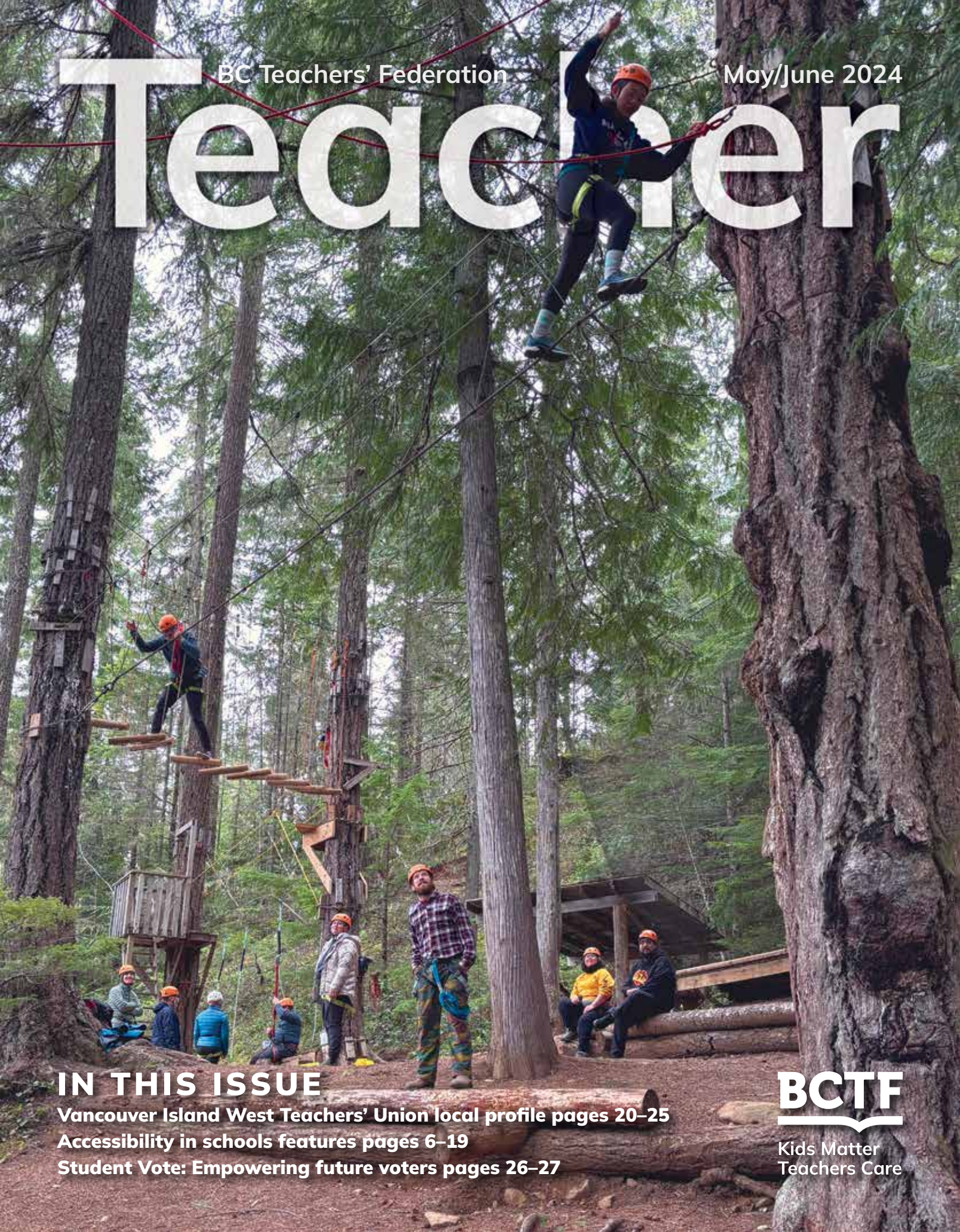
BC Teachers' Federation May/June 2024

Teacher



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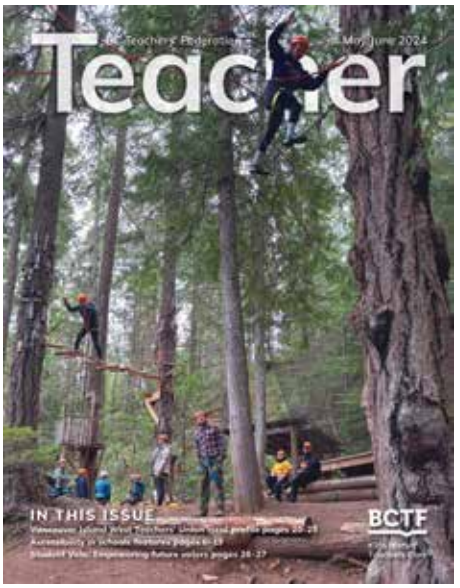

On the cover
Read about the Vancouver Island West Teachers' Union and its reconciliation retreat in the local profile on pages 20–25.

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

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Nov/Dec 2024 issue	September 2024
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Clint Johnston

Sunjum Jhaj photo

TEACHERS PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE in shaping not just minds but also societal attitudes toward disability justice and excellence. At the heart of this edition's feature on inclusion in schools lies the recognition that disability is not a deficit.

This issue has a personal side for me, as I have navigated the world with a disability since losing my hand in an industrial accident at age 23. Having lived experience with a disability and without helps me to see barriers others may not, and to understand how easy it is to be unaware of barriers if you live without a disability. I encourage all members to read this edition with an open mind, looking to expand your understanding of the barriers some of your students and colleagues experience every day. And to think of how we can all—individually and collectively—create an education system that is truly inclusive.

I'd like to thank each person who shared their story of struggle and success within the public education system for this edition. These stories highlight how important supportive and inclusive spaces are in creating a school system where every student and teacher can thrive. They also share examples of the excellence we can achieve when adequate supports are in place.

I'd also like to acknowledge all the great work happening around our province for equitable and just access to education. This goes beyond accommodations; it involves actively dismantling barriers to learning and championing accessibility in all aspects of education. Teachers' dedication, creativity, and commitment to equity is a catalyst for change. Our work in schools is fuelling the movement toward more inclusive communities.

An important part of our work as teachers is to create safety for our students within our classrooms and schools. Globally and locally, we are hearing how increasing rhetoric and hate speech in communities are threatening safety and belonging. With this in mind, a motion was brought forward, and passed, by delegates at the BCTF Annual General Meeting in March. The motion read as follows:

That the Federation:

1. continuously lobby the Ministry of Education and Child Care to include, where applicable, the following as part of the Grades 6–12 Socials and History curricula until it gets added to the elaborations:
   a. The Nakba
   b. The 1948 Arab-Israeli War
   c. Military occupation of Gaza and the West Bank.
2. have the Federation President acknowledge through the next *Teacher* magazine that these events are essential to understanding the history of Palestine and Israel in the President's Message.

World events and complicated histories are always a part of our teaching. Classrooms are where students bring their questions and curiosities about the events occurring in the world. Classrooms are also where students develop or question their understandings of world events. Starting these conversations and teaching complicated histories is a difficult task. Teachers need support to approach the historical context of present-day conflicts in their classrooms. It's important that the Ministry of Education and Child Care, school districts, and community partners come together with teachers to create the supports and resources we need to teach challenging world events.

The work of teachers has always been to bring communities together in times of division and struggle. But we are not alone in this work, and support from other partners in public education is essential.

In solidarity,

Clint Johnston,
BCTF President

MESSAGE DU PRÉSIDENT

LES ENSEIGNANTS ET LES ENSEIGNANTES JOUENT UN RÔLE ESSENTIEL pour former non seulement les esprits, mais aussi les mentalités de la société à l'égard de la justice et de l'excellence en matière de handicap. Nous profitons de ce numéro sur l'inclusion dans les écoles pour reconnaître le fait qu'handicap n'est pas synonyme de déficit.

Ce numéro me touche personnellement, puisque je vis avec un handicap depuis que j'ai perdu ma main dans un accident du travail à l'âge de 23 ans. Comme j'ai vécu une partie de ma vie sans handicap et l'autre avec, je peux repérer des obstacles que d'autres ne voient pas, et comprendre à quel point il est facile pour une personne qui n'est pas en situation de handicap de ne pas voir les obstacles. J'encourage tous les membres à garder un esprit ouvert lorsqu'ils liront ce numéro et à tenter de mieux comprendre les obstacles que certains de leurs étudiants et collègues rencontrent chaque jour. Je vous demande également de réfléchir à la manière dont nous pouvons tous—individuellement et collectivement—créer un système d'éducation qui soit réellement inclusif.

Je tiens également à remercier chacune des personnes qui ont accepté de nous raconter leurs difficultés et leurs réussites au sein du système d'éducation publique dans ce numéro. Ces témoignages soulignent l'importance des espaces de soutien et d'inclusivité dans la création d'un système scolaire où chaque élève et chaque enseignant peuvent s'épanouir. Ils sont également des exemples de l'excellence que nous pouvons atteindre lorsque des mesures de soutien adéquates sont en place.

Je souhaite également saluer tout l'excellent travail accompli dans notre province pour un accès équitable et juste à l'éducation. Ce travail va au-delà des mesures d'adaptation, il sert à démanteler activement les obstacles à l'apprentissage et à défendre l'accessibilité dans tous les aspects de l'éducation. Le dévouement, la créativité et la mobilisation des enseignants et des enseignantes en faveur de l'équité sont des catalyseurs de changement. Notre travail dans les écoles alimente le mouvement qui mènera à une société plus inclusive.

Une part importante de notre travail en tant qu'enseignants et enseignantes consiste à assurer la sécurité de nos élèves dans nos classes et nos écoles. À l'échelle mondiale et locale, nous entendons dire que la montée de la rhétorique et des discours de haine dans la population menace la sécurité et l'appartenance. C'est dans cette optique qu'une motion a été présentée et adoptée par les délégués lors de l'assemblée générale annuelle de la Fédération des enseignantes et des enseignants de la Colombie-Britannique (FECB) en mars. La motion se lit comme suit :

Que la Fédération :

1. fasse pression en permanence sur le Ministry of Education and Child Care (ministère de l'Éducation et des Services à la petite enfance) pour qu'il inclue, le cas échéant, les thèmes suivants dans les programmes de sciences sociales et d'histoire de la 6e à la 12e année, jusqu'à ce qu'ils soient ajoutés à l'élaboration des programmes :
   a. La Nakba
   b. La guerre israélo-arabe de 1948
   c. L'occupation militaire de Gaza et de la Cisjordanie
2. demande au président de la Fédération de reconnaître dans son message dans le prochain magazine *Teacher* que ces événements sont essentiels pour comprendre l'histoire de la Palestine et d'Israël.

Les événements mondiaux et les histoires complexes font toujours partie de notre enseignement. C'est dans les salles de classe que les élèves posent leurs questions et peuvent manifester leur curiosité quant aux événements qui se produisent dans le monde. Les salles de classe sont également le lieu où les élèves acquièrent ou remettent en question leur compréhension des événements mondiaux. Entreprendre ces conversations et enseigner des périodes complexes de l'histoire n'est pas une tâche facile. Le personnel enseignant a besoin de soutien pour aborder le contexte historique des conflits actuels en classe. Il est important que le ministère de l'Éducation et des Services à la petite enfance, les districts scolaires et les partenaires communautaires collaborent avec les enseignants et les enseignantes pour créer les mesures de soutien et les ressources dont ces derniers ont besoin pour enseigner les événements mondiaux difficiles.

Le travail des enseignants et des enseignantes a toujours été de rassembler les différents groupes dans les moments de division et de lutte. Nous ne pouvons toutefois pas faire cavalier seul et avons besoin de l'appui d'autres partenaires du milieu de l'éducation publique.

Solidairement,

Clint Johnston
Président de la FECB

THE LIFE THAT CHOSE ME

NAVIGATING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM WITH TOURETTE SYNDROME

By L. Phillips (she/her), elementary educator, Kamloops

EACH FALL for the past two years, I have presented to the bachelor of education students at our local university. My presentation is on Tourette syndrome (TS), one of the most misunderstood syndromes in our society, despite its relatively high prevalence. A neurological condition that one is born with, TS affects 1 in every 100 children in Canada. The numbers are higher if you also consider tic disorders.

I start my presentation very simply: "Please tell me your name and one thing you know about Tourette syndrome." The answers vary of course, from those with first-hand experience with a friend or family member, to those, the majority, who admittedly know next to nothing. Few understand the extent to which the syndrome affects the everyday life of an individual with the condition.

I always end with what I call my "myth-buster," where I tell them that the person they see in front of them is a happily married mother of two, an educator of over 20 years, and a person with TS. "If you take one thing away from this presentation," I tell them, "let it be that Tourette syndrome isn't always obvious. There is more than meets the eye."

I remember my first tics starting at about six years old. We didn't know what was causing them at the time, but my dad had some too, so it wasn't anything new in our house. Growing up Gen X, a diagnosis of any kind was rarely something we were given. My parents did all they could. They took me to a doctor, who sent me to a neurologist. But all he would say is that I had nervous tics. As if this was something I could control.

I've never had big and loud tics. In fact, few people other than my closest friends even knew I had them. I had a few motor tics: tics caused by the involuntary movements of one or more muscle groups. My vocal tics, tics that create sound or words, were small, things like sniffing or breath holding. I didn't fit the stereotypical portrait of TS with the swearing and hitting things. But then, few people with TS do.

Despite the fact that the media focuses on and portrays people with TS as swearing at everyone and calling out random words, this associated condition of TS, called coprolalia, is in fact very rare, affecting only 10% of all TS patients. Busting myths around this syndrome is not easy with the media working against you.

It is impossible to talk about TS without talking about its co-occurring conditions, as it is rarely a stand-alone condition. Most people with TS also deal with a number of co-occurring conditions: ADHD, OCD, anxiety, depression, sensory processing disorder, autism, learning disabilities, and conduct disorders, to name a few. And it is this compounding factor of multiple diagnoses that makes it so difficult to live with TS. Anxiety can induce tics, which makes the individual more self-conscious, which causes more anxiety and tics, which can cause a loss of focus, which affects the ADHD, which causes the OCD to go into overdrive trying to find some control in the chaos.

Many people with tics will exert energy trying to stop or suppress their tics for a period of time. Suppression is hard. Most of us can do it for a short period of time, but it's exhausting. To give you an idea of what it's like, try not blinking for a full minute while reading a book. As you struggle to focus on keeping your eyes open, at what point do you just give up and stop trying to figure out the words? This is what it's like to suppress a tic. For a child in a class, imagine how hard it would be to keep up with a lesson or get a written assignment done. It's also why a child with TS can appear to "show no tics" during class but explode with tics later when they get home. Holding it in all day is hard, but kids are surprisingly skilled at it, especially when they don't want to stand out. Just because you can't see tics in the classroom, doesn't mean they're not happening.

It wasn't until 2019, in my early 40s, that I finally sought out a diagnosis. My tics had eased after finishing high school, as is common in post-adolescence, but I struggled with increases in the frequency and intensity of tics at various points in my life. Why seek a diagnosis now? Because in the fall of 2018, at the start of her Kindergarten year, my daughter started experiencing tics.

First vocal, then motor, her tics started increasing in number and frequency with every passing month. It was then, watching her struggle with the frustration of a body literally out of her control, that I realized it was time I found a doctor to give me the diagnosis I'd suspected for some time. My diagnosis made it easier for her to get diagnosed, as TS is a highly hereditary condition. My daughter is the third generation in our family to have it. So, in the spring of 2019, after 30-plus years of dealing with the symptoms, I was finally diagnosed with TS. It was an unexpectedly validating moment in my life. It's funny how you can convince yourself that having a label really doesn't matter when you've obviously lived just fine for so many years. But I discovered that having

someone say the words out loud and confirm my diagnosis was like having someone hand me the moon. I wasn't "crazy" or "too nervous." There wasn't something "wrong with me." There was a neurological reason behind all I had been through. It was simply part of who I was and it was okay.

In the fall of 2019, we got my daughter's diagnosis of TS along with generalized anxiety and sensory processing disorder. In the last couple of years, she has also been diagnosed with ADHD and now OCD. It's a lot. She doesn't have coprolalia but she has a lot of different motor tics: hands, arms, toes, feet, legs, neck, back, eyes. Some of them can be very painful. The neck and back tics give her muscle spasms to the point that I had to start taking her to massage therapy. The feet tics make it painful for her to simply walk, and the hand tics make it hard to hold a pencil. There are days when she cries from the pain of the tics and asks why she has to have them. I don't have an answer. All I can do is hug her and tell her how strong she is, how proud I am of her, how much we love her. Then there are the tic attacks, when a tic gets "stuck," and that can happen non-stop for hours. All we can do is comfort her until she finally falls asleep from exhaustion. Most recently, she started to experience rages, which are common with children dealing with multiple diagnoses and TS.

My daughter's TS has been a lot more intense than mine. It has worn us all out at times. Her ADHD affects her moods as much as her attention and makes her volatile and reactive. If you've never heard of rejection sensitivity dysphoria (RSD) that comes with ADHD, take the time to read up on it. *Additudemag.com* is a good place to start. I cannot say enough about the drastic effects RSD can have on a family and a child. And it's far more common in kids with ADHD than you'd think (95% in fact).

Anxiety and OCD put holes in her self-confidence and make her afraid of trying new things, leery of change, and constantly seek reassurance. Sensory processing disorder means we've been through more styles of pants and shoes and socks with this child than most families would in a decade. All this accumulates and comes in waves (as is the way with TS), sometimes calmly, sometimes like a tsunami. Some days are good and we can relax a bit. Other days it's all we can do to get through, to reach the end and be able to say, "Okay, we did it. We survived another day." There are no words to quite encompass the level of frustration and exhaustion we can deal with on a daily basis. How hopeless I feel sometimes, as a parent, knowing there is no cure for TS.

But at the end of the day, despite the struggles, I feel that it has made me a better teacher, not only for kids like my daughter, but for all kids with neurological disorders. I've known what it's like to be the child with TS, but now I've also seen what it's like from the outside as the parent. It's allowed me to see past the behaviours to the struggles the child is going through.

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TIPS ON TEACHING A CHILD WITH TOURETTE SYNDROME

Take the time to talk to the child and talk to the parents. Ask them about the tics and symptoms they experience and how these affect them. Ask them about any triggers they might have and how you can alleviate them. Ask if there is anything you can do in the classroom to make it a safe place for them.

Recognize that tics are involuntary and are not done on purpose. That no matter how loud or annoying or inappropriate a tic seems, it is still involuntary and the student can't help what they are doing. If the tic is difficult for you to handle, imagine how hard it is for the child. If you're not sure if something is a tic, simply wait and ask the parent. The parents are your greatest resource.

Ignore tics. The more attention you feed them, the worse they get. Ignore them and encourage other students and staff to ignore them as well.

Provide a safe space to release tics if needed (such as a break room). Suppressing all day is difficult. If the child can release tics in a room where others can't see or hear them, it can make a big difference in their day.

Recognize the other conditions affecting the child's learning. Educate yourself on all facets of their multiple diagnoses and how they affect each other.

Be flexible and creative. Sometimes a creative solution can be found to help both the child and those around them. For instance, a tapping tic on a desk can be very distracting, but what if you were to put a foam pad on the desk for them to tap instead? They can continue their tic as they need to, but it is now less distracting to others. Note that such ideas should be passed by the student first. For some students this can feel like they are being shamed for their behaviour, for others it can alleviate social pressure. So always check first.

Educate. It is important that everyone working with the child is educated on their condition. This can include the janitor, secretary, and librarian who may interact with the child at some point in the day. It is also beneficial for the students in the class to know about the child's condition as well, as it helps them be more empathetic. However, keep in mind that you should never talk to the class without the child and parents' explicit permission. Not all kids are comfortable with their peers knowing. •

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Tourette.ca
Tourette Canada—includes a great handbook for educators
Tourette.org
Tourette Association of America
Leakybrakes.ca
Ontario Child and Parent Resource Institute

Student's self-advocacy builds inclusive school community

Keirnan Bray
photo provided
by author

"On a day-to-day basis people underestimate me, but with support I get stuff done."

By Keirnan Bray, student, Kamloops

HI, MY NAME IS KEIRNAN, and I am a Grade 9 student in Kamloops, BC. I have a very rare disorder called Lesch-Nyhan syndrome that affects my muscles, my speech, and my body movements. I am in a wheelchair, and I need support with everything I do. People treat me like a baby and use a baby voice when talking to me; I have to remind them that they should talk to me like a regular person. People assume that I am not smart because of how I look and because I cannot speak clearly. On a day-to-day basis people underestimate me, but with support I get stuff done. There are a lot of barriers and challenges that I face every day in my life and in my education. Like many people with disabilities, I have to be an advocate daily, in big and small ways, to feel included in my school and community.

Most people have no idea about the struggles people with disabilities face every day. Some common difficulties that people with disabilities experience are things like steps going into buildings, getting through busy hallways, and finding automatic door buttons. There are also social challenges like being underestimated all the time, not being included in school sports because other kids don't really think about you, and friends forgetting that a wheelchair doesn't fit into a regular car, so you get left behind. Accessing a fair education is a challenge—not because of unfairness, but because people don't realize some of the barriers I face. In bad weather, getting to portables can be unsafe or very messy. I could use Zoom to join class from another room, but then I don't have access to my teacher or my peers. It can be very embarrassing to be stared at when I come into class late and have to move furniture around to fit at a desk. These things are the opposite of inclusion—these barriers are very isolating.

In the last two years I have discovered a lot of barriers that I didn't know existed. I decided things needed to change so that I could have the same access to education as all of my peers. I never thought of myself as someone who could make changes happen, but there were changes that I realized needed to happen for real inclusion in my classrooms and school community. I did some research and have written two proposals to my principal asking for changes at my school that support true inclusion for myself and other students. I have learned a lot about becoming an advocate for inclusion and equality, and I feel like I'm getting really good at making a difference in other people's lives.

“By being an advocate, I have learned a lot about myself, I’ve gained confidence, and I’ve realized that I want to help people. I want to help people with disabilities have the confidence to speak up, but I also want to help my community change how they think about challenges and barriers to inclusion.”

My first proposal was in Grade 8. There were a lot of people who didn’t understand me and I wanted to make some new friends. I wrote a proposal to my principal to start an adaptive video game club at my school. I wanted to promote a feeling of community, connection, and inclusion with my peers. A community group heard about my proposal, and they bought me an Xbox and all of the adaptive gaming gear I needed for my club! The club has been very successful. I met lots of new people from my school, made some new friends, and some people learned more about me and now understand a bit more about who I am and why school can be hard for me. We are building a sense of community at school and that feels amazing!

In Grade 9, I had some health, safety, and accessibility concerns. I wrote another proposal to my principal asking how I could help them make changes at my school to give me safe and fair access to my classes with the goal of making my life easier at school, but also to make things easier for future students here and hopefully at other schools in Kamloops. Now they are aware of physical accessibility challenges with the portable ramps, they are looking at getting more automatic door buttons, and the principal even asked me for input about the height of the water-filling stations and if they were too high for someone in a wheelchair. They also now understand the need to shovel or plow the door that the bus drops me off at because it’s hard for the bus ramp to come down to get me safely off the bus when there is snow in the parking lot. Plowing and sanding wheelchair accessible doors has to be a priority when it snows.

It’s not fair asking people with disabilities to point out the barriers to inclusion and access. The people in charge, and society in general, should be more aware of problems and challenges for people with all kinds of needs, but I also understand that they don’t have the same experiences that we have. I had to become an advocate for myself and other people to help my community understand how hard people with disabilities have to work to have equal access. I just found out that Kamloops has an event called An Amazing Race to Inclusion where teams do tasks that help people to understand the barriers and challenges that people with different abilities experience every day. I have a team of friends and I have challenged the admin at my school to participate to have fun and to gain a new perspective on inclusion and accessibility.

By being an advocate, I have learned a lot about myself, I’ve gained confidence, and I’ve realized that I want to help people. I want to help people with disabilities have the confidence to speak up, but I also want to help my community change how they think about challenges and barriers to inclusion. You can start making changes in small ways and affecting a few people at a time, but if those changes grow, even slowly, then more people begin to understand, and changes start to happen naturally. •

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Disability justice in action: Changing the game

By Nikitha Fester (she/her), BCTF staff

Photo provided by Jessica Ramsey

FROM MAY 25 TO JUNE 1 Canada will recognize and celebrate the contributions of Canadians with disabilities during National Accessibility Week. Then in July, Canada celebrates Disability Pride Month, which celebrates people who experience disabilities, their identities and cultures, and their contributions to society. According to Stats Canada, the number of youth living with disabilities has increased significantly since 2017, with 20% of Canadians aged 15–24 experiencing disabilities.[1] As teachers working on the frontlines, this increase comes as no surprise. Each year, while our students rise to the challenge of social and academic expectations, we're right along side them providing and modifying the tools and skills they need to thrive.

For Jessica Ramsey, a Grades 6 and 7 teacher in Surrey BC, this meant changing the game—*literally*. Sports have been one of the ways Jessica connects with her students beyond her classroom, and she has been a dedicated track and field co-ordinator and basketball coach for the duration of her teaching career. Last year, during her recess supervision, she saw one of her students who uses a wheelchair shooting hoops, and she asked him why didn't he try out for the basketball team. He replied, "I didn't know that I could."

Disability justice is defined as a way to organize around and think about disability that centres the lives and leadership of disabled Black, Indigenous, and people of colour and/or queer, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people.[2] Jessica adds that disability justice includes removing barriers and providing opportunities so students can be their full selves. "Just because something has always been the way it's been, doesn't mean it can't change," said Jessica. With that guiding principle, Jessica and her vice-principal contacted Wheelchair Basketball BC and began organizing so that her student could not only join the team but also get minutes on the court as well.

Wheelchair Basketball BC brought in chairs, coaches, and taught lessons throughout a one-week showcase. At the end of their stay, they hosted a friendly match for the whole school. Jessica's student saw what he could achieve as a basketball player, and all students were reminded of the *ability* in disability.

Working with community partners can enrich school experiences for students and staff; however, it can also be challenging to co-ordinate all the pieces involved in bringing outside partners into schools. For Jessica, working with Wheelchair Basketball BC was effortless. The easy process allowed the school to create opportunities for all classes to participate, recognizing the vital role school activities play in students' lives and the importance of inclusion.

Today, Jessica's student is getting quality minutes on the basketball court, contributing to the success of his team, and showing other schools what is possible. Opposing schools are even requesting chairs be brought in so that their players can also experience playing in a chair. For Jessica, watching her student score his first game basket and seeing the smile on his face while his friends, and the opposing team, cheered is a memory she won't soon forget. It also reminds her of her "why." "Seeing students thrive, meet their learning goals, and pursue their passions is the reason why I am in the classroom. Seeing a student express themselves and come into their own is why I do what I do."

To learn more about Wheelchair Basketball BC, visit their website ***www.bcwbs.ca.*** •

The lesson on the next page can help kick-start disability justice action at your school and is suitable for Grades 5 to 9. Find links to references in the online version of this article on *teachermag.ca*.

DISABILITY JUSTICE LESSON PLAN *Suitable for Grades 5 to 9*

PART—1 ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT

Time: One 40-minute period

1. Discuss with your students the different categories of disability. Work through the language as needed.
2. Explain to students that with this new/improved understanding they are going to assess how accessible the school is for people with different types of needs.
3. Assign an area, or the entire school, to groups of students; have them evaluate how accessible their assigned area is for students.
   a. Remind them to remember the discussed definitions.
   b. As a class you can create a rating scale, or have each group create their own evaluation scheme.
4. After the audit, gather as a class and discuss what they noticed and how they evaluated the school.

Critical questions that could be asked

- Why do you think some areas of the school are inaccessible for students?
- Who should be included/consulted in the design of schools?
- Why is it important for schools and other places to be accessible to all?

PART 2—IDEAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Time: Approx. two 40-minute periods

Materials

- paper
- pencils
- erasers
- coloured pencils/markers.

1. In the same groups, and considering the same area, students will design an accessible space.
   a. Have students sketch a draft before doing a good copy in colour.
   b. Remind students to pay attention to details; spaces become inaccessible when small details are forgotten.
   c. For each decision they've made, have them write one or two sentences justifying the choice.
2. Once all groups have completed their redesign, have them present to the class.

Possible extension

Accessibility considerations are ways to respond to the needs of differently abled folks, but that is only one aspect of their identity. Explain Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality to your students. With that definition in mind, discuss with them what else needs to be included in their school redesign, so that their school space is responsive to the whole student, not just part of them.

1 *www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/231201/dq231201b-eng.htm*
2 Leah Lakshmi, et al., "Disability Justice: An Audit Tool," Northwest Health Foundation, Portland, OR: *static1.squarespace.com/static/5ed94da22956b942e1d51e12/t/625877951e18163c703bd0f4/1649964964772/DJ+Audit+Tool.pdf*
3 *cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/53446.html*
4 *cirb-ccri.gc.ca/en/resources/accessibility-disability-accommodations*
5 *www.invisibledisabilityproject.org/words-matter*
6 Lakshmi, et al.
7 *parents-together.org/explain-intersectionality-to-kids-with-this-simple-metaphor/*

GLOSSARY OF TERMS NECESSARY TO THIS LESSON

Accessibility The combination of aspects that influence a person's ability to function within an environment and to access it with ease.[3]

Agency The awareness that one has power over one's own actions in the world, independent of the external world.

Barrier Anything—including anything physical, architectural, technological, or attitudinal, anything that is based on information or communications, or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice—that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, or sensory impairment or a functional limitation.[4]

Disabled (adjective) The inability to function or be like others; physical, emotional, or neurological differences that limit activity or performance, generally with respect to work or education.[5]

Disability justice A term and a movement-building framework (i.e., a way of envisioning the ways people can organize around and think about disability) that centres the lives and leadership of disabled Black, Indigenous, and people of colour and/or queer, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming people.[6]

Disability tax An experience persons with disabilities have when completing additional daily tasks because of their disability and/or inaccessibility that takes time away from their work.

Equality Refers to equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for different groups of people.

Invisible disability A disability that cannot be easily seen or measured and is often discounted or not respected.

Intersectionality The combination of different identities that make up a whole individual. Just like a puzzle, each person is made up of lots of different pieces, like their race, gender, and religion. It's impossible to understand the full picture until you put all the pieces together.

A key component of social justice work is to recognize that all forms of inequality are mutually reinforcing and must therefore be analyzed and addressed simultaneously to prevent one form of inequality from reinforcing another. For example, tackling the gender pay gap alone—without including other dimensions such as race, socio-economic status, and immigration status—will likely reinforce inequalities among women. This example highlights why intersectionality is important to address in all social justice work.[7]

Neurodiversity Refers to the variation in the human brain regarding sociability, learning, attention, mood, and other mental functions.

Links to references available on *teachermag.ca*.

The Spices of Life
Student-led neurodiversity club

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By Natalie Raedwulf Pogue (she/they),
learning support teacher, Campbell River

NEURODIVERSITY is a paradigm that asserts that human brains are naturally different and that there is no "normal" or "ideal" brain. Like biodiversity, neurodiversity offers a net positive to society when different brains are recognized for their value. The neurodiversity movement is a social justice movement that calls for the equity and inclusion of neurodivergent people who currently and historically have faced marginalization and oppression. Neurodivergent people can include those who are autistic, have ADHD, Down syndrome, and many more neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions. This year at our high school, a collective of neurodivergent students, teachers, and allies came together to make a neurodiversity club that aimed to bring together and amplify neurodivergent voices, and it has had a profound impact.

I was motivated to facilitate a neuro(diversity)-affirming club for students after my own experience as an autistic and disabled teacher connecting with other neurodivergent teachers. I learned just how validating it was to connect with others who shared similar lived experiences. Neurodivergent people are more likely to struggle with school, social isolation, and mental health. This, in part, may be due to harmful stigma and stereotypes, lack of support, and lack of understanding. Neutral or strength-based narratives of neurodivergent folks are lacking, and many have a hard time disclosing that they are neurodivergent out of fear of judgment.

Traditionally social groups geared toward neurodivergent students have involved prioritizing neurotypical social skills[1] in an effort to enhance peer interactions and relationships. Although social-skills training equips neurodivergent youth with an understanding of the conventions and mechanics of neurotypical communication, these interventions inherently reinforce the notion that neurotypical social norms represent the "right" approach to interpersonal interaction. This can encourage neurodivergent people to mask or camouflage their neurodivergent traits, which research links to exhaustion, poor self-identity, and struggles with mental health. Conversely, neurodivergent people report a greater sense of well-being, self-identity, and increased feelings of belonging when they can build authentic and meaningful connections with other neurodivergent folks.

Neurodivergent people have distinct social and communication styles. This has been explained through theories such as the "double-empathy problem." It asserts that communication and socializing can be more challenging when interacting with someone of a different neurotype than yourself and more effective with someone of a similar neurotype. This also moves away from the narrative that neurodivergent people have inherent communication and social deficits and shifts the focus toward all parties needing to work to understand one another's communication style.

When we first designed the club, we knew it was essential that it be student-led, neuro(diversity)-affirming, and intersectional. Neuro-affirming is the belief and practice that neurodivergent ways of being are to be validated and supported. We had no template to go

Knowing about neurodiversity is the first step to being inclusive. I want people to know that even if [someone] has a spicy brain, they are still human, and neuro-spicy does not equal weird or stupid." – Grade 10 student

off; I am not aware of a neurodivergent-led neurodiversity club in any other school, and thus we had to make it up as we went. We use the social model of disability and the neurodiversity paradigm to shift the focus of disability away from the individual and toward identifying environmental, attitudinal, and social barriers that affect access to meaningful learning and social opportunities. The students renamed the club The Spices of Life, a play on the neurodivergent community's assertion that we can be "neuro-spicy." Students wanted time to connect with peers, opportunities to validate their experiences, and learn more about issues that affect neurodivergent people. We decided to break the club up into two parts: social time and workshops. Social time is once a week at lunch. It is a time for neurodivergent students to connect, eat together, share common interests, and socialize with each other.

"I appreciate that I can talk to people about my experiences, and they understand." – Grade 10 student

"I really like it when we share our recent interests and projects." – Grade 10 student

The workshops are held monthly during class time and focus on teaching students about issues affecting neurodivergent people and neuro-affirming skills and strategies to support their learning, well-being, and positive self-identity. Attendance is voluntary and based on student interest.

"It's a great place to learn about how to work around sensory issues and meet other folks like yourself!" – Grade 10 student

The workshops are held during class time to ensure students have a break over lunch and to emphasize that this learning is important and should happen at a time accessible to all. Students select the topics and we highlight research, perspectives, and resources from neurodivergent people such as self-advocates, authors, social media influencers, and scholars. Topics we have covered include masking and camouflaging, sensory sensitivities, accessibility tools, and the lived experiences of neurodivergent people. Recently the students proposed an ASL workshop to explore sign language as a form of non-verbal communication.

I am continually reminded about how diverse and intersectional our group is, and that by coming together we create opportunities to build empathy and support for the various facets of neurodivergent and disabled experience. The club acknowledges and actively explores the role of intersectionality in individual experiences of navigating the world and accessing supports. A neurodivergent Indigenous or Black student's experience will be different than a neurodivergent white student's experience. A cis-het neurodivergent student's experience will be different than a neurodivergent student identifying as 2SLGBTQIA+.[2] Someone with an intellectual disability will have different barriers to receiving support than an honours student who struggles to get their support needs recognized.

To keep the club safe, we came up with the following community agreements:

People can divulge as much or as little as they like about their diagnosis or identity, lived experience, or any other personal aspects about themselves.

Neurodivergence is nuanced. Some may identify as neurodivergent, some may have a diagnosis, and some may have both or have one and not the other. We do not gatekeep who can join based on whether they have a diagnosis or not. Diagnosis is a privilege many do not have, and some families and cultures may reject medical-model, deficit-based language and labels. No one has to "prove" they are neurodivergent. If you identify as neurodivergent or an ally, you are welcome.

We respect each individual's right in how they identify. Some may use person-first language (person with autism), and some may use identity-first language (autistic person). We do not accept ableist language or deficit-based labelling as per the tenets of the neurodiversity paradigm.

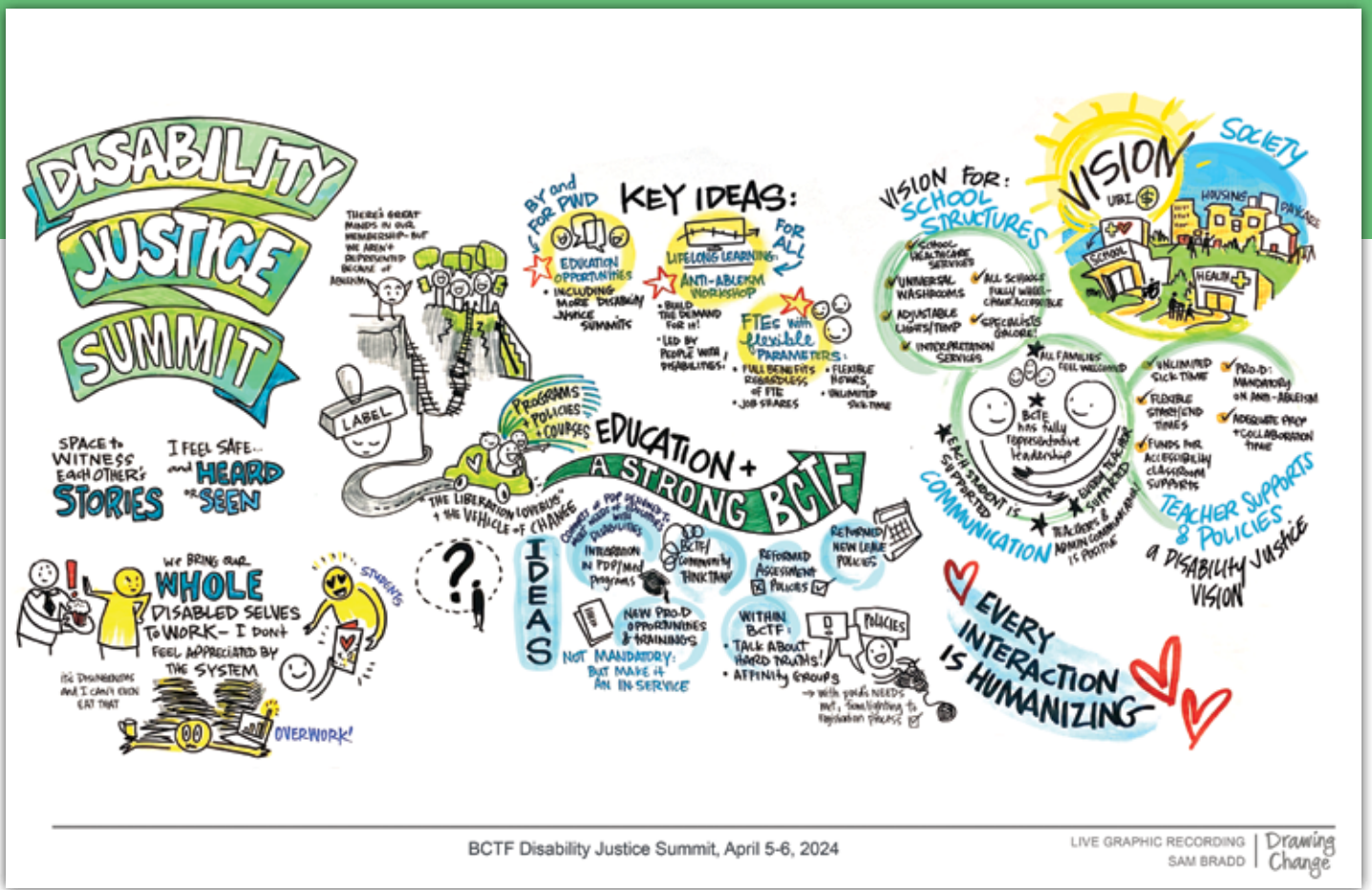
What we share is confidential. We respect that what we share in our clubs and workshops is intended for that space, and we do not have the right to share what other people may have disclosed.

Although still in its first year (and constantly evolving as we go), The Spices of Life has seen a lot of success. With strength in numbers, the students have become strong advocates for neurodiversity, for themselves, and for one another. Collectively we have created a space where neurodivergent people can celebrate identity and share their unique and different ways of being on their own terms. I look forward to our weekly visits when students bring in their latest passion projects or share each other's joys or frustrations of living in a neurotypical world.

Neurodivergent and disabled people have long had other people speak for them, but centring neurodivergent voices and fostering positive neurodivergent identity is a worthy and necessary endeavor if we want to create school communities and societies that truly foster inclusion and diversity. •

1 Socializing in the way of people whose neurocognitive patterns are within the range of society's standards of normal.

2 To learn more about intersectionality, I recommend referring to Talila Lewis's (2022) conceptualization of ableism in relation to racism, capitalism, colonialism, and other interconnected systems of oppression: *www.talilalewis.com/blog/working-definition-of-ableism-january-2022-update*



BCTF Disability Justice Summit, April 5-6, 2024

LIVE GRAPHIC RECORDING SAM BRADD | Drawing Change

BCTF Disability Justice Summit, April 5-6, 2024

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Celebrating disability justice: Interdependence and community

"...the impact on me was profound. I am working on telling anyone and everyone about the importance of events like this at the BCTF and the importance of amplifying disability justice within our union..."
– Disability Justice Summit participant

By Heather Kelley (she/her), BCTF staff

IN EARLY APRIL of this year, the BCTF hosted its second Disability Justice Summit. An event where members from across the province who identified as being part of the disability community (living with physical disabilities, mental health challenges, chronic health challenges, neurodivergence and/or health and medical conditions) came together for a Friday evening and a Saturday to connect and build community, relationships, and leadership capacity. The event emphasized creating the time and space for participants to be reflective and thoughtful about their experiences and the opportunity to vision and dream big about what could be, within the context of what it is like to teach as someone living with a disability.

This was the second event of this kind, the first was held last year in late spring. It was a powerful experience to be with a group of people with a shared lived experience. Just like last time, many folks, including myself, reflected on this being the first time we could recall being in a space specifically for and with people living with a disability or difference.

There was a freedom in knowing that we didn't have to explain or justify our experience to the room, because on some level, we all got it. We didn't just sympathize with the experiences that we were talking about, we lived them. Living with a disability can be lonely; and feeling like you can't be your whole self can be exhausting.

A participant reached out following the event and shared this: "I am still processing the whole thing, but I can tell you that the impact on me was profound. I am working on telling anyone and everyone about the importance of events like this at the BCTF and the importance of amplifying disability justice within our union, especially given the intersectionality of it all."

During the visioning session participants were asked to dream about what teaching and the union would look like if they could change anything. We dreamed about a time when there would be unlimited sick leave, flexible FTEs, easy job shares, schools that were all physically accessible, and more professional development available for all teachers around ableism. The integration of child and health care into schools and the reimagining of schools as community spaces and hubs would also lead to a brighter future for public education. We dreamed about the value of people being more than what they are able to do—a time when every interaction is humanizing.

Disability justice is by nature intersectional, and the participants were able to explore how their lived experiences were similar and different to each other and to think about who wasn't in the room and why that might be. Disability justice as a framework is a way to think about disability that centres intersectionality and the experiences of people who live at the intersecting junctures of oppressions. This includes, but is not limited to, disabled people of colour, immigrants with disabilities, queers with disabilities, and trans and gender non-conforming people. Disability justice also centres the notion of interdependence, and, as Mia Mingus explains, the importance of "...moving away from the 'myth of independence' and the idea that everyone can and should do everything on their own, because no one does it on their own."[1]

These summits are a starting point for us to explore disability justice while building community and working on the ways ableism shows up in our schools, classrooms, and union. If these past two events are any indication, this work is always best done in community, with delicious food and an expectation of interdependency. •

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1 leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/02/12/changing-the-framework-disability-justice/

How assignment-based grading hurts disabled students

By Al Friesen (they/them), teacher and district behaviour specialist, Surrey

"The advantages of outcomes-based assessment are that it's inclusive, flexible, and can be adapted to meet the needs of any learner in the classroom."

IN 2016, the BC Ministry of Education published a document called A Framework for Classroom Assessment. In that document, the Ministry gave an overview of "competency-driven curriculum," also called "outcomes-based assessment." The focus on outcomes, rather than assignments, means that teachers now have more flexibility when it comes to assessment. Take, for example, the English Studies 12 outcome "Students are expected individually and collaboratively to be able to evaluate the relevance, accuracy, and reliability of [oral, written, visual, and digital] texts." Students can show that they've mastered this outcome in a variety of ways, including discussing bias in a particular news article, a debate about the relevance of a 19th century short story to contemporary Canadian culture, or an essay about how satire like Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" might be interpreted if it were published today.

One might argue that this has always been the case under assignment-based grading. Using outcomes-based assessment, however, allows teachers to separate competencies from other learning outcomes. For example, a student who struggles with writing can demonstrate their learning in ways that do not rely on written output. For a student with speech challenges, an entire class discussion about bias isn't necessary; a discussion between the teacher and student could suffice. The notes a student would use for a debate could also be used for assessment, as could an essay outline.

Outcomes-based assessment is far more flexible, which is a boon for teachers and students alike. It allows students to demonstrate their understanding in different ways. For the Swift essay, for instance, one student could show their mastery through the finished product, yes, but a different student could show their mastery through annotations they made on a paper copy of the text, and yet another student could show their mastery through a discussion of the topic with the teacher. The outcome need not be met even through the same topic: a student could show their understanding of an outcome through another piece of writing, or a video, or a discussion unrelated to Swift's essay. This freedom allows every student in a class to thrive as they are not limited to demonstrating their understanding in exactly the same way.

This is the crux: learners are different, learn in different ways, and thus should have the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in different ways. Moreover, students shouldn't be compared with each other, something that is common in assignment-based assessment. We still need to have high expectations for students, but these expectations need to also be reasonable. Indeed, expecting students to all act and respond the same way, whether socially, emotionally, or academically, can be harmful. This is just as true for students in Kindergarten as it is for students in Grade 12: every student in the province should be able to access curriculum, including academic graduation requirements like Mathematics 12 and English Studies 12.

By focusing assessment on outcomes rather than assignments, the curriculum becomes more accessible to all students. Principles of Universal Design for Learning can be applied in every course, Kindergarten to Grade 12, and thus every course should be accessible to every learner. That's how the new curriculum was designed, and that's how it should be implemented. Outcomes-based assessment allows this to be possible. The advantages of outcomes-based assessment are that it's inclusive, flexible, and can be adapted to meet the needs of any learner in the classroom. It should also be pointed out that creating a learning environment suitable for all learners in our classrooms is not optional. This includes assessment. That's why we have specialists like resource teachers and learning support teachers to support us as classroom teachers when assessing students with invisible disabilities. In moving toward outcomes-based assessment, we as a province have become more inclusive and more open toward people with differences. As a disabled educator who works with neurodivergent kids, I am grateful that outcomes-based assessment allows us the flexibility to meet the needs of all students.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Al Friesen is a district behaviour specialist in Surrey. They are also an adjunct professor at UBC instructing EPSE 317 Development and Exceptionality in the Classroom. Al has been a classroom teacher in Grades 1–12, from primary music to AP English Literature and Composition.

STRATEGIES TO IMPLEMENT OUTCOMES-BASED ASSESSMENT

START SMALL

Take it one step at a time. It's not reasonable to expect that you can transform your entire teaching process overnight. Consider developing a single unit that focuses on outcomes rather than assignments and build more over time.

COLLABORATE WITH OTHER EDUCATORS

Connect with resource teachers and learning support teachers at your school for support. Classroom teachers are not expected to do it all alone. These colleagues at your school can support you in implementing more inclusive assessment practices, especially for students with invisible disabilities or students who may seem neurotypical but are in fact neurodivergent.

COLLABORATE WITH STUDENTS

Students are our partners in learning, so ensure that they are aware of what the learning outcomes are throughout the course. For example, show students the big ideas, curricular competencies, and content for a specific course. Then, ask them how they want to learn this content and how they want to demonstrate their understanding throughout and at the end of a unit. This can sometimes be linked to curricular content: the process of working together as a class to design a plan for learning can be compared to similar processes throughout history (e.g., building consensus in domestic and international conflicts and co-operation, as per the Social Studies 10 content). Giving students choice and agency in how they demonstrate learning for any particular outcome leads to greater engagement and makes adaptations easier.

For elementary teachers, consider grouping together big ideas from different subject areas. For example, the question "How has climate change affected civilizations?" brings together the Social Studies 7 big idea "Geographic conditions shaped the emergence of civilizations," the Science 7 big idea "Earth and its climate have changed over geological time," and the ADST 7 big idea "Complex tasks may require multiple tools and technologies." Grouping together specific learning outcomes from each subject area that address this overall question makes assessment simpler. This can also be done (and should be done!) in secondary school, but requires more collaboration with teachers in other subject areas.

USE A "YET/NOT YET" STRUCTURE

Rubrics can be created to implement outcomes-based assessment, but it's frequently simpler to use a "yet/not yet" structure: if a student has met an outcome, great! Celebrate! If not, work with them and create a plan to help them demonstrate understanding.

FOCUS ON STUDENT UNDERSTANDING

Let go of the idea that assignments must be complete to demonstrate mastery of an outcome. The curriculum asks us to assess whether or not a student has mastered a curricular competency or shown understanding of specific content-area knowledge. It does not ask us whether or not a student has completed an assignment.

Assignment-based assessment places a high priority on the assessment, and grading, of individual assignments. If an assignment is missing, then a score of "incomplete" or a zero is sometimes used. It is possible, however, that the specific outcomes addressed with a particular assignment have been demonstrated through another assignment. Focusing on outcomes rather than assignments allows for more flexibility in assessing all students, but especially students who need additional supports. •

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A teacher's journey to an ADHD diagnosis

By an anonymous teacher

I HAVE ADHD. I am a teacher. I am a man. A husband. A father. A runner. I am many things, but I don't let any one of my identities control me entirely; I allow them to exist and to inform different parts of who I am.

During my bachelor of education program, I failed my first teaching practicum. I was told two weeks before the end of my 16-week practicum that I might fail, which of course was against the policy. I was told, "We don't know exactly what it is. We think you'll be a good teacher, but we just think you need more time."

I had a teaching job lined up but was not able to start because of my failed practicum. Instead, I spent that year cutting lawns and using the food bank while my wife was growing our second child. It was difficult.

That failure was really hard to understand because the assessment wasn't clear, and I was able to get students to respond to what I was doing during my practicum. I had also recently and successfully completed a master's degree on a full scholarship.

I succeeded on my second attempt at my practicum. With my degree in hand, I began teaching in a small town in BC, and it was great. Parents and students alike enjoyed the work I was doing and the activities we did.

When I moved to a different school in the district, I had a parent complain to district leadership about my teaching practice. I was flabbergasted. In a fairly short period of time I had gone from being well liked in town to being accused of not doing my job.

My teaching was evaluated, and I failed—twice. I see now that those evaluations were accurate, and they were specific about feedback. I didn't understand the feedback though because I hadn't yet been diagnosed with ADHD.

I conflated being a well-liked teacher with doing my job proficiently. Part of the challenge was working with administrators who liked what I did in one location, and then later working with administrators who were concerned about a part of my work. I am grateful for the learning that came from the administrators I worked with, but the changing expectations were hard to understand, especially with undiagnosed ADHD.

ADHD is strange because it creates selective blind spots. When I was young, I didn't realize that people started businesses.

"I am so thankful for the difficult process that led to my diagnosis and now successful teaching practice."

What a strange thought. I didn't ever think about how a business would begin. I didn't realize that people would go to law school, or that there was a process for getting into law school. The same thing lived in my mind for becoming a plumber. A big empty space that I had never even thought about, or knew that I could think about.

The same blind spot extends to planning. ADHD is a dopamine deficiency, which causes problems for perceiving time. I was not just bad at planning, I didn't understand why anyone would need to plan things. Finances, vacations, curriculum and assessment, training for a marathon: these are things that can be planned or mapped out in advance. I didn't recognize the role planning had in supporting kids because I was achieving good results without focusing on it at my first school. So, not only could I not tell you what I would be teaching in February when it was September, I would be incredulous that you would even ask me the question, because I wouldn't know how fast the students would learn.

Since I started taking medicine for ADHD, I am able to understand a. the existence of planning, and b. the importance of planning for both myself and the students. It may sound weird, but I am so grateful to understand this now. I keep thinking, "Wait, this is how 'normal' people think?"

I also struggled with assessment before my ADHD diagnosis because I was focused on the idea that data-driven assessment is impossible. In my mind, I estimated there would be one million data points in any one class, which is unreasonable for any person to collect, so why bother? For example, in a music class with 40 kids, playing two notes per second, for 40 minutes, assessed five different ways (length, pitch, tuning, articulation, intonation) there would be 960,000 data points to collect (40x2x60x40x5 = 960,000). I now understand that we can grade based on a small slice of ability that is foundational for all other skills. But I didn't know that existed or was necessary, nor was I motivated to collect data in the way my admin thought was necessary because I was focused on the knowledge that it was impossible.

So, I struggled and failed. The union and the district supported me through a diagnosis, which changed my entire perspective and method of teaching. My friends laughed and said that they had known for years I had ADHD. I was baffled because I suspected that ADHD wasn't that real.

I was given some time to get used to the medicine, and I passed my third evaluation with my superintendent with flying colours. She was very sweet and asked, "Why am I even here?" For those who don't know: a third evaluation has to be done by the superintendent because if it's a failure, there's a lot at stake, including a possible loss of your teaching license, so they want to make sure it's done right. She came in without prior knowledge of my story. By that time, I was connecting the beginning of lessons to the middle, reviewing well, planning well, and assessing carefully.

I am so thankful for the difficult process that led to my diagnosis and now successful teaching practice. It was awful and stressful; I was shocked every time I failed. The worst part was not being able to share parts of the process with students, especially because they were enjoying learning in my classes *during* the failures. Parents seemed happy with what was happening in my class. I was even gifted mugs and coffee shop gift cards at Christmas, which is not as common in older grades. So, my failure was happening while parents and students gave me positive feedback. That made it harder to understand. But I am thankful.

Now, I can help colleagues go through difficulty, and hopefully I can empathize with students and teachers as they navigate working together from different viewpoints.

The stigma about neurodivergence and mental health isn't something I notice, because I am so socially motivated and outgoing, so I am happy to share my struggles. That said, since starting medicine for ADHD, I have become a lot more careful about listening or taking the temperature of the room to see if my stories are wanted.

ADHD does not define my identity in my life outside or inside the classroom. However, getting a diagnosis, being supported in learning about the ways it affects my perception of the world, and taking medication for it, have helped me thrive in my role as a teacher. Now, my experience is a strength when I work with neurodivergent students who I can see need the supports I needed. I am one example of how important diagnosis and support can be for neurodivergent people to adapt to a world designed for neurotypical brains. •

"Now, I can help colleagues go through difficulty, and hopefully I can empathize with students and teachers as they navigate working together from different viewpoints."

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LOCAL PROFILE

MOVING FORWARD AS ALLIES: WORKING TOWARD RECONCILIATION IN THE VANCOUVER ISLAND WEST TEACHERS' UNION

PHOTO
Reconciliation retreat participants L to R: Robert John, Kaija Farstad, Ian Caplette, Devon Hansen, Julie Smith, Connie Chan, Audrey Smith, Lee Vanden Ham, Carole Tootill, Azar Kamran, Nathan George, Marie Lavoie, Richard Samuel, Tammy Dillon, Elmar Nabbe, Christian Stapff, Valerie Hansen, Jeremy Payne, Jay Ishaya, Sarah Kerman. Sarah Young photo.

FOR THOSE OF US living in BC’s urban centres, it’s easy to forget just how remote parts of our province can be. Most of us are used to easy access to shopping and necessities. We can drive to grocery stores and hospitals within the city limits of our own communities. For members of the Vancouver Island West Teachers’ Union (VIWTU), these activities require a lot more planning.

With just 35 full-time members, and fewer than a dozen teachers teaching on call, this local is spread out across the territories of the Nuchatlaht, Mowachaht/Muchalaht, Ehattesaht/Chinehkint, and Kyuquot/Checleseht First Nations.

The members of this local serve families in four communities: Gold River, Kyuquot, Tahsis, and Zeballos. Elmar Nabbe, VIWTU Local President, has taught in all four communities and has a thorough understanding of the challenges of teaching and living in each area. The communities, though all very remote, have greatly different demographics and geographic challenges for teachers.

Kyuquot is the most remote school in the local, with just five teachers at a K–12 school in a community that is only accessible by water taxi. Housing, while challenging to access across the province, is exceptionally difficult to come by in such a remote community, so all of the teachers live in teacherages. Groceries are shipped in once per week, with an extra cost of nearly $80 per order for shipping costs. The nearest grocery store requires 10 hours of round-trip travel across ocean, logging roads, and highways.

Teachers Tammy Dillon, Kaija Farstad, and Sarah Kerman have found teaching in the community to be one of the most rewarding parts of their careers, despite the challenges of being so isolated from other parts of the province.

“We get to really be a part of the community,” said Sarah. “There are no cars in our community, so I walk to the school, I see my students in the community all day every day, and I get to centre the community in my classroom practice.”

The school works closely with the Kyuquot/Checleseht First Nation to support students, nearly all of whom are Indigenous, through locally responsive curriculum. This means including culturally relevant teachings from local leaders, supporting student engagement in land-based learning, and incorporating Nuu-chah-nulth language into all aspects of the school.

“There is a difference between teaching a second language and teaching a cultural heritage language,” said Tammy. “We have to find different ways to integrate the language into the school and community to make sure it isn’t forgotten.”

This year, Kyuquot Elementary Secondary School will host the annual district-wide, student-led cultural gathering. For this event, students from each school in the district will come together in Kyuquot to celebrate local Indigenous cultures through presentations, song, dance, and feasts.

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The teachers from Tahsis intend to bring all of their students to witness the cultural gathering in Kyuquot as part of their commitment to reconciliation.

In Tahsis, unlike Kyuquot, the student population is predominately white. For teacher Jeremy Payne, this means his classroom has a strong focus on reconciliation.

“To me, reconciliation is having hearts open, hearing the truth, and acting together to bring healing and learning,” said Jeremy.

Through partnerships with community members, Jeremy’s students have had an opportunity to learn from the Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation. Students have learned introductory protocol so they can introduce themselves respectfully to Elders who visit their class. From Margaretta James, the school First Nations support worker, the students have learned about the history of the Mowachaht/Muchalaht people, including the historical significance of Yuquot Whalers’ Shrine.

Whalers’ shrines are sites of cultural significance to Nuu-chah-nulth nations and included collections of important cultural artifacts. The generational Yuquot Whalers’ Shrine embodied ancient spiritual practices connected to preparation for early Nuu-chah-nulth whaling practices. Many of the spiritual artifacts have been in storage for over 100 years in the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

The students in Jeremy’s school put their learning around reconciliation into action when they learned about the artifacts stolen from whalers’ shrines. Students are currently writing letters to the museum requesting the artifacts be returned to the community from which they were removed.

“Kids can shift stories into something more honest and beautiful,” said Jeremy. “They teach their families and the adults around them when they know the truth.”

Mowachaht/Muchalaht Elders and representatives also travelled to New York to initiate claims for the rightful return of their cultural property. As of yet, the artifacts have not been returned, but the students are hopeful as they continue to back their commitment to reconciliation with action.

“I want our children to come out of the school system with the same amount of care and love they came in with.”

– Marie Lavoie, Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation

"This retreat has been an eye-opener for me and makes me want to support teachers however I can."
– Devon Hansen, Kyuquot/Checleseht First Nation

"Teachers in this local are very committed to reconciliation, and so is the school board," said Elmar.

In this district, like many across the province, school and district administrators have opportunities to meet with leaders from the local nations to discuss reconciliation and partnerships for education. Teachers, however, do not often get an opportunity to participate in these discussions.

"About a year and half ago, I listened to Ian Caplette from the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council speak passionately about his vision for the future and the way forward for reconciliation," said Elmar. "My colleagues didn't get to hear this conversation because it happened at a meeting of mostly administrators. But the grassroots movement is in the classroom; teachers are the ones with the children. We can better support students and reconciliation if we work directly with the nations."

After nearly two years of brainstorming and problem-solving, Elmar was able to create space for teachers to meet directly with members from the local nations at the first reconciliation retreat hosted by the VIWTU at Strathcona Park Lodge and Outdoor Education Centre.

The VIWTU sponsored attendees from each school to join the retreat using the BCTF Political Action Grant.

These members will be able to take their learning back to their school to share with their colleagues. Representatives from the nations whose lands the schools occupy were also present.

The retreat was facilitated by Richard Samuel from the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council. Richard shared that reconciliation is change, and that working toward change requires discomfort sometimes. Rather than following colonial ways of meeting and working, the retreat put into practice Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The group had no formal agenda or predetermined outcomes. Instead, they sat together in a talking circle.

"We're all equal in a talking circle," shared Audrey Smith from Nuchatlaht First Nation.

The circle created a respectful space where teachers could ask questions about their role in supporting reconciliation in schools and members of the nations could share their hopes and goals for the future of their communities' children.

"I want to see our children learn our traditional ways, but they also need to know the ways of the modern world they live in. We need to find a common ground," said Nathan George from the Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation.

→

“Elmar is what we need to build up our union; he has a vision, and I can get behind passion any day.”
– Connie Chan, teacher, Gold River

Lee Vanden Ham, a teacher from Zeballos, is trying to do just that in his teaching practice. Lee incorporates Indigenous ways of knowing and being across the curriculum and draws on community members from the nation to guide students’ learning about culture and heritage.

The recent death of a mother whale, and the subsequent stranding of her calf, in the waters off Zeballos were culturally significant events in the community. Lee worked closely with Shelia John, the school First Nations support worker, and Victoria Wells, a community leader, to create culturally appropriate lessons related to the events taking place in the community. The students later visited the site to offer prayers to the whale; however, not all students expressed interest in participating.

“When kids don’t want to be a part of their cultural events or learning, I wonder what my place is,” said Lee. “How do I navigate my role in helping students learn about their culture as a visitor on this land?”

Julie Smith from the Nuchatlaht First Nation offered that it’s important for kids to see and be around culture, even if they don’t appear to demonstrate interest. “Not every aspect of culture will resonate with every child, and that’s okay. They are developing their understanding of culture through experiences like this, and they will take away pieces that resonate with them,” said Julie.

The retreat created opportunities for many rich and meaningful conversations about what reconciliation in schools looks like, but the most important outcome is the relationships that were built between teachers and community members.

On the second day of the retreat, the attendees moved from a talking circle to an outdoor team-building activity on a ropes course. Through participation in the ropes course, the attendees worked collaboratively to overcome obstacles—a visual representation of the work they did the day before in the talking circle, and a way to further build the relationships and trust that were established on day one.

"Reconciliation is only meaningful through collaboration with as many community members as possible," said Connie Chan, a teacher from Gold River. "Building relationships through volunteering for community organizations and coaching youth sports are a few ways that allow me to bring community connection into my teaching. I am a community member first. I want to start a family here, so the impact I have isn't isolated just inside the school," she added.

At the end of the retreat, the teachers and community members all expressed interest in carrying on the conversations they started that weekend. Elmar is now planning a second reconciliation retreat for the fall, when a new cycle of grant applications will open for additional funding.

"My hope is that teachers and members of the nations will have more trust communicating with each other, so we can move forward as allies," said Elmar.

The Vancouver Island West Teachers' Union may be small and isolated, but as this first reconciliation retreat shows, local leadership and grassroots organizing have the power to decolonize the structures we work within, all while creating meaningful relationships and long-lasting change.

Teachers and members of the nations arrived at the retreat with open hearts and minds, and were able to hear each other's questions, challenges, and priorities. Future retreats will create opportunities to expand the work already happening in schools across the local, and work to overcome barriers they face in their work toward reconciliation.

"The reason things change is because now we have people in the system who are willing to listen with open hearts. That listening must continue," said Marie Lavoie from the Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation. •

PHOTOS

Pages 22–23: A view at Strathcona Park Lodge (top left); participants sharing as a group (bottom left) and then breaking into community circles (top right). **Pages 24–25:** Connie Chan begins the ropes course (top left); Richard Samuel, Julie Smith, and Sarah Kerman support Carole Tootill on the ropes (left); Elmar Nabbe and Lee Vanden Ham navigate the course (above). Sunjum Jhaj and Sarah Young photos.

Photos provided by CIVIX

Student Vote: Empowering future voters

By Lindsay Mazzucco, CEO of CIVIX

FOR THE LAST 20 YEARS, educators throughout the country have been engaging their schools in a program that brings democracy into the classroom and helps students develop the habit of electoral participation.

Student Vote is a parallel election for students under the voting age that coincides with general elections. Students explore government and democracy, research the parties and platforms, and discuss the election with family and friends. In the culminating activity, students take on the roles of election workers, set up voting stations, and cast ballots for official candidates running in their electoral district.

Participating schools receive lesson plans, videos, slide decks, and other tools to teach key concepts and support their research and analysis of the parties and candidates. Ballots, ballot boxes, and voting screens are also provided to help create an authentic voting experience.

The initiative was designed to give students a taste of politics, foster their connection to the community, and help reverse the decline in voter turnout.

We believe democracy and citizenship are best learned through practice, and the need to foster the skills of responsible and informed citizenship has only grown more urgent. We are so grateful for the time and passion that teachers dedicate to bringing this program to life for their students.

Program evaluations have demonstrated that Student Vote develops the characteristics of young voters among participants, including enhanced civic knowledge, increased political interest and discussion about politics, and a greater sense that voting is a civic duty.

The first Student Vote program available to British Columbia teachers was held during the 2004 Canadian federal election. The project engaged more than 245 schools and 30,000 students in the province. Twenty years later, the program now engages 1,200 schools and around 200,000 students during provincial and federal elections throughout British Columbia.

Teachers love the program and keep coming back. We asked three local CIVIX ambassadors why they are involved with Student Vote. Here is what they had to say.

GET INVOLVED

CIVIX is proud to collaborate with Elections BC to provide the Student Vote program free to schools for the October 2024 provincial election. Sign up your school for Student Vote BC at ***www.studentvote.ca***.

LIKE A LEARNER'S LICENSE FOR VOTING
JEREMY REID, KAMLOOPS THOMPSON

Student Vote provides students with an opportunity to practise exercising their democratic rights. It's like getting their learner's license for voting in a safe format, where they can learn the process and see how it goes. Hopefully, when they're of age to be able to vote, they'll see the importance and take the time to vote.

We've been doing Student Vote for a number of years. The last time I looked at the numbers for our school district, even though we're not the largest school, we had more ballots cast than any other school. I'm so proud of our school-wide engagement in the program. And it's kind of built-in now. It's baked into the culture at the school. Whenever there's a hint of some election, I always have students coming up to me wondering about the next Student Vote.


Jeremy Reid

A REWARDING EXPERIENCE
KATIE GLOVER, LANGLEY

In my school, we set up the voting booths in the library and have student volunteers from social studies classes run the polls from before the first bell until the end of the day. We advertise the election beforehand and make reminder announcements the day of. Our goal is to have as many students vote as possible!

Participating in Student Vote is more than just about "election day." I really enjoy the lessons, research, and conversations about democracy students engage in leading up to Student Vote day. It also feels very rewarding when students are eager to see the results of the real election after participating in the program.

I participate in Student Vote because I think it's essential that students have the opportunity to understand the importance of voting and practise engaging in democracy. My hope is that by practising voting, they will feel confident and motivated to vote in the future.

Katie Glover

EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO TAKE ACTION
ALISTAIR KING, NANAIMO

In my classroom, I stress that understanding and participating in the democratic process is not just a civic duty but a vital way to shape our society. Participating in Student Vote allows students at my school to engage directly with this process. It's an immersive way for them to learn about political parties, their platforms, and the electoral system. The program helps me demystify the voting process, make it accessible, and show young people that their voices matter.

As the social studies department head, I co-ordinate the distribution of CIVIX-provided lesson plans to teachers and lead my students through the learning process. We form an election team from the student body to manage our mock election, mirroring real-world electoral roles. A highlight is our all-candidates meeting/debate/town hall, where election candidates engage with students in a lively discussion, deepening their understanding of political issues and processes.

Student Vote transforms abstract concepts into tangible, actionable experiences. This hands-on approach ignites their interest and deepens their understanding of political engagement. Seeing a student who was indifferent to politics become passionate about a particular issue or candidate reminds me of the power of education to inspire change.

The program also sparks discussions that extend beyond the classroom, involving families and the wider community, thereby strengthening the democratic fabric of our society. •


Alistair King

"I want to be an engineer!" How to keep girls in STEM through inclusive education

By Michelle Dusko Biferie, UBC Faculty of Education doctoral student, Vancouver

"...women continue to be underrepresented in STEM in Canada: only 34% of Canadians with a STEM post-secondary degree and only 23% of the STEM workforce are women."

IT'S TIME to change how we approach STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education by giving girls an equal footing with inclusive STEM education. There is a STEM workforce shortage in North America, and our technological, research, and development industries are losing ground to international competition.[6] Unfortunately, women continue to be underrepresented in STEM in Canada: only 34% of Canadians with a STEM post-secondary degree (Stats Canada, 2019) and only 23% of the STEM workforce[2] are women. In contrast, in Europe more women than men are in STEM careers: 51.3% and 48.7%, respectively.[1] Our young women aren't getting the support they need to succeed in STEM despite popular girls-only STEM programming during their primary and secondary education. More problematically, the not-enough-girls-in-STEM problem is framed as a "women's issue"; however, it needs the full participation of all genders, schools, communities, and parents to encourage young women to choose and stay in STEM.

Gender differences in STEM academic and professional achievement largely depend on social, cultural, and associated psychological factors. The recent increase in girls-only STEM education programs addresses mostly individual psychological factors, such as stereotype threat, poor STEM identity, low confidence, lack of positive female role models, and lack of a sense of belonging in STEM.[3] School and non-profit organization partnerships that enable sharing resources and teaching practices yield best results: young women report a stronger STEM identity, greater feeling of belonging in STEM, greater confidence in their abilities, more friendships and support with and from other like-minded girls, and more knowledge about and interest in pursuing a STEM career.[4,5,6] Examples of girls-only approaches include female scientists discussing their career paths, "girlified" STEM activities such as lipstick- and soap-making to illustrate STEM principles, discussions about what it means to be a woman in STEM and the facilitators and barriers to equal participation. However, these programs' temporary successes still don't translate into significant growth in the number of girls entering STEM programs and careers.

Despite the significant gains for girls participating in these programs, girls-only STEM programs are a Band-Aid solution, and these solutions place the problem on girls themselves. These programs attempt to bolster girls' strengths while ignoring the rest of us that can promote equitable participation in STEM. Girls-only programs reinforce the misguided idea that girls need "special approaches" and "girl-centric" activities to thrive as budding engineers and scientists. These programs support girls in isolation from the world they actually live in. Girls alone cannot change the disheartening statistics of Canada's STEM workforce composition. As parents, educators, and school administrators of any and all genders, we also need to change.

Systems thinking has us seeing the student, the school environment, and the home as all interdependent and dynamic influences on the appeal of STEM for girls. Instead of focusing on parts of the whole (i.e., girls), we need to look at how changes in teacher attitudes and approaches, school climate, and parental influence can work synergistically to promote change. Instead of just addressing the symptoms of

the problem of girls' weaker STEM identities, we try to be courageous in avoiding simple, Band-Aid solutions (like girls-only programming) and see change as a process that permeates all parts of the system.[8]

In other words, we must focus on the system if we genuinely want girls to succeed in STEM. We need to be the change we want to see. Below is a series of tips on how to help young women along in their STEM journeys based on the roles we share in their lives.

TEACHERS

What the research says: most STEM pedagogy focuses on teaching STEM subjects to boys and students with an aptitude for STEM. Inclusive STEM pedagogy focuses on universal and whole-child approaches that are effective for girls and marginalized and vulnerable students. More traditional approaches to classroom management can inadvertently create an uncomfortable learning environment for such students and reinforce gendered expectations of STEM academic performance and stereotypes.[3,6,7]

What you can do

- Create an inclusive classroom that is gender-neutral. Everyone is an engineer or a scientist.
- Be mindful of stereotype threat. As a leader, students look up to you and notice how you think about them. Set high expectations for all.
- Make STEM a social activity: promote collaborative, hands-on, project-based experiences that focus on communication and teamwork and encourage exploration, imagination, and ownership of the learning products. Assign specific roles to students irrespective of gender and cultivate critical thinking and personal discoveries. These approaches foster greater STEM identities.
- Provide specific, positive feedback on effort, strategies, and behaviours to improve self-confidence. Enable students to learn from failure and emphasize that skills can be learned through practice and problem-solving.

SCHOOL LEADERS

What the research says: you don't need to be a STEM school to encourage inclusive teaching of STEM.[6,7]

What you can do

- Build connections with industry and community organizations that promote STEM education. Create programs that all students can participate in regardless of ability or gender.
- Provide leadership in cross-grade and intra-school STEM activities.
- Promote a positive school culture where students feel safe to be themselves and where all students are allowed to participate as equals with others.

PARENTS

What the research says: parents model gendered behaviours and can influence child development through expectations around gender roles and activities. Even small children learn through parental modelling and unconscious biases. Parental support was seen as one of the most significant predictors of girls staying with their STEM dreams, especially in teenage years when girls' interest in STEM wanes because of gendered cultural expectations.[3,5,6,7]

What you can do

- Be mindful of unconscious bias and how it shows up in your choice of toys and expectations of boy and girl behaviour.
- Be a STEM role model; change gender roles in your family.
- Notice and encourage your child's interests despite pressure from family or friends.
- Believe in your daughter and set high academic expectations for STEM.[3]

We need to move away from thinking and acting like STEM is associated with boyhood or masculinity. After all, pipettes, microscopes, and computers don't know the gender of the person using them. Women in STEM make unique contributions to their industries, focusing on social good, promoting equality, and challenging dominant neo-liberal, profit-driven motives.[3,7] Changing our deeply ingrained cultural and social understandings of what it means to do and be in STEM will take time. In the process of change, we must give girls and women more support and recognition of their strengths in an inclusive way that benefits not just girls but everyone who wants to fulfill their dreams in STEM. •

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iStock.com/SDIProductions

Identity Day to foster connection and belonging

By Jennifer Strachan, Gianna Holmes, and **Harjit Chauhan,** teachers, Maple Ridge

THIS FALL at Fairview Elementary School, we decided to set a positive tone for the new school year by launching a school-wide celebration of culture, history, and identity through Identity Day. The idea proved to be a resounding success, warmly embraced by students and parents alike. The event served as a unique platform for students to share their interests and cultural backgrounds, fostering connections among peers, teachers, and parents.

Classroom teachers approached the event with creativity, showcasing projects ranging from artwork and poems to poster boards, memory suitcases, and interactive displays, each reflecting the unique identity of the students. All students actively participated, and some teachers integrated Identity Day as a unit. The overwhelmingly positive response led to new connections and meaningful conversations.

SHARING IDENTITY IN JENNIFER'S GRADES 5/6 CLASS

As a classroom teacher with 23 years of experience, I witnessed my students genuinely engaged, interested, and impressed by their classmates' presentations. I chose to teach a unit on identity and being yourself leading up to our school-wide Identity Day celebrations. We watched videos, biographies, and slideshows about what identity means, read stories about families' and people's identities, and listened to personal stories, including my own. A few of the resources I used to support my unit on identity were Discovering My Identity lesson from Learning for Justice,[1] Social Identity Wheel by the University of Michigan,[2] and Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network's identity lesson.[3]

My class presented poster and trifold boards showcasing their identities. We planned our posters/trifolds around a graphic organizer and rubric that we created as a class. Some students also had artifacts to share with their projects, including cookbooks, stuffed animals, artwork, and photo albums.

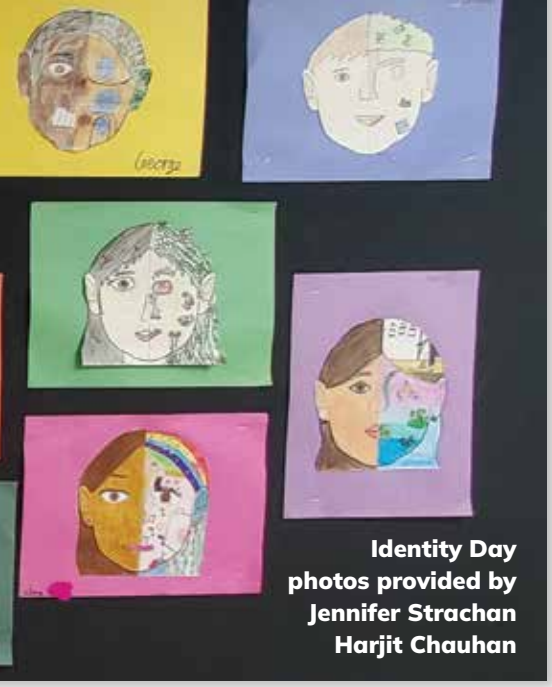
On the presentation day we had a rotation system divided by our two school hallways: one group would visit the other and see/hear the presentations, then they would switch. Parents visited at the end of the day. The rotation system allowed students from different grades to explore various projects, creating a sense of unity and community within the school. Identity Day stands out as a highly recommended activity for anyone seeking to strengthen and build their school community.

LEARNING ABOUT IDENTITY IN GIANNA'S LIBRARY COMMONS

"Identity" was the theme in the library commons for September and early October. Students were introduced to a series of books that promoted positive personal and cultural identity. The Kindergarten students drew pictures highlighting a special interest or fact about themselves—these pictures were posted outside the library for all to enjoy.

Links to references can be found in the online version of this article at *teachermag.ca*.

1 *www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/lessons/discovering-my-identity*
2 *drive.google.com/file/d/1w7yo6ljyS0pnvEO-BOrE7Aohmaa9n5Jf/view*
3 *www.glsen.org/activity/identity-lesson-grades-3-5*



Identity Day photos provided by Jennifer Strachan Harjit Chauhan

There are many excellent picture books on the market to augment an Identity Day project. Some titles I like to use to teach this unit are below:

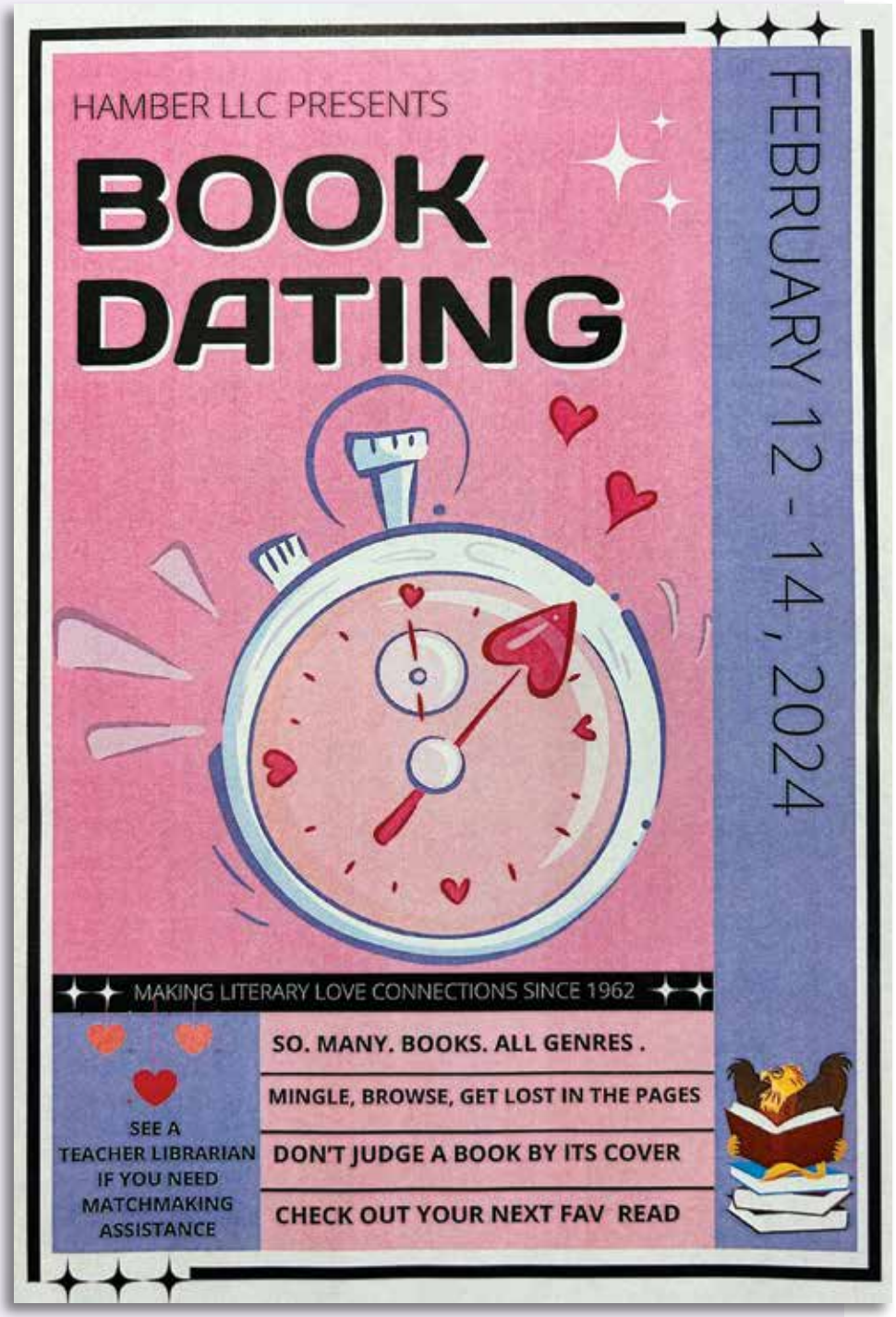
Lunch from Home by Joshua Stein
Where Are You From? by Yamile Méndez
I Can Be All Three by Salima Alikhan
My Day with Gong Gong by Sennah Yee
Big by Vashti Harrison
Eyes That Kiss in the Corners by Joanna Ho
Be Who You Are by Todd Parr
Whoever You Are by Mem Fox
The Best Part of Me: Children Talk about Their Bodies in Pictures and Words by Wendy Ewald
Remarkably You by Pat Zietlow Miller
The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi
The Proudest Blue by Ibtihaj Muhammad

CELEBRATING IDENTITY IN HARJIT'S ELL CLASS

English language learner (ELL) students vary in ages, backgrounds, and English development. To springboard the discussion about the word "identity" for my learners and what it means, I began with the question of how we got our names. Names can be closely connected to who we are, where we come from, and our history. Over the years, I have found that many international education students from South Korea choose an English name to "fit into" mainstream culture. I have also noticed ELL students will often shorten their names so they are easier for others to pronounce. One of my earliest childhood memories was having my own name mispronounced and I recalled thinking how it would be easier to change it. To support the discussion about names, I read aloud *My Name is Saajin Singh*, by author Kuljinder Kaur Brar. After the read-aloud, many ELL students made connections with the main character of the story and how it takes courage to correct another person. Students excitedly shared stories about their names, and for those students who did not know what their names meant, they asked their families for more information. This led to further meaningful discussions about how language, the countries we come from or are born in, and our culture are connected to identity.

Next, I showed my ELL students a picture of an iceberg. According to anthropologist Edward T. Hall, the idea of an iceberg can be used to explain our cultural awareness. He described how the top part of an iceberg, or the visible part, is the surface culture that the people around us can see about us, and that the bottom of the iceberg, or hidden part, is the invisible or deeper culture that others do not see. I modified the idea of the iceberg so my ELL students could share out the parts of their identity that were visible at school and compare them to the parts that are not as visible because they are at home or around different parts of the community. My ELL students described their appearance, clothes, foods, hobbies, and the activities they enjoy at school as the visible part of the iceberg. They described family customs, belief systems, traditional foods, cultural holidays, and community connections outside of school as the invisible part of their identity. Together, we discovered that our identities have both visible and invisible parts, like an iceberg, and all these parts combined make us who we truly are.

Overall, Identity Day was an exciting learning opportunity for my ELL students as they had a platform to share about themselves at school, and they felt proud to share the parts that were not visible to everyone. The students deepened connections with their peers, students from around the school, and teachers. Each share was unique and expressed individual creativity, and it was a great way for students, staff, and families to get to know each other better and embrace the diverse nature of our identities. •



SWIPE RIGHT FOR READING

SPEED DATING WITH BOOKS AT HAMBER SECONDARY

by Tracy D. Smith (she/her), teacher, Vancouver

TWO WEEKS into teaching four blocks of English 11 at my new school, Eric Hamber Secondary, my class was invited to the school library to select individual silent reading books. I had no idea how incredible a sight it would be when I headed down to the library learning commons to find tables adorned not only with stacks of books but also hearts, roses, and fake candles. It turns out my grand idea of "speed dating with books" was not so unique after all. Stephanie Lemmon and Gillian Lau, a dynamic librarian duo, not only had the same brainwave ages ago but also took it to the next level by scheduling it around Valentine's Day, adding decorations, and extending the metaphor to its most engaging end.

There I was, thinking I was so clever coming up with this idea at my old school, only to find out it's an old tried-and-true practice here. The library was transformed into a literary love nest, and I couldn't have been more thrilled. The idea was to encourage our students to casually date books, you know, no strings attached. No big commitment, no need to pop the question—just pick up a book, give it a read, and see if there's a spark.

Stephanie and Gillian had the tables arranged strategically, and they had already picked out some gems to showcase. As the students took their seats, the teacher-librarians became the matchmakers, providing book talks and highlighting the allure of each genre to pique the students' curiosity. Snippets about each book were shared, highlights of their quirks and charms, which made it impossible for the students not to be intrigued.

The students then tried out different books at each table, just like changing partners at a dance. If they found a new book crush, they could

gracefully say goodbye to the old one, with an "it's not you, it's me," and move on to the next literary adventure. The timer was set, and students had three to four minutes to read any of the books at their table. We encouraged them to read the book jacket cover and then start on page one. They could even just read the book jacket of each book at their table. Students were not to talk or discuss the books with each other but to read for the whole time, even if there wasn't a book there that they seemed to like. Part of the point of the session was to just practise their reading skills.

The best part? The whole thing wasn't about settling down with the first book they liked. It was about exploring, trying out different genres, and not judging a book by its cover (though that might be the start of the attraction) but looking beyond that first impression and finding out if it's a match. Finally, and hopefully, they would find that one book they wanted to take home and introduce to their parents, a metaphorical way of saying they found a keeper.

The beauty of this book "dating" experience is that it breaks down the barriers of judgment, urging students not to use "looks" as their only deciding factor but rather to explore a book's content and decide if it resonates with them. By the end of the session, students had "dated" several books, met new authors, and explored genres they might not have considered before. The aim was to help students see that books are more than mere words on pages—they are gateways to new worlds, perspectives, and emotions.

Our library turned into a literary love fest, and the excitement was contagious. The students discovered that books are like relationships: some are meant to be and some are just passing flings. But the thrill of the chase and the joy of discovering a new literary love were palpable.

So, fellow teachers and librarians, if you're looking to ignite that passion for reading in your students, consider giving speed dating with books a shot. It is working for us, and I'm sure it will work for you too. Swipe right for reading, and let the bookish romance begin! •

PHOTOS
Opposite: Poster promoting the book-dating event.
Right: Hamber School Library decorated for the occasion.
Below: Stephanie Lemmon, Tracy D. Smith, and Gillian Lau (L to R).
Photos provided by author.


Tout est possible!
J'accepte la grande aventure d'être moi
Les Jours de la Semaine
lundi
mardi
mercredi
jeudi
vendredi
samedi
dimanche
Numéro de jours passé à l'école
106
La saison est
et le temps fait
et
octobre
Les Couleurs
blanc
blanche
noir(e)
gris(e)
vert(e)

Teaching: A love story

By Brianna Romeo, teacher, Maple Ridge

WHEN I WAS SEVEN, I wrote that I wanted to be a teacher on the back of a story we were writing for our creative writing unit. When I was in high school, I watched my teachers instruct their lessons and daydreamed about what I would do differently (I was a precocious teenager, mostly to a fault). I resisted the idea of teaching upon entering university. I knew I wanted to work with young people, and so I did an undergrad with a major that focused on children and their development, but was no longer sure about teaching them within the public school system—after all, hadn't I just worked for 12 years to get out of the school system? Once I did a practicum inside an elementary school, I quickly changed my mind. And so, the love story began.

I love schools for what they represent, for their straightforwardness in description. They are buildings usually located in the middle of a community with the intention of educating nearby kids. They are also places of giving and aid within the community: they're the leaders of breakfast clubs, food drives, clothing donation centres, backpack programs. I love the gap they fill within communities. And have you ever been to a school at pick-up time and marveled at all of the life that exists? It's a buzzing, open, full-of-life place. Open the doors and peek into classrooms, and there are even more treasures within. Paper-craft covered hallways leading to classrooms, each with a distinct personality, routine, structure—a classroom is an ecosystem, a small village, and the teacher at the front is its steward and guide.

My personal life has taken me on a route such that I am not sure what my next steps as a teacher look like. I am surprised at how much I am mourning the loss of my own classroom already, just as I was beginning. I have been strategizing ways to keep a part of my career with me—a master of education seems a natural step—and I can't help but be grateful for all the ways that the community of education shapes a person. I feel a loss of identity; there is a part of me that will mourn the day that I can't be in a classroom for a significant stretch of time.

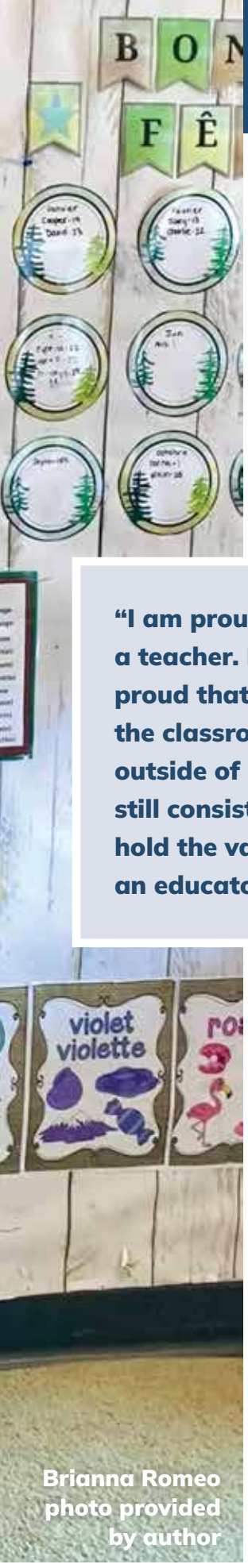
What is it that makes us educators so passionate about teaching? Why, even when the kids are acting like it's a full moon the day after Halloween in the middle of April, do we continue to love a job that sometimes feels like it won't love us back? What is it about us that finds unparalleled joy in watching a young child struggle and persevere and succeed? I have been trying to figure it out, taking microscope and magnifying glass to the art that is teaching.

The best that I can come up with is that educators all share the distinct ability to lead, to manage a small army, to find creative ways to drum up excitement on subjects that kids may be less than enthused about. The system of education may seem outdated and tired and in need of a facelift, and yet the people who work within the system are some of the most creative, out-of-the-box, and intelligent. The world, I think, would be a better place if teachers were made presidents and prime ministers.

I am proud to be a teacher. I am proud that within the classroom, or outside of it, I will still consistently hold the values of an educator tight: creating strong community and being connected to those around me, the gift of learning, and the ability to critically think and share that thinking with others.

I am early yet in my journey. And, as Glennon Doyle has said, "You must decide what you believe to be the most important work. And then, you must go and do that work." The beauty of the work of a teacher is that it is always changing; it is a dynamic river of thoughts, ideas, systems, and structures that fluctuate with the times and the lives of the teachers who inhabit them. The only constant is this: that I teach as I breathe. A love story that, like any other, has ebbs and flows and is marked by work, by dedication, by passion, and by the continuous desire to show up—day in and day out. •

"I am proud to be a teacher. I am proud that within the classroom, or outside of it, I will still consistently hold the values of an educator tight..."



Brianna Romeo photo provided by author

PEER SUPPORT SERVICE

Peer Support Service (PSS) consultants bring a trauma-informed lens to their coaching. We use the BCTF Aboriginal Lens to help ground us in supporting members: respect, relationship, relevance, responsibility, reciprocity, reconciliation, resilience. If you are new to the profession, have a new assignment, are returning from a leave of absence, have a plan of assistance, or are in receipt of a less-than-satisfactory evaluation report, PSS can help.

PSS consultants collaborate; share resources; help with planning, assessment, and curriculum; and more. This confidential program is free for members and release time is provided.

For more information and to access PSS, contact Sherry Payne, Miranda Light, or your local president. PSS is available online upon request.

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Professional and Social Issues
604-871-1803
1-800-663-9163
spayne@bctf.ca

Miranda Light, Administrative Assistant
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INTERNAL MEDIATION SERVICE

The Internal Mediation Service (IMS) can help manage unresolved conflicts with colleagues and repair professional relationships. IMS will mediate member-to-member conflicts, small group conflicts, and work with support staff and administrators as appropriate. IMS practises a trauma-informed approach. We use the BCTF Aboriginal Lens to help ground us in supporting members: respect, relationship, relevance, responsibility, reciprocity, reconciliation, resilience.

Participation in mediation is voluntary and confidential. Outcomes of mediation are not reported to union officers or your school district.

You can request to work with a mediator who has a similar background and life experience to yours, and mediations can be conducted in French or online upon request.

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

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CLASSIFIEDS

GULF ISLAND GETAWAY
Website: *timdmcgowan.wixsite.com/mysite*
Email: *timdmcgowan@hotmail.com* to reserve.

GULF ISLAND GETAWAY, Pender Island BC
Website: *ainsliepointcottage.com*
Contact Alma at 604-760-6877

THE BCTF CODE OF ETHICS states general rules for all members of the professional service and conduct toward students, colleagues, and the professional union. Members are advised to contact local union officers or appropriate BCTF staff for advice on how to proceed with issues related to the BCTF Code of Ethics.

1. The member speaks and acts toward students with respect and dignity, and deals judiciously with them, always mindful of their individual rights and sensibilities.
2. The member respects the confidential nature of information concerning students and may give it only to authorized persons or agencies directly concerned with their welfare. The member follows legal requirements in reporting child protection issues.
3. A privileged relationship exists between members and students. The member refrains from exploiting that relationship for material, ideological, or other advantage.
4. The member is willing to review with colleagues, students, and their parents/guardians the practices employed in discharging the member's professional duties.
5. The member directs any criticism of the teaching performance and related work of a colleague to that colleague in private. If the member believes that the issue(s) has not been addressed, they may, after privately informing the colleague in writing of their intent to do so, direct the criticism in confidence to appropriate individuals who can offer advice and assistance.*
   It shall not be considered a breach of the Code of Ethics for a member to follow the legal requirements for reporting child protection issues. (*See 31.B.12 of the *Members' Guide to the BCTF*.)
6. The member acknowledges the authority and responsibilities of the BCTF and its locals and fulfills obligations arising from membership in their professional union.
7. The member adheres to the provisions of the collective agreement.
8. The member acts in a manner not prejudicial to job actions or other collective strategies of their professional union.
9. The member, as an individual or as a member of a group of members, does not make unauthorized representations to outside bodies in the name of the Federation or its locals.
10. In the course of union business and meetings, the member must not discriminate against any other member because of race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or age of that person or member, or because that person or member has been convicted of a criminal or summary conviction offence that is unrelated to the membership or intended membership, or any other protected grounds under the *BC Human Rights Code*.

LET THE CODE OF ETHICS GUIDE YOUR PRACTICE

The Judicial Council implements the Code of Ethics, supports professional and ethical practice, and considers alleged breaches of the code. For information and advice on the Code of Ethics and the complaint process, contact Sherry Payne, Ethics Administrator, at 604-871-1803 or *spayne@bctf.ca*, or Nadia Bove, Internal Relations Administrative Assistant, at 604 871-1823 or *nbove@bctf.ca*.

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to
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Vancouver, BC V5Z 4P2
email: *teachermag@bctf.ca*

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ABOVE: A sunset in Kyuquot, BC, one of the communities served by the Vancouver Island West Teachers' Union. Turn to page 20 to read about the unique teaching experiences of members in this local. Tammy Dillon photo.