

BC Teachers' Federation

Nov/Dec 2024

Teacher



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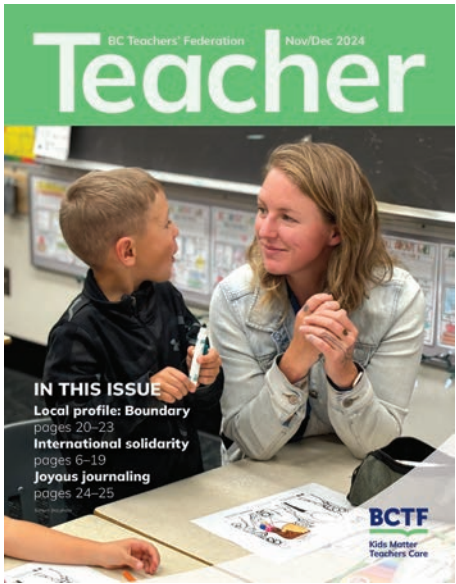
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THIS IS YOUR MAGAZINE



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

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

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

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Hyperlinks are available on the magazine's website: teachermag.ca

On the cover

Emma Boyd, a teacher and member of the Boundary District Teachers' Association, works with a student. Read more about members in the Boundary region and what makes the local unique in this issue's local profile, pages 20–23.

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Clint
Johnston
(photo by
Sunjum Jhaj)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

THIS EDITION of *Teacher* magazine features a collection of articles highlighting the BCTF's work in solidarity with other teachers' unions and federations. The BCTF is proud to have a long history of standing with our colleagues around the country and the world who are fighting to improve the quality of public education in their region.

Through our solidarity with other teachers' unions, we are reminded that educators everywhere are fighting for the same things: fair working conditions for teachers and quality, accessible public education that supports all students.

Our collaboration with the Canadian Teachers' Federation and teachers' unions across the world gives us insight into how other unions push back against policies that undervalue public education and the strategies that have worked in pushing for more government investment in education.

We will continue to support and collaborate with teachers' unions around the world, sharing strategies and successes as we work toward a common goal of improving public education. When we stand together as a community of global educators, our collective voice is amplified.

The culture of collaboration and support that is created through solidarity is one I am proud to be a part of.

The stories of teacher colleagues from across the province, and world, that are highlighted in this edition are inspiring, whether it's innovative classroom practices or tireless advocacy for students and teachers in public schools. The sharing of stories and experiences allows us all to learn from one another.

Thank you for all you do to inspire and empower not only your students, but also your colleagues.

In solidarity,

Clint Johnston
BCTF President

PHOTOS: (Opposite page) Images from the first BCTF International Solidarity Teacher Inquiry Project, a collaboration between the BCTF and the Paulo Freire Institute in Brazil. Read the story on pages 12–15. Photos provided by project participants.

MESSAGE DU PRÉSIDENT

CETTE ÉDITION du magazine *Teacher* présente une série d'articles qui soulignent le travail de solidarité de la Fédération des enseignantes et des enseignants de la Colombie-Britannique (FECB) avec d'autres syndicats et fédérations d'enseignants et enseignantes. La FECB est fière de sa longue histoire de solidarité avec ses collègues partout au pays et dans le monde lesquels se battent pour améliorer la qualité de l'enseignement public dans leur région.

La solidarité mutuelle entre les syndicats d'enseignants et enseignantes nous rappelle que tous les enseignants et toutes les enseignantes du monde entier mènent les mêmes combats pour des conditions de travail équitables pour le personnel enseignant et pour un enseignement public accessible et de qualité pour tous les élèves.

Grâce à notre collaboration avec la Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants et les syndicats d'enseignants du monde entier, nous pouvons mieux comprendre comment d'autres syndicats s'opposent aux politiques qui sous-évaluent l'enseignement public et quelles sont les stratégies qui ont permis d'obtenir une augmentation des investissements des gouvernements dans l'éducation.

Nous continuerons à soutenir les syndicats d'enseignants et enseignantes du monde entier et à collaborer avec eux, en mettant en commun nos stratégies et nos réussites afin de nous permettre de réaliser notre objectif commun d'amélioration de l'enseignement public. En nous joignant à une communauté d'éducateurs planétaires, nous pouvons faire résonner notre voix collective encore plus fort.

Je suis fier de faire partie de la culture de collaboration et de soutien qui se crée grâce à la solidarité.

Les histoires de nos collègues enseignants de toute la province, et du monde entier qui sont mises en lumière dans cette édition qu'il s'agisse de pratiques novatrices en classe ou de défense inlassable des intérêts des élèves et du personnel enseignant dans les écoles publiques sont une véritable source d'inspiration. Nous pouvons tous tirer des leçons des histoires et des expériences de nos collègues.

Je tiens à vous remercier de tout ce que vous faites pour inspirer et responsabiliser non seulement vos élèves, mais aussi vos collègues.

Solidairement,



Clint Johnston
Président de la FECB



BCTF, CTF, EI: Partners in the fight for quality public education



WHAT IS THE CTF?

The Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF), much like the BCTF, is a federation that brings together affiliates who are autonomous but have decided to work collectively for shared goals. Like locals that are a part of the BCTF, each affiliate organization of the CTF makes its own decisions, engages in its own collective bargaining, and does its own advocacy. For issues that affect members from across affiliate organizations, troubleshooting together and leveraging the power of solidarity can help support all our shared goals.

NATIONAL ADVOCACY

The CTF advocates at a national level for issues in education that affect students and teachers across the country. Many of the issues the CTF addresses through advocacy are brought forward by affiliate organizations after their members have made decisions at their own annual general meetings. As such, the process is democratic, with voices represented from across the country.

One example is the National School Food Program. The CTF's work and advocacy was instrumental in securing a commitment of \$1 billion from the government for food programs in schools.

Another example of the CTF's advocacy that directly affects BCTF members is their work surrounding fair use legislation in Canada. Thanks to a provision in Canada's *Copyright Act*, teachers can copy and use short excerpts of copyright-protected materials, such as books, movies, and artistic works, for use in the classroom. Education publishers have been lobbying the government to remove education as a protected provision to the *Copyright Act*. Changes to this legislation could have affected teachers' ability to photocopy and use pages from books or resources without additional payment. However, thanks to the CTF's advocacy for clear differentiation between K–12 fair use and post-secondary fair use, teachers are still able to freely use excerpts from copyright-protected materials without paying copyright royalties.

Currently, the CTF is pushing for meaningful change to address the national teacher shortage. Provincial organizations recognize that we can't compete against each other to recruit teachers from other provinces or from other countries. Instead, we need to focus on improving the working conditions of teachers across Canada as a recruitment and retention strategy. The CTF is working to ensure this is recognized as a national issue.

PHOTOS

Page 6: The delegation to the Education International World Congress gathers for a photo in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Page 7: (Top, L to R) Carole Gordon, BCTF First Vice-President; Clint Johnston, BCTF President; Amber Mitchell, BCTF Executive Director, at the EI World Congress.

(Bottom right) Carole Gordon attends to the business of the meeting at EI World Congress.

Photos provided by Clint Johnston.

**“Solidarity isn’t short term:
it’s something you invest in,
so when the struggle comes
you have a great team.”**

– Clint Johnston,
BCTF President



Our involvement in the CTF is an important part of our solidarity with other provincial teachers’ federations. We share resources, ideas, and advocacy, and know that our colleagues from other provinces will do the same when we need it. We also work together to tackle some of the struggles we share from coast to coast to coast.

The CTF also dedicates time and resources to fight the rise of the far right and the privatization of education. This issue extends beyond Canada’s borders: our colleagues around the world face very similar challenges because of the rise of the far right. For issues like this, the CTF works in collaboration with Education International (EI)—the global federation that brings together member organizations from 178 countries and territories.

EI WORLD CONGRESS

Education International advocates for free, quality, publicly funded education for every student in every country. Since it brings together national teachers’ associations, the BCTF participates in EI through the CTF.

Every five years, EI hosts a world congress where it brings together all the member federations to uplift public education, strategize against the far right, and share stories of success and struggle from around the world.

The latest world congress took place last summer in Buenos Aires, Argentina. BCTF delegates attended with CTF partners.

The world congress dealt with themes affecting public education, including teacher shortages, climate emergencies, the rise of 2SLGBTQIA+ hate, peace education, Indigenous education, oppression, and inequitable access to digital devices for learning.

Coming together with other teachers’ federations is an opportunity to learn about how other countries are addressing many of the same challenges we are facing here in Canada. We learn from our colleagues around the world about how disaster capitalism can exacerbate privatization, hear about the initiatives to improve pension programs, and listen to approaches for decolonizing education.

EI shows us that we all want the same things for public education, no matter what obstacles stand in the way. For some of the countries represented at EI World Congress, the risks to teachers and union leaders who advocate for strong public education systems are profound, but they continue the fight knowing they have the support of all teacher unions across the world.

Our participation in EI is an important part of BCTF International Solidarity work. Solidarity is founded on principles of equity, not equality. Every participating organization contributes differently to EI to support and share in the collective struggle. Events like the EI World Congress allow us to see that we are part of a much bigger fight for quality public education for every student. •





International solidarity is a BCTF heritage

By **Larry Kuehn** (he/him), former BCTF President

WE ARE ALL part of the global story, including the teachers of BC. Today the Federation's global engagement is characterized as solidarity and *intercambio*.

Both are expressions of mutual relationships. Solidarity implies understanding the struggles of others, seeing the commonality with our own struggles, gaining something positive for all parties. *Intercambio* is a Spanish word meaning exchange or interchange. These two principles are the basis for the BCTF International Solidarity Program, and they link BC teachers to the more than 30 million others who teach elementary and secondary students globally.

The BCTF has long responded to teachers and the struggles for public education in the world beyond our boundaries. It began in 1923, only shortly after the founding of the BCTF in 1917. Harry Charlesworth, then general secretary, took part in the founding of the World Federation of Education Associations, and he served as vice-president until 1937. It was formed in the aftermath of World War I and its objective was to avoid future wars. The hope was to produce international understanding through education. In BC it supported "Goodwill Day," and for many years the BCTF distributed ideas for activities on that day, including exchanging letters with students in other countries.

World War II, followed by the Cold War, created a new reality, with divisions that got in the way of international co-operation.

The 1960s brought new challenges that some BC teachers, especially John Young and Bill Long, saw as demanding direct engagement. Dozens of former colonies in Africa and Asia became independent countries working to create new, universally accessible public education systems.

After working in Borneo for a year, John brought a motion to the BCTF AGM for the Federation to create an International Assistance Fund with an annual allocation from the fees to support the development of education in "developing countries."

Utilizing these funds, Bill organized a summer program for BC teachers to offer professional development in several African countries. The program was soon adopted by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) nationally as Project Overseas, now renamed International Collaboration for Education (ICE), which still offers summer professional development programs internationally.

An annual allocation of BCTF funds for international programs has continued for more than 60 years. The special fund reserved for this work is named after Bill—the W. R. Long Fund—in recognition of the role he played in initiating this element of social justice work in the BCTF.

The focus of the program changed in the 1980s. In 1983 the name was amended from International Assistance Program to the International Solidarity Program. That reflected a recognition of the colonial, one-way implication of "assistance." In contrast, "solidarity" recognized the mutuality of the struggles of BC teachers through their union with the struggles of teachers elsewhere for their bargaining rights, working conditions, and quality public education.

The BCTF expanded international solidarity work by developing relationships with teacher unions in Latin America. In the 1980s, there were struggles, particularly in

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“... solidarity and *intercambio* ... a Spanish word meaning exchange or interchange ... are the basis for the BCTF International Solidarity Program, and they link BC teachers to the more than 30 million others who teach elementary and secondary students globally.”

Central America, against the US-supported military regimes that dominated, and the teachers there were very much involved in the struggles.

The military government in Honduras had taken over the union and its offices, and appointed puppet officers, but the teachers recognized their elected officers, not the appointed ones. During the civil war in El Salvador, the teacher union executive had to meet in secret to avoid arrest by the military. Unions were illegal in Guatemala, so the teachers had an underground network in the form of a “life insurance company” that could investigate the “disappearance” of teachers. The Sandinistas had overturned a military dictatorship in Nicaragua and teachers had a prominent role in a crusade to develop universal literacy, but the social gains were threatened by a US-supported “contra” counter revolution.

BC teachers were themselves involved in struggles against government attacks on their working conditions and union rights. But they didn’t face the extreme repression colleagues in Latin America were facing, and they saw a role for their union in supporting Latin American teachers and unions engaged in struggles.

The International Solidarity Committee had a mandate for working in Latin America and resources to support that. However, the BCTF had no staff who spoke Spanish, nor any established links with unions in Latin America. To facilitate these links activists, including some teachers, created an NGO called CoDevelopment Canada to connect our unions and those in Latin America. Over 40 years, the organization has grown to facilitate these links not only for the BCTF, but also for other unions in BC, as well as teacher unions in Quebec, Ontario, and Alberta.

So, what are some examples of international solidarity projects and results over the past 40 years?

A strategic objective of solidarity has been to provide support for strengthening the unions. One of the lessons of the BCTF in the 1970s and 1980s was that engaging women in the union was key to making it stronger. Like the BCTF in its first 50 years, while the great majority of teachers in Latin America were women, few were involved in union leadership. The first BCTF projects provided support for the creation of women’s committees and training programs to engage women in union leadership.

Several unions have been involved in these projects, and many more women are participating in union leadership both in unions and schools. However, as an outgrowth of the programs, several women in Central America determined that training and confidence were not enough to really empower women and girls. Unless social attitudes changed, among all genders of teachers and in the larger society, the same barriers would exist; so they created a program of non-sexist pedagogy. It included pedagogical philosophy, teaching resources, and training programs for all teachers. The BCTF provided financial support for this ground-breaking program.

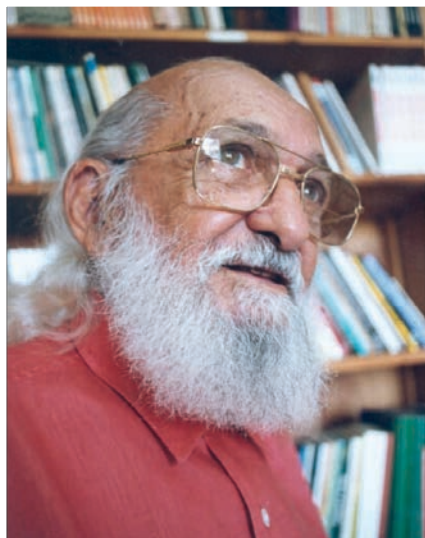
They were able to get government recognition and, in some cases, financial support for their program in several countries. The BCTF has also brought facilitators from the program to offer workshops in BC on their approach to non-sexist and inclusive pedagogy, as an example of *intercambio* of experience and knowledge.

From these have grown many more initiatives from union partners around Latin America—too many to detail here, but each worth a story in themselves. These include the Schools as Territories of Peace in war-scarred Colombia, a program to restore an Indigenous language in Mexico, research on working conditions in Central America, the health and safety of teachers, and much more.

For 30 years the BCTF has participated in the Trilateral Coalition in Defense of Public Education with union participants from Mexico, the US, and Canada. This has provided an opportunity for dozens of BC teachers over the decades to share stories of issues and challenges to education in the three countries and compare strategies to respond to the challenges.

Solidarity takes many forms. Sometimes it is resources at a crucial time. Other times it is sharing experiences and ideas for what might work in response to a particular problem. Sometimes it can be sending letters urging governments to act fairly and stop oppressive action. It can also be as simple as expressing support, saying we see you in your struggle, you are not alone, we join you in seeking the best for public education and for teachers.

BC teachers can be proud that their union has long acted in solidarity not only with teachers in BC or even Canada, but also internationally. •



PAULO FREIRE INSTITUTE: Dreaming of democratic education

By Angela Biz Antunes, Janaina Abreu, Moacir Gadotti, and Paulo Roberto Padilha, directors, Paulo Freire Institute

WHAT IS THE PAULO FREIRE INSTITUTE?

THE PAULO FREIRE INSTITUTE (IPF) was created in 1991, in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, with the mission of “educating to transform.” The institute is a non-profit, non-governmental organization inspired by the praxis of Paulo Freire, its patron. Freire wanted to bring together people and institutions to contribute to the construction of a world with social justice and equal rights, through reflection, exchanging experiences, developing pedagogical practices, and conducting research.

Such initiatives contributed to the birth of new IPFs in Brazil and in other countries, expanding and reinventing Freire’s legacy of dreams and utopias. The Paulo Freire Institute works to spread emancipatory education, meaningful teaching and learning, and to combat all forms of oppression, violence, prejudice, discrimination, exclusion, and degradation. We develop human rights education projects, educating people to practise planetary citizenship from childhood.

The Paulo Freire Institute presents itself less as an institution and more as a collective of people. For over 30 years, it has been a large and generous space for meetings, bringing people and institutions from various parts of the world together, dreaming of another possible world. For us, the dream of a society of equal and different beings will never end.

We participate in education forums, such as the Youth and Adult Education (EJA) Forums in the city and state of São Paulo. The Paulo Freire Institute is part of the National EJA Commission, is a representative of the Brazilian Network of Education in Human Rights, and is a member of the National Committee for Education and Culture in Human Rights. Working together with organizations and social movements, we fight for democratic public education, developing research and training guided by Freire’s philosophy.

“The world is not finished. It is always in the process of becoming.”

– Paulo Freire

PHOTOS

Above: Participants in the first Paulo Freire Journey at the IPF Reference Centre. **Above left:** Paulo Freire, Novohorizonte de Economia Solidaria; public domain. **Right:** CoDevelopment Canada and IPF reps during the second Paulo Freire Journey.

THE STRUGGLE FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION IN BRAZIL

Neoliberalism conceives of education as a commodity, reducing our identities to that of consumers and undermining the humanistic dimension of education. The opposite of this, emancipatory education, affirms the educational principle of building knowledge based on dialogue.

Educational injustice is part of the wider injustices that exist in Brazil. We live in a democracy of proclaimed rights and unfulfilled promises. Only in a real, popular, participatory democracy can we achieve and expand access to human rights. This is the essence of the emancipatory and transformative education practised by Paulo Freire.

In the last decade, with the expansion of ultra-conservative neoliberalism in Brazil and constant attacks against the Paulo Freire Institute, the fight for emancipatory public education has not been easy. Fortunately, we have the solidarity and generous support of many people and institutions that share the same ideals. The BCTF's support was instrumental when we were under the Bolsonaro government and continues to be now, at the beginning of President Lula's third term.

The attacks on the Paulo Freire Institute are attacks against the ideas Freire defended: radical democracy, with social justice, equal rights, and education for all—ideas the extreme right actively tries to dismantle.

We are thrilled to see children and young people participating in the construction of democracy at schools today. In Latin America and in Brazil, particularly, the struggle for the democratization of public school management has recently been strengthened by the creation of school councils and student unions. Participation and democratization in the public education system is the most practical way of educating for and through citizenship. In a hierarchical society like ours, democracy needs to be continuously fought for. It's never fully achieved.

These are steps forward, but there are also setbacks. Among the setbacks is the introduction of civic-military schools. This model of fascist education from the first half of the 20th century in Brazil is disciplinary, indoctrinating, and without any critical reflection. Its introduction into our system will work against the struggle for emancipatory education.

Paulo Freire said, "The world is not finished. It is always in the process of becoming." He insisted that we assume ourselves as "makers of the future." This awareness keeps alive what conservatives and reactionaries want to kill: hope, utopia, dreams, and the possibility of change.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

One of our greatest joys in recent years has been our collaboration with educators from British Columbia, Canada, and now, in its third year, with educators from Latin America. Sharing experiences has been a great learning opportunity for us.

After reflecting on the first year of this collaboration, called the Paulo Freire Journey, we created an activity called the "intervention project" (an action research project), which the BCTF calls an inquiry project (see pages 12–15). The objective was to improve practice by addressing a relevant issue in our work as educators on school grounds or in the communities where we work. We learned from Paulo Freire that the meaning of teachers continuing their education lies in the possibility for them to critically reflect on their practices, and relearn and modify those practices.

The BCTF and CoDevelopment Canada's team dedicated the same level of attention and care to the Paulo Freire Journey as we did. Democratic criteria were used to select teacher participants. The educators who were present at the first two journeys showed the richness and diversity of British Columbia teachers. We see common dreams and struggles. We were strengthened on these journeys.

Just as the practices of oppression and denial of rights become internationalized, it is essential for us, in our activism and fight for democratic public education, to unite, learn from each other, and strengthen the struggle for dreams we know are possible. We hope to continue teaching and learning from the BCTF, working toward international solidarity from a decolonial perspective. •





Learning from our international colleagues: Inquiry project with the Paulo Freire Institute in Brazil

By **Karen Andrews** (she/her), teacher, Terrace;
Corin Browne (she/her), teacher, Vancouver;
Chiana van Katwijk (she/her), teacher, Victoria;
Kristin Singbeil (she/her), teacher-librarian, Nanaimo

IN 2023, we had an opportunity to participate in the first International Solidarity Teacher Inquiry Project (TIP), and the first province-wide TIP, as part of the BCTF's work with the Paulo Freire Institute in São Paulo, Brazil. We each came into the project hoping to see Freirean pedagogy in action, gain clarity about our roles within chronically underfunded and systematically flawed education systems, and find inspiration to create change in our own practices. We completed the project feeling connected, inspired, and hopeful.

We began this TIP by reading a book together, *The Pedagogy of Hope* by Paulo Freire, which we discussed and used as a framework to come up with a guiding theme for our inquiry. A quote from the book that resonated was, "There is no change without dream, and there is no dream without hope."¹ From this came our overarching theme: Hope is an action/Hope in action.

Each participant in this inquiry project was supported in pursuing their own inquiry related to our overarching theme. We visited the Paulo Freire Institute to observe, engage in dialogue, and learn from our colleagues in Brazil. Following our visit, we came together to discuss our personal inquiries.

We spent five days learning about Freirean pedagogy at the Paulo Freire Institute and visited two schools that both received the Paulo Freire Municipal Education Quality Award, which recognized projects developed and initiated by educators that improve the quality of education. The first school, Pérola Ellis Byington, is an early childhood education school that received the award for its initiative called Our Identity, Our People, Our Struggle: Anti-Racist Education for Young Children. This school-wide initiative had students researching and celebrating Afro-Brazilian culture to reduce racism in the school and community.

The second award-winning school, Campos Salles, was transformed into a community space for learners of all ages. Daycare, elementary and high school, technical college, university, and adult continuing studies are all located in one central community space that exemplifies community, autonomy, participation, and social transformation.

Both school visits allowed us to witness transformative and innovative education that inspired our own practices within our schools.

¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2021: pg. 95

INDIVIDUAL INQUIRY SNAPSHOTS

CREATING COMMUNITY THROUGH JOYFUL PLAY

CHIANA'S INQUIRY: *How does intentional, unstructured play serve to reject the idea of middle schoolers as "adults in training" and instead co-create and foster a sense of community, joy, and love in my classroom and school ecosystem?*

In many of the middle years spaces we visited during our trip to Brazil, the tweens were given the space to be kids while also treated as competent, capable humans. This dichotomy spurred me to investigate the ways in which play seems to disappear in the middle years.

I integrated more play and connection time in my classroom after talking to students about their thoughts on play and how/ if they felt connected to their classroom community. While I started off small with more games in math, longer breaks outside, and more hands-on activities, it quickly evolved into blocks of unstructured free play where I provided toys like Lego, Magna-Tiles, wooden blocks, art supplies, board games, and other materials.

I noticed a huge improvement in the overall sense of community in my class. There was a tangible sense of closeness that had been fostered through play. It led to larger projects like creating a classroom garden, some students starting a comic book series and collaborative novel series, and other creative endeavours.

I was able to renew my identity as a teacher, and I saw my middle schoolers reclaim their identities as kids.

FROM DREAM TO PRODUCTION: ANIMATION THAT SHOWS WHAT IS POSSIBLE IN EDUCATION

CORIN'S INQUIRY: *To investigate, apply, and review how a Freirean practice of dialogue can be used to develop an animation production unit where students collectively imagine, pitch, and animate a scene that explores their dream school.*

I took the opportunity of the purposeful and focused self-reflection time of the TIP process to ask myself some important questions about how my teaching practice aligns with my dreams and goals for social justice and youth liberation. Teaching is my second career, and I felt like I had so much freedom as a community-engaged artist to do really meaningful, authentic, and activist-based work with kids. It's not always easy to find space for that as a public school teacher when you add the challenges of a structure that dictates schedules, the work of assessments, classroom management, and the limited autonomy that a lot of students face in a school system. This process reminded me that making purposeful and mentored space for imagination and dialogue can be as important and meaningful as the work I was doing in community before I started teaching. And it's always possible (and so joyful) to design projects that encourage students to use art-making as the springboard for connecting hope and social change. →



**Chiana
van Katwijk**



**Corin
Browne**



A crochet tribute to Paulo Freire



PHOTOS: All portraits and International Solidarity Teacher Inquiry Project photos provided by authors.

LITERATURE FOR LIBERATION

KAREN'S INQUIRY: *How can the use of literature inspire teachers to practise critical pedagogy—one of liberation—when working with young students?*

Although it is challenging for teachers to unpack difficult topics, students are ready to engage. Literacy is a tool that can help foster critical consciousness and bring structures of oppression to the forefront. As teachers, we are facilitators of change. As such, we have to be comfortable with the uncomfortable.

My learning from this TIP has allowed me to take on more difficult topics with my students. I see that, even at a young age, learners can make meaningful connections, reflect on change, take action, and transform the world around them.

FINDING HOPE

KRISTIN'S INQUIRY: *What is hope?*

As the TIP facilitator for this project, I did not have a formal TIP but was inspired by the work of everyone involved. This led me to explore what hope means in relation to schools and education systems. I asked everyone involved in this project, including educators, students, and families, to find out what a dream education system would like.

Music, art, flexibility in schedules, choice, outdoor education, collaboration across grades, and community were all response for dream schools. Interestingly, we saw all these things in action in São Paulo schools.

We witnessed community involvement, student-selected committees for assessment, multiple teachers and students working together in one room (one Grade 1 class had 90 students and 3 teachers working together in one space), outdoor art, sensory spaces outdoors, and playgrounds at both primary and secondary schools. Lunches were made at the schools and eating together was a priority every day. The community and cultural connections were everywhere in the school spaces. We make learning accessible collectively. It will take collective action to improve our education system so every student can attend a dream school.

BRINGING OUR LEARNING HOME

We learned from our colleagues at the Paulo Freire Institute that Freire believed it is impossible to teach without learning. We are students as we teach and teachers as we learn. Our participation in this project was a reminder that we can be learners in our own classrooms and have so much to learn from our colleagues around the world. The BCTF International Solidarity Program has allowed us to bring knowledge from our colleagues in Brazil to our British Columbian schools.

We also learned that Freire never wanted to be copied, but instead reinvented. We can reinvent the ways we apply Freirean pedagogy to our unique settings, so that we can create school communities grounded in collective care.



**Karen
Andrews**



**Kristin
Singbeil**

We are so grateful to have had the opportunity to connect with each other, and our inspiring colleagues in Brazil, who reinforced that the impacts we have within our classrooms are the most important thing each of us can do in terms of activism right now. Choosing joy and love in teaching is a radical act. It dispels the notion that education is transactional, one-dimensional, and apolitical.

This experience filled us with hope that we can create a “world where it is less hard to love,” a saying from the staff at the Paulo Freire Institute that resonated. ●

BCTF partners in Latin America against privatization

By **Alexandra Henao-Castrillon**,
Education Program Director,
CoDevelopment Canada



DURING THE LAST 50 YEARS, Latin America has felt the impact of the false promise of development after agreeing to implement economic policies dictated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Instead of seeing the promised results of increasing its income, Latin America became a laboratory for neoliberal policies that particularly affect the quality of life of vulnerable communities throughout the region. While some governments dissent, others accept the regressive agenda to the detriment of public services, working conditions, and democratic spaces. Education is one of the most affected sectors, and two CoDevelopment (CoDev) partners, committed to fight against neoliberalism, can teach us how to resist: the Puerto Rico Teachers' Federation (FMPR) and the Union of Peruvian Education Workers (SUTEP).

DISASTER OR OPPORTUNITY? HOW FMPR BATTLES PRIVATIZATION FOLLOWING ENVIRONMENTAL CRISES

FMPR is one of the most combative civil society organizations in Latin America, working with its members and with community groups against neoliberal government projects and against the diversion of government funds to benefit private schools. Coalition building with community groups and unions of other sectors is one of FMPR's most effective strategies that has allowed them to fight against the privatization of essential services that often affect low-income families the most.

FMPR is carrying out a project to keep one school open for community use, a school closed by former education secretary Julia Keleher in 2018. The project provides resources for the maintenance of the school and weekend artistic and sports activities to benefit children from the community affected by school closures. This project has the support of the BCTF and has allowed FMPR to strengthen its ties with communities that later become allies in the defense of an emancipatory public education system.

FMPR has made public the effects of underfunding education and has accompanied teachers and students to protest against the government's lack of attention to school infrastructure. Some public schools with broken air conditioning have changed the schedule because of this year's extreme heat waves and power cuts that produce overwhelming conditions for teaching and learning.

Recently, FMPR and other unions held a commemoration of 3,000 lives lost and thousands of homes destroyed by Hurricane Maria, a Category 5 hurricane that hit Puerto Rico in 2017. They believe that the government took advantage of the disaster to privatize public services, like the electrical system that was contracted with LUMA Energy—50% owned by a Canadian company. Since then, there have been multiple problems with electricity distribution that have permanently affected thousands of public schools with blackouts and voltage problems. As FMPR and its allies believe, "the disaster is political," and it is urgent to take action to solve the crises caused by government corruption and the poor management and excessive bureaucracy of private companies like LUMA.

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SUTEP'S FIGHT AGAINST CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT POLICIES

SUTEP has become the strongest and most effective force for championing public education and labour rights for teachers and education assistants, confronting a government that has, for several years, attempted to advance a neoliberal agenda. The educational system in Peru has been defunded and transformed through neoliberal policies. SUTEP has been relentless in urging the government to ensure that funding for public education and sustainable investment in the teaching profession are in accordance with the law. As per Peru's Article 16 of the Political Constitution, the state must allocate no less than 6% of the GDP to education, with a plan to improve educational infrastructure. Only 4.3% was approved for 2024. The inclusion of this article in the Political Constitution was due to the work of SUTEP.

SUTEP is part of the General Confederation of Peruvian Workers and has participated in national mobilizations against the neoliberal policies that affect the working class in Peru. In addition to organizing meetings with the rank and file across the country, and co-ordinating

conferences on pedagogical themes, SUTEP does an incredible amount of work promoting and defending workers' rights and calling for policies that ensure democratic public education that responds to the needs of the Peruvian people. Its overwhelming work ranges from lobbying members of Congress and government authorities to carrying out multiple mobilizations and protests in front of government buildings, and numerous rallies and marches in the streets of several Peruvian cities. SUTEP has even gone as far as to carry out two hunger strikes in the last two years as extreme measures to push its agenda. Thanks to their strong commitment and organizing skills, SUTEP has celebrated significant victories and continues to challenge the current and previous governments.

SUTEP has worked vigorously to expand its membership and gain formal state recognition as the sole legitimate official union to represent all Peruvian teachers at the negotiation table with the Ministry of Education. Thus, the Secretary of Gender and Equity of SUTEP has been carrying out a project, also supported

by the BCTF, that aims to contribute to the strengthening of the legitimacy of SUTEP by expanding its membership throughout the country and growing the participation of women teachers in the union. In 2022, part of SUTEP's work was to lobby Congress members to protect the progress of the gender-inclusive curriculum from conservative educational initiatives that review textbooks and ban topics related to gender issues.

Our Latin American colleagues, including FMPR and SUTEP, will continue the struggle to defend the common good, teaching us all the value of collective power. CoDev, in partnership with the BCTF, will continue to facilitate alliance-building and exchanges between Canadian and Latin American teachers to learn from each other about courage to confront repression, commitment to social justice, and working in solidarity with other social

sectors to protect public services—including education—from neoliberal agendas that are on the rise across the globe, including here in Canada. •



PHOTO

Left: SUTEP demonstrators at a mobilization against privatization rally in September 2023. Photo provided by CoDevelopment Canada.



Taking in an exhibition on colonialism.



A classroom in Namibia.



Annie Ohana. Photos provided by author.

EDUCATE TO LIBERATE: A journey of intergenerational solidarity between the BCTF and NANTU

By Annie Ohana (she/her), teacher, Surrey

THERE I WAS, a newbie to the Namibia project, eager to work alongside Namibian colleagues on a BCTF International Solidarity trip. The Namibia National Teachers Union (NANTU) began working with the BCTF over 30 years ago as they formed their union. Since then, they have engaged in professional development with the BCTF, and are working with us once again to develop a retired teachers' organization in Namibia, alongside preservice opportunities and constitutional changes.

Our time together was an exchange of knowledge between NANTU, the BCTF, and the BC Retired Teachers' Association (BCRTA). NANTU Secretary General Loide Shaanika, her colleague and NANTU National Secretary for Culture, Jackson Kavari, and a retired teacher and university professor, Clanet Nomsa, shared about their work in defense of public education and the union's dedication to social justice. NANTU is inspiring in its scope of services for members in all stages of their careers.

Our hosts, including Acting President Daniel Humbim, generously arranged beautiful experiences for our trip. We visited multiple schools, the Namibian Independence Memorial Museum, and witnessed the opening of a decades-long project of BCRTA member Don Reader

to open an Early Childhood Development Centre. The trip exemplified the depth of our relationship over three decades.

Our visit to the Namibian Independence Memorial Museum provided us with a scope of history and how Namibia has overcome European colonization, including the terror of genocide, and apartheid.

"Liberation" is not just a slogan to Namibian teachers: it is their nation's story, it is their people's glorious rise to sovereignty. Education plays a fundamental role in Namibia's freedom, something that was clearly visible in the school visits. The BCTF's ongoing international solidarity work allows us to learn from the incredible work of Namibian teachers in leveraging education as a tool for liberation.

Our visit to Ella Du Plessis High School, a sprawling compound filled with students taking year-end exams, allowed us to meet some of the educators doing amazing work for students coming from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. A sad reality was the burning down of the girls' dormitory, something the BCTF has promised to help repair. For students who need a dormitory to access education, this was a tough reality. Yet, you could see the dedication of the staff to rebuilding and moving forward.

Our next school visit was to the Dr. Abraham Iyambo Public School, with 3,000 students attending from within the Havana informal settlement, a shanty town, the largest in Namibia. The resourcefulness, dedication to education, and uplifting of heritage was simply beautiful in this school surrounded by challenges. As Namibia rises from decades of oppression, the school is a beacon of hope and pride, empowering students and families. An inspiring moment of Indigenous pride we witnessed was hearing the seven Indigenous languages spoken in the surrounding homes being centred in the elementary school students' education. Indigenous languages come first, then English, German, and Afrikaans later.

This international solidarity work replenished our souls, expanded our knowledge, and strengthened our dedication to teachers at every stage of their career, from here in BC to various projects around the world.

The work we did in that one week was only a chapter. The BCTF and NANTU are moving forward with plans, sharing resources and knowledge, and new supports that will continue our 30 year relationship, together in education, in the name of liberation. •



Trinational Conference in Defense of Public Education

Alexandra Adhikary at the trinational conference in Oaxaca, Mexico. Photo provided by author.

By Alexandra Adhikary (she/her), teacher, Fort St. John

MAYBE YOU SAW the call-out for participants to attend the trinational conference this year in San Antonio, Texas, and wondered what the trinational was? What I can tell you as a former participant is that attending the trinational conference is an incredible experience and it will fuel your passion for defending public education and advocating for students and colleagues across the globe!

The BCTF International Solidarity Committee has been a part of the Trinational Coalition in Defense of Public Education since the early 1990s. This coalition is formed between education unions from Mexico, Canada, and the United States. The trinational coalition was a response against the neoliberal attack on public education and formed as a result of NAFTA's Free Trade Commission and defended public education against privatization arguments included in NAFTA. The BCTF has participated in the trinational conference from the very first conference in 1994. The central idea of the conference is to bring together union activists from Mexico, Canada, and the United States to develop a collective understanding of how things are similar or different in the three countries, and identify ways we can work together on defending public education.

These conferences have been a forum for intense exchanges on the different realities in our respective countries, and a place for reflection on our current and future actions. Participants work together in discussion-like workshops where they take time describing the problems faced in all three countries and share effective strategies to continue advocating for public education. The conference is held every two years, and each time there are several themes, based on current challenges public education is facing, that lead the discussions. This year the themes are the new right's attack on public education, culturally responsive and sustainable teaching, and working and learning conditions.

I had the privilege of attending the trinational conference twice: Orizaba, Mexico, and in Oaxaca, Mexico. Not only was it an amazing opportunity to connect with other educators who are advocates for public education, but also, it gave me the chance to discuss the realities of public education in Canada, as well as in the US and Mexico. School visits are another component of attending the trinational conference. Participants get the privilege of visiting schools in the area that is hosting the conference. I had the opportunity while in Oaxaca to visit a school that focuses on teaching the local Indigenous language and culture. It was amazing to see students using both Spanish and the local Indigenous language in the classroom.

Participating in the trinational conference was an incredible experience. As a high school Spanish teacher, it provided me an opportunity for professional development as I was able to speak Spanish and learn more about the conditions and culture. I brought this learning back into my pedagogy and my classroom activities. For example, when I was in Oaxaca, I was inspired by their celebration of Indigenous languages and culture across their state. I created an assignment for my Spanish 11 class where students research history, culture, and other components, and then share with the whole class so that they understand the history of Mexico and are exposed to the many Indigenous languages and cultures across the country. I then have students reflect on their prior knowledge and what they learned from their research and peers. It is amazing to see the knowledge growth from this assignment. I run this project every year now and have continued to expand the work we do in my Spanish classes, all thanks to my incredible opportunities of having participated in the trinational conference.

The trinational conference is a wonderful experience and the continued advocacy work that the trinational coalition continues to do should be celebrated. I hope that more members are able to participate at the upcoming and future trinational conferences! •

LOCAL PROFILE BOUNDARY



FROM BIG WHITE, near Kelowna, to Christina Lake, in the Kootenays, the Boundary District Teachers' Association spans more than 200 km. Despite the physical distance between schools, the local has managed to engage members effectively, creating a community of professionals reflective of the community-centred approach taken by each school in the local.

The community feel is a big part of the draw for teachers in the Boundary local. Parents and community members are involved in the schools in big and small ways throughout the entire school year. From weeding, harvesting, and drying produce grown in school gardens, to supporting trades programs in the schools and volunteering for school and classroom events, parents take a great deal of pride in their community schools.

"A lot of parents are alumni from these same schools, so there is a sense that the school is part of the family's tradition," shared Denise Herdman, learner support teacher at Boundary Central Secondary School.

Denise herself is a graduate of Boundary Central Secondary (where her mom, Susan Baird, was the secretary for more than 20 years), and was happy to move back to Midway after living in Calgary and Vancouver for several years. Now, Denise gets to go to work alongside her sons, who are students at the same school.

Living in the Boundary region is a family tradition for many teachers here. Janine Fraser, Local President, spent her childhood visiting grandparents in the region, and Jamie Stewart, elementary teacher and outdoor education co-ordinator, grew up here. Both Janine and Jamie taught in the Lower Mainland before settling in the Boundary region. The reason? Affordability, family ties, and, of course, access to nature.

Every school in this local has easy access to nature and plenty of opportunities for outdoor education. At West Boundary Elementary, Emma Boyd has an outdoor day every week with her class.



**Mat
Houlton**



**Denise
Herdman
and student**



**Emma
Boyd**



**Janine
Fraser**



**Jamie
Stewart**

Although the school has an outdoor classroom, school garden, and a natural growth section of the school yard (an area that is not mowed and where native plants are left to thrive), often the outdoor day is spent in the forest just behind the school, or at one of the offsite land-based learning sites the school has partnerships with, including the West Boundary Community Forest and the ski hill.

Outdoor education is a big part of Jamie's work in the school district. When he first started teaching at John A. Hutton Elementary in Grand Forks, he started incorporating outdoor education into his classroom practice. Eventually, he moved into a new role as district outdoor education co-ordinator. He now spends two days in his classroom at Hutton Elementary and two days collaborating with teachers around the district on outdoor education. In the warmer months, outdoor days can include local hikes, working in community gardens, catching crayfish, building mountain bike trails, playing forest games, or learning about Indigenous cultures. In the winter months, the classes focus on survival skills and ski skills.

"I didn't realize until I was doing it that outdoor education is my passion," said Jamie, who unintentionally followed in his dad's footsteps. Jamie's dad, who is now 83 years old, spent most of his 40-year teaching career in the Boundary district where he taught outdoor education as a prep teacher.

Jamie noted that he gained the confidence to start outdoor days with his students from colleagues he met in the Environmental Educators' Provincial Specialist Association (EEPSA) and the Columbia Basin Environmental Education Network (CBEEN). He now gets to take students to camping spots and trails that he ventured over as a child and teenager himself.

Being in nature is a big part of teachers' lives outside of their classrooms as well. Staff get together to go mountain biking or hiking outside of school hours to have an opportunity to connect and create a professional community.





At Grand Forks Secondary, the professional community is also supported by a strong history of mentorship. One in five teachers at this high school completed their teaching credentials in the West Kootenay Teacher Education Program (WKTEP). The WKTEP specifically sets students up for success in rural teaching environments with an emphasis on place-based learning and community.

"I get to work alongside my teacher mentors and my former mentees," said Mat Houlton, Grand Forks Secondary teacher. "It creates a multigenerational professional family."

Mat shared that having teacher candidates in the school building creates opportunities for productive conversations, and that in turn fosters a culture of reflective practice that supports professional growth.

Teachers new to their role are also supported through a mentorship program where they get release time to visit their mentor or mentee and observe each other's teaching. This mentorship program is instrumental in helping members feel connected to one another in an area that is so spread out; it's also important for professional growth.

In a small local like this, geographically far from urban centres, professional growth opportunities in the form of professional development (PD) conferences or courses can seem limited. However, that is not the case. Denise is the local PD chair and shared that the Boundary District Teachers' Association is proud to support members' professional growth with \$3,000 of PD funds per member per year. This allows teachers to pursue PD that may be a bit further away and make autonomous decisions about their PD needs.

"I've attended so many conferences that I wouldn't have expected to be able to attend," said Emma. "The local is really supportive of newer members attending conferences, BCTF events, and participating in the local."

Emma, who is in her third year of teaching in the Boundary district, is now the bargaining chair for her local. A role she feels confident taking on because of the support she receives from her Local President, fellow executive committee members, and colleagues in schools across the local.

"The executive is looking to bring in newer teachers and include them," said Mat. "We want to make sure there is a continuum of leadership at the local level."

The local has recently sent out a bargaining survey to learn more about what members' bargaining priorities are for the upcoming round and what challenges they would like to address.

Like all parts of the province, teaching in this local is not without challenges. Environmental crises have caused chaos at times. In September, a forest fire near

Grand Forks closed Highway 3 for a short time, while a windstorm in Christian Valley closed part of Highway 33, leaving some students unable to get home for several hours after school.

Another key challenge that affects students and their families is the limited access to services in the region.

“Families can have a very hard time accessing services and supports, which is impactful, especially in the early years,” said Janine.

Without easy access to pediatricians, occupational therapists, and other professionals, families must travel to Kelowna or Vancouver for assessment and support. This exacerbates the long delays for getting designations that already exist in the rest of the province.

The Boundary School District has adopted a unique four-day work week to help accommodate the travel that is needed for students and teachers to attend appointments. The four longer days of school each week are also helpful for students who have long commutes to get to school. For example, Beaverdell is a small community that is approximately a one-hour bus ride away from Rock Creek. Beaverdell has a one-room schoolhouse for Kindergarten to Grade 3 students, but after Grade 3, students must travel to Rock Creek to finish elementary school, and then travel to Midway for high school.

“Having Friday off helps kids get through their long commute,” shared Denise.

The four-day work week is also an important recruitment and retention piece for the district. Even though many teachers have some very long days due to extra-curriculars on top of the already longer school day, the four-day work week is still viewed favourably. Teachers who volunteer to coach sports at their school work late into the evening, or work on their day off, because they must travel with their school teams out of the district for games each week. The district is too small to have multiple sports teams in each age category, so the only option is to travel to other districts for competition.

The travel doesn't seem to deter teachers and students though. The sports scene is thriving at each school in the district. Schools also offer a range of other extra-curriculars, including e-sports and musical theatre.

In a rural local like Boundary, teachers find themselves representing the school every day and everywhere they go. The community knows them first and foremost as the teacher, and there aren't many places you can go without being recognized. While this sounds like a challenge to those of us from urban centres around the province, all the teachers included in this profile mentioned they didn't mind it.

The small community means you know each student, family, and colleague; you know their history; you know what they need; you know how to help; and you know there will be people to help if you need it. Ultimately, this is the biggest draw for the teachers volunteering for their local union in this region.

“I love the sense of community and the people,” said Janine. “You feel you're not alone.” •



PHOTOS

Pages 20–21: A Boundary view and the members interviewed for this article. **Pages 22–23:** Boundary students enjoying their school garden produce and lessons with Emma Boyd. All photos by Sunjum Jhaj.



JOYOUS JOURNALING (part two!)

How journaling changed my classroom ... and my life

By **Jessica Deitcher** (she/her), educator in New Westminster and faculty associate at Simon Fraser University

IN THE LAST ISSUE of *Teacher*, I led you through the first part of my journaling journey with my Grades 4 and 5 students. Eight years of journaling alongside them has taught me so much about the journaling process and also about how identities are critical to our success in the classroom. When I read my students' journals, I gain better insight into their identities, and I can then understand how to meet their needs in the classroom. Journaling is a great tool for learning more about yourself and, with permission, learning about others. The key part is to write your data down and to realize that *everything about your life is worth writing down*.

After 14 years as a public school educator, I made the move to Simon Fraser University to work with preservice teachers in the Faculty of Education.

Like my elementary students, my student-teachers thrive when I give my support and guidance as they step into their teacher selves. They also need me to give them their space and allow them to find their own way. They seek connection with me and with other classmates through activities, games, conversations, and discussions. They want to know the finer details about how and why we do the things we do as teachers, and they want their time to be honoured and valued as they navigate the education program. They look to see if they can trust me as their instructor. Essentially, the same things that elementary and secondary students need from us teachers, adult learners need as well. *They need the same love and care, through the lens of, "I see you for you."*

Unlike my Grades 4 and 5 students, my student-teachers were a bit more apprehensive about journaling and its process. They were skeptical of its place in their learning, or unsure of what they could or could not share. A few of them were hesitant to share their journals with me at all. I realized I was going to have to change my tune, just slightly, to prove to the adults that journaling is worth it.

One of the biggest changes I made to my journaling practice for the student-teachers was to provide loose "instructions" for journal entries and demonstrate with my own examples. While my elementary students were eager to pick up my journals and read them, the student-teachers were much more tentative. I noticed that social dynamics and pressures came into play when journaling with adults; they seemed to feel like more was on the line, that sharing journal entries was perhaps too personal and there was a fear of being judged. I realized that I would have to show them my own entries first to gain their trust.



There were also journaling stereotypes we overcame together. We contradicted the idea that journaling is copious amounts of writing, or that it's only ever about the big things in life, the serious things, the "Dear Diary" things. I tried my best to show my student-teachers that journaling could be different than what we have come to expect.

After a few weeks of journaling with one of my first cohorts, things began to click. It took more time to trust the process, but *time with journaling* and the routine we were building was a turning point for most of my student-teachers. They needed to journal first—in various ways and formats I presented to them—to understand how meaning could be made. They needed the proof. In sharing their journals with me, they came to understand what it felt like to have someone see them for themselves.

After journaling with numerous cohorts over the years, my student-teachers have given me feedback on the experience. One student wrote that journaling, "was a moment to revisit, organize, and calm my thoughts and feelings," while another expressed that journaling, "has meant honouring experiences and documenting moments in time." Numerous students told me that journaling helped them connect with me, and many others described journaling as fun and a way to relieve stress. The most common critique I get of journaling with student-teachers is that they wished I gave them more time in class to complete their entries.

While I have learned that it is powerful for myself to have documentation of my life, there is also no substitute for the meaning-making that happens when journals are shared with others. Reading through the journals of my Grades 4 and 5 students and my adult student-teachers is the same kind of inspiring, connective experience: *reading the stories of someone's life is truly a gift*. Understanding point of view and perspective, being privy to opinions and ideas, and gaining insight into the mind, heart, and spirit of others—journaling has allowed me entry into the worlds of those I teach, inevitably turning the table so that I become the learner. As I explore what it means to journal my own truths, I witness my students (and student-teachers) doing the same, in part because I journey alongside them. I have learned that there is great reciprocity within the sharing of stories, and journaling is a valuable tool through which connections, trust, and care are strengthened within education, *no matter what age*. •

Jessica's book *Worth Writing Down: Ideas for Journaling Your Truest Self* is out this month! It includes her favourite journal entries and how-to instructions useful in the classroom. Also check out Jessica's Instagram @joyous_journaling and website joyous-journaling.com.

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HOW TO START A JOURNALING PRACTICE

If you are curious about journaling on your own or with students, here's how to begin:

- **Start with empty pages:** Choose a journal that has blank pages—no lines. This gives you so much freedom to create. Don't feel you have to write sentences. Write however you like.
- **Stick to a schedule:** Journaling is all about *consistency*. I have found that once a week is the right amount for my practice to flourish. Pick the same day each week to journal to build a routine. Stick with it, even if you don't write as much as you'd like.
- **Don't worry:** Don't worry about what you write. *It is more important that you do*, even if you think you're writing about nothing. The more you practise journaling, the better you'll get at writing how you want.
- **If you're stuck:** If you're really stuck on what to write, here are two prompts that will *always* give you something to write about:
 - How am I feeling today?
 - What am I grateful for today?
- **When you're ready:** To make journaling *even more powerful and meaningful*, read over your past entries once in a while. You'll gain insight into who you are. If you're willing to go further, share your journal with someone else. This is where the real magic of journaling happens: when someone else witnesses your stories.

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From HSP to SLP



Sheba Mathew
(photo provided
by author)

FOR YEARS, I struggled to find the right words to capture a significant part of my journey. The title “From HSP to SLP” might seem unconventional, but it holds a deeply personal story. As a highly sensitive person (HSP) and a speech language pathologist (SLP), I’ve discovered that my sensitivity isn’t just a trait but a profound part of how I connect with others and approach my work. In this article, I’ll take you through my journey of embracing my sensitivity and how it has transformed my role as an SLP.

The term highly sensitive person was coined by psychologist Elaine Aron. According to her theory, HSPs possess heightened sensitivity to sensory stimuli—whether emotional or physical. We feel deeply, react strongly, and process experiences in a more nuanced way than most people. As strange as it may sound, I identify as an HSP. My sensitivity to emotions and subtle environmental cues has played a pivotal role in shaping who I am as an SLP.

EMBRACING SENSITIVITY AS A STRENGTH

As a child, I was labeled “too sensitive,” often ridiculed for crying easily or being overly dramatic. People didn’t understand that I wasn’t just reacting more to situations—I was feeling more. “You’re so sensitive” was never a compliment, but over time, I learned to embrace it. I began to see my sensitivity as a tool—much like how only the most sensitive seismometer detects subtle shifts in the earth. My heightened emotional awareness allows me to detect the unspoken needs of my clients, especially those with autism spectrum disorder, who might struggle to express themselves verbally.

NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF AN HSP

Being an HSP in a profession as emotionally demanding as speech language pathology presents unique challenges. Early in my career, I often felt overwhelmed by the emotions I absorbed from my clients. I wasn’t just hearing their words—I was feeling their fears, frustrations, and anxieties as if they were my own. This emotional intensity left me drained, and I questioned whether I had the emotional resilience to continue in this field.

One significant challenge was setting emotional boundaries. As an HSP, I naturally empathize deeply with others, including parents anxious about their child’s progress and children struggling to communicate. I would often carry their emotions with me after each session. Over time, I realized that while empathy is essential, I needed to protect my own emotional well-being to serve my clients effectively.

How SENSITIVITY became my SUPERPOWER

By **Sheba Mathew** (she/her),
speech language pathologist, Surrey

I've learned that detached attachment—caring deeply while maintaining a healthy distance—is crucial. It took time, but I developed strategies to manage the emotional load, such as practising mindfulness before and after sessions to regulate my emotions. This mental boundary helps me stay present and focused during therapy without becoming emotionally overwhelmed.

Sometimes, being highly sensitive can still be exhausting, and I find myself needing to step back. Pausing is challenging when working full time, so I've developed ways to stay grounded. A walk in nature, for instance, helps me clear my mind and prepare for the emotional work ahead. Even a brief moment outside restores my energy, and I've heard many fellow HSPs say the same.

In addition to mindfulness and nature, writing has become a vital outlet. Journaling allows me to process feelings that might otherwise cloud my judgment or drain my energy. I also find solace in painting and colouring—simple creative acts that help me release emotional tension and regain clarity.

Beyond emotional management, I've made sensory accommodations for myself. Whether it's wearing comfortable clothing, adjusting the lighting in my workspace, or being mindful of the foods I consume, small changes make a big difference. These practices help me avoid overstimulation, ensuring I can function effectively without pushing my limits.

TURNING SENSITIVITY INTO STRATEGY

In my work, I've developed a system of quiet observation at the beginning of each session. By simply sitting with the child for a few minutes, without asking them to speak or interact, I can gauge their mood and readiness for therapy. This allows me to adjust my approach to fit their emotional state, ensuring they're more engaged and receptive. It's a small but powerful way to use sensitivity as a strategy for success in therapy.

Engagement and interaction are often my goals for a child, and play is my mode of getting there—because we learn best when having fun. I often start my sessions with a game that piques the child's interest but requires minimal conversation, or sometimes, it's a simple craft or colouring activity. This sets a relaxed tone and helps ease them into the session.

FINDING MY COMMUNITY

When I discovered that I am an HSP, it felt like all the missing pieces of my life suddenly fell into place. This revelation was enlightening and empowering, helping me understand many aspects of my experiences and reactions. Realizing this was so transformative that I felt compelled to share it with others.

I began sharing my journey on Instagram, discussing the challenges of being an HSP and how various situations affect me. I also talked about my strategies for managing these sensitivities and sometimes sought advice from my followers. The response was incredible. Connecting with fellow HSPs, especially those in caregiving professions like teaching or therapy, has been immensely comforting. Sharing our unique perspectives has not only helped us grow as professionals but also as individuals. Knowing there's a community that understands the ups and downs of being highly sensitive has been a profound source of support.

REFLECTING ON THE GIFT OF SENSITIVITY

Over time, I've come to see my sensitivity not as a weakness, but as my superpower. Being an HSP makes me a better SLP, and I wouldn't trade it for anything. This profession didn't just fall into my lap—I believe it chose me, and I'm endlessly grateful for that.

So, the next time you're working with a student who's struggling, consider what their unspoken behaviours are telling you. What emotions or needs lie just beneath the surface? For those of us who are highly sensitive, tuning into these subtle signals can be the key to unlocking breakthroughs. •

HSP RESOURCES

The Highly Sensitive Person

by Elaine Aron

The Highly Sensitive Child

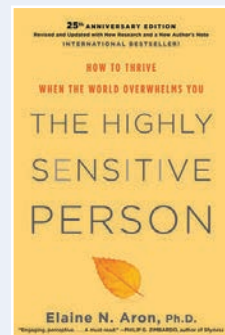
by Elaine Aron

hsperson.com Dr. Aron's site includes HSP research, articles, and self-tests.

highlysensitiverefuge.com HSP articles and community support.

The HSP Podcast with Kelly O'Laughlin: Offers insights and tips on navigating life as an HSP.

Highly Sensitive Healing with Lisa Lewis: Podcast on self-care, mental health, and emotional wellness for HSPs.





NEVER GIVE UP!

Land-based learning and Indigenous knowledges inspire student art

By Neva Whintors, teacher, Surrey

I gratefully acknowledge that I work and learn on the shared traditional and unceded territories of the Katzie, Kwantlen, and Semiamhoo First Nations. It is this land that moulds our behaviours, practices, relationships, and social interactions.¹

THIS IS THE STORY of a school that has been guided on a three-year journey by Dr. Cher Hill and Elder Rick Bailey; a journey in learning to care for salmon like family.

I began working with Dr. Hill, from Simon Fraser University, in 2020. She was working with Councillor Rick Bailey from the Katzie Nation and wanted to support our students in learning to care for salmon. Every Thursday for three years Dr. Hill came to Maddaugh Elementary to support myself and Dorothy Smithson, my good friend and colleague, in outdoor education with our classes. We engaged in land-based learning with students, allowing them to pursue inquiry related to their passions and deepen their understandings of Indigenous knowledges. Dr. Hill supported this work by bringing in Indigenous Elders, storytellers, and drummers.

Elder Rick Bailey had a dream to inspire children, our next generation, to care for salmon like family. He shared his passion and stories with children during each visit to our school. This took learning off the page and into the hearts and minds of children. His stories and passion inspired Maddaugh students to care deeply for salmon and the land that we live upon.

Each year we watch the salmon spawn and release salmon to build connection with our keystone species. We have also planted a total of 522 trees in Campbell Valley and Kanaka Creek over the last two years, and we commit weekly to picking up garbage around our school and the creek that borders it to protect the water ways for salmon. Children take on their own ideas of how to care for salmon. They share knowledge with their families, and parents often email me to share how their children have orchestrated a weekend family trip to local parks and streams to visit salmon-bearing streams.

1 D. Cuddworth and R. Lumber, "The importance of forest school and the pathways to nature connection," *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*, 2021, 24(1), p. 71-85.

Elder Rick Bailey says, “If you call something yours, you have to take care of it.” With these words, the concept of salmon as family allowed salmon to swim in the hearts and minds of our students, and inspired our Maddaugh street art.

Our school community follows a social-emotional well-being philosophy based on the theory of PERMA: positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning, and achievement. A Grade 7 student of Maddaugh Elementary had been part of a cohort of students working on “living in their strengths in new and novel ways.” This student had a dream to paint street art. They had been working on painting small projects and yearning to paint something big that would make a difference. There were three cement embankments outside of our school marking the end of the road and the entrance to our school. Our principal suggested we submit a request to paint the cement embankments. We applied to the City of Surrey, and it was approved! We had now found the canvas for this student-artist to live in their strength, to paint something big, to make a difference!

The student-artist met with primary students and brainstormed a vision for the art. They wanted to share one of the teachings we have learned from observing salmon—to never give up! Together classes went outside to paint near the cement embankments that are bordered by tall, wild grass surrounding a salmon-bearing stream. On reams of white roll paper every student painted aspects of the environment and on every primary student’s masterpiece they chose to include salmon!

I had met Ryan Hughes, an Indigenous artist from the Snuneymuxw Nation, at a pow-wow at the beginning of the school year, and I knew he would be able to support the student-artist to bring this work to life. Hughes made many visits to Maddaugh. He shared how he connected to the land through the raven, the trickster, who loved to have fun, to laugh, and to find joy. On Earth Day Hughes presented to nine classes, and their families, and talked about how he connects to the land and shares this connection through art. For Hughes, learning with books and paper lessons did not come alive in his

heart and mind until he began to express his understanding through art.

Together Hughes and the student-artist met with the primary students, who shared their paintings and ideas for the street art. They enlisted the help of a good friend of the student-artist, and the three of them drew the image that is painted on the embankments, a representation of the school’s learning and philosophy. With the support and encouragement of our entire school population, they painted a message that reflects our Maddaugh community.

The Never Give Up mural welcomes hundreds of families each and every day to our school. Like all good learning, the mural holds within it many stories from our school community. It brings to life a Grade 7 student’s vision. It is the culmination of the endless hours Dr. Cher Hill has engaged in learning and teaching our school community to build relation and care for the land. The art showcases the teachings of Councillor and Elder Rick Bailey, to care for salmon, the keystone species of this land, like family. Embedded in this art is the vision and passion of Indigenous artist Ryan Hughes from Snuneymuxw Nation and his collaborative work with the student-artist and hundreds of Maddaugh students to see the raven, the trickster, and bring his love of life into all we do. The mural is a representation of the passions and artwork of hundreds of primary students who supported this collective vision. It highlights the work of our dedicated Maddaugh educators, supported by a principal who understands learning does not come alive for everyone in the same way. Embedded in this mural is the notion we all need to push ourselves to live into our strengths in new and novel ways and to support our students to live into their strengths. It is a reminder to everyone to Never Give Up! •

CONTRIBUTING GRANTS

This work was made possible by grants from the BCTF Aboriginal Initiative Grant, the SD36 Indigenous Learning Grant, a Surrey Teachers’ Association grant, and the City of Surrey Small Project Grant.

PHOTOS

Opposite: The completed Never Give Up mural; a student works on the mural; primary students painting.

This page: A student’s painting.

All photos provided by author.



Navigating identity:

An autoethnographic reflection of a teacher of multilingual learners


By **Jaimie Bin Li** (she/her),
teacher, Langley

MY NAME IS JAIMIE BIN LI, and I am a Chinese woman who lives in Canada. I grew up in a small village in the southeast part of China. I speak Mandarin as my first language and used to speak Fu'an dialect as my second language. I learned how to speak English when I moved to Canada at the age of 26. I now speak English better than I can speak the Fu'an dialect.

My life was very simple. Growing up in a small village in southeast China, poverty was all we knew. I had a few friends with whom I hung out every day. When the weather was nice, we would carry our bowls of congee and sit in a row on a tree log. My friend's mom would put some soy sauce in our congee; that was one of our favourite foods. We did not know what the outside world was like. We had nothing to compare our lives to, so we were happy.

My mother was not around much. I accepted the fact that as a single mom she had to make money to support my grandparents and me, so I never complained. I was used to living without her. I went to a very small school that had only around 100 students from Kindergarten to Grade 5. I learned how to recite poems from the Tang dynasty and the multiplication tables. My teachers liked me. When I turned 13, my mom registered me at a middle school that was a one-and-a-half-hour walk from my grandparents' home. My mother repeated over and over that I had to study hard to get out of poverty. I told myself to try hard and one day take all my family out of the village.

Attending middle school was very exciting. Kids were all in uniforms, so I did not need to wear the oversized hand-me-down clothes from my cousin. I learned the word "race" at the age of 13. My geography teacher taught us that there were three races in the world: black, white, and yellow. Chinese belonged to the yellow race. I still remember I looked at my skin and questioned, "But we don't look yellow." My teacher reminded me that this was knowledge from the textbook and that I only needed to remember it.



Jaimie Bin Li
(photo provided
by author)

“Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am.” – Parker Palmer

I immigrated to Canada in 2008, trying to pursue a teaching career with all my credentials and qualifications from China. However, with minimal English and zero local working experience, survival was difficult, and my dream of becoming a teacher in Canada seemed almost impossible. I started my free English language learning by working at McDonald's, volunteering at elementary and high schools, taking a teacher assistant job at a preschool that paid half the minimum wage, and talking to strangers whenever possible. As an adult learner, I used every possible opportunity to speed up my English acquisition. In 2010, after taking TOEFL four times, I finally met the language prerequisite to start my teacher training at Simon Fraser University. In class, I always felt utterly jealous of classmates with the perfect English accent. Every word that rolled out of their mouths seemed so perfect and sophisticated. I became the quiet student in the class. I chose not to talk because I did not want to sound stupid.

Unpacking my identity was not easy. I was resistant and confused. I did not want to find fault, judge, or criticize the terms with which I was supposed to identify myself. I thought that the assumption that racial identity was shaped by my heritage and culture was pretty accurate, and there was no need to re-examine it. My doctorate program pushed me to pause, reflect, and seek “information that lies beyond our common-sense ideas about the world,”¹ and to think critically. I asked myself, if racial identity was affected by only my heritage and culture, wouldn't I just simply call myself Chinese-Canadian now? It might be absurd to say, but I tried to understand myself. I looked back at my years of self-actualizing. I believed that immigrating to Canada would allow me to get my family out of poverty. Somewhere on the journey of becoming Canadian, I began trying hard to leave the Chinese in me behind. I did not want to use my Chinese name anymore. I reminded myself to make Canadian friends so I could speak like a native English speaker. I went to church, although I was a Buddhist. I gave my daughter an English name because I thought that would make my family more Canadian. All these “common-sense” actions turned into a moment of mind-blowing self-recognition: I called myself Chinese, but I did not even want to be Chinese. What I have been trying to do was to fit in—I just wanted to fit in!

All these self-actualizations opened up years of assumptions I had embraced about what was desired. I wondered if this was pernicious, internalized racism—a form of self-hatred.

Combs stated, “We may ignore the self in our teaching, but we cannot ... escape the fact of our influence upon the self or our responsibility with respect to whether the effects of schooling are positive or negative.”² If my well-planned years of being and becoming have created internalized racism, I wonder what kind of impact I have been passing down to my students unconsciously. I learned about the importance of ethnic identity development and how positive perceptions of our ethnicity can help separate our personal worth from social problems, and I learned to distinguish personal responsibilities from attempted impositions of blame by others.³ I reflected on my own practice as a teacher of multilingual learners. Over the years, I have encouraged my students and their families to read more English at home when they told me they read books in their first language. At school, I introduced so many different cultures to my multilingual learners to embrace diversity, but never really reinforced that they needed to value their own ethnic heritage, promote self-authentication, and develop healthy and positive self-concepts. I thought what I did was good for my students so they would speak perfect English, succeed at school, and have a better life in Canada. But I was wrong.

“Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am.”⁴ Revisiting one of my favourite author's notes helped me reclaim the courage I needed for change. “I want to learn how to hold the paradoxical poles of my identity together, to embrace the profoundly opposite truth that my sense of self is deeply dependent on others dancing with me and that I still have a sense of self when no one wants to dance.”⁵ I asked myself, if I cannot fix the misjudgments I had made in the past, can I now use my lived experiences of acculturating and self-actualizing to help raise awareness and understanding among teachers of the processes, identity formations, and challenges emergent multilingual students might go through in our school system?

This narrative is a channel for me to share my study with educators like me and others who wish to become mentors to emergent multilingual students, fostering beliefs in their potential and supporting them to dream big, just like their English-speaking peers who are firmly grounded in their linguistic and cultural knowledge. ●

1 O.Z. Sensoy & R.J. DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal?: An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education* (2nd ed.), Teachers College Press, 2017, p. 48.

2 G. Gay, 11 “Ethnic Identity Development and Multicultural Education,” *Racial and Ethnic Identity in School practices: Aspects of Human Development*, 1999, p. 195.

3 *ibid.*

4 P.J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*, John Wiley & Sons, 1999, p. 78–79.

5 P.J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, John Wiley & Sons, 2017, p. 74.



Circle of Trust: Restorative connection in a community of colleagues

By **Shirley Giroux**, Local President, McBride-Valemount Teachers' Association
in conversation with **Susan Yao**, teacher, Delta

ALTHOUGH WE TEND to be very collaborative when working toward supporting positive outcomes for students, teachers are often not so proactive when it comes to taking care of our own needs as human beings. Given the complexity of teaching—management of multiple caregiving, instructional, assessment, and organizational demands, while under time pressures for each—it is understandable that teachers might benefit from opportunities to reconnect with what is most meaningful for them within a supportive community of colleagues. The systematic and sustained use of facilitated peer support groups is one way that teachers can support each other: a Circle of Trust is one such group.

In 2019, I completed a PhD in Health Sciences wherein I used a mixed-methods approach to research the ways in which female teachers enacted their resilience given multiple caregiving responsibilities. In particular, I was interested in the ways people managed to care for children all day at work (i.e., focusing on the caring labour aspect of teaching) and then head home to their own children. As part of that research, I used participatory narrative inquiry,¹ a narrative qualitative method where research participants share individual stories and then are also invited to interpret the collected results in groups of participants. Watching teachers read and make sense of stories shared by their colleagues from across the province provided me with the single greatest insight from my

studies: that providing teachers time together to hear about each other's experiences in a supportive environment is a validating and valuable endeavour. As a registered clinical counsellor, I connected this observation to my experience of clinical supervision, which—in its various forms—is a primary mechanism through which mental health professionals process the emotional aspects of their intensely interpersonal work.

Based on my research observations, my understanding of clinical supervision, and the resilience literature, I wondered why teachers did not also have a consistent, reliable, trustworthy means of supporting each other and processing the intrapersonal effects of their interpersonal work. I have spent the last five years testing models through which this might be accomplished. In 2021, I discovered Parker Palmer's Circle of Trust retreats,² which appeared to include all of the features that I knew were valuable in a teacher group intended to help simultaneously support introspection and reflection, connection with colleagues, and momentum for systems change. In the spring of 2024, I reached the point in my training as a Circle of Trust retreat facilitator where I was required to plan and facilitate my capstone retreat, which I elected to do as an online option to support the work of union leaders, such as Local and Sublocal Presidents—the latter group which includes me. One of these participants was Susan Yao, Local President of Delta at that time.



SUSAN'S STORY

The first meeting of the Circle of Trust introduced me to the practice of “being touchstones” in a way that was respectful and provided clarity on the expectations of members of the circle. This practice creates intentional space for collaboration. Gentle and engaging prompts challenged us to consult our inner voices in identifying which of the eleven touchstones resonated and why.

This was followed by work on the questions we ask ourselves and questions we ask others, including about our emotions and the important data they can provide. We delved deeper into asking questions: looking at what makes an honest, open-ended question.

With several small-group experiences, we developed our skills in a setting where the guidelines of trust had been established. This, for me, is key to being able to discuss difficulties and to be able, from that, to find the insights that come from “respecting that the inner teacher is present in and guiding each of us while we learn in community.” The experience provided space to both give and receive honest, open questions in community, and opportunity to gain insights about myself and others. As someone in the group said, “Sometimes we need to vocalize to hear our voice come to life!”

Yes! Engaging in the Circle of Trust gave me the powerful experience of engaging with others in community while exploring individual members’ challenges, including my own specific concerns. Being in the circle allowed me to explore and consolidate issues with questions that—more than once!—I received as thoughtful gifts because they allowed me to dig deeper. Knowing how to ask questions that can become gifts to another has been transformative in my relationships, particularly with my adult children.

The duality of life and the paradox of connection and disconnection were part of the work over the three mornings we came together. We worked with metaphor and imagery to find insights: identifying with the strength of a Douglas fir, the nourishing fruit of an age-twisted apple tree, and the gnarled peeling beauty of the arbutus prompted other thoughts in me. As a child, I experienced concern and anxiety encountering a leaf-filled forest in fall. Who will clean this? Who will sweep these up? I was anxious about the chaotic layers of leaves covering and cluttering the forest floor. I am working through my anxieties about the world and its chaos, my life and its chaos, and finding meaning in the juiciness and nourishment that lies within and underneath the chaos. The Circle of Trust provided a safe, supportive space to do some of this deep work. As someone said, “Connection is there if you allow it.” The Circle of Trust has that potential.

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While this particular group was convened on behalf of folks who were released from their teaching duties for union work, the other teacher groups I have run have been outside of the teaching day. In my current district, we have access to supplementary pay to support approved work (generally special projects such as groups of this type) outside of school hours, which helps affirm that collaborative work is a valuable and valued part of teaching. My vision for the future of education is that we have more supported spaces of this type to connect with ourselves and each other with the recognition that our work is primarily relational, which has repercussions for our continued well-being as teachers. I look forward to continuing this conversation. ●

1 C. Kurtz, *Working with Stories in Your Community or Organization: Participatory Narrative Inquiry* (3rd ed.), Kurtz-Fernhout Publishing, 2014.

2 P. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*, Jossey-Bass, 2004.



Rashda Munawar
(photo provided
by author)

Promoting growth mindset and type 1 diabetes inclusion in children's literature

By Rashda Munawar,
teacher and author, Langley

I AM RASHDA, a math educator by day and an indie author by passion. I've always been captivated by the power of children's literature. There is an immense amount we can learn through storytelling.

There are two elements in children's literature I always seek: purposeful stories that instill a growth mindset in kids and diverse inclusion, with representations of various cultures and abilities in a normalized way.

When my daughter was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, I realized how little awareness there was about this condition, despite it being common among children aged 5 to 12. I was shocked by the lack of representation of type 1 diabetes in children's literature, especially given the advancements in technology like diabetic pumps and glucose monitors. Many kids and teachers are still unaware of what type 1 diabetes entails.

I felt there was a bigger need for type 1 diabetes awareness specifically through representation in children's literature, so I decided to address the gap by writing a book myself.

I faced a dilemma: should I write a story with a type 1 character and focus on type 1 diabetes, or should I integrate it subtly? Ultimately, I realized the importance of normalizing diverse conditions in children's literature. By doing so, we can create a more inclusive and understanding world for our children.

This journey led me to write my debut children's book, *Think BIG: Believe, Achieve, and Soar High*, which not only embodies the principles of a growth mindset, but also subtly includes type 1 diabetes representation, making it relatable and educational for young readers.

Think BIG is a captivating tale of Maria, a spirited girl on her first day of Grade 1. The story unfolds as Maria grapples with the conflicting voices in her head: Mr. Small, the voice of doubt, and Mr. Big, the voice of encouragement.

As Maria navigates her desire to conquer the daunting firepole on the playground, she encounters challenges that reflect the

November is National Diabetes Awareness Month!

internal struggle between fear and courage. Encouraged by a new friend, Siana, Maria learns the power of embracing a growth mindset.

Mr. Big and Mr. Small personify the growth mindset and the fixed mindset. No matter the situation, if children can identify whether their thoughts align with Mr. Big or Mr. Small, it will be easier for them to navigate their emotions. Recognizing negative thoughts allows them to understand that positive feelings exist too, enhancing their self-awareness.

Maria, the protagonist, happens to have type 1 diabetes. However, the story does not revolve around the character's condition. This approach normalizes the experience of living with type 1 diabetes and demonstrates that individuals with this condition can lead fulfilling lives beyond their diagnosis. By incorporating type 1 diabetes representation in stories that focus on broader themes and adventures, we can empower children with type 1 diabetes to feel less alone and more confident in navigating their health challenges.

I hope this book will inspire children and adults alike, fostering a greater understanding and acceptance of diverse experiences and challenges. I am looking forward to my author visits in schools to talk about my book. You can find free colouring sheets and a lesson plan on my website (www.rashzee.com). There is also a resource guide at the end of the book with reflection questions and activities for kids in class. I am in the process of creating more resources to go along with my book, which will be available on my website soon. •

LESSON PLAN

On the opposite page is a sample lesson plan to teach about emotions and feelings with *Think BIG*.

Lesson plan for Grades 1 to 4: Understanding growth mindset and fixed mindset through *Think BIG*



OBJECTIVE

Students will understand the concepts of growth mindset and fixed mindset using the characters Mr. Big and Mr. Small from the story *Think BIG*. They will learn to identify and challenge their own fixed-mindset thoughts and replace them with growth-mindset thoughts.

CURRICULAR COMPETENCY

Identify and describe feelings and worries, and strategies for dealing with them.

MATERIALS

- the book *Think BIG* by Rashda Munawar
- chart paper and markers
- sticky notes
- worksheet: growth-mindset vs. fixed-mindset statements (www.rashzee.com/resources)
- drawing materials (paper, crayons, markers).

DURATION

60 minutes

Introduction (10 minutes)

1. Greeting and warm-up

- Begin by asking the students if they've ever tried something new that was difficult at first. Allow students to share their experiences.

2. Introduce the concepts

- Explain that today they will be learning about two important ideas: growth mindset and fixed mindset.
- Define growth mindset: believing you can get better at something through hard work and effort.
- Define fixed mindset: believing you can't change or improve because of who you are.

Reading the story (15 minutes)

1. Read *Think BIG*

- Read the story *Think BIG* aloud to the class, showing the illustrations.
- Pause at key moments to ask prediction questions (e.g., "What do you think Maria will do next?").

Discussion (10 minutes)

1. Discuss the characters

- Ask the students to identify Mr. Big and Mr. Small. Discuss how each character talks to Maria and how it makes her feel.
- Chart responses on a t-chart labeled "Mr. Big" and "Mr. Small."

2. Reflect on personal experience

- Ask students if they've ever heard a "Mr. Small" voice in their heads. What did it say? How did it make them feel?
- Encourage them to think of times when they heard a "Mr. Big" voice and how that felt different.

Activity: Identifying mindsets (15 minutes)

1. Growth-mindset vs. fixed-mindset statements

- Distribute the worksheet with statements and ask students to determine if each one is an example of a growth mindset or a fixed mindset.
- Review the answers as a class, discussing why each statement fits into its category.

2. Creating Mr. Big and Mr. Small

- Give each student a piece of paper and drawing materials. Ask them to draw what Mr. Big and Mr. Small look like to them.
- Encourage them to write a sentence that Mr. Big might say and a sentence that Mr. Small might say.

Conclusion and reflection (10 minutes)

1. Share drawings and journeys

- Allow students to share their drawings of Mr. Big and Mr. Small.
- Hang the drawings of Mr. Big around the room or create a bulletin board display titled "*Think BIG: Our Growth Mindset Heroes.*"

2. Reflection

- Ask students to write or draw one thing they want to try to get better at and what Mr. Big might say to encourage them.
- Collect the sticky notes and create a "Growth Mindset Wall" in the classroom.

Assessment

- Observe students' participation in discussions and activities.
- Review the completed worksheets and drawings for understanding.
- Use the reflections to gauge their grasp of growth mindset principles.

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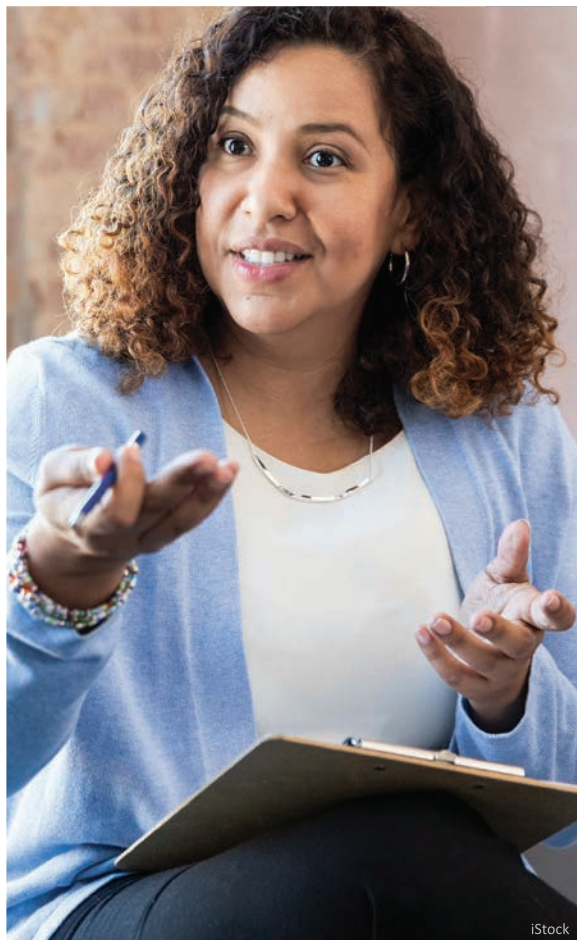


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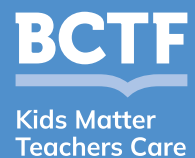
For more information and to access PSS, contact Sherry Payne, Miranda Light or your local union.

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

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ABOVE

A crochet tribute to Paulo Freire, Brazilian educator and philosopher. Read about Freire's legacy and the work being done through the BCTF International Solidarity Program in this issue, pages 6–19. Photo provided by International Solidarity Program participants.