

BC Teachers' Federation

March 2025

Teacher

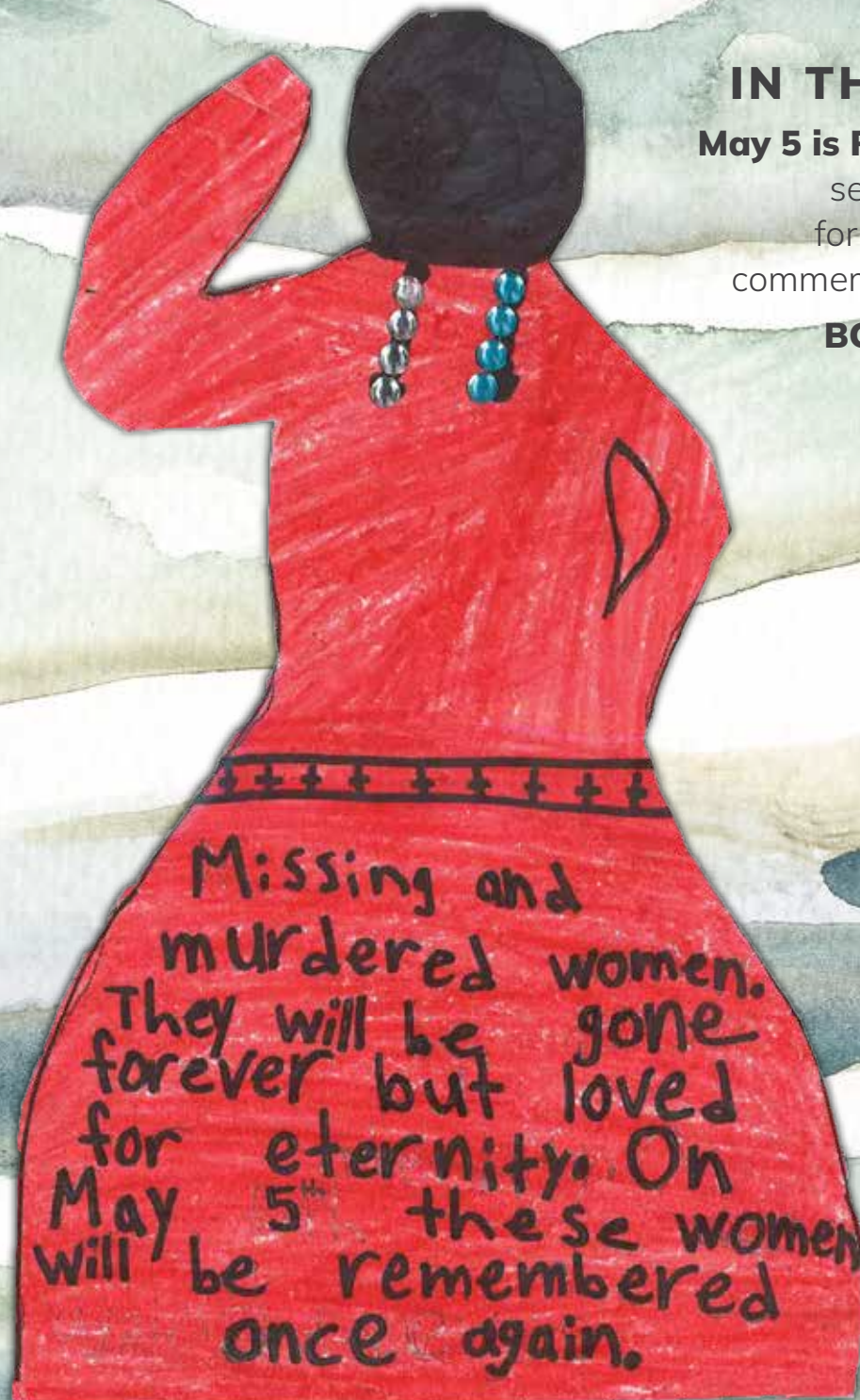
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see pages 20–23
for lesson ideas to
commemorate MMIWG

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BCTF

Kids Matter
Teachers Care

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Articles reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily express official policy of the BCTF. The BCTF does not endorse or promote any products or services advertised in the magazine. Advertisements reviewed and approved by the BCTF must reflect BCTF policy and be politically, environmentally, and professionally appropriate.



THIS IS YOUR MAGAZINE



Do you enjoy writing? Have a story to tell? Know of a project at your school or in your local you want to share with colleagues? Then consider writing for *Teacher*, the flagship publication of the BCTF! Submission guidelines are available at teachermag.ca.

We also welcome letters to the editor. Send your letter to teachermag@bctf.ca.

Teacher reserves the right to edit or condense any contribution considered for publication. We are unable to publish all submissions we receive.

Deadlines

May/June issue March 2025

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ON THE COVER

May 5 is Red Dress Day, the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Turn to pages 20–23 for lesson ideas to commemorate this day. Pictured is a piece of student art created in Denise Hendry's class.

CORRECTION

The article "Joy as collective action: BCTF hosts first Anti-Racism Symposium" in the Jan/Feb 2025 edition of *Teacher* incorrectly named Terry-Ann Webster. The member quoted and pictured in the article was Terry-Ann Gunter.





PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

AS LOCAL BARGAINING wraps up, I'd like to extend my gratitude and congratulations to the members who have put time and effort into securing improvements to the collective agreement. In some cases, the employer may have refused to move in this round, but you have brought those issues forward and made your voice heard. The work of our union is ongoing and cumulative, and your efforts this round lay a foundation for future success.

The Provincial Bargaining Team is also hard at work at the BCTF office. I encourage you all to regularly visit bctf.ca for provincial bargaining updates and news.

Part of the Federation's bargaining preparations is to conduct a public opinion poll on the K-12 landscape. This informs our messaging, tone, and approach as we head into bargaining and continue the advertising campaign that supports it.

That poll is completed and shows that a large majority of the public agree it is important for every primary classroom to have an education assistant and for every BC school to have a mental health counsellor. The BCTF is holding the NDP accountable to their promises from the last election to provide these much-needed supports for our members and students in schools.

On March 5, colleagues from the BC School Counsellors' Association and I will be meeting the new Minister of Education and Child Care, Lisa Beare, to discuss the importance of school counsellors and further lobby the NDP to ensure that those counsellors are our members—who can build the relationships that are the cornerstone of successful student support.

I know it's always a busy stretch in schools leading up to spring break. I'd like to thank you all for your work in holding together a chronically underfunded public education system—we see your efforts, and so do parents. I hope spring break brings some well-deserved rest and time with loved ones.

In solidarity,

Clint Johnston
BCTF President

Clint Johnston photo
by Sunjum Jhaj

MESSAGE DU PRÉSIDENT

ALORS QUE LES NÉGOCIATIONS LOCALES touchent à leur fin, je tiens à exprimer ma gratitude et mes félicitations aux membres qui ont consacré du temps et des efforts en vue d'améliorer la convention collective. Bien que, dans certains cas, l'employeur ait refusé les changements au cours de ce cycle, vous avez soulevé ces enjeux et fait entendre votre voix. Le travail de notre syndicat se fait en continu et sera cumulatif. Les efforts que vous avez déployés au cours de ce cycle ont donc permis de jeter les bases des futures réussites.

L'équipe provinciale de négociation est également à pied d'œuvre au bureau de la Fédération des enseignantes et des enseignants de la Colombie-Britannique (FECB). Je vous encourage tous à consulter régulièrement le site Web de la FECB (bctf.ca) pour obtenir des mises à jour et des nouvelles sur les négociations provinciales.

Pour préparer les négociations, la Fédération a réalisé un sondage d'opinion pour dresser un portrait de la situation de la maternelle à la 12^e année. Les réponses à ce sondage éclaireront les messages que nous souhaitons communiquer, le ton que nous emploierons et l'approche que nous adopterons dans le cadre des négociations et de la campagne publicitaire connexe.

Le sondage est maintenant terminé et les réponses reçues montrent qu'une grande majorité du public est d'accord pour dire qu'il est important qu'il y ait un aide-enseignant dans chaque classe au primaire et un conseiller en santé mentale dans chaque école de la Colombie-Britannique. La FECB demande au NPD de respecter les promesses faites lors de la dernière élection selon lesquelles le Parti allait mettre à disposition ces mesures de soutien indispensables à nos membres et aux élèves dans les écoles.

Le 5 mars, j'aurai le plaisir de me joindre à mes collègues de la BC School Counsellors' Association pour rencontrer la ministre de l'Éducation et des Services à la petite enfance, Lisa Beare. Nous aborderons l'importance cruciale des conseillers scolaires et nous plaiderons en leur faveur auprès du NPD, afin que ces derniers puissent établir les relations nécessaires à un soutien efficace aux élèves.

Je sais que les écoles sont toujours très occupées à l'approche de la semaine de relâche. Je tiens à vous remercier de tout ce que vous faites pour tenir à bout de bras notre système d'éducation publique qui est chroniquement sous-financé. Nous sommes conscients de vos efforts, tout comme les parents. J'espère que vous profiterez de la semaine de relâche pour bien vous reposer et pour prendre du temps avec vos proches; vous le méritez bien.

Solidairement,



Clint Johnston
Président de la FECB



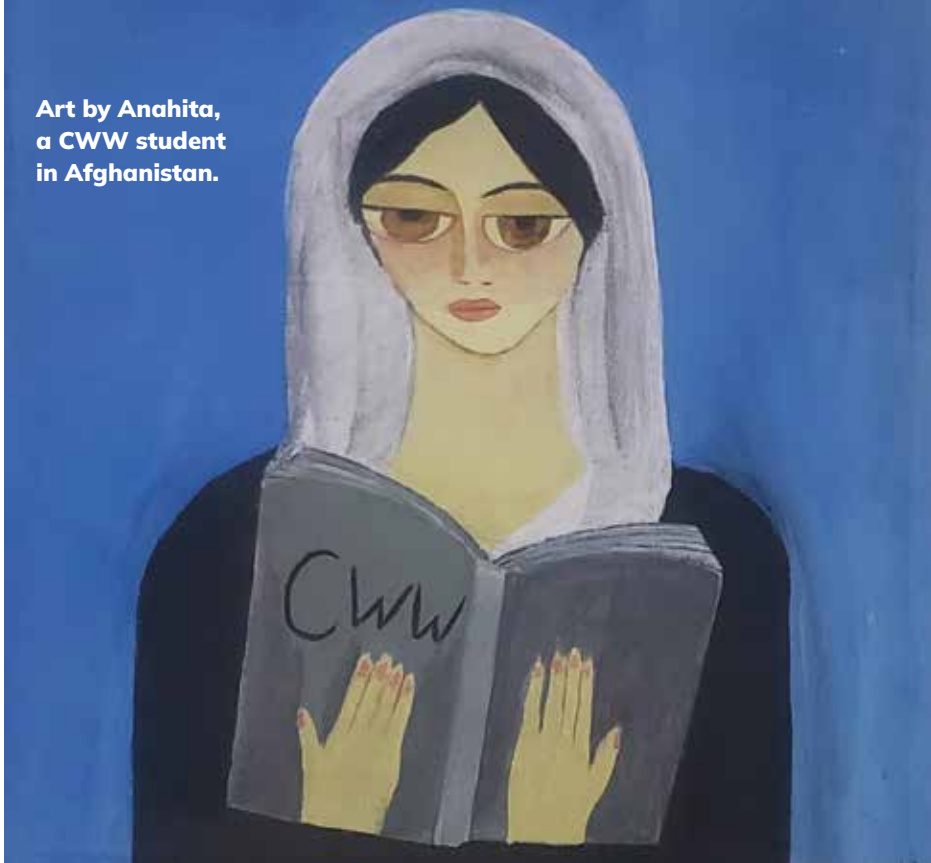
Mahima Lamba photos

TEACHER MAGAZINE DELIVERS

Mahima Lamba's Kindergarten students have a paper route to deliver each edition of *Teacher* to school staff. Pictured below is Josie Zahn accepting her magazine delivery from a student.



Art by Anahita,
a CWW student
in Afghanistan.



CLASSROOMS WITHOUT WALLS

BC teachers connect with students in conflict zones

By Nancy Knickerbocker, BCTF staff

BACK IN 1989, when David Falconer welcomed the first students into his classroom at Cayoosh Elementary in Lillooet, he could never have imagined that 35 years later he would be giving classes and comfort to hundreds of students in war zones around the world.

Like countless others, Falconer watched in horror as Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. As Ukrainians mobilized to defend their homeland, Smart Osvida, an educational non-profit in Kyiv, sent out an international appeal for help teaching thousands of displaced children.

"I replied right away," David said. Within a month he had launched Classrooms Without Walls (CWW), reaching out to colleagues across Canada to teach English and other general topics online. Within a year they expanded into Afghanistan, where the Taliban have banned girls from school and university, and later into Myanmar, where civilians face a humanitarian and human rights catastrophe.

Wherever they are, students in Classrooms Without Walls are hungry to learn and eager to connect with classmates and teachers, David says. "It's all about connections, about getting to know the kids, letting them know you care, that you understand what they're going through, and that they're not alone."

David was teaching in Nunavut when CWW first launched. "The Ukrainian students really enjoyed my stories about polar bears and the northern lights." During one class he was astonished to see the participant list on Zoom going up from 30 to 50, 100, 200. "Over 300 kids showed up! They wanted to know who is this person on the other side of the world? And why does he care?"

Students responded enthusiastically, despite the horrendous war conditions. One boy wrote, "Me and mom were hiding in the basement when the bombs went up and the roof in front blew off. There's such a big hole. Sorry I can't take a picture. Thanks for the lessons!"

David gained a deeper understanding of the students' realities when he visited Kyiv in March 2024. Just half an hour after their arrival an air raid siren wailed, and they had to seek refuge in a bomb shelter.

"This is the constant stress and anxiety the children are dealing with," he said. "One student called our hour of class time 'an island of normal life.' For 60 minutes they can transport themselves into another, safer place." Guest teachers such as astronaut Chris Hadfield have helped students dream of other realities beyond their immediate grim circumstances.

English teacher Bonnie McComb was one of the first to respond to David's appeal. After retiring, she worked as a teacher-librarian in Warsaw. "I felt very connected because I had lived close to Ukraine for five years and had also visited Kyiv and Chernobyl."

Bonnie offered weekly poetry classes for high school students and found her class sizes ranged from 13 to 100, depending on intensity and proximity of the war. Sometimes students were blocked from class because Russian hackers attacked Ukrainian internet services.

They read ancient and modern poets together, and students sent Bonnie their own poems. One student whose nom de plume was Andrew Bear wrote from occupied Kherson about his dream of going after the Russians with his best friend Smoke. Bonnie was deeply moved by "this 14-year-old boy in a war zone sharing his thoughts with a woman on Vancouver Island."

*Bear and Smoke
Fighting red enemy
For Kherson's freedom*

*Figures unknown
Under cold dangerous moon
With iron plan ahead*

When Nanaimo biology teacher Sarah Marshall volunteered with CWW, she found that "the Ukrainian school system was still based on the classic old Russian model with kids sitting in rows, expected to stand and deliver." Our more innovative and inclusive approach

through a social/emotional learning lens is more appropriate for children living through trauma, she said.

"In one class of about 80 students, I literally had two kids joining in from bomb shelters. One had to leave the class because the war was coming too close," Sarah said. "Their everyday reality is a state of fear." By contrast, for Ukrainian children whose families made it to safety in Canada or elsewhere abroad, "their reality is a state of guilt."

This understanding helps Sarah support Ukrainian and Syrian refugee students in her school today. "We find with some students it might be three months that they don't speak at all. But perhaps that makes sense when you come from a place where there's bombing. They don't know how to get out of adrenaline mode. We just have to go really slowly."

David emphasizes that trauma-informed practice is more important than the content of any lessons. Understandably, these students can experience poor concentration, low motivation, memory problems, learning difficulties, depression, anxiety, irritability, and more.

"When they can't concentrate just put the lessons aside," he says. "Put on some music. Hold their hands virtually and take them for a walk in the park. Most of all what's needed is empathy, compassion, kindness, patience, and unconditional love."

Both volunteers said that working in Classrooms Without Walls is rewarding and exhausting at the same time. "It is a very heartwarming and heartbreaking thing to do," Bonnie said.



David Falconer in Kyiv. Images provided by CWW.

Afghan women risk everything for education

It's a rainy Saturday morning when about a dozen young Afghan women close the doors to their rooms, go online, and enter a Classroom Without Walls, their only contact with the world outside their homes, a world where women are free to learn, and dream, and converse freely.

Teacher David Falconer, who they sometimes call "Grandfather," opens the class with friendly chatter about the weather in Kabul, Calgary, and Vancouver. He introduces "Mrs. Nancy" and explains that I want to learn from them and write about their struggle for education, despite the obstacles and danger. For security reasons, the young women do not show their faces on screen.

"If the Taliban find out they're getting these lessons, their lives could be at risk," David says. "You'll only see their names and hear their voices. You connect with them heart to heart, not face to face."

Students Wazhma and Adila give a presentation on life under the most repressive regime in the world for girls and women. They contrast how it was "when women had rights and education," to their current reality, illustrated by a photo of women hidden underneath blue burkas.

"Women are suffering so much anxiety and depression," says Wazhma, who was forced out of university after the Taliban seized power in August 2021. "I was doing my BA in Business Administration and then, suddenly, I'm sitting at home doing nothing. It's hard to accept. Everything is banned for us—education, working outside the home. We don't even have permission to go to a public park."

Many young women are forced into marriages against their will. "I had a friend, a very smart and intelligent girl, a role model for me," Adila says. "She was so good in English, good in math. She wanted to play guitar and piano. She wanted to be a doctor to help other girls and women. But because of her beauty at 15 she was forced to marry a Talib 25 years older than her!"

When women do stand up against their oppressors, they are taken by the Taliban. "We don't know where they are. And everyone is silent."

Adila's voice cracks as she expresses her despair at the muted global response to their plight. "In America people are talking about human rights, women's rights, but there are no rights here. They say they're sorry, but they don't take any action. People all around the world have just forgotten about us."

And that's precisely why Classrooms Without Walls is so important to them, Adila says. "It's the only hope for me. Before I had none. Now Mr. David and other teachers give me hope when I want to give up."

"I'm so grateful for the chance to talk freely in this class," says Asma. Other students describe CWW as "the only bright light" and "a real inspiration for us."

"The Taliban want to control us, our ideas, our thoughts. They fear educated women because we challenge the old ideas," says Asma. "Because when women are educated they don't just change their own lives, they bring fairness to the world."

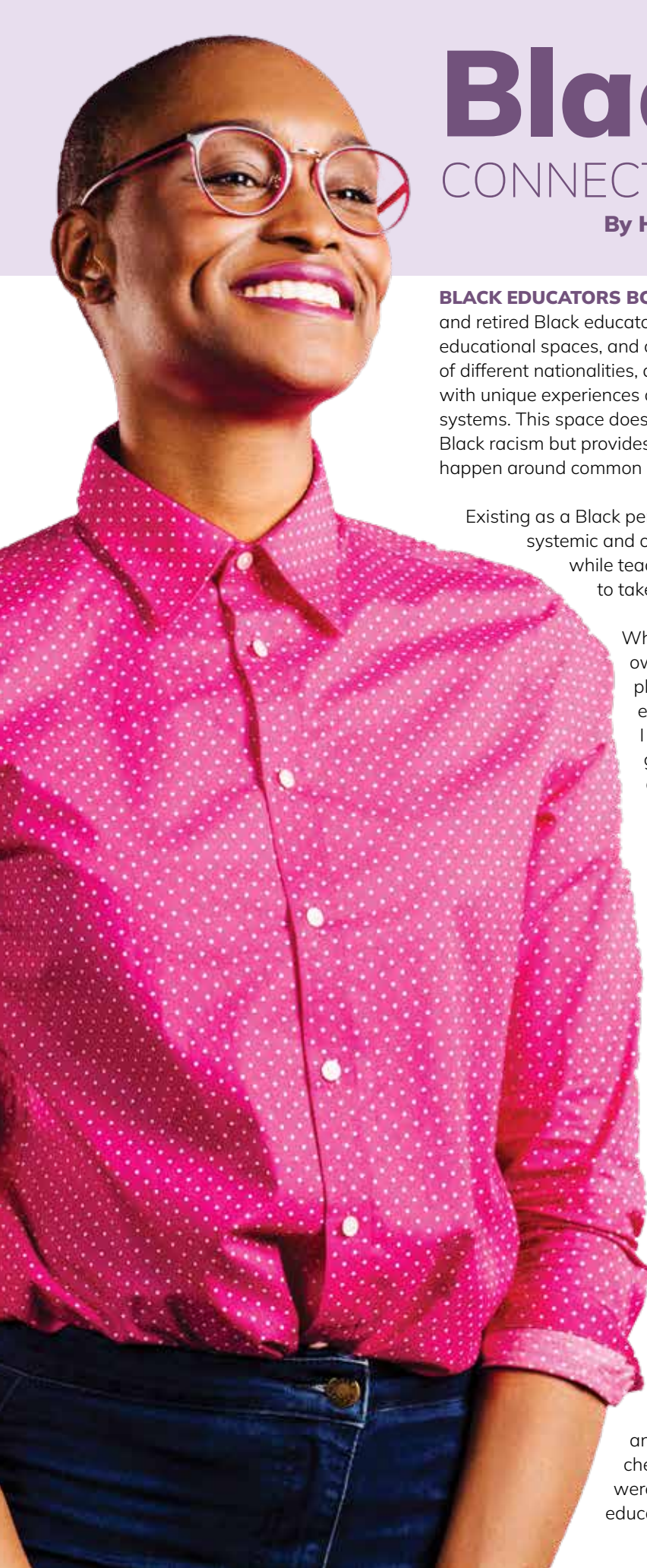
Their "beloved teacher Mr. David" and the other CWW volunteers are, in turn, inspired by their Afghan students. David praises their courage in taking the immense risk of studying clandestinely, in holding onto their dreams of education, and building a virtual community based on "resilience, kindness, and love."

Meanwhile, he says, "here in the West we need to call on our governments to put pressure on the Taliban so that someday women in Afghanistan will be free." •

More information

Email David at dfalconer@classroomswithoutwalls.ca.

To learn more, visit classroomswithoutwalls.ca.



BlackEd BC

CONNECT, UPLIFT, EMPOWER

By **Heidi Beveland-Dalzell**, teacher and founder of Black Educators BC Network, Maple Ridge

BLACK EDUCATORS BC NETWORK (BlackEd) is a network of prospective, current, and retired Black educators in public and private K–12, post-secondary, community educational spaces, and counselling offices in BC. We are a collective of individuals, of different nationalities, ages, genders, and years of experience working in education, with unique experiences of what it means to be Black in BC within our educational systems. This space does not exist to exclude other races from dialogue around anti-Black racism but provides an affinity space for raw learning and understanding to happen around common experiences of being a Black educator within the BC context.

Existing as a Black person within our school system, experiencing racism (both systemic and overt), supporting racialized students with their experiences, while teaching from an anti-racist lens, is too much for any one person to take on in isolation, and yet for years we have.

While our experiences are diverse, allow me to share my own to provide more context. My entire education has taken place in the Lower Mainland, and I did not see another Black educator until I began teaching. There, in School District 42, I met the late and legendary Henry Fair and for the first time grasped the impact of the lack of Black educators in my own educational experience, and our importance within our province.

Most Black youth are growing up in our school system without seeing themselves represented as educators in the classroom, and I have learned while administrating this network that most Black educators are the only ones within their schools. Many outside the Lower Mainland are the only Black educator they are aware of within their district. Each of us works within our sphere, from an anti-racist perspective born out of necessity and survival, to empower students, develop curriculum, engage in challenging dialogue and advocacy, and create spaces of enrichment to support equity within our school communities. The Black Educators BC Network provides a space to create linkages across our province that allow for a larger sharing of the struggles and successes of each individual and collective celebration.

BlackEd started as a grassroots response to the murder of George Floyd in 2020. I found myself engaging in conversations around race, identity, and civil rights with colleagues and students, moving through my workday while integrating personal experience with learned histories. I was emotionally and mentally exhausted at the end of each day, and would often debrief with my sibling and fellow educator, Aaron Beveland-Dalzell, and colleague-turned-mentor, Kenneth Headley. Through our check-ins it became apparent that the same conversations were happening across our schools, and as the (often sole) Black educator in the space, the individual burden was heavy.



BlackEd BC at UBC's Black Futures event. Photo provided by author.

BlackEd BC's logo designed by Nigel Amenu-Tekaa. See more work on Instagram @hungryyy.art.

With the encouragement of Aaron and Ken, I put out a call for membership, and we pulled together a small group of educators from the Lower Mainland to meet on June 19 (Juneteenth) of 2020 over video conference.

The resultant, apparent necessity for this affinity space led to a commitment for continued connection, and since then the group has grown through word of mouth, networking at professional development events, and a public sharing of our joy through the Instagram page [@blackeducatorsbc](#).

Have these conversations, not just with people of other races ... you should be having these conversations with people of your own race as well.

– Ijeoma Oluo, *So You Want to Talk about Race*

Connection was the first goal of BlackEd. I wanted to know where Black educators were teaching, at what levels of education, and how they were doing. The initial hope was to conduct our first meeting in person, but during the COVID-19 pandemic we opted for a video conference. This pivot allowed for an unforeseen diversification of connection. Through a digital platform, BlackEd BC has gained members across the Lower Mainland, on Vancouver Island, and through the interior as far as Prince George, and connected with the Black Teachers Association of Alberta. After each meeting new connections and opportunities are collectively shared.

"Affinity groups" ... support recruitment, retention, and heightened productivity.

– Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*

Uplifting is the natural outcome of connection. In meetings, members seek guidance and advice from each other. Educators may be engaging in difficult conversations with colleagues and students about systemic racism, supporting students or themselves when overt racism occurs, or navigating the creation of anti-racist curriculum. Educators may be looking for opportunities to connect themselves or their students with further support or learning opportunities. They may wish to find a new collaborator or simply connect with others who understand our current educational climate. BlackEd members connect monthly to ask guidance from others who have navigated similar experiences, find emotional support, and leave the meetings with advice and strategies to carry them through.



It may be necessary for us to have spaces where [these feelings] can be expressed so that we can trace its roots, understand it, and examine possibilities for transforming internalized anger into constructive, self-affirming energy.

– bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

Empowerment has followed organically out of the conversations within the network. As educators share about considering new positions, leadership opportunities, and public speaking events, the network is along for the journey, cheering them on, and creating a space where each individual win is a gain for the collective.

BlackEd has become a hub for sharing highlights of opportunities for students and educators alike, as well as a space to invite further celebration of the individual wins of the collective. Witnessing and sharing in the wealth of innovation of Black educators across the province has been a highlight of my past five years as an educator.

When a youth in Port Coquitlam needs a mentor who speaks French, when a teacher is considering taking on leadership responsibilities in their school, when an educator is navigating microaggressions in the workplace, when a grassroots educator network needs an artistic designer for a logo (Nigel Amenu-Tekaa), BlackEd provides. Every month, when the meeting starts, "our strangers-turned-family" builds a force for positive change and more demographically reflective representation for our students.

Going forward we have goals of creating a larger space to connect families and students to educators, counsellors, advisors, and funds to support increased success for Black students within our province. Black youth need to see themselves as educators within their schools. As Marian Wright Edelman said in the 2011 documentary *Miss Representation*, "You can't be what you can't see." Not only is our presence necessary, but the students need to know that we are here, with and for them. The deeper truth is that the additional responsibilities that come along with being a Black-bodied educator are heavy ones to bear.

Providing space for Black educators to support one another decreases the burden and elevates the joy. We strive to do our part toward a future where all educators and students are empowered to show up authentically within their educational spaces. •



COMMUNITY ACTION PROJECTS

The power of messy, wall-less learning

By **Charlotte Fesnoux** (she/her), teacher, Cowichan Valley, and Program Co-ordinator/ facilitator, Thetis Island Nature Conservancy

“WELL, THIS PROJECT is turning out to be very different from what we thought. It’s much more complicated and challenging, but I love it!” This was one student’s reflection when we realized that our water management project was going to be far more than a series of rain gardens. Instead, it evolved into a comprehensive site proposal reimagining water flow throughout the property, and included input from local soil scientists, agricultural engineers, and environmental consultants. This is often the reality with real-world projects: they’re messy, non-linear, and emergent; “failure” and detours are inevitable, reflection is essential, and the process can be exciting and fulfilling.

Authentic, community-based learning experiences have long inspired me—especially those in which students respond to a need in their community. I first encountered this model in 2011 while participating in Simon Fraser University’s A Semester in Dialogue. In this model, the boundary between the classroom and the community is blurred, and skills needed to build a better society are developed. I vividly recall thinking, “Why can’t all school experiences be like this?” Later, I came across a similar model at a nature-based school where students were deeply engaged in their learning and having a blast! These formative experiences sparked my journey into teaching and laid the foundation for Project -Re- Generation (ReGen), an immersive program that aims to inspire, empower, and activate lifelong learners in the reimagination and regeneration of our communities through action projects.

The ReGen model: Explore, engage, expand

To give you a sense of what this learning could look like, I’ll outline the general flow of the ReGen program, which is structured around three pillars: explore, engage, and expand.

EXPLORE

Throughout the program, we explore “place” by embarking on frequent excursions, connecting students with community members to learn about topics ranging from the wonders of the intertidal zone, to permaculture, to crafting salves and spiral gardens. These outings deepen students’ connection to both their geographic and social communities, and, once a project is selected, provide valuable breaks from the intense schedule of project design and implementation.

ENGAGE

Early in the program, community members pitch project ideas to the students, sparking imagination and ensuring projects are relevant to local needs. Ideas might range from establishing a tool library to setting up a black soldier fly farm or creating a medicinal plant garden. After the pitches, excitement is at an all-time high, but to ground this excitement in reality, students are asked to conduct a detailed analysis of three to four finalist projects. They set realistic SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound), as well as more ambitious “stretch” goals that encourage bold, visionary thinking. Students also identify available and necessary resources, draft potential timelines, assess team capabilities, and evaluate the projects through the lens of sustainability (nature, economic, social, and personal well-being). This analytic process helps students grasp both the opportunities and challenges of each project. Based on this, one project (or a combination of elements) is selected, and students work collaboratively—both with each other and with the community—to plan and implement it. This process may involve several revisions, and, if necessary, a handoff plan to ensure a smooth transition and continued success.

EXPAND

Much of the learning in ReGen comes from the digestion of the experience through reflective practices. To accommodate diverse learning styles, reflection can take many forms, including photo journals, vlogs, podcasts, essays, poems, and more—either individually or collaboratively. This reflective practice serves two purposes: it allows students to make meaning of their experiences and, if published, can provide valuable updates for the community while serving as a digital portfolio for students' future endeavors. One example I often share is a podcast series created by four students, who interviewed community experts on sustainability topics. What began as awkward and tentative evolved into a confident, insightful production, with the students refining their interviewing, recording, and editing skills. By the final episode, their conversations flowed naturally, complete with polished intros and outros!

The role of the teacher

Before diving into the benefits and challenges of this approach, it's important to highlight the teacher's role. In this model, the teacher becomes a connector, mentor, and facilitator, guiding students through the often messy process of project design from ideation to planning, implementation, and revision. Because these projects are emergent, the teacher also becomes a co-learner, exploring new skills and knowledge alongside students. Not only is this fun for the teacher—from personal experience—it fosters a sense of solidarity and helps break down the traditional student-teacher hierarchy. While the teacher provides support, the focus remains on student-driven learning, empowering students to take ownership of their projects.

Real-world projects: Catalysts for growth and learning

Engaging in community action projects offers numerous benefits, particularly through “situated” learning, where students are active participants. This approach gives knowledge purpose and fosters genuine understanding. Moreover, projects naturally encourage an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on skills and insights from various subjects. This allows students to see how different disciplines intersect, rather than remaining siloed.

Projects also engage students holistically—intellectually, emotionally, and physically—empowering them to leverage their unique skills while developing new ones. Essential skills such as the “Four Cs”—critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, and collaboration—are at the heart of this process. As projects are authentic, so too are the conditions in which they unfold, requiring students to remain flexible and adaptable as they respond to the project's evolving needs and circumstances. What I find most special about this learning approach is the opportunity it gives students to contribute to their communities. Not only does this benefit the community, but it also cultivates a strong sense of ownership and pride as students see their projects come to life.



The People's Apothecary Garden, a ReGen project, is now home to over 50 medicinal plants and hosts many garden-related workshops and activities for community members and the nearby elementary school. Photos provided by author.

Adapting the model to traditional settings

Implementing this approach isn't without challenges. Programs like ReGen and A Semester in Dialogue are intensive, theme-based (vs. subject-based), and often involve smaller cohorts of no more than 20 students. These attributes allow for greater flexibility, mobility, and immersion. That said, teacher creativity and a supportive community can bring meaningful projects to life in any setting. Projects can be customized to suit the specific needs and constraints of different environments, with scope adjusted for different age groups and available resources. To ensure alignment with learning outcomes, clear parameters should be set early, particularly when inviting community members to pitch ideas. These parameters guide both project design and delivery. Collaborative teaching across disciplines can provide more time and resources. For larger groups, projects can be split into smaller subprojects. For instance, a pollinator garden could involve teams for design, plant selection, additional features (like bee baths or mason bee homes), and communications. Each team would handle tasks such as planning, planting, creating educational events, and engaging the community.

Models like ReGen exemplify the power of authentic, community-based learning experiences in shaping students into engaged, reflective, and empowered individuals. By allowing students to work on real-world projects that directly benefit their communities, the program fosters not only practical skills and interdisciplinary knowledge but also a profound sense of ownership and pride. Through exploration, engagement, and reflection, students are able to tackle complex, emergent challenges, navigating the inevitable twists and turns with creativity and resilience. While implementing such projects in traditional educational settings may present challenges, the flexibility and collaborative spirit at the heart of ReGen offer a valuable framework that can be adapted to diverse learning environments, ensuring that students are not only prepared for the future but are also actively contributing to the betterment of their communities today. •



MAKING DISABILITY VISIBLE

INCLUSION AS IDENTITY-AFFIRMING PRACTICE

By **Andrea Kellaway** (she/her), TTOC and teacher educator at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver

LISTENING to Lizzy McAlpine's song, "erase me," sparked a reflection on how we erase disability—not just in memory, but in our schools and society. While the song speaks to the end of a relationship and the deliberate steps taken to erase a former lover from memory, it made me think of a paper I recently read during my MA in Special Education at the University of British Columbia.

In relationships, erasure can be intentional, an active effort to remove traces of someone. But in the context of disability, the erasure often isn't deliberate—it's ingrained in societal norms, systemic structures, and unconscious actions. Yet, the impact remains the same: a silencing, a dismissal, a forgetting.

In this paper, a 2021 study by Carlyn Mueller,¹ a participant shared a story from a speech given by a disabled social worker connecting with a young girl in her care. The child said,

I'm glad I met you. I didn't know people with disabilities could grow up to be adults.

This resonated with the participant, who recalled her own formative years. She knew she would become an adult but had no idea how—how to live, work, engage in relationships, or contribute. She had had no examples to refer to in her learnings at school. Disability as a valued identity wasn't presented in her school curriculum, and there were no disabled role models to emulate. Disability was never framed as "just another way of being."

Schools, like many institutions, have perpetuated the stigma of disability as something that needs fixing rather than as a natural part of human diversity. This stems from the medical model of disability, which sees disability as a problem within the person that requires fixing, support, or separation. In contrast, the social model posits that societal barriers—environmental, attitudinal, and organizational—are the true issues. The disability justice model goes even further, recognizing the intersectionality of disability with other forms of oppression and marginalization.

Disabled people exist. Few would argue otherwise. But do they exist in identity-affirming ways in classrooms and schools? This is the erasure I mean—children need to see themselves represented, valued, and included as part of their communities. They need role models who demonstrate that disability is not a limitation but another way of being.

So, where can we begin to address the erasure of disability?

iStock/AnnaStills

Incorporate disability history and literature in the classroom

Teachers should include disability history, culture, and contributions in their lessons, just as they would for any other marginalized identity group. This helps students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and understand the broader context of disability rights and advocacy.

For instance, lessons could include the Disability Rights Movement, highlighting leaders like Judith Heumann, or the progression of disability rights policy and law in Canada, including our very own *Accessible BC Act*, inception 2021. Explore literature by disabled authors. Both Kidsbooks and Indigo offer a growing selection, as representation of disability in literature continues to expand. However, not all literature about disability is created equal. Some works can perpetuate ableist stereotypes, making them ideal for classroom discussions that explore ableism in literature.

Explore ableism and adopt anti-ableist approaches

While strategies to support classroom diversity are great and necessary, they are subject to failure when rooted in unexamined beliefs. Begin by reflecting on ableism and how it might show up in your practice. Liza Talusan's *The Identity-Conscious Educator* provides excellent reflection questions, and Maria R. Palacios's poem "Naming Ableism" can provoke deeper thought. If something makes you uncomfortable as you're reading it, it's likely worth exploring further.

Teachers can also create classroom norms that challenge ableist language and assumptions. For example, fostering discussions about disability-related stereotypes and promoting inclusive language can help build a more respectful and supportive environment for all students.

Consider disclosure if you are a teacher with a disability

This can be daunting, especially for those with invisible disabilities who have the privilege of masking, as I have. A few years ago, I began disclosing my own disability to teacher candidates I work with at UBC. While I occasionally faced judgment, it often empowered others to share their disability status and see the value of their lived experiences in shaping inclusive teaching practices. This also prompted their non-disabled peers to recognize the benefits of their insights. Our students need this from us. And to be frank, we need this from us.

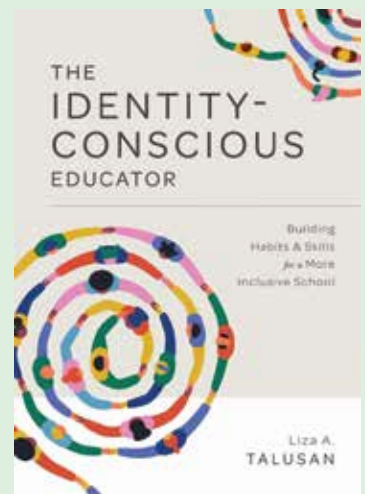
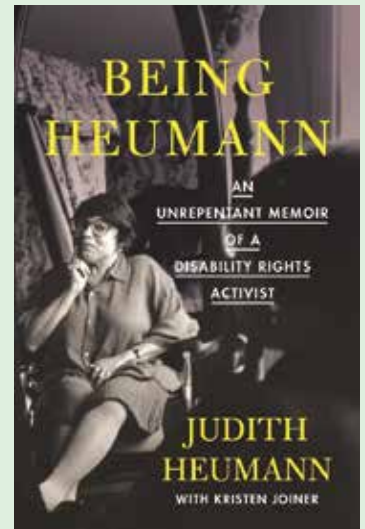
Disclosure can also model resilience and self-advocacy for students. When teachers share their experiences—within appropriate boundaries—it humanizes disability and reduces stigma. It also demonstrates that challenges can be navigated successfully, and that disability is not a barrier to professional achievement.

By embracing anti-ableism and representation, we acknowledge disability as part of the human experience and empower every student to see their worth and potential. This isn't just about inclusion—it's about justice. •

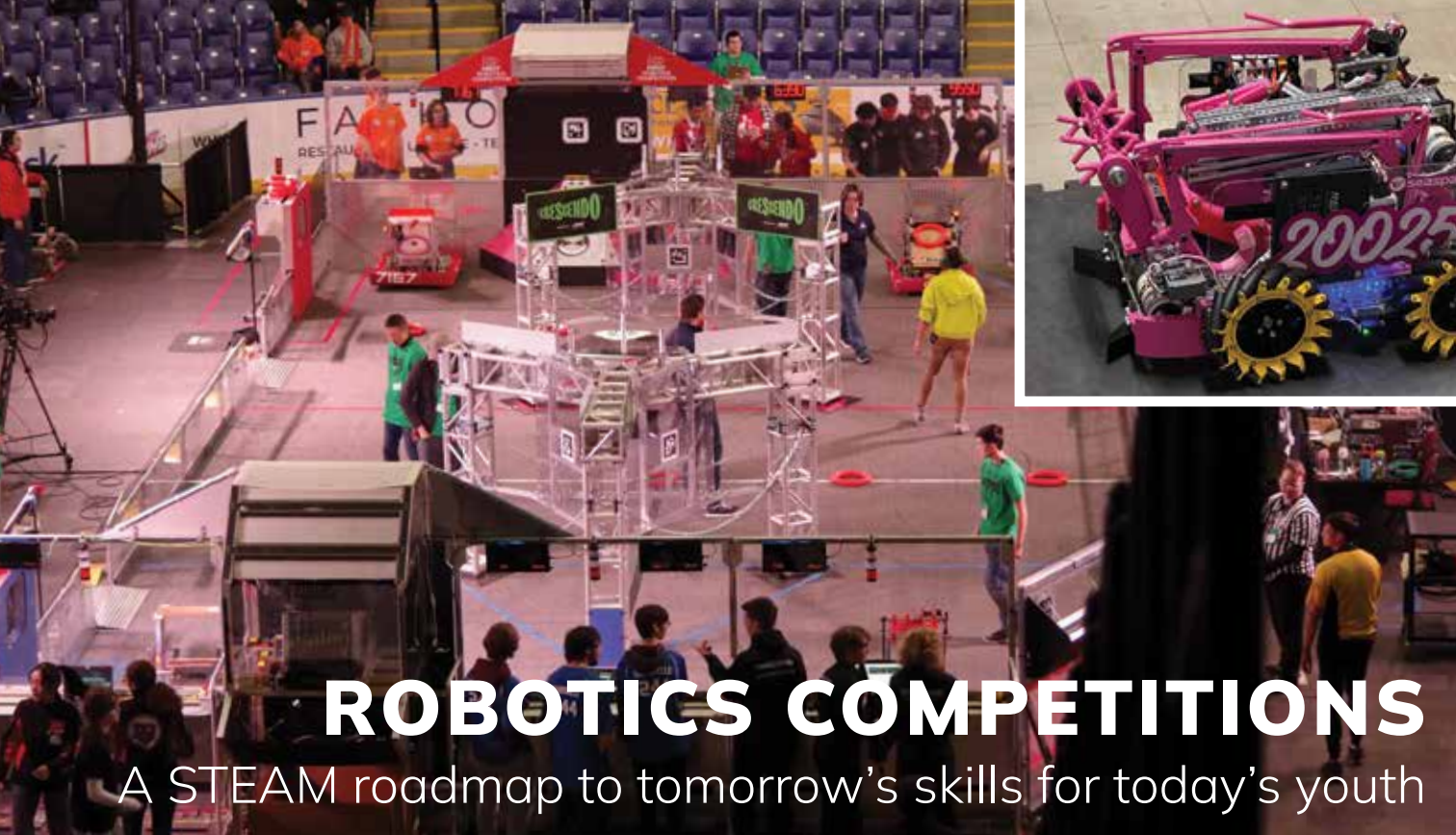
Resources

For resources to support a disability-inclusive curriculum (including the poster featuring activist Lydia X.Z. Brown, pictured right) visit Disability Equality Education at disabilityequalityeducation.org.

Also pictured: Judith Heumann's memoir *Being Heumann* (top right) and Liza Talusan's *The Identity-Conscious Educator* (centre).



1 C.O. Mueller, "I Didn't Know People with Disabilities Could Grow Up to Be Adults": Disability History, Curriculum, and Identity in Special Education," *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 44(3), 189–205, 2021: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406421996069>



ROBOTICS COMPETITIONS

A STEAM roadmap to tomorrow's skills for today's youth

By **Tina O’Keeffe** (she/her), teacher, Victoria

CANADA currently faces digital and STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) skills shortages due to rapid digitalization across the economy and low enrolment of students in STEM post-secondary programs. A shift in ways that educators approach learning in STEM fields can foster students’ curiosities about STEM careers. One approach that has been gaining traction is the integration of arts into STEM, shifting to a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) style of education.

STEAM is not simply adding an “A” to STEM and utilizing arts to entice students toward STEM; instead, it must be seen as a pedagogical approach to integrating all five disciplines equally. The difficulty in this shift for educators is that it is not about teaching specific subjects but, instead, about teaching students a new way of utilizing thought processes in their learning.

STEAM learning seamlessly integrates convergent and divergent thinking, fostering a holistic approach to problem-solving and creativity. Convergent thinking (STEM) is emphasized in the analytical process of finding precise solutions to well-defined problems, such as when students apply mathematical calculations or scientific principles to test hypotheses. Conversely, divergent thinking (arts) encourages creative exploration and open-ended inquiry, allowing students to brainstorm multiple possible solutions, think outside the box, and design innovative projects. By blending these two cognitive processes, STEAM education nurtures a balanced skill set, enabling learners to not only solve complex problems efficiently but also to imagine novel possibilities and approach challenges from multiple perspectives.

Above: The Canadian Pacific Regional Competition.
Above right: Skp-R, FTC 2024 robot with 3D-printed pieces.

Introducing STEAM education into classrooms

If STEAM education is not a curriculum of lessons, how do we bring this approach into our classrooms and build interest among students in the STEM field? At home in Victoria, I have seen first-hand how robotics competitions increase student interest in STEAM activities and open the door to applying these skills to future workplaces.

FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics offers a thrilling sports-like challenge to students with either school- or community-based programs. The league offers three levels of competition for students from pre-K to Grade 12: FIRST Lego League (FLL), FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC), and FIRST Robotics Challenge (FRC). The start of the FRC Canadian Pacific Regional, hosted in Victoria, was my introduction to this league in late 2017. Even though I had some basic training in robotics through a microcomputer technician course (one of my interests and hobbies), this by no means prepared me for what was about to come. With the support of the FIRST BC representative, an eager young mentor, a supportive husband, and a zealous Grade 12 student wanting to build big robots, I started our team with 12 students (seven boys and five girls) from Grades 9 through 12.

Our team captain led the team in designing and building the robot. Fortunately, we had a community mentor with a background in robotics who had approached the school about starting a Java programming club and eagerly stepped in to teach students how to program. With a few ratchets, screwdrivers, parts, and much enthusiasm, we set out to meet the challenge of the competition—in eight weeks.

The learning curve was steep; students were provided a basic kit of parts and step-by-step instruction from FIRST (via a tutorial titled Zero to Robot) to set up the drive base, but the remaining parts and design were up to them. Thankfully, this league is built on the cornerstones of gracious professionalism (compete intensely while treating others with respect and empathy) and “coopertition” (teams help and co-operate with others even as they compete). Along these lines, teams are encouraged to share their designs and ideas from previous years, giving us a wealth of information to support our development. We saw this come to light at the competition when we arrived with our robot set up incorrectly. A competing team lent us one of their programmers for four hours to help us. In our rookie year, we were awarded the Rookie All-Star award and were invited to the April World Championships in Houston, Texas. This is likened to the Superbowl of robotics, as over 400 teams from around the world come together to compete for a chance to be the world’s best and share with others what makes them the world’s best.

Since our rookie year, we have grown significantly in our knowledge base, abilities, and set-up. We now operate the entire school year, starting in September with the FIRST Tech Challenge and joining the FIRST Robotics Challenge in January. The students continue to build and design after their competitions and participate in community events to share their learning with others. We started this team as a club and are now operating as credited courses (ADST 9, Computer Studies 10, Robotics 11, and Robotics 12) that all meet the criteria of the BC curriculum. Our team now operates with over 30 students from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, gender identities, and interests; it has mentors, both female and male, who have been trained in astro space engineering, mechanical engineering, and computer science, all bringing real-life experience to the classroom.

As a mandate of FIRST robotics, students have a real-world application of their skills that mirrors modern careers and industries by introducing them to relevant worksites and mentors. Team members visit sites within our community to visualize how the components they use on their robots translate to a larger world scale. For example, students visited the fire hall to see how the ladder on a fire truck works and gain an understanding of their robot arm extension. Plus, students are exposed to potential careers in engineering, computer science, robotics, and related fields that bring a broader view of options for their future. The emphasis on iterative design processes (prototyping, testing, feedback, and refinement) gives students the experience to build critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. Students build prototypes out of wood to ensure their idea will work, and, if not, find out what they need to do to improve. Using OnShape (an online, computer-aided design program), they can create a 3D render of their robot and utilize features like assembly constraints, motion studies, and third-party plug-ins to simulate its movement and functionality. The competition challenges students to solve complex problems through trial and error, building their resilience and adaptability, and to work collaboratively both with their team and with other competing teams.

The students are also encouraged to think creatively when designing robots, solving challenges, and finding novel applications. Competition judges look out for the students’ innovation as they go over their design processes with them.

Last year, our robots were designed with a “Barbie” theme. Our smaller robot in FTC was Skp-R, and our larger robot in FRC was Bar-B, and both robots were styled with pink 3D-printed accessories. Our team focused on the importance of women in STEM (women made up half of our FTC team, and all our mentors were women).

Currently, robotics alumni are studying mechatronic engineering, software engineering, electrical engineering, computer science, architecture, business, and sciences. Not everyone will become an engineer, but everyone will use the skills they have procured on this team in their post-secondary experiences.

Robotics competitions offer students the opportunity to learn skills and attributes they will carry well beyond their secondary school experience. Beyond the robot, students are developing leadership, time-management, business, and technical skills that will serve them well in our rapidly changing world, which waits for them outside the school doors. •



Left: A few of the members of Tina’s team with examples of their creativity and design.

Below: Bar-B, the team’s FRC 2024 robot with signature 3D-printed pink pieces. Photos provided by author.





TEACHING THROUGH TRAUMA

By an anonymous teacher

Content warning: This article discusses the impacts of sexual assault on mental health and may affect some readers.

I STARTED TEACHING in December 2019, at 24 years old. I'm sure we all know what follows. To keep a long story short, I think the correct, one-word summary would be "trauma."

At 24 years old, I can without a doubt say that I was not ready to help 50+ teenagers navigate a world-wide pandemic and the trauma that followed after a sudden and stark separation from their friends, family, and school community.

I can also say that as a woman, and as a sexual assault survivor, I was also not at all ready to confront, overcome, and deal with my own trauma that began to bubble up as I started my teaching career.

I didn't know I had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from my assault. For seven years, I had successfully and completely disassociated from it. Sure, there were times where I would lose it on loved ones for unknown reasons, have mental breakdowns in the middle of the night after a bad dream or any form of intimacy, or have panic attacks in the university bathrooms, but I was doing well in all my courses. My GPA was high and I was on a track to have a successful career as an educator; something I had always wanted. I was fine.

I was fine until a high school student, in that very first year of teaching, inappropriately called me a "naughty, naughty girl" in front of all his peers. This was a phrase I heard seven years prior from the mouth of my rapist. I looked at him in utter shock as he laughed with his buddies. All I could force out was a quiet, "That was very inappropriate. Please do not talk to a teacher like that." And life went on.

I went home. I cried. Those same awful feelings of shame and disgust began to bubble to the surface. But I woke up the next day, ready to teach again. And I did, over and over again, until COVID-19 shut the schools down.

What followed was Zoom meetings with distraught students who had so many questions about the future of their world. Was COVID going to kill them? Was COVID real? Were their families going to be safe? Would they ever see me again? Would they ever see each other again? Their friends?

I was swarmed with desperate cries of loneliness and confusion; all the while, experiencing this new, traumatic, world for the very first time too. After a day of Zoom meetings, I would sit in my warm bath and sob, wondering if I would ever see my students again. If I was doing enough to help comfort them. I never felt it was enough.

It was also the first time I couldn't completely disassociate. I wasn't busy anymore. I didn't have my peers to talk to at university, or assignments to complete. I didn't have my friends around. I didn't have students or heaps of work to help distract me from my personal trauma. I was alone. Isolated. It was awful.

As COVID-19 continued, the trauma also continued to pile on. On top of trying to prepare for and teach seven different high school courses, there were masks, vaccines, exposures, deaths, and tensions ran so high that angry parents started demonizing and devaluing teachers online. The teaching program didn't prepare me for this. It couldn't.

My anxiety became so debilitating I finally reached out for help two years in. Medication did help, but I still was unable, or unwilling, to address the root of my problem. To confront what had been haunting me since I was 17 years old.

That all changed when I started teaching middle school. It was the first time in my career I genuinely felt happy. I laughed a lot. The pandemic was over. I could see the kids' faces again. I was medicated, busy, and I felt ... normal.

Then, one Monday morning one of my students was crying. Something was seriously wrong. I sat with her, and I asked if she was okay and if I could help in any way. It was then she told me her story.

One in every four North American women will be sexually assaulted during their lifetime. This may not even be an accurate statistic; the number may even be higher, as only 6 out of 100 sexual assaults in Canada are reported to the police.¹

iStock/gradyreese

“We have lived experiences that bias us, that challenge us, that change us. Like we so often say about students, each educator comes to school wearing their own backpack of burdens, filled with stories both told and untold.”

But there we were, two victims, sitting across from each other in a classroom. Eye to eye. One speaking, one listening. One, a child. The other, a teacher. A caregiver, mandated to report.

So, I made those calls and I fulfilled my duty as someone who cares for children. But afterward, the personal spiral that took place was unlike any I experienced before. For the first time I was confronted with my past in a way that was undeniable. I was constantly reminded of my own pain with every tear that she shed. I saw this student every day; a student I cared for deeply, but saw so much of myself in that working became very painful. I became a different person. Throughout my day, I would completely disassociate and sit there quietly with flashbacks that seemed all-encompassing and never-ending. I realized I needed to reach out for professional help. I even “justified” it by saying it was for my students. All I’ve ever wanted was to be a “good” teacher, and seeking help may allow me to be more present for my students.

So, I did. It was the first time since my assault that I ever sought out professional help. I was diagnosed with PTSD and started the long and painful process of healing that I am still currently working through. I ended that year feeling more positive, but still in a lot of pain as I felt deep shame and guilt for how I acted around co-workers and principals who had no idea what burden I was carrying and proceeded to call me too sensitive.

Now, as I reflect on my personal experience living through trauma as not only a woman but also as an educator, I often come back to Ted Aoki’s words in *Layered Voices of Teaching*. He writes “... good teachers are more than they do; they are the teaching.”² This is a philosophy I believe to be true. We educators don’t just teach curriculum, we teach who we are. However, when 73.8% of educators in BC are women,³ and when such a high number of women experience some sort of sexual assault in their lifetime,⁴ it begs the question: how many educators are out there, currently, trying to teach through their own trauma?

Moreover, how many educators are similarly struggling to compartmentalize their deepest lived experiences? Is it possible to truly compartmentalize those parts of yourself in a profession

that calls for you to care and build relationships with some of the most vulnerable youth in the province? How can we honour our personal identities through a trauma-informed lens, while still being the best we can be for the kids in our care?

I have no answers. What’s expected of us as teachers often feels impossible. We cannot always be objective, perfect humans that guide youth to water, so-to-speak. We have lived experiences that bias us, that challenge us, that change us. Like we so often say about our students, each educator comes to school wearing their own backpack of burdens, filled with stories both told and untold.

If in that backpack, you have something heavy to carry, offer yourself some grace and time to heal, like we do with our students. Every day, I see how much care educators have for their students. To care and to be vulnerable is brave.

I encourage all educators to not only view their students, but themselves and their colleagues as well, through an empathetic, trauma-informed lens. You never know who might be struggling to teach through their trauma. Healing is a difficult, lonely, and isolating process. But, maybe it doesn’t have to be. If we are brave enough to come forward with our experiences, we will find that a lot of them are shared. For better or worse. •

Resources for mental health support

Crisis Support Line: Text or call 988

BC Mental Health Support Line: 310-6789

Canadian Mental Health Association BC resources:

bc.cmha.ca

References

1 “Sexual Assault Statistics in Canada,” Sexual Assault Canada: www.sexassault.ca/statistics.htm

2 Ted Aoki, “Layered Voices of Teaching: The Uncannily Correct and the Elusively True,” 1992.

3 Statistics Canada: www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710015303

4 “Sexual Assault Statistics,” Rape Victims Support Network: assaultcare.ca/services/sexual-assault-statistics

Navigating union spaces as a member with a disability

By **Serena Mohammed** (she/her),
teacher-librarian, Richmond

AS A RACIALIZED WOMAN who has a physical disability, I have experienced many barriers, inequities, and exclusions throughout my education, work experiences, and in various community spaces. So, as a newer member I felt unsure and unconfident about participating in union committees and roles. I was worried about experiencing similar barriers and challenges. I was also worried about feeling isolated, as I wasn't sure if other members would have similar lived experiences, views, and passions.

However, when I became active in my local and provincial unions, I realized that there were many members who shared my passion for advocacy, social justice, equity, and inclusion. Being active in the Richmond Teachers' Association (RTA) and the BCTF has been empowering and educational for me. I have been able to work and connect with members from all over the province and have developed many meaningful connections and friendships. I have had many opportunities to contribute to a wide range of advocacy work related to social justice, gender equity, women in leadership, working and learning conditions, and the labour movement. These connections and opportunities have helped me become a more empowered and confident advocate for myself and other members, especially when there are issues and barriers related to accessibility, health and wellness, equity, and inclusion.

My first involvement with my union was on my local's TTOC and early career teachers' committees. I later joined my local's social justice committee. I was very fortunate to have a colleague who reached out to me and encouraged me to join this committee. Participating in the RTA Social Justice Committee helped me develop a sense of belonging and helped me feel connected to my local union. It also allowed me to learn more about the various ways members can get involved with their union.

There is a wide variety of union work for members to participate in, both at the local and provincial level. After some time on local committees, I joined the BCTF Committee for Action on Social Justice (CASJ)—Status of Women Action Group. I served on this committee for six years and had the opportunity to travel to different locals to help facilitate Summer Leadership Conferences, Fall Zone Meetings, and Spring Zone Meetings. Some of the events required travelling and attending meetings over multiple days. I was unaware of what the process would be for asking for accommodations to support my accessibility needs, and I was worried about how I would be perceived or judged by others. As I gained more experience and opportunities working with colleagues who are also very passionate about removing barriers, inequities, and exclusions,

“As I gained more experience and opportunities ... I felt more confident and empowered to speak up and advocate for myself and others when there were actual or potential barriers to accessing union roles, spaces, and events.”

I felt more confident and empowered to speak up and advocate for myself and others when there were actual or potential barriers to accessing union roles, spaces, and events.

One of the most memorable, empowering, and transformative experiences that I gained from serving on CASJ was getting to represent the BCTF on the BC Federation of Labour Human Rights Standing Committee. This experience had a lasting impact on me. I learned about how other labour unions are working toward advancing human rights for their members and communities. My experience also reaffirmed my belief that equitable representation of members with disabilities/disabled members in all union roles, events, and spaces is essential as their lived experiences contribute to barriers being addressed in proactive and meaningful ways.

Another great avenue for union participation is through provincial specialist associations. I am currently serving on the executive committee of the BC Teacher-Librarians' Association. In my work with this PSA, I get to advocate for teachers, students, and public education. PSAs also have a strong focus on professional development and fostering community among teachers with shared interests and teaching specialties.

I am also currently a BCTF facilitator with Women in Leadership. This role gives me opportunities to facilitate workshops all over BC to help union representatives better understand their roles, union policies and procedures, and the collective agreement.

By getting involved in the union, I've grown as a teacher and an activist. Barriers to accessibility still exist in all our public spaces, but I've learned that accommodations are available in union work. I hope that my story will encourage other members, especially members who are part of equity-seeking or traditionally underrepresented groups, to become more active in their local and provincial unions. If you are thinking about starting your journey into union work, I encourage you give it a try. •

BCTLA wins national award for advocacy



Photo provided by Tammy Le.

BC Teacher-Librarians' Association 2024 Executive Committee.

IN 2023, the BC Teacher-Librarians' Association (BCTLA) Executive Committee started a BCTF Teacher Inquiry Project to look closely at the working conditions of teacher-librarians across the province. As they worked through their inquiry, they realized there is some mystery surrounding the role of teacher-librarians, with many people unclear on what exactly a teacher-librarian does.

The group saw this as an opportunity to launch an advocacy campaign both for community members and for their educator colleagues.

They created bookmarks, colouring sheets, posters, and presentations that were brought to the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, BC Federation of Labour events, and the BCTF Annual General Meeting.

These materials, along with other advocacy pieces such as a *Teacher* magazine article in the September/October 2024 edition on book challenges, highlight the role of teacher-librarians in the broader school community, and some of the ways teacher-librarians are integral in fostering learning.

Teacher-librarians champion freedom to read by actively combating book challenges through policies and processes implemented at the district and school levels. All students need books that represent their lived experiences so they can experience the joy of reading.

While teacher-librarians are responsible for maintaining book collections, a big part of the role is to support classroom learning through collaborative teaching.

"Our job is to connect with students and teachers to build a stronger community," said Tammy Le, BCTLA President. "We help the school community tie inquiry to the curriculum by accessing research skills and tech skills."

"We collaborate with teachers to make sure students know how to find accurate information and verify information. This skill is paramount in today's world where we're bombarded with disinformation and misinformation," said Marilyn Carr, BCTLA Member-at-Large.

Because of the teacher shortage, teacher-librarians are frequently pulled from their non-enrolling teaching positions to cover other classes. This means less time for collaborative teaching and cancelled book exchanges for students. In some districts, the teacher-librarian role is a prep position that further diminishes collaborative teaching.

"I see the teacher-librarian role as a mentor role," said Nicole Hurtubise, Coordinator of Membership and Surveys on the BCTLA Executive. "Someone who can find the information you need, connect you with resources and books, and support their teacher colleagues and students."

Tammy and Marilyn have met with Members of the Legislative Assembly to

talk to them about library issues, and the challenges non-enrolling teachers face because of the teacher shortage.

With bargaining on the horizon, the BCTLA Executive Committee was eager to hear from teacher-librarians across the province about their specific goals and priorities for bargaining.

The team sent out a survey for teacher-librarians and used the results to create templates that BCTLA local chapters could use to make pitches to their local union executives for bargaining priorities.

"We've gained a lot of support from other members within our locals," said Tammy.

The BCTLA Executive Committee's advocacy to raise awareness about the role of, and challenges faced by, teacher-librarians led to national recognition from Canadian School Libraries. This national non-profit organization is focused on professional research and development related to school library learning commons. The BCTLA Executive was awarded the Donald Hamilton School Library Advocacy Award, which is presented to an individual or organization who has successfully and publicly championed the work of libraries or teacher-librarians.

The award recognizes and celebrates the BCTLA for their work and effort to uplift their teacher-librarian colleagues while also educating the broader community about the role and importance of teacher-librarians in schools. •

May 5 is Red Dress Day,

the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Teresa Robinson was only 11 years old at the time of her death. She was the youngest of 5 children. Teresa was very well liked in her community. She would make people laugh she was outgoing and fun to be around. Everybody loved her.
- Sandra Robinson

May 19, 2005 - May 5, 2015

TERESA ROBINSON



• A teacher visited the RCMP to report her missing after she didn't come to school for several days.
• Her parents had investigated the school of her disappearance but after the school came home for a couple days, they never returned and started searching for her.

• Community members found Teresa's body on May 11.
• At first the condition of her body and investigation originally think she had been killed by wild animals.
• An autopsy revealed signs that she had been sexually assaulted before being killed and the doctor to her body could not be certain because after Teresa was dead.


"She was a little girl. She was my baby."
- Sandra Robinson

In efforts to find Teresa's killer, RCMP collected hundreds of clothing DNA samples from community members. A sample matched the DNA from the girl's body in a local store. He was arrested in March 2016. He was sentenced to the maximum term sentence of 10 years - 6 years in custody followed by four under condition of supervision in the community. The judge also imposed a 10-year weapon prohibition and a 50% limit for his bail.

Carol had her first son at age 16 and a daughter who was taken care of by her birth father.

Carol Ruby Davis

She was known to family and friends to be kind, loving and generous. Family members said the police don't do much to investigate in her case.



Carol Davis, born in Haida Gwaii, had 7 siblings and two kids. At 28 she was stabbed many times, then dropped into a ditch in Burnaby on June 27, 1987. Her murder is still unsolved to this day.
- Cambria Archer



Missing and murdered women. They will be gone forever but loved for eternity. On May 5th these women will be remembered once again.



Through the years women have gone missing and been murdered. We should all take a moment and think and remember what happened to the poor Indigenous women, girls, mothers and daughters. Someone loved them. Someone is crying every red dress day. Think to have your mother gone.

Pages 22–23 have lesson ideas for primary and secondary grades that can guide discussions about MMIWG and the creation of student art, like that pictured here. Remembered below are Teresa Robinson, Carol Ruby Davis, Diane Dobson, and Ashley Morin, in work by students in Penny Carrite's class. The figures in the bottom row are by students in Denise Hendry's class.

Diane Dobson

36 years old at time of death, found dead on February 15th 1995

Found in a ditch in Brighton beach, blows to the head and face were ruled as the cause of death.

Rita Matte, Diane's daughter, remembers her as more like a sister than a mother, with a youthful and kind spirit. Diane loved sharing her joy with those around her, accepting of anyone, and having a desire to create a safe space for people with nowhere else to go. Rita recalls how "the foster home was right around the corner from our house... so they would come every day. Every single day." (CBC News)

Over 25 years later in this investigation, and police still haven't arrested anyone for her brutal murder. The police stated in 2012 that they lacked enough physical evidence to bring anyone in; though an email from police in 2020 confirmed that they "continue to investigate all cold cases," (Windsor Star) despite the many dead ends.

ASHLEY MORIN

31 year old woman who is 5'5" with long black hair and brown eyes

She was last seen at 7:30pm on July 10, 2018

Her body was never found and is a suspected victim of homicide

She was last seen at 7:30pm on July 10, 2018

Her body was never found and is a suspected victim of homicide

She was last seen at 7:30pm on July 10, 2018

Her body was never found and is a suspected victim of homicide

Murdered
Missing
Indigenous
Woman and
Girls

Missing and Murdered women were daughters, mothers, aunts, cousins and they all were loved. Some were children or women. We need to remember everyone who were lost or murdered. The mothers who were missing missed their child. They never had a chance to say good bye to their loved ones but they will always be in each others dreams and hearts.

Young Indigenous Women and girls are going missing and we have to put a stop to it. It is so hard for families to lose their loved ones. Aunts, Cousins, Moms, Grandmas and Sisters are going missing. These missing people were loved and they will always be remembered.



Lesson ideas to commemorate **Red Dress Day**, the National Day of Awareness for MMIWG

May 5 is the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

PRIMARY GRADES

By Jean Moir, teacher, Langley

AS A NON-INDIGENOUS TEACHER, I only use children's stories written and, hopefully, illustrated by Indigenous authors and artists. For my Grade 3 class, the story I use is *Together We Drum, Our Hearts Beat as One*, written by Métis author Willie Poll and beautifully illustrated by Métis author and artist, Chief Lady Bird. This story can be used to approach the subject of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) in a sensitive manner for primary students. Teachers can choose how deeply to engage with this book. For example, it could start the conversation with young children about the hardships Indigenous women and girls face, as well as how all of us can learn to deal with painful events, racism, and what Willie Poll calls "a monster named Hate."

To begin the discussion about MMIWG, I ask students why they think the women standing together in Poll's book are dressed in red. After hearing and discussing responses, I explain that a Métis artist named Jamie Black began The REDress Project in 2010 because she wanted everyone to know about the tragedies that have happened, and continue to happen, to Indigenous women and girls. When we see the red dresses, she wants people to think about Indigenous women and girls, to honour them the way all women and girls should be honoured, to remember those who are no longer with us, and take action.

Since our school begins teaching Indigenous history and culture in Kindergarten, my Grade 3 students know a lot about the history of residential schools in Canada and the devastating impact they have had on Indigenous Peoples. The students are already able to discuss how badly Indigenous women and girls were treated in the past and understand they are still treated unfairly. To deepen understanding, we discuss how important it is for us to help all Canadians understand and, most importantly, take action to ensure Indigenous women and girls are treated with the respect and kindness they deserve.

As a follow-up activity, students create their own red dresses, then collaborate with others to make a hall display to educate others in our school about The REDress Project and its importance. The children are always engaged and devoted to this project. For my Grade 3 students, I cut out red felt dresses using blackline masters. Heavy red cardstock paper could also be used to make dresses. To design the dresses, I provide a wide selection of self-adhesive rhinestones or "jewels," buttons, beads, etc. You could attempt sewing beads on the dresses, but would likely need volunteers and lots of time.

Above: A school display of student art by Jean Moir's class.

SECONDARY GRADES

By Penny Carrrite teacher, Langley

IT IS IMPORTANT for students to make the connection between the past and the present; they must see history as something that is in progress. Historicizing events as things that happened in the past and are now over, without examination, can lead to social injustice and inaction.

My unit on MMIWG has several components. Each component is guided by the following questions:

- What is MMIWG?
- Who are the women and children who are missing and murdered? What are their individual stories?
- Are Canadians aware of MMIWG? How can knowledge about MMIWG be shared?
- What was the MMIWG National Inquiry? What were the findings?
- What is the root cause of Canada's staggering rates of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people?
- How do Indigenous Peoples advocate for justice? How do they resist colonization?

First, students watch videos and read articles about the inquiry into MMIWG, the Highway of Tears, and coverage of the ongoing crisis. We also debrief what they learn from the videos, and how it relates to the guiding questions for our unit.

In my MMIWG unit, students are reminded of earlier government policies that were repressive to Indigenous women. These colonial and patriarchal policies often displaced women from traditional roles in communities and diminished their status in society—leaving them vulnerable to violence. Students are also invited to look at the action and inaction of governments to address the persistent and deliberate human and Indigenous rights violations and abuses that are the root cause behind Canada's rates of violence against Indigenous women. As they listen to the stories of mothers, aunts, and sisters they will understand the injustice and inaction of police and governments.

Later, students research the story of a specific Murdered or Missing Indigenous Woman or Girl. My Grade 12 students watch Episode 1 of "Taken," on CBC Gem, about Tina Fontaine. They are given a red piece of paper to display the findings of their research and to share the stories of MMIWG. The red papers are displayed in our school hallways so the school can learn these stories.

Next, students learn about the ways that art can be used to communicate and honour stories. We use Jamie Black's The REDress Project as an example. Students then brainstorm ideas for art displays that create public remembrance. In the past, students have created a memorial vigil with the assistance of Tara Helps, Aboriginal support worker. They have invited other classes to participate in the vigil. They've also invited other classes to share in their remembrance by displaying images of MMIWG, hanging red dresses in the school, and writing messages of hope and healing on the jingles of a jingle dress.

My Grade 12s are also invited to join the Women's Memorial March each year on Valentine's Day. It was a moving and transformative experience for all those who participated. Students were asked to respond to their experience at the march. Some chose to create a photo exhibition featuring powerful images of the event. This exhibit will be on display at the Langley School Board office as of May 5. Next year, it will travel to all the high schools in our district.

When teaching Indigenous history, it is important that stories of resilience and resistance are celebrated. That is why I decided to not only teach my students the tragedy of MMIWG but also share stories of courage with them. Gregory Scofield's poem "She is Spitting a Mouthful of Stars" attempts to change the tone of the narrative. And taking students to the Women's Memorial March allows them a powerful view of resistance. •

Below: Remembered are Gladys Tolley, Savannah Hall, and Roxanne Thiara. Art by students in Penny Carrrite's class. Images on pages 20–23 provided by Gail Stromquist, BCTF Aboriginal Education. Background image iStock/rustemgurler.

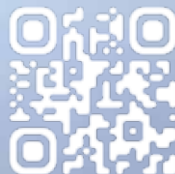


Learning from the natural world

Rami Katz (he/him), teacher, Vancouver



To watch
“Gifts of the Land”
scan the QR code.



AS A NEW TEACHER with the Vancouver School Board, I am reflecting on the experiences of my practicum and what kind of teacher I want to become. The school that I was paired with for my practicum was Windermere Secondary, which is located in East Vancouver. It was great to observe and work with teachers who love their jobs, as well as connect with the students and the rest of the staff there.

I was thrilled to participate in the gardening club during my practicum, which runs twice per week, and is supervised by a teacher and a student support assistant. Each Tuesday and Thursday after school, if the weather permits, the gardening club meets at a specific spot outside on school grounds. On the first day that I joined, we all walked over to the orchards on school grounds (apple and cherry trees) and did some weeding together. The gardening club was student-run, led by the senior students, meaning students were directing the activities and the sponsor teacher was there mainly as supervision and support.

I enjoyed the feeling of helping foster community-building outside of an academic setting within the school. As a gardener myself, who tends to a vegetable garden at home, it was a nice way to informally get to know some of the students and enjoy an outdoor activity together. Furthermore, because the club was student-run, it gave me some ideas as to how I might incorporate student inquiry or student self-assessments into my classroom as a teacher.

Reflecting on the readings and videos from my course work at UBC, the first thing that came to mind was Robin Wall Kimmerer’s guided nature tour.¹ I loved the curiosity and wonder that Kimmerer brings to nature and the outdoors, and I feel a sense of connection to when I am gardening. I think this is a wonderful activity for students to be able to work with their hands in an outdoor learning environment, while also providing unstructured time for socialization

*We're told that we should always pay attention
when the chickadees speak to us ...
old stories that say we could learn from the birds
and benefit from their counsel
is something that gets dismissed as fairy tales or folklore,
but when you really do start to listen ...
they're not just making noise,
they're talking to each other,
and why not talking to us as well?*

– Robin Wall Kimmerer, “Gifts of the Land”

and creativity. In the video, Kimmerer says, as she is walking through a forest path, that she advocates really listening and engaging with the land, and slowing down, which takes practice considering all of the time we spend on screens and indoors. Kimmerer “fears that we are forgetting how to really engage with the land and learn from the land as our teacher,” but the good thing is all we need to do is spend some time outside and pay attention.

These teachings lead naturally to the First Peoples Principles of Learning,² which has been gaining attention as schools and districts seek to incorporate Indigenous practices and teachings into the educational system in BC. An aspect of these teachings is place-based learning, connecting with the land, and situating ourselves within the land’s history. By recognizing the struggle Indigenous Peoples continue to face with regard to ownership of their land and territory in BC and Canada, teachers like myself, who are settlers, can at the same time learn from and appreciate their stewardship of the land over generations.

Furthermore, Marilyn Watson, in her article “A Curriculum of Care,” writes about how teaching values such as compassion, tolerance, and understanding can be difficult in certain classroom environments. Having access to the outdoors and nature may allow for a more caring learning environment, one that is built on empathy and compassion for all living things. Such activities are more likely to help students to participate in a caring environment, and “develop concern for

the rights and feelings of others,” as well as “positive attitudes toward their school” and community.³

Finally, I connected with what Steven Wolk writes in his article “Why Go To School.”⁴ He writes that schools should be spaces where students can experience joy, rather than doing continuous monotonous work, such as hundreds of worksheets, which is what the author’s son was given in one year at school. In addition, children and teenagers spend hours each day on screens. Wolk claims that “schools should accept the responsibility of having their students walk through forests, look at clouds, feel the desert, wade through streams, canoe rivers, and witness our astonishing ecosystems.” By spending more time outdoors or in nature, students can get an experiential education that encompasses an important aspect of our world and cultural experience.

I would like to take what I learned from observing the gardening club during my practicum and see how I may be able to incorporate outdoor or place-based learning into my curriculum. Perhaps it will be taking the students for a quick walk around the school grounds for a brain break, or simply leaving the blinds open so that the beautiful view of the mountains can be seen from class. Perhaps it will be screening videos that help to foster a sense of wonder and curiosity. Whatever it may be, having different ways to connect students to outdoor learning environments is an important way for students to remain connected to the land and deepen their curiosity and engagement with the world around them. ●

1 Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Gifts of the land: A guided nature tour with Robin Wall Kimmerer*, March 25, 2021: www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxJUFGIPYn4

2 “First Peoples Principles of Learning,” First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2006: www.fnesc.ca/first-peoples-principles-of-learning/#

3 Marilyn Watson, “A Curriculum of Care,” 2004: www.greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/curriculum_of_care

4 Steven Wolk, “Why Go To School,” *The Phi Delta Kappan*, May 2007: www.jstor.org/stable/20442354



AGM 2025

BC Teachers' Federation
March 15–18, 2025
Hyatt Regency Vancouver

AGENDA

FIRST SESSION

Saturday evening—March 15

- 6:30 p.m. Traditional Welcome
Call to Order
Preliminaries
Report of the President
Leadership Report
Education Finance
- 8:30 p.m. Report of the Nominating Chairperson
Election statements from Full-Time Table Officer candidates
Question and answer session for Full-Time Table Officer candidates
Call for Nominations
- 9:25 p.m. Announcements
9:30 p.m. Adjournment

SECOND SESSION

Sunday morning—March 16

- 9:00 a.m. Greetings—
Sussanne Skidmore,
BC Federation of Labour
- 9:10 a.m. Finance
Unfinished Business
- 11:15 a.m. Education Policy
Publications of the BCTF
- 12:25 p.m. Announcements
12:30 p.m. Adjournment

THIRD SESSION

Sunday afternoon—March 16

- 2:00 p.m. Constitution and By-laws
3:00 p.m. Guest Speaker—
Niigaanwewidam Sinclair
Unfinished Business
- 4:30 p.m. Report of the Nominating Chairperson
Election statements from Member-at-Large candidates

Question and answer session for Member-at-Large candidates

Call for Nominations

Unfinished Business

6:25 p.m. Announcements

6:30 p.m. Adjournment

FOURTH SESSION

Monday morning—March 17

- 9:00 a.m. Greetings—Heidi Yetman,
Canadian Teachers' Federation
- 9:15 a.m. Canadian Teachers' Federation
Health, Welfare, and Safety of Teachers
- 11:00 a.m. Ministry of Education and Child Care
Research
Teacher Education
Provincial Specialist Associations
Induction Ceremonies, Awards
Unfinished Business
- 12:25 p.m. Announcements
12:30 p.m. Adjournment

FIFTH SESSION

Monday afternoon—March 17

- 2:00 p.m. Greetings—
Karen Ranalletta, CUPE BC
- 2:10 p.m. Communications Update
- 3:00 p.m. Awards
Unfinished Business
- 4:00 p.m. Organization of the BCTF
Social Justice
Certification of Teachers' Council
- 5:45 p.m. Report of the Nominating Chairperson
Final Call for Nominations

5:55 p.m. Announcements

6:00 p.m. Adjournment

SIXTH SESSION

Tuesday morning—March 18

- 9:00 a.m. Greetings—SNTCED
- 9:20 a.m. Elections
Annual General Meeting
Unfinished Business
- 10:20 a.m. Greetings—Caroline Malm,
BC Retired Teachers' Association
- 10:30 a.m. Pensions Report
- 11:15 a.m. Political Action
Questions on Reports
Executive Director's Report
- 12:25 p.m. Announcements
12:30 p.m. Adjournment

SEVENTH SESSION

Tuesday afternoon—March 18

- 2:00 p.m. In Memoriam
Presentation—Past President's Pin
BCTF Member Survey
Bargaining
Professional Ethics, Rights, and Standards
Goals of the BCTF
Unfinished Business
- 5:25 p.m. Announcements
5:30 p.m. Adjournment

EIGHTH SESSION

Tuesday evening—March 18

- 7:30 p.m. Unfinished Business
New Business
- 8:45 p.m. Introduction of the 2025–26 Executive Committee
- 8:55 p.m. Courtesy Motion
9:00 p.m. Adjournment



SPECIAL RESOLUTIONS

Special resolutions are motions that include a by-law change or Salary Indemnity Plan Regulation change. They can only be passed by the Annual General Meeting (or a Special General Meeting).

CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS

Executive Committee recommendations

That By-law 17.2 be amended as follows:

The Salary Indemnity Plan shall be governed in accordance with the trust agreement that establishes the Salary Indemnity Fund as of January 1, 2025. The Salary Indemnity Plan benefits and eligibility requirements will be as prescribed in the Salary Indemnity Plan Regulations set in accordance with By-law 8.7. Special funds, other than the Salary Indemnity Fund, will be governed by regulations or procedures determined by the Executive Committee.

That By-law 7.2 be amended as follows:

The Judicial Council shall be composed of ~~a~~ two chairpersons, who shall be elected by the Representative Assembly, and an additional 18 members, *all of whom shall be elected by the Representative Assembly. At least one of the chairpersons and nine of the additional members shall be designated for members from an equity-deserving group, with a minimum of six being Aboriginal, Indigenous, Black, or persons of colour.* All members of the Judicial Council shall be ~~voting~~ active members of the Federation entitled to vote; and must receive a majority of the votes cast by the Representative Assembly. When a Judicial Council member resigns from or otherwise leaves the Judicial Council, the member's appointment to the Judicial Council may continue solely for the purpose of completing ongoing proceedings.

HEALTH, WELFARE, AND SAFETY OF TEACHERS

Local resolutions

The following resolutions contain changes to the Salary Indemnity Plan Procedures and Regulations.

Coquitlam

That Procedure 13.C.02—19.4.b. be amended as follows:

The benefit payable in a month shall be reduced by the sum of: ~~the sum of~~ monthly wage loss and disability benefits paid to the claimant in the month from Workers' Compensation, which are related to the current disability claim. *Any permanent disability benefits from Workers' Compensation will not be offset.*

Cariboo-Chilcotin

That Salary Indemnity Plan 17.2 (b) be amended as follows:

which will provide a gross income of at least ~~60%~~ 80% of the predisability full-time equivalent gross employment income within five years of starting the new employment, this income to be adjusted annually to reflect the cost-of-living allowance the claimant would have received since the date of disability.

Central Coast

That Salary Indemnity Plan Regulation 9.1 be amended as follows:

To qualify for benefits under this section of the plan a member must be presented by a) illness, ~~or~~ b) injury, or c) *be required by the local medical institution to leave their home community in order to give birth thereby preventing them from performing their normal employment duties.*

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

for PRESIDENT



Carole Gordon
Central Okanagan

Facebook:

facebook.com/carole.gordon.921

Experience, Commitment, Solidarity

In putting my name forward for President, I look forward to continuing the necessary work to raise the profile and value of public education, and the critical work of all BCTF members across the province in supporting students, families, and communities.

Having been at Ministry, government, and stakeholder tables for six years, I have extensive experience in advocacy, discussing policies that affect members in classrooms and schools. The priority is always to protect worker rights and professional autonomy, and address workload and funding concerns.

While recruitment is a priority for everyone in K-12, we need to continue to press for retention to be a means to better recruitment. To attract new generations of educators, we must address workload and bargain the working conditions

that shape a sustainable and rewarding profession. We must also work to ensure members are respected for their work in preparing students to contribute meaningfully to an ever-changing world, especially in times of economic pressures, climate change, global unrest, and the rising challenges to human rights.

Together we can improve working conditions, lift up public education, and engage in solidarity to create the world we want for ourselves and for our students.

EXPERIENCE

Provincial: First VP (current), Second VP 3yrs, Executive 10yrs, Pensions, CTF Trustee, AGM 22yrs

Local: Executive (Second VP, H&S, Bargaining), Staff Rep

Community: Labour Council President, United Way

Teaching: Prep, classroom, TTOC (since 1991)



Jillian Maguire
Vancouver
Secondary

Bluesky: [@foghornlil.bsky.social](https://foghornlil.bsky.social)

Instagram: [@jillian_maguire](https://jillian_maguire)

Medium: medium.com/@jillimag5

I'm writing shortly after our education minister fired the democratically elected trustees for the Greater Victoria School District. Our self-described progressive NDP government, with its roots in the labour movement, is prioritizing police in schools over adequate ratios of teachers and EAs in classrooms. This harkens back to 2016 when the Christy Clark government fired the Vancouver School Board. History repeats itself, and our current government, while better than the disaster we would have seen under the BC Conservatives, is betraying the trust the BCTF put in them.

It seems like every year I get an email introducing yet another manager, which further syphons money away from schools to pay for top-heavy ballooning administration. The same is happening in our healthcare system. As workers we need to work strategically with our

union siblings to press the government on these issues, and let the public know where their tax dollars are actually going.

Teachers want careers that nourish the soul, uphold our society's democratic ideals, and actually pay the bills. Education is a vehicle for change that empowers students to envision a brighter more inclusive future. As teachers, as a union, let's build the world we want!

EXPERIENCE

- 27 years in classroom
- Long-time Staff Rep and Social Eco Justice Rep
- Co-founder BCTF Divest Now and Stanley Park Preservation Society
- Podcast host "Arrest Stories"
- Media savvy
- Musical projects Foghorn Lil and Tiny Milkshakes.

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

for **FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT**



Elmar Nabbe
Vancouver Island
West

I am Local President and worker. I recall events from twenty-ish years ago from a BCTF AGM I attended. We were not yet BCFED members. A principled, seasoned activist stood at the microphone wearing clothing best suited to construction sites. With briefcase in hand, he emphatically declared: *I am a worker!* He stressed the importance of BCTF taking its place among BC trade unions in the House of Labour.

We are all workers. Our interests diverge significantly from those seeking to manage, govern, and rule us. Funding shortfalls create conditions where it becomes impossible to educate. How does management respond? They increase lower management—more principals and vice-principals; they increase middle management—more district principals, directors of instruction, assistant and deputy superintendents—all with commensurate pay bumps!

As First Vice-President, I will pursue classroom funding.

Globally, a nexus approaches: climate crisis, resource allocation, housing, imperial designs, war, genocide, famine, desertification, and systemic inequalities of indigeneity, race, sexual orientation are destined to collide. The BCTF does remarkable, laudable work addressing inequity through hiring and electoral practices. We must look at systemic changes for achieving the world we want. Managing pension funds is critical to resolving the crises this nexus presents.

EXPERIENCE

- Achieved Bachelor of Education, 2000
- Teaching full-time, October 2000, KESS
- Attended first BCTF AGM as an observer/uninvited guest, 2001
- Circa 2004–5 Social Justice Action Group, Poverty
- Various VIWTU positions.



Robin Toszak
Greater Victoria

Instagram: [instagram.ca/rbntzk](https://www.instagram.com/rbntzk)

X: twitter.com/rbntzk

Facebook: [facebook.com/rbntzk](https://www.facebook.com/rbntzk)

Representing teachers as your Second Vice-President has been a privilege. I get to connect with members and local leadership from around BC, and I'm inspired by the work you do every day supporting students and advocating for public education. Hearing from you helps me be an effective advocate on your behalf at the provincial level. I'm ready to be your First Vice-President.

My ongoing focus is teachers' workload and the teacher shortage. We know the two are intertwined and urgent, and so I continue to push for immediate responses, along with a comprehensive and funded recruitment and retention plan.

The bargaining table is a key opportunity for making teaching in BC more attractive and sustainable. As a lead negotiator on the last Provincial Bargaining Team, I'm proud of the gains we made. And as we head back to the

table this spring, I'm excited about talking with teachers, strategizing together, and doing my level best representing you at the table. Together we're going to get the best possible deal.

Thank you for all you do in your schools, communities, and locals. It's an honour to serve alongside you in support of a robust and inclusive public education system.

EXPERIENCE

Provincial: Second Vice-President; Member-at-Large; Provincial Bargaining Team; *Teacher* magazine & TTOC advisory committees, workshop facilitator

Local: Executive (First VP, Grievance Officer, H&S, LR, Treasurer); Labour Council; Contract & Bargaining committees

Teaching: Elementary, ELL, inclusive education

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

for SECOND VICE-PRESIDENT



Jatinder Kaur Bir
Surrey

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X: @BadhBir

I'm honoured to run for Second Vice-President as a Surrey teacher and past president, working on the unceded and ancestral territory of the Kwantlen, Katzie, Qayqayt, & Semiahmoo Nations. I'm a proud member and I see the power of members' strong, united defense of public education, teachers' working and students' learning conditions. I commit to creating equitable opportunities for all members, within a union that prioritizes the diversity of our needs.

Unions have so much more to offer members as workers and professionals, responsive to the needs of our members and our students. My leadership is grounded in ethics, collaboration, and advocacy for members at work and in representation. My institutional knowledge and anti-oppression lens informs my actions and values. I am committed to lifelong learning and meaningful service to public education.

As a BIPOC woman, special education teacher, and union leader, I have faced and overcome many challenges with resilience, determination, and a commitment to *seva*—selfless service. Rooted in humility, equality, and solidarity, I strive to ensure every voice is valued and uplifted in our union spaces and am experienced at the local, provincial, Ministry, and labour levels.

I humbly ask for your vote to serve all members.

EXPERIENCE

Elected: BC Teachers' Council, PBC Board and Committee Chair, AGM/RA Chairperson, BCTF AGM Resolutions and delegate, Finance Committee, Labour Council, Surrey LP/VP, Local Bargaining, LR
Appointed: CTF Chair, delegate, WIN, SURT facilitator, developer



Winona Waldron
Greater Victoria

Facebook: facebook.com/WinonaWaldronBCTF

Instagram: instagram.com/winonawaldron/

Bluesky: bsky.app/profile/winonawaldron.bsky.social

Across British Columbia, challenging working conditions are making it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain teachers. To address this, we must tackle key issues, including rising violence in schools, shortening the salary grid to ensure equitable access to top earnings sooner, bargaining a contract that uplifts all members, and enforcing compliance with restored collective agreement language.

As an experienced BCTF Executive Committee member, I bring the skills to balance representing members and navigating the internal workings of the Federation. Equity has always been central to my work. I've championed initiatives like special hiring agreements for racialized members, the creation of a local position for 2SLGBTQIA+ members, and an Indigenous mentorship program. Through strategic use of media and advocating with employers and government, I have worked tirelessly to improve working conditions for members.

My proven record includes negotiating fair agreements, successfully defending the collective agreement through grievances and arbitration, and serving on the Provincial Bargaining Team.

My vision for the BCTF is rooted in inclusion, equity, and strength through unity. Together, we can build a stronger, more effective union that uplifts our profession and positively impacts the communities we serve.

I would be honoured to represent you as Second Vice-President.

EXPERIENCE

National: Bargaining panelist, Women's Symposium presenter, Daughters of the Vote facilitator, AGM delegate
Provincial: Bargaining Team, Member-at-Large, Women In Negotiations, WLC/BAC, Local Rep
Local: President, Vice-President, Lead Negotiator, Grievance Officer, Staff Rep
Community: Labour Council Executive

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

for MEMBER-AT-LARGE



Michael Aldridge
Comox

I am a 16-year teacher with a wealth of union experience, eager to serve my fellow BCTF members on the provincial stage.

Before moving to BC, I spent 13 years in northern Alberta, taking an active role in the ATA from day one. Over the years I took on every role asked of me and strove to repay my colleagues' faith with tangible results, whether locally as a president and bargaining chair, or provincially on the Bargaining Advisory and Political Engagement committees. For the past three years, I have taken every opportunity to learn about the BCTF, its members, and its processes. I understand the level of work, time, and sacrifice required for this position and I welcome the challenge.

Having taught at every grade level from K to adult ed, including online, blended, and in-person instruction in both remote

rural and urban settings, should prove invaluable when considering education and teaching across our diverse province and membership.

As a Member-at Large, I promise to value diverse perspectives, focus on improving teaching conditions, and always centre members in decision-making.

I humbly ask for your support and look forward to being a voice for you on the Executive.

EXPERIENCE

Teaching: 16 yrs classroom teaching

BCTF: LR, local MaL, Contract Cmte, AGM delegate

ATA: Local President (6 years), Barg. Chair (3 rounds), 15 other elected positions

Education: B.Ed. Generalist/Indigenous Studies; M.Ed. Ed. Studies, Leadership, and Change



Violette Baillargeon
Surrey

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Public education is at a crossroads. Corporate interests push privatization, workloads continue to intensify, and climate disruptions threaten stability. Our response must be bold and unwavering.

Throughout my years of union activism (both locally and provincially) I have prioritized meaningful member engagement, decentralized decision-making, and an unshakable commitment to social justice. As a full-time classroom teacher and parent of four, I don't just advocate for policy changes—I live them. I understand the challenges frontline educators face, the barriers to engagement, and the urgent need for policies that support working teachers, especially women and caregivers.

With over a decade of experience on Executive Committees (BCTF and STA), I have seen firsthand that our strength lies in the collective voice of teachers. I remain committed to amplifying that

voice—whether by securing funding for locals and staff reps or advocating for a just transition in the face of climate change. My approach is rooted in deep collaboration, ongoing consultation, and a belief that our structures must evolve to meet the realities of today's educators.

With your support, I will continue to fight for a well-funded, accessible, and just public education system—one that empowers teachers and uplifts communities.

EXPERIENCE

Provincial: EC (2019–22), Peer Support/Mediation (2017–19), TriNational: USA (2014) Mex (2018), AGM (2005–2024), facilitator (2012–19)

Local: LR (2014–now), Environmental Justice (2018–now), Bargaining (2016–19), International Solidarity (2013–19)

Teaching: 24 years, French/Spanish, IB, FRIM, AdEd

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

for MEMBER-AT-LARGE



**Shannon
Bowsfield**
Mission

I believe in the power of teachers, the strength of our union, and the importance of public education. However, the teacher shortage, increasing workload, and lack of student supports have made our profession unsustainable. I commit to working with the BCTF on bold, coordinated action on recruitment and retention—addressing workload, housing, childcare, and post-secondary access to make teaching a viable long-term career.

As LP, I've seen firsthand how workload issues impact teachers and students. I've faced management to advocate for solutions, collaborated with stakeholders, and bargained on behalf of members. I know the realities of our classrooms and the need for policies that reflect our experiences. I pledge to work within the BCTF to push for concrete solutions that prioritize teacher well-being, strengthen professional development, and ensure our voices shape policy decisions.

Mentorship for early career and new-to-BC teachers is key to retention and a stronger profession. Public education is the foundation of our communities—it must amplify diverse voices, foster innovation, and support teachers so we can continue shaping the future.

I am committed to equity, reconciliation, and anti-racism, knowing this work requires learning, discomfort, and action. I would be honoured to earn your support for BCTF Member-at-Large.

EXPERIENCE

Provincial: RA Agenda Committee, IMS, LR, Safety Ally, Solidarity Nights, AGM delegate

Local: LP, Lead Negotiator, VP, Social Justice, Indigenous, Health & Safety Chairs, Staff Rep

Teaching: 24 years—Mentor teacher, learning support, elementary, middle, and high school



Jo Cornthwaite
Nanaimo

Compassion, Strength, Courage

As a candidate for BCTF Member-at-Large, I bring compassion, strength, and courage to the Executive table. With 26 years of teaching experience, primarily in special education, and a Master's degree focused on inclusive practice, I am dedicated to ensuring all members feel heard and supported. As a second-generation teacher and Local President of the Nanaimo District Teachers' Association, I am committed to listening, engaging in meaningful dialogue, and assisting members in challenging times.

I have served in leadership roles locally and provincially, including Chair of the BCTF Professional Issues Advisory Committee and as a workshop facilitator and developer. If elected, I will amplify regional voices, diverse perspectives, and ensure meaningful participation and representation in the BCTF.

As a queer woman, I understand the importance of inclusivity and representation. I want to work with my colleagues to build a Federation that values every member's unique voice and experience. I am a person of action, focused on turning experience into meaningful change. By listening to locals and sublocals, I will ensure the Federation supports the incredible work happening across British Columbia. I look forward to hearing from you and representing you as Member-at-Large. Thank you for your support!

EXPERIENCE

Provincial: Member of BCTC, Chair PIAC, BCTF workshop developer and facilitator, TIE-BC Conference Chair

Local: President, Contract Officer, Professional Issues Officer

Teaching: 26 years

Education: BA (Trent University), B.Ed (Queen's University), M.Ed (VIU) Special Education

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

for MEMBER-AT-LARGE



Adrienne Demers
Fernie

Bluesky: @adriennedemers.bsky.social

Remote Rural Teacher, Collective Vision

I entered the teaching profession with a strong determination to make a meaningful impact. Confronted by systemic challenges that often render our aspirations for public education seemingly unattainable, I became involved in the work of the union.

As Local President, my primary focus is on including and amplifying teachers' voices. I diligently strive to enhance member engagement and steadfastly uphold our collective rights through bargaining and grievance processes. Serving on various provincial committees, I have advanced significant issues such as eliminating obstacles in the teacher certification process, addressing the teacher shortage, fostering respect for our profession, empowering teachers through professional autonomy, and promoting teacher wellness.

The untenable working conditions, exacerbated by the teacher shortage, have reached a critical juncture. The scarcity

mindset, systemic oppression, and the persistent reality of chronic underfunding pose serious threats to our working environment. Teachers are increasingly bearing the brunt of these impacts. It is essential that we build solidarity and engage in collective actions to uphold the principles of social justice and protect the rights long held in our collective agreement.

Throughout these efforts, my approach remains consistent—relational and assertive, grounded in core values of inclusion and solidarity.

EXPERIENCE

Local: President, VP, H&S, Social Justice, Staff Rep, EKD Labour Council

Provincial: BC Teachers' Council Co-Chair, Professional Issues Advisory Committee, Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Committee, VP myPITA

National: CTF Professional Issues Advisory Committee

Teaching: Inclusion, DL/hybrid, humanities, K-12



Mary Lawrence
(she/her)
Prince George

Weebly: mary4bctf.weebly.com

Facebook: facebook.com/mary4MAL

Strong public schools build strong communities. With my relational and collaborative approach to leadership, I've advanced public education through advocacy and action. I fought to improve our working conditions to address the systemic teacher shortage and defended public education as a public good amidst rising right-wing populism. Now I'm ready to bring this work to the Executive table.

I'm a queer teacher and settler on Lheidli T'enneh territory in Prince George. I have been teaching for nine years and my experience includes both rural and urban schools, as well as classroom and non-enrolling positions. From the start, I have been deeply involved in union work, carrying forward the lesson I learned as the daughter of two union leaders: when workers stand together, we win.

Government's neglect of our working conditions cannot continue. Manageable workloads, fully staffed schools, and respect for our expertise should be non-negotiable. I collaborated with members across the province, the country, and the continent to reimagine bargaining structures and a public education system that centres members' voices, collective action, and collaboration, because it is only together that we can win real change through a bold, strategic, and unified approach to fighting for teachers.

Let's get to work.

EXPERIENCE

Local: Executive, Bargaining Committee/Team, NCLC, SJ, H&S, AGM delegate

Provincial: BCFED Executive/Officer/Convention Elections Co-Chair; Bargaining Task Force; WLC/BAC, Women in Leadership, CTF/Trinational delegate

Teaching: Secondary socials, Indigenous student support

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

for MEMBER-AT-LARGE



Frano Marsic
Richmond

I believe in a strong Federation and value our governance structures. Our union is strong because we value debate and dialogue. We may not always agree, but our common commitment to public education and serving members unites us. Solidarity is crucial as we enter provincial bargaining. I value actively listening, asking questions, and ensuring that rights, voices, and access are protected. A Federation that is equitable, safe, and welcoming must continue to be our priority.

If elected, I will work to ensure our advocacy and demands for meaningful change and funding remains our focus. The ongoing impact of rising violence, teacher shortages, and workload must be addressed. Without change, the challenges with recruitment and retention will continue to escalate. We have a right to a reasonable workload and to be safe at work.

I can bring knowledge of bargaining, collective agreement enforcement, advocacy, and finance to the meetings. In my local, I have successfully negotiated letters of agreement that have helped to address recruitment, retention, remedy, and access to professional development. I have supported members with conflict, wellness, and grievances. I understand the importance of strong autonomous locals.

I would be honoured to use my voice to work for you.

EXPERIENCE

Local: Vice-President, Co-Lead Negotiator for Local Bargaining, Executive Committee Member, Staff Representative

BCTF: Local Representative, AGM delegate, BC Fed delegate, Summer Conference, issue sessions

Teaching: 20 yrs, secondary English, social studies, drama



Andrew McFayden
Prince George

One of the best decisions I made was getting involved in the BCTF. Giving back to the organization that gives so much to members is important to me, and my work as a Local Representative has reinforced that belief. As a secondary French and Spanish teacher, I experience the realities of underfunded schools. Improvements in working conditions, particularly in preparation time, have been my deepest wish since I started teaching in 1995.

I speak four languages: English, French, Scottish Gaelic, and Spanish, each with different world views. I believe in the power that language learning has on combating racism and ignorance. I was part of the provincial curriculum development team for Dakelh, a local Indigenous language. We must protect professional autonomy and advocate for strong improvements to working conditions so that teachers can put their passion and skills toward projects that advance reconciliation and anti-racism.

As a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, I recognize the challenges that equity-deserving members face. I want to represent all members and leave this Federation in a better place than when I started. I live by an old Gaelic saying: *Abair ach beagan is abair gu math e*: say but little and say it well.

EXPERIENCE

Provincial: Delegate to many AGMs, Local Representative to BCTF, French Advisory Committee, Federation Leadership Institutes, Summer Conference delegate, PSA Executive member; Bargaining Conference delegate

Local: Member-at-Large, Political Action Contact, Bargaining Committee, Pro-D Committee

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

for MEMBER-AT-LARGE



David Peterson
Nechako

Facebook: "David Peterson for BCTF Member At Large"
[facebook.com/profile.php?id=61572236873169](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61572236873169)
or <https://tinyurl.com/yc3u5s39>

I am a proud public school teacher. Sadly, over the past decade we have seen conditions deteriorate due to systemic underfunding. Between inflation and workload-creep, schools and teachers are being starved of the resources they need. British Columbians deserve better. We must demand a public education system that we can be proud of. I believe improving working and learning conditions must be our main priority as a union. As a union of professionals, this is the central issue that unites us. Our strength is solidarity.

I am a strong advocate for teachers with a voice that is passionate, compassionate, and reasoned. Whether I'm speaking to the BCTF AGM or RA, reporting out at the labour council, or meeting with school district administration, I ground my advocacy in the lived experiences of teachers supported with relevant details from the

CA, policy, and legislation. I see effective advocacy as a moral duty in service to both my students and my colleagues.

All students deserve a high-quality *public* education with well-resourced classrooms and supported teachers. We must demand equity for all, regardless of socioeconomic status, disability, SOGI, geography, community size, or any other set of circumstances. Teachers and students deserve it!

EXPERIENCE

Provincial: TPPAC/Pensions, WLC BAC, LR, AGM

Local: Lead Negotiator, Bargaining Chair, Vice-President, OHS Chair, Staff Representative

Community: North Central Labour Council Trustee

Teaching: 10 years secondary (science/math/computer science)

REPORT OF THE NOMINATING CHAIRPERSON

The Nominating Committee presents the following names (in alphabetical order for each position) of BCTF members who have been nominated pursuant to By-law 5.4 (p. 12–13 of the *Members' Guide to the BCTF*) for positions on the Executive Committee. Additional nominations may be made from the floor of the Annual General Meeting.

For President—one to be elected

Carole Gordon, Central Okanagan
Jillian Maguire, Vancouver Secondary

For First Vice-President—one to be elected

Elmar Nabbe, Vancouver Island West
Robin Toszczak, Greater Victoria

For Second Vice-President—one to be elected

Jatinder Bir, Surrey
Winona Waldron, Greater Victoria

Members-at-Large

Non-designated—five to be elected

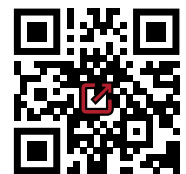
Michael Aldridge, Comox
Violette Baillargeon, Surrey
Shannon Bowsfield, Mission
Joanna Cornthwaite, Nanaimo
Adrienne Demers, Fernie
Mary Lawrence, Prince George
Frano Marsic, Richmond
Andrew McFayden, Prince George
David Peterson, Nechako



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INTERNAL MEDIATION SERVICE

The Internal Mediation Service (IMS) can help manage unresolved conflicts with colleagues and improve professional relationships. IMS mediates member-to-member and small group conflicts and works with support staff and administrators as appropriate.

Mediators use a trauma informed practice and the BCTF Aboriginal Lens guides our support to members: respect, relationship, relevance, responsibility, reciprocity, reconciliation, and resilience.

The service is confidential, voluntary, and the outcome of mediations are not reported to local unions or school districts. Release time is provided at no cost to members. You may request to work with a mediator who has a similar background and life experience to yours, and mediations can be conducted in French and online upon request.

For more information and to access IMS, contact Sherry Payne, Nadia Bove, or your local union.


Sherry Payne, Assistant Director
Internal Relations, Professional and Social Issues
 604-871-1803 | 1-800-663-9163
spayne@bctf.ca

Nadia Bove, Administrative Assistant
Internal Relations, Professional and Social Issues
 604-871-1823 | 1-800-663-9163
nbove@bctf.ca



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BCTLA wins award!

The BC Teacher-Librarians' Association was awarded the Donald Hamilton School Library Advocacy Award by Canadian School Libraries. Turn to page 19 to read about the valuable work of the BCTLA in championing the work of libraries and teacher-librarians.

Left: BCTLA 2023 Executive Committee. Photo provided by Tammy Le.

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