom at Erma Stephenson Elementary School, Surrey teacher, Janet Brine, is now principal at Laronde Elementary School.

Intensive French...a BC perspective

by Wendy Carr

Intensive French is a French as a Second Language program option that is garnering attention in British Columbia. Intensive French is an innovative approach to teaching and learning French that was introduced in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1998 as a boost to core French. It has produced such good results that all Grade 6 students in that province now take it instead of core French.

There are 10,000 students taking intensive French across Canada in almost every province and territory including British Columbia and the Yukon. Surrey implemented it in 2004, and its first group of four classes is entering secondary schools in September. Vancouver is implementing the program in September 2007, and other districts in the province are interested as well.

How does intensive French compare to other FSL programs such as core and immersion? The three approaches share some common goals, such as instilling in children a love of the language and culture and achieving varying degrees of bilingualism, but there are also some significant differences and challenges.

French immersion is offered as a program of choice in Kindergarten (Early) or Grade 6 (Late). Students are taught the regular curriculum—from Math to PE—using French as the language of instruction. Students who graduate from Grade 12 immersion receive a “Double Dogwood Diploma,” are functionally bilingual and can pursue post-secondary studies or work in either official language. About 30% of students complete Grade 12 immersion; there are often competing demands for coursework at the secondary level, and many high schools cannot offer a wide variety of courses in French.

Core French is an introductory course usually offered in two 40-minute blocks per week in Grades 5 to 7 and for about three hours per week in Grade 8. Its focus on basic communication, cultivating cultural understandings, and acquiring/presenting information in the early grades is developed in the secondary grades. The problem with core French in BC, apart from its limited time allocation, is that

during the mandated Grades (5 to 8) it is delivered mainly by generalist teachers with very little language background or specific methodological training. Under these conditions, students do not make a great deal of progress (not surprisingly after only about 260 contact hours spread over four years) and, by the time they can receive specialized instruction in high school, many have already dropped out. Many university programs no longer require French 11 or 12: an introductory language at Grade 11 or equivalent often suffices. For all of these reasons, only about 10% of students who start core French in Grade 5 complete French 12.

Intensive French offers great potential for children to achieve functional bilingualism while remaining in their neighbourhood school.

Intensive French (IF) is a program of choice in BC in which Grade 6 students have five months, in which everything except Math, takes place in French. It is basically a French language arts program for four hours a day for half the year; students do language-rich projects and activities, and read and write in French. For the second half of the year, they take a compacted version of the regular science, socials, and language arts curriculum in English plus one hour of French per day. In Grade 7 and beyond, they continue an enriched French program along with the regular curriculum. In intensive French, students stay in their neighbourhood schools, do the regular English curriculum and acquire 600 hours of French instruction. They enter secondary school speaking French and take Intensive French 8, a differentiated course using IF pedagogy but treating regular French 10 themes and linguistic concepts.

What are the challenges to implementing intensive French on a wider scale? The two major ones are similar to those faced by French immersion, that is, finding fully bilingual teachers and starting a new program within an existing school organization. IF normally starts at Grade 6 and continues with a

daily hour follow-up in Grade 7, thus requiring only one teacher per school. In theory, if there is enough community interest in a school's catchment, a program should be able to run without too much disruption. The exception to this theory is if a teacher needs to be displaced, as is likely if there is not a potential IF teacher on staff. The lack of methodologically trained, bilingual teachers is a problem affecting all FSL programs in this province. A concerted effort is needed to recruit new French teachers, enhance existing teachers' training, and ensure that all pre-service teachers take at least one basic course in second language methodology.

Some ask if intensive French should replace core French. A better question, I believe, is: What lessons can we learn from IF to improve other FSL programs? The winning combination of time and intensity produces results in immersion and intensive programs and the lack of both is part of why core French doesn't yield better outcomes. IF focusses on literacy (a language-arts approach) and uses interactive teaching strategies that enable students to develop fluency and accuracy. Students use and re-use language in real situations while teachers model and redirect what they say, helping them to internalize that language. This, in turn, leads to the intuitive use of French in a very short time.

The inclusion of intensive French pedagogy into teacher training and professional

development would serve all FSL educators well. A summer institute for IF teachers—and open to all FSL educators—is offered August 20 to 24 at the University of British Columbia. Sessions run in French, and elementary and secondary FSL teachers are welcome. See details at www.mmecarr.ca.

Intensive French offers great potential for children to achieve functional bilingualism while remaining in their neighbourhood school. The addition of this program to a district's offerings can bring renewed attention to French as a desirable addition to a child's education and could open up programming possibilities at the secondary level. In other provinces, for example, IF students join their late and early immersion counterparts in secondary elective courses offered in French. And, rather than drawing students away from immersion programs, overall enrolment in those programs has increased in districts and provinces where IF has been implemented.

Intensive French has arrived in British Columbia! It has much to contribute not only to how we teach and learn French but also to Canada's goal of doubling the number of bilingual graduates by 2013. Stay tuned!

A similar article was published in the *Canadian Parents for French Winter 2006 bulletin*.

Wendy Carr has been a core French teacher for 31 years in Coquitlam. She is now a part-time Intensive French helping teacher in Surrey and coordinates the French teacher education program at UBC. For information about intensive French: www.mmecarr.ca/ICF/ICF.html.

Comparison of Elementary FSL Programs in British Columbia

Core French	Intensive French	French Immersion
220,000 students in BC 1,600,000 in Canada	250 students in BC 10,000 in Canada	38,500 students in BC 300,000 in Canada
150 hours (Gr. 5, 6, 7)	600 hours (Gr. 6 & 7)	5,000 hours (K to Gr. 7)
Students learn French using a communicative approach wherever possible.	Students use French to do activities and projects. Regular school subjects are compressed into second half of the intensive year.	After Grade 6, a student can engage in a general conversation.
Core French is provincially mandated in Grades 5 to 8, usually delivered in two 40-minute lessons per week.	Intensive French is a program of choice that starts in Grade 6 with an intensive half-year (80% French) followed by one hour/day in French for second half of year and all of Grade 7.	French immersion is a program of choice that starts in Kindergarten or Grade 6 with 100% French instruction.
By Grade 12, a student can communicate in a variety of real-life situations.	After Grade 6, a student can engage in a general conversation.	By Grade 12, a student is functionally bilingual.

What is the school library's role?

The following letter to the minister of education from teacher-librarians in School District 68 (Nanaimo) is printed here with their permission.

We, the teacher-librarians of School District #68, are very pleased with your commitment to improve literacy in BC. We have just read your recent press release, which outlines the millions of dollars to be spent enhancing the public library system, as well as increasing support to these programs: *ReadNow BC, Ready Set Learn, Literacy Now, and Adult Education*.

We are wondering, however, what role you see for the school libraries in British Columbia. Almost all children attend school in BC, and all schools have a library. Many international studies have shown that a professionally staffed and adequately funded school library will improve student literacy and achievement (Lance, Keith Curry, 2005).

School libraries not only provide access to quality literature, they are the focal point in the school for teaching research skills, the use of databases, and appropriate use of online information sources. School library collections are developed to support the K-12 curriculum, are age appropriate, and are staffed by teacher-librarians qualified to assist students with their literacy needs.

Public libraries do not share this mandate, as their audience is much larger and public library collections are not curriculum specific. School libraries are, therefore, an integral part of any literacy program, and need to be recognized and supported.

Equitable access to literacy materials is essential for all school-aged children. Unfortunately, many school-aged children are unable to access a public library due to geographic or social difficulties. This is not a consideration with school libraries, which, in theory, should be accessible to all school children each school day.

We would like you to explain, Ms. Bond, why your government is so completely silent on the important role played by school libraries in improving literacy for the children of BC? Why are school libraries not mentioned in any of your publications? We would like to hear from you how you intend to increase support for school libraries, which have been notoriously understaffed and underfunded for years.

Elsa Armstrong, Lynn Barnes, June Bouchard, Janice Brantner, Helen Fall, Linda Irvine, Karen Leeson, Margaret Litch, Cindy Lowry, Robert Lussier, Donna McDaniel, Kathy McKierahan, Iris Mennie, Katherine Miller, Robyn Mylett, Bonnie Palfrey, Ann Rainboth, Lene Rounis, and Elizabeth Sansoucy-Jones.

Underfunding sp

Phony consultation on provincial autism school

An informed parent writes the minister

by Dawn Steele

This is a letter I wrote to the education minister on March 16, 2007, after leaving the invitation-only parent meeting to discuss the minister's plans for a provincial autism school. I left when it was made clear that I would not be permitted to voice the concerns that I had been asked to by the Vancouver Autism Parent Group to raise.

Dear Minister Bond

I'm writing as a parent to express grave concern over (1) your planned provincial demonstration school for autism, and (2) your ministry's disturbing abuse of process in consulting with parents about this planned school. I will start with the latter.

Provincial model school for autism—Process

I was asked by several groups to represent them at an invitation-only meeting organized by the ministry to consult with parents on a proposed provincial demonstration school for autism. I agreed to attend as a delegate for the Vancouver Autism Parents' Group, to bring forward some of the concerns we have been hearing from parents about the concept. There are currently 426 identified students with autism in Vancouver's public schools—about 1/6 of the provincial total. Vancouver's District Parent Advisory Council has rejected the model school concept. So has the Vancouver School Board's Special Education Advisory Committee and the Vancouver Autism Parents' Group. I summed up all the concerns and solicited additional comments from my own provincial autism parents network.

At the meeting, we were informed that the minister had already decided to proceed with the creation of a provincial demonstration school for autism as a choice and that ministry staff were studying what form this would take and how it would be funded and operated. Provincial schools are permitted under BC's *School Act*, though none have existed for some time, since the old segregated schools were closed down. When asked why the minister had decided on a provincial autism school as the solution to problems facing students with autism in our public schools, we were told this decision was based on earlier input that parents wanted more choices—a remarkable suggestion, given that today's meeting was the ministry's first public (albeit invitation-only) consultation with parents of students with autism on this concept!

Halfway into the meeting, after participants had been extensively canvassed about potential benefits of such a concept, I pointed out that the agenda only permitted 15 minutes to discuss potential challenges and no opportunity to discuss concerns about a provincial model school for autism, compared to 90 minutes allocated to potential benefits and attributes of such a school. Given the diversity of views on this issue among participants, I requested equal time to discuss concerns. Ministry staff refused, stating that this was not the purpose of the meeting. Later in the meeting, staff refused to permit a show of hands to see

I wish to formally protest the disrespect shown to all participants, to due process, and to any reasonable concept of public consultation.

how many parents did not favour the concept of a provincial model school for autism.

I wish to formally protest the disrespect shown to all participants, to due process, and to any reasonable concept of public consultation. If the minister and/or her deputy have already made up their minds and are simply looking for a choir to sing praises and provide justification for the decision, why waste our valuable time by pretending to consult?

Finally, given that no details were provided to participants about what form this provincial school for autism will take, one must challenge the validity of the long list of supposed benefits that proponents were invited to list at this meeting. (Examples included well-trained staff, safety, parent involvement, expertise in autism, and accountability—none of which could be attributed with any certainty to a vague proposal in which teaching methodology, structure, staffing, and governance have not yet been defined.) If this is how this ministry develops policy, then it should be no surprise that special education in this province is in the dire state that we find it today.

Provincial model school for autism—Concept

Rationale

This ministry's core mandate is to provide education—based on sound educational principles—not to offer a smorgasbord of choices. A provincial model school for autism requires a sound educational rationale, and the ministry has failed to provide any such rationale for having already decided to open such a school.

Evidence-based decision-making requires a clear definition of the problem/objective, to allow purposeful implementation and objective evaluation. The ministry has provided no evidence that a dearth of "choice" is the key problem facing BC's 2,593 public school

students with autism, or explained how a single Vancouver school will offer more choice to the majority of students who live too far away to attend it. Most of the issues raised by parents at today's meeting related to inadequate quality/quantity of special ed services in the public schools to meet the unique needs of their children. This is consistent with what I've heard in extensive discussions over nine years with parents of hundreds of students with autism, and with parent/advocates representing the rest of BC's 61,277 students with special needs. So if the problem is actually the inadequacy of special ed in our public schools, we need to understand why that is so before we can decide on what would be an effective solution. Here are the key reasons that I've heard from parents:

1. Ideology

BC has a pragmatic policy of inclusion that recognizes integration in regular classrooms as the default, but certainly not the right answer for everyone, or all the time, and therefore calls for a range of options so that each child can receive services and supports in ways dictated by their unique needs. It's a good policy, but trustees and staff feel free to interpret it as they choose, sometimes based on personal ideologies, and often to the detriment of students, because there are no ministry checks and balances to ensure the intent of provincial policy is respected.

This ministry's core mandate is to provide education—based on sound educational principles—not to offer a smorgasbord of choices.

Since 2002, certain ministry policy shifts have also unintentionally degraded the quality of special education services. For example, the shift to school-based decision-making/staffing has resulted in a significant loss of special education expertise. In 1999, Vancouver had a full district team of highly specialized autism experts on call to support all students and provide individualized advice and training to their teachers and aides. That team has gone, leaving generalist school-based resource teams who are expected to cover everything that crops up—ESL, "grey-area kids," autism, Aboriginal, behaviour, communication, etc. for that particular school. This organizational model is not effective or conducive for addressing complex special needs. It's far more cost effective to have district-based specialists who can provide more specialized expertise to support challenging students across the district.

2. Resourcing

In 2000, the ratio of special needs teachers to students with special needs in Vancouver was

1:9. In 2006, that ratio had climbed dramatically to 1:13. (Source: Vancouver Special Ed Advisory Committee brief to VSB Budget consultations, March 2007). Each special needs teacher in Vancouver is now handling 50% more students with special needs compared to just six years ago (when the ministry commissioned a special report on the "Crisis in Special Education in BC"!). It should therefore surprise no one that BC's teachers are unable to deliver adequate service to students with autism/special needs in our public schools today. Not only are they less specialized, they also have far higher caseloads.

Further, school-based therapies (speech and language pathology, occupational therapy) that are critical to autism and other special needs have been drastically cut, due to the 2002–04 MCFD budget cuts. Waitlists are endless. Recently, one Vancouver student was finally approved for speech therapy on turning 19 and leaving school, after waiting for most of his school life for critical help that never came.

The intensive programming that some parents of students with autism are demanding in a provincial model school are equivalent to elite New York models that charge \$72,000 to \$120,000 US per student annually. In comparison, your education ministry only pays our public schools \$16,000 a year for each student with autism. In Vancouver, the cost of a special ed teaching aide alone is over \$35,000/year. So our provincial funding does not even cover half the cost of an aide and none of the cost of specialist services required. No wonder our public schools aren't measuring up to these expectations! Why not spend the extra \$70,000 per student in the public system, to allow our public schools to succeed instead of shipping kids off to segregated provincial schools when they fail because there was no one to help them in the first place? If some students need specialized separate programming, why not fund this as a demonstration program in one district or across the board as district programs in the public system? Why do we need a provincial school to demonstrate teaching methodologies and programs that have been proven over and over elsewhere?

3. Collective agreements/legislation

The education ministry and its representatives have negotiated collective agreements that place professional autonomy/seniority rights above the individual needs of students. *Many* parents complain that the public schools are powerless to resolve problems when the rights of staff take precedence over the rights of students. We must as parents respect workers' rights and working conditions. My own child's teachers and aides have mostly been stellar, going far beyond the call of duty. And parental expectations can at

times be unrealistic. But some staff and their unions must also accept some responsibility for the problems, frustration, and widespread lack of faith that I often hear from parents.

Each special needs teacher in Vancouver is now handling 50% more students with special needs compared to just six years ago...

The education minister also introduced legislation last year, Bill 33, which places the rights of staff and other students ahead of the rights of students with autism/other special needs. Bill 33 has limited their access to key classes without any provision to ensure our children's educational needs will be respected when they are turned away due to the new special needs classroom caps.

Districts policies and practices create additional administrative barriers to educating students with autism—for example, only the most junior teachers with no special ed training or experience are being assigned to Vancouver's special education programs.

These are very real and complex problems. But you need to sit down with all the partners to examine how real-world contractual, administrative, or legislative barriers impede the education of students with special needs and autism. A provincial model school set up in a Utopian Ivory Tower outside the collective agreements, outside district policies and practices, and/or outside legislation like Bill 33 will do nothing to help identify those barriers and how to resolve them over the long run for the benefit of all students with autism/special needs in BC.

A Cadillac autism school that can work in a Utopian world proves nothing new—there are plenty of existing American and Canadian models that do exactly that. If the minister wants to demonstrate something truly useful, show us that a quality autism program can work in the face of realities confronting real school districts and actual public school teachers and administrators. It will certainly be more difficult to do, but involving all the players from the outset will give them a sense of ownership, create buy-in, and support knowledge transfer so that the initial investment pays the greatest possible dividends in the long run.

4. Training

A major challenge cited by parents is the lack of training and expertise among staff in the public system. University/college training programs are nowhere near adequate to prepare teachers for today's diverse classrooms. Special ed teachers have all but vanished as a profession and funding/interest in in-service training is at best limited. If trained teachers are

Special education

so scarce in the public system, how are we going to magically find them for this provincial school? And if we do lure a few from the public schools, how does this help students in the bigger picture? If we are going to have to recruit and train them to make a provincial school work, why not just recruit and/or train them to support students in the public system instead?

What expertise will be required for this provincial school? Why hasn't the minister or her staff approached the experts who teach special education at UBC and SFU to ask them what expertise will be needed and if a provincial model school is the best way to provide it? I've talked to some of them and am informed that they are more than willing to offer their expert advice, if someone at the ministry would just ask.

5. Accountability

Since 2002, the ministry's emphasis on standardized testing as the primary accountability instrument for public schools has also indirectly hurt students with autism and special needs, who are excluded from most standardized tests. Resources and attention get focussed on what gets

Why do we need a provincial school to demonstrate teaching methodologies and programs that have been proven over and over elsewhere?

measured, usually at the cost of what's not getting measured, and that is exactly why resources have been shifted away from special education and toward elite/prestige programs to compete for high performing students who will improve a school's FSA scores or arrest declining enrolment.

Few, if any district accountability contracts have any meaningful performance measures to assess outcomes for students with autism (or most other special needs). Not one of the education ministers, since Christy Clark introduced this concept in 2002, has ever expressed the slightest concern over this. Given the premier's commitment to building the best system of support for special needs in Canada (Great Goal for the Golden Decade #3), it is deeply disturbing that as minister you have not set a single performance measure specific to students with special needs or autism in your 2007-08 Service Plan.

6. Squeaky wheel system

We have a squeaky wheel special education system in BC. My own son with autism is doing very well in an integrated public school classroom because I've learned how to "squeak" very effectively. When told my son would not qualify for an aide in high school next year, I shared my concern with the opposition critic, who raised it in Question Period. Fifteen minutes later, my

principal called to say that our district had confirmed aide support for my son next year.

Many students doing well in the public system either have milder forms of autism, like my son, or else their parents know which doors to knock on when help is initially denied. And when the public system fails, families with financial means can always turn to private options to rescue their kids. But the majority of BC's 2,593 students with autism in our public schools don't have that luxury, nor do most of the 61,277 students overall in the province with various special needs. In Vancouver, more than half our 426 students with autism have ESL families. When they complain about inadequate supports to assure safety and/or academic progress, they're told that's all the ministry funds and that's all they should expect. End of story—because they don't know which doors to knock on and language barriers make it very difficult to express the necessary arguments to force the school, the district, and the minister to live up to their obligations.

Provincial schools—the wrong answer to a real problem

No parent, who has ever watched their child or another child struggle, would ever want to deny an opportunity to help a child in crisis find the support necessary to thrive and succeed. My heart goes out to families asking for a special school because the public system has failed their children. My heart also goes out to the many other families who have approached me for help because their children are suffering equally, except they don't know how to be "squeaky wheels" and they won't be helped by a provincial model school.

Solutions that tackle the above problems *within* our public schools are what we need, because these will help all students who are struggling, not just a few. Solutions that are imbedded in the public system from the outset will take more effort but they will identify the

If trained teachers are so scarce in the public system, how are we going to magically find them for this provincial school?

real barriers, generate more buy-in, serve children province-wide, and pay the maximum long-term dividends for all students. Solutions that build on the range of options now available to address the diversity of special learning needs in our public schools will help all students succeed, not just the handful in Greater Vancouver who manage to make it off the waitlists for specialized services at a single provincial school.

For all these reasons, a provincial demonstration school is the wrong answer to a very real need. Demonstration

programs in our public schools that model how to make the public system more responsive to the needs of especially challenging students—Yes! More support for integrated students—Yes! Seeking out and celebrating and learning from the success stories in our public system—Yes! More accountability and the will all around to address barriers to success—Yes! Demonstration programs designed from the outset, with educator input, to facilitate knowledge transfer and capacity building in the public system—Absolutely!

Phony consultation to provide window-dressing for a "done deal"—No! Real dialogue that asks all the partners to help define the barriers and consider how they can contribute to solving them—Yes!

Phony consultation to provide window-dressing for a "done deal"—No! Real dialogue that asks all the partners to help define the barriers and consider how they can contribute to solving them—Yes!

I do see one significant advantage in a provincial autism school model (as opposed to a demonstration project in the public system). It will finally give us a clear accounting of the full cost of accommodating and educating a student with challenging special needs, thereby finally providing a sound basis for adjusting the provincial funding formula to cover the real costs of special education in our public schools.

Dawn Steele, a parent of a student with ASD, Vancouver.

Segregated schools

It appears the fix is in

Well, the full-court press for a segregated "model" school is on. As a parent of a child with special needs and a former school trustee, I can't decide whether to scream or cry.

(1) Current Education Minister Shirley Bond mentions such schools in the legislature. (2) Former Liberal education minister Christy Clark wants to set one up, likely in a Vancouver school. (3) Eleanor Gregory, a Non-Partisan Association Vancouver school board trustee supports the idea in a *Vancouver Sun* Issues & Ideas article. (4) School Board chair Ken Denike says he has a "gut feeling" that a "model" segregated school will go ahead. (5) Clark interviews Denike on CKNW about the "need" for a model school. All this has occurred before the issue has been discussed at a public meeting.

The irony is too sweet. A provincial government under-

funds education. School districts, such as Vancouver, cut supports for students with special needs. Parents are rightly outraged. Now, the ministry of education, Clark, and it looks like Vancouver NPA trustees ride in with the answer—a semi-private "model" segregated school.

There is ample evidence that inclusion (which does not mean dumping kids in classrooms with insufficient support, and might include time in separate supported classrooms) can work. We need the funding and commitment to give inclusion a chance to succeed, for all students.

*Jane Bouey
Vancouver*

Vancouver's cuts in services

A key and frequently missing component in the emerging debate on the segregation of kids with special needs in a separate Vancouver school is the chronic underfunding over the years of special education programs by successive provincial governments in BC.

As a former principal of a Vancouver elementary school for 25 years, I have painfully watched what was once a lighthouse school district in the delivery of appropriate support, shamefully decimated—essential programs and services for special ed kids and their families are being eroded or disappearing entirely.

As staff members in a diverse urban system we felt justifiably proud of the co-operative and innovative community-based model developed by the VSB. A continuum of quality special ed services was provided in a flexible manner by the board. Not any more.

For the public record, as part of the ongoing debate, the battering the Vancouver School Board's special education infrastructure has received over the years is evidenced by all of the following: the closure of the four (one in each area of the board) of the VSB's highly successful Teaching and Evaluation Centers with specialized staff providing programs for kids with learning difficulties when they returned to their home school; the layoff of skilled speech and language pathologists, school psychologists, area counselors, itinerant teachers, and student support workers (SEAs); the dropping of the district's autistic team; the near elimination of small allowances for supplies and resources for special ed classes; the complete elimination of the position of staff assistant (a position, at the time, unique to the VSB); the weakening of the district's innovative school-based team model, which served as a hub for the co-ordination of in-school services; the cutbacks to mainstream programs and services also impeded our ability to integrate on a full- or part-time basis special ed students into regular classrooms; the gradual decrease in the essential number of workshops and in-

service courses for learning assistance and resource teachers and other staff—the professional life blood of any special education program worth its salt.

This cumulative loss of expertise, experience, and resources in so many specialized areas took a terrible toll on the system. And bit-by-bit we are no longer able to provide the full range of learning options that our students need.

That the system has survived as it has is a tribute to the commitment of staff and dedicated parents who support our public schools.

It has not gone unnoticed that some of the proponents of a so-called model special ed school (a school within the Vancouver school system but outside the governance of the board) by their inaction—Christy Clarke for example, who as minister of education slashed support, and NPA trustees whose silence over 16 years was deafening—are now leading the charge for a segregated school. Also it is not surprising that the current round of closed-door meetings, sponsored by the Ministry of Education for selected parents, are now part of the push to get this regressive model quickly approved without a full public debate.

Those who erroneously allege that the opponents of this plan are ideologically driven should consider the statement of a leading figure to the world's education ministers at the 2005

"Our research shows that on average, disabled children in regular classrooms perform better than those in special schools."

—Peter Evans, OECD Special Education Program

OECD (Organization for Economic Development) conference on special education in Santiago, Chile.

Peter Evans, head of OECD's special education program stated: "Our research shows that on average, disabled children in regular classrooms perform better than those in special schools. Those who go to special schools follow a different curriculum and it is difficult to integrate them into society after school. There is less prejudice against them if they have attended regular schools." To drive home his point he cited the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results for 2003, which showed disabled students doing remarkably well.

Successful and inclusive schools need appropriate, stable support in a mainstream public system, not retrograde, isolated models that deny all kids the opportunities for full participation they need and deserve.

*Noel Herron
Vancouver*

Why be a sponsor teacher?

As most teachers know, the practicum is the most important part of a student-teacher education program. Sponsor teachers receive the highest ratings in terms of positive models and practicum support.

Working with pre-service teachers provides the opportunity for a sponsor teacher to reflect on one's own practice, to discuss emerging and established educational theories, to model effective teaching strategies, and to become a mentor and guide.

The vast majority of experiences are positive. Sponsor teachers perceive the experience to be an opportunity for enjoyment and professional growth for themselves. Here are some of their comments:

"Hosting a student teacher is an amazing experience. The first time I shared my classroom with a student teacher, I was somewhat apprehensive. Teachers are, after all, very protective of their students, their routines, their resources, and their classrooms. However, I soon discovered that I was learning as much from my student teacher as she was from me, and that by sharing my space, I was gaining more than I was giving. I loved having someone to share the daily experiences that arise when dealing with 20+ eight-year-olds—the funny things kids say, the behavior challenges that need a second opinion, and especially the extra teacher to help students who struggle academically.

"I also discovered that having a student teacher made me question my educational practices in a very positive way. I had to ask myself questions like: Why do I teach spelling the way I do? How can I make guided reading sessions the most efficient and beneficial? Is silent reading time meaningful for the kids? Am I saying more positive and empowering comments in a day than negative remarks? How effective am I at asking higher-level questions?

"Hosting student teachers has been the best form of professional development I've had. Watching young teachers develop into professionals and colleagues is so rewarding and exciting. I highly recommend

trying it for yourself—you won't regret it!" — *Suzanne Gravel, Grade 3 teacher, Alexander Elementary School, Abbotsford*

"I believe I have learned as much about the practice of teaching and my own practice as I have passed on to my student teacher. Being with a student teacher every day becomes an opportunity to reflect, most often on why I do things the way I do. Through this reflection I have found my own practice continue to improve long after the student teacher has left my classroom. I have also learned that it is enjoyable to have another adult in the room, to talk to and discuss teaching and educational practice with. We are so often closed behind our classroom door; the regular opportunity to have discussions about our practice is enjoyable. I have had a couple of student teachers during the time I was involved in Masters and Ed D work. I was able to both apply and discuss the theoretical aspects that I learned in my course work to my experience in the classroom and with student teachers." — *Bruce McCloy, English teacher, New Westminster Secondary School*

"I have learned several things, the biggest is that my way may not be the only or best way of doing things. I had the privilege of working with a young lady a while back whose style was quite different than mine. At first I wanted to explain to her how to make her lesson look more like mine, but when I gave her the opportunity to show me, the final outcome of her lesson was very good. Although the route she took was not one I would have taken, she was successful. I have also realized that there are many things that I do well, and I enjoy sharing that and helping another to hopefully make a good entrance into our profession." — *Debbie Piggin, Grade 6 teacher, RL Clemitson Elementary, Kamloops*

"Their learning is our learning. We have the opportunity to rest for a moment and review our teaching methods, to organize and clean, to look at old resources and lessons that have been shoved to the back of the file cabinet. This is also a time for improvement. As

teachers, we know, learning is everyday, every way, and everywhere. Student teachers bring new ideas and twists on old ones. They also bring to the classroom another expert, the faculty advisor who supports both the student and the sponsoring teacher. The moments are golden for those of us who can share our teaching ideologies with a peer. Many great relationships start and continue with sponsoring a student teacher. When they leave the classroom, we have also gone through a transformation of a kind. Our classrooms as well as ourselves benefit from the experience." — *Kathy Manning, visual art teacher, Earl Marriott Secondary School, Surrey*

"I feel it is important to provide a safe place for teacher candidates to experiment with the various teaching styles and try to implement strategies knowing they have the support of a co-operating teacher who will not judge them on any errors that may occur when they attempt something new. Teacher candidates need honest feedback on their performance. This will enable them to become more effective teachers, in a more timely fashion, than if we allowed them to realize their mistakes on their own. Having a teacher candidate in full immersion frees up my time to allow me to work with students who need extra assistance. It also allows me to take on projects within my school that benefit teachers and students." — *Joanne Hapke, Grade 4 teacher, Westwood Elementary School, Prince George*

"I have been doing this for many years and I enjoy it immensely. I find that student teachers bring a lot of enthusiasm to practicum and a genuine desire to learn. My job as a teacher is to help students (no matter the age) to learn and get better at what they do. I also feel that I have lots to offer to a student teacher, to help fill up their own toolbox of teaching materials. I had great sponsor teachers when I was going through the process and I feel that this is one of many ways that I can give back to the profession." — *Gary Maitland, PE teacher, Nanaimo District Secondary School*

— *Pierre Blouin*

New Teachers' Conference

Participants at the workshop "Webpage Creation for the Absolute Beginner" by Brian Yu, teacher at David Thompson Secondary School in Vancouver.



BRIAN YU PHOTO

Re: Inconvenient truth

by Lance Read

Viewing *An Inconvenient Truth* in Grade 8 is perhaps too late. We watched this documentary with my nine-year-old nephew and he understood it very well. It is time for schools throughout the developed world to include not only this but also anticonsumerism programs in all areas of study.

Consumerism can and must be explored in every area of the curriculum. Not one single subject in any grade should be excluded from a reflection on climate change and global frying.

Starting with simple Kindergarten math, for example, how many shoes does your family own divided by number of family members and what is the effect on the environment? Later grades can study all sorts of relationship math. How do you get to school—walk, bike, bus, or private car? What kind of gas mileage and what is the difference in climate change costs? Lego math: what is the environmental cost of one Lego block and what can you do with the least number of blocks?

In history class: oil abuse from the Battle of the Bulge to the idiocy of Iraq.

In daily PE: how few sneakers can you get by on—one pair for indoor, one for outdoor, and one pair of all purpose molded-sole cleats for baseball, soccer, and football?

All grades: Alberta Tar Sands—worst environmental disaster ever created by humans. One of the largest remaining land-based carbon sinks being squandered to mine oil at a 60% net recovery rate, i.e., four barrels burned off in order to gain six.

For years, I attempted to include environmental education in my classroom. In the beginning, I latched onto elementary school mentor, Bill Bleasdale, and the *Salmon in the Classroom* unit. He and I worked through years of developing, improving, and disseminating this program as widely as possible. We believed in sensitizing children to the environmental difficulties in spawning salmon from tiny eggs. We encouraged students to get involved with local stream clean-up projects.

In 1989, teaching colleague Brent Pattison organized school and student paper recycling two years before GVRD businesses had started recycling waste paper. Little, if anything, of this kind of recycling was being done anywhere else. The first year, we received a lot of ribbing about so much extra effort being somewhat a waste of time. There isn't a person today who would think so.

After years of effort surrounding the 3Rs—Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle, it has become apparent to many of us that we've done a pretty good job with recycling. We are struggling with the reuse part and have completely neglected the reduction component. Consumerism is the cause of global frying and we must all quit this human behaviour. It is a habit more addictive and destructive than crack cocaine, alcohol, and tobacco.

While spending seven months in Cuba, "enjoying" its hottest

winter on record, I received constant e-mails from family in Vancouver about bizarre weather. In my Spanish class at the Havana-U, students from all over Europe spoke about disappearing glaciers, dying bears, unprecedented river flooding, etcetera. As a result, I wrote the poem *Polar Bears are Gone Now* and translated it into Spanish.



Polar bears are gone now

Polar bears are gone now all that's left are bones, Scattered widely 'cross the land that used to be their home.

These bears can paddle sixty miles that's always been their way, But more than that is far too much their lives they had to pay.

The ice broke up quite suddenly as they chased along for seal, Polar bears they went extinct just trying to get a meal.

The polar bears all left you know just up and went away, First dinosaurs and now the bears "Are tigers next?" you say.

— Based on *Dinosaurs Are Gone Now*, Anonymous

Lance Read is a middle school teacher, SD 43, on sabbatical in Cuba doing documentary film work since July 2006.

DVDs for all public secondary schools

A copy of the DVD of Al Gore's Oscar-winning documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, will be distributed to all public secondary schools in BC.

Gregor Robertson, Member of the Legislature for Vancouver Fairview and founder and former CEO of Happy Planet Foods, had the vision for the project. He brought together Tides Canada Foundation, Paramount Pictures, and Novex Couriers in this unique initiative to raise awareness about global warming among BC youth.

Tides Canada Foundation is gifting the DVD's. Distribution will be carbon neutral, courtesy of Novex Courier's clean fleet of hybrid and low emission mail vehicles, and bicycle courier service.

This business/charity partnership aims to ensure that BC's secondary school students have access to this excellent, solutions-oriented film.

Yours for the asking

Teachers' Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy

The teachers' institute is a unique professional development opportunity for teachers of governance and citizenship education. Each November, the program brings together approximately 70 educators from across the country, for an intensive, informative, unforgettable week on Parliament Hill.

The institute is hosted by the Speakers of the Senate and the House of Commons and organized by the Library of Parliament. The program is open to teachers of social studies and related subjects, including political science, history, law, civics, or Native studies, currently teaching from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

For more information, go to www.parl.gc.ca/education, toll free 1-866-599-4999. Completed applications must be forwarded electronically or be postmarked no later than April 30, 2007.

www.langCanada.ca

The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT) invites you to discover the LangCanada.ca portal, a one-stop window on the Internet to information on official second language teaching and learning.

You will find an abundance of educational resources, educational materials, training organizations, and information that enhances second official language teaching and learning in Canada. Simply by visiting the site, you have easy access to a database of over 3,000 educational resources and over 500 educational institutions.

To quickly find classroom resources, you can search the database by type of language program you are teaching, by skill level of your students, by theme or subject, by keyword, and even by the specific type of teaching and learning material you need (games, texts and documentation, references, clip-art, exercises, tests, music, etc.)

Established in 1970, the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT) increases awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the importance of second language learning and teaching throughout Canada and promotes the advancement of professional excellence among language educators. See www.caslt.org for more information. Become a

member today to discover more language teaching resources and to be kept informed on the latest developments in the language teaching profession.

Free teaching resources

Surfing the web for information about plastics and the environment just got a whole easier with an educational web site dedicated to just that. Have a look at www.plastics.ca/teachers and you'll find everything from a 101 primer on plastics (history, evolution, materials, etc.) to a colourful poster depicting how a plastic pop bottle gets recycled into a fleece sweatshirt. All the material on the web site is available for free. Most of it can be downloaded from the site and most of it is available in French.

The Environment and Plastics Industry Council (www.plastics.ca/epic) created the web site, working with teachers and consultants. There is a range of curricula suitable for teachers of students in Grade 2 through to Grades 9 and 10. There are also on-line games, crossword puzzles, and word finds that can be downloaded and reprinted.

Sign up on the web site for an electronic newsletter—*Plastics in-Class*—that discusses real-life plastics recycling applications, provides classroom activity suggestions, and highlights various contests and/or events. Signing up on the web site.

Breakfast for learning

Breakfast for learning (BFL) is the leading national non-profit organization solely dedicated to child nutrition. Working to ensure that every child in Canada attends school well nourished and ready to learn, BFL provides program grants, nutrition education resources and research, and advocacy. To date, thousands of children have been served nutritious breakfasts, lunches, and snacks through the programs we support. Studies show that kids need to eat well in order to learn well and *Eat Right! Be Bright! the Club* is an interactive web site dedicated to child nutrition that can help ensure students are getting the most out of every school day.

The site also presents kid-friendly games and teaching materials that will help get kids excited about healthy eating and excelling in the classroom.

For more information, visit www.breakfastforlearning.ca.

free, or it can hold on to the nut and stay trapped. According to Brenner, monkeys usually hold on to the nut. This story embodies the wellness story. Each day we have the opportunity to go free or stay trapped by the choices we make.

In the March issue of *Teacher*, Anne Jardine wondered if full-time teaching was hazardous to teachers' lives because of the increased workloads that have become more complex. She points out that teachers are now giving some thought to the amount of time they want to spend on teaching and how they intend to alter their teaching craft given that "new demands are added, yet none of the traditional teaching duties are subtracted." There seems to be a perception amongst the masses that if one reduces the time spent devoted to teaching

10 New BCTF lesson aids

1 LA 9982—Making Connections: A Resource for Building Supportive Integrated Classrooms by Corrine Harris, 50 p. ©2006. The purpose of this resource is to provide classroom teachers with information and insight regarding children who require an individualized program. The classroom teacher plays a profound and significant role in the student's educational experience and it is the author's desire to support the daily efforts in assisting all kinds of learners to achieve their highest academic and social capabilities. The students benefit academically and emotionally when an alliance or partnership is formed with their integrated classroom teachers. The book includes brief, concise snapshots of various disabilities and challenges, coupled with helpful information and strategies, references, internet resources and blackline masters. All grades. \$29.95

2 LA 8580—Little Skittle Lost! Adventures on a Rocky Shore by Unicorn Studios, nine-minute DVD, ©2006. This DVD production utilizes colorful animations combined with stunning real-life nature scenes to bring messages home to young viewers. Skittle the crab lives on a rocky shore and one day he's accidentally scooped up in a child's bucket, and moved some distance from home. While finding his way back, Skittle encounters strange marine creatures, from whom he learns about adaptations. With each new encounter, Skittle becomes envious of the special advantages each creature has for surviving in its own environment—a wave-swept rocky shore. However, the oystercatcher convinces Skittle that crabs are "perfect, just the way they are." Includes a printed sheet of follow-up lesson ideas. Grades K–4. \$14.95

3 LA 9181—Spreading the Word 3 by CBC Television, 115-min. DVD, ©2006. This is an educational initiative of the Vancouver International Readers' and Writers' Festival. The content contains readings and discussions by Canadian and international authors for audiences from Grades 2 to 12, which was taped live at the 2006 Vancouver International Writers' and Readers' Festival. The video content is connected to curriculum at indicated grade levels and includes a study guide for each event. The collection is introduced by CBC television host Gloria Macarenko. Author Maggie de Vries discusses her book "Big Fish" about a sturgeon from the Fraser River, answers audience questions for Grades 2–6, and a Rick Hansen special message is included. Award-winning playwrights Stephan Cloutier and Dennis Foon act out how the written word is brought to life "From Page to Stage," suitable for Grades 8–12. Grades 2–12. \$3

4 LA 9182—The Family Under the Bridge by Rob Seath of Novelworks, 42 p. ©2007. This reading response for the novel *The Family Under the Bridge* by Natalie Savage Carlson can be used with any classroom groupings, from individuals

to whole class. It is effective for children on adapted or modified programs as well as those learning English as a second language. It is helpful for students who find written output to be a challenge and weaker readers are provided structure because most of the responses focus on critical story elements such as characters, setting, problems and plot. The responses can be photocopied for classroom use as over-heads or for individual use. This resource includes open-ended responses, classification activities, analogies, puzzles and word searches and answers. Grades 3–5. \$20

5 LA 1011—In Fine Form: The Canadian Book of Form Poetry edited by Kate Braid and Sandy Shreve, 305 p. ©2005. This anthology showcases 175 poems by 140 Canadian poets from the 16th century to the present day, representing some of the best poetry Canada has produced. This book explores and explains Canada's verse. It covers the familiar territory of sonnets and stanzas, ballads and epigrams, blues and haiku, and it presents the less familiar, such as the villanelle and pantoum, and introduces the fugue and palindrome as emerging forms. The result is a collection that appeals to poets and readers, young and old, teacher and student. The book is a resource for creative writing and English literature classrooms. It is arranged by sections, one for each form, with a brief introduction to that form's conventions and variations. These introductions are followed by a sampling of poems, some written close to the tradition, others riffing off the rules. At the end, an extended essay explores common poetic terms and technical devices. Grades 4–12. \$29.95

6 LA 8088—Daily Language Review, Grade 2 by Evan Moor Educational Publishers, 130 p. ©2005. This book includes reproducible Mon. to Fri. lessons for each day of a 36-week school year and short daily lessons. The Mon. to Thurs. lessons include two sentences to edit for corrections in punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and grammar, etc.; and three items practising a variety of language and reading skills. Fri. practise cycles through three formats: identifying mistakes, language usage and correcting mistakes in lists and letters. The pages are reproducible and the book includes a skills list and answer keys. \$19.95. Also, **LA 8088A Daily Language Review, Grade 2: Student Practise Book**, 130p. \$4.95

7 LA 8089—Daily Language Review Grade 3 by Evan Moor Educational Publishers, 130 p. ©2005. This book includes Mon. to Fri. lessons for each day of a 36-week school year and short daily lessons. The Mon. to Thurs. lessons include two sentences to edit, including corrections in punctuation, capitalization, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary and three items practising a variety of language and reading skills. Fri. practice cycles through four formats: language usage, identifying and correcting mistakes and combining

sentences, and choosing reference materials. The pages are reproducible and the book includes a skills list and answer keys. \$19.95. Also, **LA 8089A—Daily Language Review, Grade 3: Student Practice Book**, 130 p. \$4.95

8 LA 9177—Daily Language Review, Grade 5 by Evan Moor Educational Publishers, 130 p. ©2004. This book includes Mon. to Fri. lessons for each day of a 36-week school year and short daily lessons. The Mon. to Thurs. lessons include two sentences to edit, including corrections in punctuation, capitalization, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary and three items practising a variety of language and reading skills. Fri. practise cycles through five formats: language usage, identifying and correcting mistakes, combining sentences, choosing reference materials and figurative speech (similes, metaphors). The pages are reproducible and the book includes a skills list and answer keys. \$19.95. Also, **LA 9177A—Daily Language Review, Grade 5: Student Practice Book**, 130 p. \$4.95

9 LA 9178—Daily Language Review, Grade 6, Evan Moor Educational Publishers, 130 p. ©2005. This book includes Monday to Friday lessons for each day of a 36-week school year and short daily lessons. Each of the daily lessons has five language tasks for students to complete. The following skills are addressed: sentence editing, punctuation, grammar, vocabulary, word study skills and reference skills. The pages are reproducible and the book includes a skills list and answer keys. \$19.95. Also, **LA 8087A Daily Language Review, Grade 1: Student Practice Book**, 112 p. This consumable student practice book includes many focussed practice exercises. \$4.95

10 LA 9856—From A to Z: The Comprehensive Guide to Safe Bicycling for Kids and Adults by AMC Media Corporation, 32 p. ©1995. This colourful, illustrated guide teaches children to ride bicycles safely and defensively, to wear helmets and to apply good judgement in potentially dangerous traffic situations. This guide is easy to read, ethnically inclusive and entertaining. The dictionary format provides quick access to important information. Grades 4–9. \$2.50

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

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

On being well

Wellness is letting go

by Julia Johnson

In the book by Elizabeth Brenner; *Winning by Letting Go*, Brenner tells a story of how people in India catch monkeys.

They cut a small hole in a box. Then they put a tasty nut in the box. The hole is just large enough for the monkey to put its hand through, but it is too small for the monkey to withdraw its hand once it has clutched the nut inside.

Brenner then explains that the monkey has two choices. It can let go of the nut and go

so more time can be spent with family or achieving personal health, or if one makes changes to how the job of teaching is performed then such sacrifices make teachers less professional, less skilled, less effective, less caring, and schools become less effective at educating students. It is my belief that such a perception instils personal guilt and creates an atmosphere of judgment, which in turn impacts the health of the workplace and the health of the individual.

Matthew Fox, in his book, *The Reinvention of Work*, suggests that in this post-industrial era we need to rethink, "the way we define work, the way we compensate work, the ways we create work, and the way we let go of work and learn to infuse it with play and ritual," because this new era of rapid technological change and our global

economies are creating a system that is not working, a system that threatens our health and the health of the planet.

Letting go of work or the way we do our work is not an easy thing to do. As creatures of habit we are not always open and receptive to the demands brought on by change. The expectations we have for ourselves and others becomes a yoke around our necks and like the monkey that is unable to let go of his nut, we hang on to teaching practices that are no longer workable in the complex teaching environments in which we work.

Fox suggests that if we ask the question, "What are the work needs of our time; we can actually launch new ways of doing work, of being workers, of making jobs, of compensating work." When we are left to consider, "What might this new

work be?" Fox tells us, "that it is work on the human being itself." Like E. F. Schumacher, in *Small is Beautiful*, says "We can each of us work to put our own inner house in order," Fox believes that putting "our own inner house in order" will prove to be the key to reinventing work for the human species. Fox states that to do as Schumacher suggests requires a deep letting go of the old ways of living and working, if we and planet Earth are to survive. By transforming our work with choices that are freeing, we in turn transform our souls, our being, our health, and the way we live our lives.

Julia Johnson, a retired learning resource teacher in Quesnel, is a BCTF PD wellness associate and a member of the Teacher Newsmagazine Advisory Board. livingjewels@shaw.ca (250-747-3650).

Teachers' pension plan

Where's the money?

Trustees of the Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees have a duty to ensure that all investments remain prudent investments in the plan. The board's Statement of Investment Policies and Procedures outlines the board's position on investments. As well, the board evaluates fund performance at every board meeting.

On December 31, 2006, the total unaudited Teachers' Pension Plan assets totalled \$12.9 billion, with another \$2.9 billion earmarked for indexing. Fund earnings for last year, net of investment costs, were 15.1% for the Basic Account and 15.0% for the Inflation Adjustment Account (IAA).

Where was the money, and how did it do so well?

Where invested	% of Fund	Return Rate %
Short-term bonds	2.8	3.9
Gvt and Corp. bonds	17.0	3.8
Index-linked bonds	4.6	-2.6
Mortgages	3.9	5.1
Canadian equity	16.2	18.2
US equity	17.2	15.2
Foreign equity	21.3	25.9
Real estate	12.4	26.0
Private placements	3.4	n/a
Total	100%	15.1%

The top 10 equity holdings, as a % of the total equity holdings:

Canada	% of Cdn Total	% of Total Equity
Royal Bank of Canada	4.8	1.4
Manulife Financial	4.5	1.3
Suncor Energy Inc	4.2	1.2
Bank of Nova Scotia	4.0	1.2
TD Bank	3.8	1.1
Encana Corporation	3.6	1.0
Bank of Montreal	2.4	0.7
Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce	2.3	0.7
CN Railway	2.1	0.6
Petro Canada	2.0	0.6

USA	% of US Total	% of Total Equity
General Electric	2.7	0.8
Exxon Mobil Corp	2.5	0.8
Citigroup Inc.	2.2	0.7
Microsoft Corp.	1.9	0.6
Bank of America	1.9	0.6
AT & T Incorporated	1.8	0.5
JP Morgan Chase	1.4	0.4
Proctor & Gamble	1.3	0.4
Altria Group	1.3	0.4
Pfizer Incorporated	1.3	0.4

The estimated \$16 billion in the Plan's Basic and Inflation Adjustment Accounts is a lot of money, but it is spread around various asset classes and among various opportunities within each asset class such that the total pension fund is not over-exposed to any one bond, stock, or other form of asset-property.

Tax deducting the cost of purchase of service

For information about reinstatement of service and the tax implications, go to www.bctf.ca/SalaryAndBenefits.aspx?ed=4790, click on Pensions, then click on Tax deducting purchase of service.

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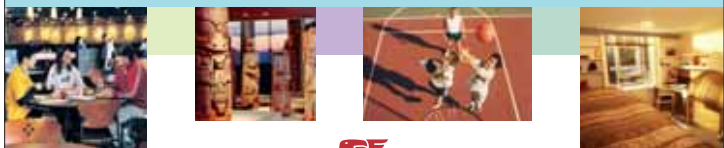
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WHITEHORSE 4 bdrm house for rent for the summer. \$3000, has been discounted for teachers. berquist@klondiker.com or canadavacationrentals.com

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MISCELLANEOUS

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PD CALENDAR

MAY

2-5 Regina. DreamCatching 2007: Professional Development Workshops in Math & Science for Teachers of Aboriginal Students, at the University of Regina, Saskatchewan. Cost: TBA. Information: www.dream-catching.com

5 Vancouver. Investigating Our Practices 2007. Celebrating IOP's 10th Anniversary. Teachers from different educational contexts convene at UBC to share their investigations, understandings, and questions. Call for Proposals—Share Your Classroom Inquiries. Submission deadline: March 9. Scarfe Education Building, 2125 Main Mall, UBC. Information: www.eplt.educ.ubc.ca/workshops/ or contact Judy Paley, 604-822-2733, or judy.paley@ubc.ca

11 Whistler. 2nd Annual PITA (Provincial Intermediate Teachers' Association) Whistler Workshops—Supporting struggling students in the grey area. Featuring Dawn Reithaug. Online registration and information goes live in February. Fee \$95. Contact Ray Myrtle PITA President, f: 604-224-5754 rmyrtle@canada.com

18 Chilliwack. Professional day activities, extend yourself beyond the classroom walls. Interested in touring the valley? Want to change jobs? How about financial security? Art? Food? Photoshop? Music? Look at our springboard calendar of workshops early in April. Registration and information: Chilliwack Teachers' Association, Elizabeth Gillies 604-792-9233 or pd33@bctf.ca or egillies@mac.com

28-30 Vancouver. 15th Annual David Berman Memorial Concurrent Disorders Conference. This conference will provide advanced training in concurrent disorders, including in-depth exploration of integrated treatment. Held at the Coast Plaza Hotel & Suites at Stanley Park, 1763 Comox Street, Vancouver, BC. For further information, please visit www.interprofessional.ubc.ca, or contact ipad@interchange.ubc.ca or 604-822-7524

JULY

2-19 Quebec City. Institut de Francais, UBC a Quebec, French Bursary Program for Teachers. This French immersion program is intended for all teachers and administrators interested in learning or improving their French language skills. Information: www.frenchcentre.ubc.ca/quebec or toll-free 1-866-528-7485

5-16 China. Peace and Reconciliation Study Tour to China Supported by BC Social Studies Teachers' Association (BCSSTA). The study tour facilitates a better understanding of the cultural and historical background of China during the Asia-Pacific War (1931-1945). Meet survivors and historians, visit museums and historical sites in Shanghai, Zhejiang and Nanjing. BC Assoc. for Learning and Preserving the History of WWII in Asia (BC ALPHA) covers all ground costs inside China. For more information contact Thekla Lit at 604-313-6000 or bcalpha@shaw.ca. Application details www.alpha-canada.org/StudyTour

14-15 West Vancouver. Non-Judgemental Teaching with Junko Lowry. Learn to access the ever present universal energy through enter-the-heart contemplations. Deal with all the challenges teaching presents with this very powerful method. For more details download the NJT information form at www.nihongobc.com and click the "Non-Judgemental Teaching Seminar" link or contact Brad for more information at brad@nihongobc.com

22-27 Fredericton, New Brunswick. St. Thomas University. 10th Annual Summer Institute in Human Rights for Teachers. This course is designed to educate teaching professionals about the various rights, instruments and issues pertinent to human rights from international, regional, and domestic perspectives. For information contact: Dr. Heather Richmond Richmond@stu.ca or Marc Gionet marginet@stu.ca 506-453-7203 or visit us on the web at: www.stu.ca

AUGUST

13-15 Parksville. Achieving excellence in writing with Susan Augustyn. This workshop is practical, offering a comprehensive writing program to take back to the classroom to use immediately. Interesting, informative and effective. Students' writing shows dramatic improvement within six months. For information contact Susan at 250-248-6434 or saugustyn@shaw.ca

13-17 Vancouver. 4th Media Literacy Summer Institute. In a media-saturated world, how do we help students to manage the barrage of messages? Held at the BC Teachers' Federation building. For further details contact Dan Blake at 604-301-1247 or debblaca@telus.net

19-21 Penticton. The 3rd Annual Summer Leadership Conference. Designed to cater to the professional learning needs of teachers, vice-principals, parents, trustees and district leaders. Sunday evening pre-conference and two days which include noted authors and leading educators. Information and registration at: www.sd67.bc.ca or contact Kathy Levesque klevesque@summer.com, 250-770-7718, local 1.

22-24 Victoria. All Kinds of Minds, in collaboration with St. Michaels University School, a "Schools Attuned" workshop. For more information, please visit www.smus.ca/campus/extension/schools_attuned.html, send an e-mail to edextension@smus.bc.ca, or call (250) 370-6117.

23-24 Surrey. The Literacy Continuum: The changing faces of literacy. The Literacy Networks' annual 2-day conference featuring Dr. Richard Allington, Leyton Schnellert and Pam Quigg plus workshops by respected local educators. On-line registration begins end of April. VISA and MasterCard accepted. For information contact Bonnie Mackwood at mackwood_b@sd36.bc.ca or call 604-590-2255.

PSA PD Day: October 19, 2007

bctf.ca/ProfessionalDevelopment.aspx

Additions/changes: elambert@bctf.ca

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Helping out in Phuket



Retired Langley teacher Peter Adams teaching English to students in Phuket, Thailand. Phuket was one of the communities devastated by the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami.

by Peter Adams

Furthest from my mind, as I disembarked from the Vancouver to Bangkok flight four months ago, was teaching English in a Phuket primary school. After 35 years as a secondary teacher in

Eager to learn, the pupils energetically engage in every classroom activity, in the same way they would join in playground games. It is no wonder, as the program emphasizes a child-centered approach.

Canada, I believed I was about to begin an extended vacation in Southeast Asia. Within a week of my arrival in Thailand, however, I read an article in the *Bangkok Post* describing a special English language program in Baan Kalim School, Phuket Island, Southern Thailand. I was greatly impressed by the Phuket Has Been Good To Us Foundation's efforts to help children in a village that was ravaged by the Boxing Day tsunami of 2004.

Phuket Has Been Good To Us was formed in response to the tsunami by a group of Phuket business and professional

people, together with educational leaders. The foundation works with local educators to improve the economic opportunities and life chances of young people, by funding and implementing high quality, practical English-language education in government schools on Phuket Island. The foundation wants to help Thai youth become capable and confident English speakers, so that they can secure well-paying employment, remain close to their families on Phuket Island, and ultimately begin to assume the reins of the economy.

Phuket is a place where English is widely spoken, but where few Thais speak English well and most high-paying jobs and upper-management positions on the island are dominated by expatriates. In a recent study, Thailand ranked second to last among nations in the region in English-language skills. The foundation is committed to addressing this in a positive and proactive way.

With its warm waters and fine sandy beaches, Phuket is an idyllic location for work or vacation. It is widely regarded as one of the most beautiful tourist destinations in Southeast Asia, with a cost of living about a third of that in BC. The country contains some of the most beautiful Buddhist temples, often set amongst verdant rainforests. With world-renowned cuisine and warm,

friendly people, it often seems like a tropical paradise.

A week later, after being accepted as a volunteer teacher in the school, I was on my way to Phuket. What a wonderful experience it has been. The children, ranging in age from six to twelve years, are an absolute delight. Eager to learn, the pupils energetically engage in every classroom activity, in the same way they would join in playground games. It is no wonder, as the program emphasizes a child-centered approach. Using the most up-to-date materials and teaching strategies, and with class sizes of less than 20, the pupils learn practical verbal, reading, and writing skills.

Kate Cope, the foundation's educational director, has put in place a wide array of learning materials. Teachers use an interactive approach to teaching English, which includes the use

Using the most up-to-date materials and teaching strategies, and with class sizes of less than 20, the pupils learn practical verbal, reading, and writing skills.

of a miniature, hands-on, "educational playground" for the English-language classroom.

The program is focussed on "total physical response," which engages the children by hearing, seeing, and actually doing.

The children eagerly move about the classroom examining maps, posters, books, games, and models of everyday objects found in the home and the market. I am constantly being served with impromptu meals of model sandwiches, pizza, ice cream, fruit, and vegetables. It felt strange at first to pretend to eat plastic grapes, but after seeing the delight on the children's faces, I now welcome the opportunity to engage them in conversation about the various kinds of fruit being held in a child's pretend shopping basket. We even have plastic models of life-size lobster, clams, and crabs. All of these provide perfect opportunities to ask, What is this? Do you like that? and so on. Imagine the delight in hearing a little seven-year-old reply "This is a ham, cheese, and lettuce sandwich."

There is no emphasis here on memorizing lists of words and phrases. We use games, puzzles, and role-playing to such a positive extent that many children arrive early to class and linger after the lesson is over. Bingo games, using the names of objects rather than numbers, are a real favourite.

Co-operation among pupils is constantly encouraged. It is most rewarding to observe children helping each other to

finish a crossword puzzle or match-up game. Imagine the beaming smile of a child basking in the applause of the class after correctly pronouncing a series of words in English. I can't think of more conclusive proof of the success of the program.

I came to Thailand to see the sights and learn something of the culture. I had no idea that my insights would be provided by the pupils of a primary school in Phuket. I have been led to conclude that children all over the world love to learn and are eager to help each other. Given

I have been led to conclude that children all over the world love to learn and are eager to help each other.

the appropriate setting, both of these can be accomplished in a co-operative and supportive fashion and at an astonishing rate. In my case, the teacher has become the learner.

If you are interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities at Baan Kalim School, please contact Stephen Cope, Director of Development, +66 (0)76-341-932, stephen@phukethasbeengoodtous.org, www.phukethasbeengoodtous.org

Peter Adams is a retired Langley teacher.