



## Prising TOCs from VSB's \$6.5 million surplus

The school board would rather keep money in the bank than provide continuity of service to students.

At a recent Finance committee meeting, it was reported that the Vancouver School Board is projecting a surplus of \$6.5 million this year. I attended the meeting with great optimism and expected the trustees to take this opportunity to attack some of the immediate problems facing Vancouver students.

I was a bit shocked to note that District Management recommended that the money be kept in a bank account. I felt sure that this Board of new trustees did not know the full extent of the discrimination our students with additional needs were experiencing in Vancouver schools.

I explained to the Trustees that the shortage of Teachers-on-Call was seriously affecting the learning programmes for our most needy students.

I told the committee that many students' needs are ignored because, as we all know, there is chronic under-staffing of resource teachers. But here in Vancouver the problem is

compounded by the decision not to provide a Teacher-On-Call for the specialist teacher when he/she is absent for the first three days. Now there is a new layer of discrimination because when a classroom teacher is absent the specialist teacher is redirected to cover a class and so support for her needy students is cancelled again!

I explained that the so-called teacher "shortage" is artificially created in Vancouver. Vancouver, unlike other school boards, has actually *closed* its TOC list and is not recruiting TOCs – except in a few specialist areas.

I further explained that even in the few months of the year when the list is open, Vancouver refuses to hire retired teachers – although the board has no difficulty hiring retired principals.

My pleas fell on deaf ears. Trustee Shirley Wong said that she preferred a "conservative" approach and it was best to keep the money in the bank. I don't think the parents of the students who are falling further and further behind will agree. This is taxpayers money meant to be spent on the students of today.

### The so-called teacher "shortage" is artificially created in Vancouver

I am amazed that in the light of the North Vancouver court decision on services to special needs students that the trustees have decided not to provide the most basic service to students even when they have the money. (In the North Vancouver decision, the judge said lack of money was no excuse.)

The experience of the individual student is surely the heart of our work. Imagine the experience of the Vancouver student who needs additional support. It takes many assessments and many meetings to confirm the student is in need and will be provided with additional support.

But wait ... just as the student starts receiving the support it is interrupted. His teacher is sick so the student's support is cancelled. Service resumes when the teacher gets well but then support stops again. The student is confused; he sees the teacher in school, so why is his support cancelled again? The teacher tries to explain another teacher in the school is absent so she has to go teach that class.

The message to the student is clear: "You are not important. The additional service you should be receiving is not valued. The additional support which everyone agrees is essential for you to succeed is not essential on a consistent and regular basis. Your support can be disrupted because the Vancouver School Board chooses to keep a large bank account rather than spend the money to provide you with the services you so desperately require now."

Teachers need to inform parents whenever their child is denied service. Parents have a right to know. Perhaps it will take another lawsuit to prise the money from the vault.

Mary McDermott  
VESTA President

### Supreme Court of Canada upholds teachers' right to inform parents about classroom conditions

BC teachers have won a court ruling that allows teachers to talk to parents about working and learning conditions in our schools. On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, The Supreme Court of Canada dismissed an application by the BC Public School Employers' Association to appeal a BC Court of Appeal ruling that upheld teachers' rights to inform parents of their concerns about class size and composition, and education funding cuts.

The case goes back to 2002, when the BC Liberals legislatively imposed the teachers' contract for the first time, and began making cuts that eventually left school boards facing funding shortfalls in excess of \$300 million.

To highlight the impact on classroom conditions, teachers distributed cards to parents that reported their children's class sizes before and after the government stripped firm limits from the collective agreement. In addition, teachers mounted posters on bulletin boards with information on reductions in staffing of specialist teachers, such as librarians and counsellors.

After some school boards attempted to prohibit teachers from distributing the class-size cards or posters, the BCTF launched a provincial grievance. Arbitrator Don Munroe, QC, ruled that school boards had indeed violated teachers' right to free expression under the Charter of Rights, and that such interference was not justified in a free and democratic society.

The employers' association challenged his ruling at the BC Court of Appeal, but that court reaffirmed that teachers' free expression is protected by the Charter. Finally, BCPSEA applied for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada, which was denied, with costs to the BCTF.

"This case illustrates to what lengths the employer is willing to go to try to prevent parents from hearing about the realities in our classrooms," Jinny Sims said. "BCPSEA won't be allowed to spend any more tax dollars on silencing the voices of teachers."

Sources: Globe & Mail, bctf.ca

#### DID YOU YOU KNOW?

The VSB is projecting a \$6.5 surplus for next year, and recently received \$540,000 previously held back by the Ministry.

Teachers-On-Call are not provided for specialist teachers by the VSB until the third day of absence.

There is no "shortage" of TOCs in Vancouver. There are plenty of teachers looking for work. The VSB just hasn't hired enough, and has turned down offers to allow retired teachers on the TOC list.

The VSB has closed its TOC list, and is not recruiting any new teachers, except in a few specialist areas.

The VSB saves money every time it disrupts student support by not supplying enough TOCs to cover absences.



# Equity for Aboriginal learners

**“We take this opportunity to acknowledge the shared traditional territory of the Coast Salish people on which our school is built.**

*We thank all of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil Waututh Nations. We would also like to acknowledge the diverse population of people who have come to this country and contribute to its dynamic culture.”*

What a wonderful way to honour our Aboriginal / First Nations people, not to mention our diverse cultural groups! This was an Aboriginal Acknowledgment that I was first introduced to at Queen Alexandra

Elementary School in 2004/5 and brought along on my journey to Nightingale Elementary where it is now a regular part of our assembly following the singing of *O Canada*.

At Nightingale, we are now having students and parents, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal read aloud this acknowledgment. It has been quite amazing and very moving the response that I have received from various First Nations parents, who have expressed sentiments of acceptance and honour.



While I am glad that these individuals are feeling empowered, I can't help wonder why an acknowledgment of

this kind hasn't/wasn't actualized throughout our District all along. Why is an acknowledgment of this kind not part of our regular vocabulary

and formalities in all school assemblies like *O Canada*?

I was recently at a First Nations meeting hosted by the VSB on January 31, 2006 and also at the VESTA Staff Rep. Training on February 7. It was curious that at both meetings the question was posed something along the lines of, “What are the barriers to success that our First Nations students face?” followed by “What are we currently doing to address these barriers and what more can be done?”

While these are pretty loaded questions, with no quick-fix solution, logically it would seem that a simple acknowledgment of identity and belonging, might just be a good first place to start. Mary McDermott gave the acknowledgement at the start of the Staff Rep Training, and this

will now be part of our General Meetings and Staff Rep Assemblies too. But what about elsewhere? I would like to challenge not only schools in Vancouver, but for Management to also commence their sessions, Board meetings, and so forth by extending an acknowledgment as well. For myself, I need to educate myself as to the names and locations of the traditional territories at least in BC, if not across the country as we have many students coming into our District from other provinces. I need to not skip over the Aboriginal content in the Science, Socials and Math texts, but rather educate both myself and my students as to the ways of a people who are both spiritually and culturally rich.

## Why is an acknowledgment of this kind not part of our regular vocabulary?

will now be part of our General Meetings and Staff Rep Assemblies too. But what about elsewhere?

I would like to challenge not only schools in Vancouver, but for Management to also commence their sessions, Board meetings, and so forth by extending an acknowledgment as well. For myself,

I need to educate myself as to the names and locations of the traditional territories at least in BC, if not across the country as we have many students coming into our District from other provinces.

I need to not skip over the Aboriginal content in the Science, Socials and Math texts, but rather educate both myself and my students as to the ways of a people who are both spiritually and culturally rich.

**Elena Hutchinson  
Nightingale**

**VESTA acknowledges the joint traditional territory of the Musqueam Nation, Tsleil Waututh Nation, Squamish Nation, and Sto:lo Nation.**

**Pronunciation guide:**

Musqueam  
Mus-quea'm

Tsleil Waututh Nation  
Slay Waa- tooth

Squamish  
Squa-mish

Sto:Lo  
Stow Low

Thank you to **Chris Stewart** for providing the wording and pronunciation guide.

## Aboriginal-issues workshops

**The BCTF offers a number of workshops on Aboriginal issues that are freely available to members. Members are encouraged to increase their awareness around the needs of Aboriginal learners and teachers by taking part in one or more of these opportunities.**

Call **Michele Hope** at the BCTF, **871-1857**, for more information or to book one of these professional development workshops for your staff.

### Aboriginal history and culture

This workshop is based on the content of First Nations studies and is aimed at providing background for teachers at all grade levels to better understand the situation of Aboriginal students and current issues, such as the treaty process.

### Inclusive schools and teaching practices

This workshop is based on implementing the concepts in the inclusive schools and teaching practices recommendations from the Task Force on First Nations Education. Each workshop will focus on a limited number of the many items included in the *Task Force Discussion Guide*. The workshop will conclude with developing plans for continuing work on inclusive practice.

### Beyond words: Creating racism-free schools for Aboriginal learners

This workshop offers an Aboriginal perspective on racism, an ugly and controversial reality in our schools. This workshop is designed for participants to have an open and frank discussion about racism concerning Aboriginal people. We want to make visible the invisible.

### Working with Aboriginal youth

This workshop deals with the question: “How do I honestly reach Aboriginal youth in today's educational system?”

### Employment equity for Aboriginal teachers (New)

In this workshop, participants will gain understanding and knowledge of the employment equity process, as it relates to Aboriginal teachers. They will learn how to review bargaining proposals, and develop strategies for supporting the implementation of employment equity.

### Enhancement Agreements (New)

This workshop will show you what an Enhancement Agreement is, and who it's for. It is extremely important that all our members are well schooled on Enhancement Agreements so that we can seek ways to work together to improve the learning needs of Aboriginal students in B.C. public schools.



The VESTA and VSTA executives hosted a wine and cheese for the VSB trustees early in February. Thank you to everyone who was able to attend.

## VESTA news

Published by the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association, local 391 of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation



**VESTA**  
2915 Commercial Drive  
Vancouver, B.C. V5N 4C8  
Phone: 604-873-8378  
Fax: 604-873-2652

www.vesta.ca

**Editor**  
Glen Hansman  
**Proofreader**  
Barbara Kay  
Ken Grant  
**Photography**  
Glen Hansman

**Editorial Advisory Committee**  
Mary McDermott  
Barb Parrott  
Barbara Kay  
**Layout**  
Glen Hansman  
David Anderson

Articles herein reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily the policies of the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association. No reprints without permission.

**Printed by Broadway Printers.**

# Sticking together in the BC Fed



**We need to appreciate the support we get from other unions, but we also need to remember that they look to us for the same.**

At the February 2006 VESTA General Meeting I was struck by the mood in the room. It felt like an undertone of disappointment and fatigue was taking hold: "The government won't even honour the Ready settlement; our fees to BCTF might go up; we have to brace ourselves for another fight..."

Sigh.

Then some people commented that their home school staffs seemed to be losing heart...it might be hard to organize for another stand on our next round of bargaining...we will never get the public back on our side

again...what is the point of being in a union anyway?

Well, I recognized that mood, because I was in it for a long time myself.

But here is what made the difference for me: I went to the BC Fed of Labour AGM in November. There I saw hundreds of people get on their feet in ovation after ovation in appreciation for what we, the teachers of BC, had done for their children. And just as importantly, what we had done for the working people of BC by not submitting to the heavy handed and illegal actions of the government.

I really wish those of you who are feeling discouraged right now could have been at that AGM to witness, first hand, how much support is really out there for teachers and our issues. Yes, it sometimes feels like we lost. Yes, it sometimes seems that this current government is not listening. But in fact I think the government *is* listening. They are listening and watching very closely to see if we

can be demoralized and divided against each other. If they sense that we have had the wind taken out of our sails, they will continue with their current tactics... Isn't that how bullies work? Don't we tell our students that?



Some people were disappointed that we didn't take our fight last fall far enough. But I was at that BC Fed AGM. I learned some of the reasons we stopped short of a general strike....too

complicated for this space, but suffice to say, I cooled off considerably when I heard what other unions had sacrificed to support our strike. The front page of January VESTA News detailed some of the hits that other unions took *because of us*. And that's only the tip of the iceberg.

But trust me, the government knows that they would be extremely foolish to bring us to that brink again.

I truly believe our membership in BC Federation of Labour is a major advantage in our upcoming struggles. Let us also remember that we are amongst the highest paid of the unions in that collective. We need to appreciate the support we get from them, but we also need to remember that they look to us for the same.

So: stick together. Do not let the stonewalling, pressuring get to you. We are on the right side in this fight and we have the working public with us.

**Lorraine Baker Mackenzie**

**Our permanent affiliation vote with the BC Federation of Labour is coming up later in April. Visit [www.bcfed.com](http://www.bcfed.com) to find out some of the ways the BC Fed works for you.**

## LABOUR NEWS ON-LINE

**Columbia Journal**  
[www.columbiajournal.ca](http://www.columbiajournal.ca)  
**LabourNet**  
[www.labournet.org](http://www.labournet.org)  
**LaborNotes**  
[www.labournotes.org](http://www.labournotes.org)  
**LabourStart**  
[www.labourstart.org](http://www.labourstart.org)

## TRANSFERRING & GOING PART-TIME

**Q. When do I need to send in my transfer card?**

A. Usually by March 15<sup>th</sup>, but this year by April 13<sup>th</sup> (as agreed by the VSB and us at the Teachers' Personnel and Staffing Advisory Committee, Article 11.C)

**Q. I am thinking of going back to work only two days a week. Can I apply to full time jobs and then declare my desire for part-time — or am I obligated to only apply to part-time jobs? My concern about being limited to part-time jobs is that my choices will be greatly decreased and I may not be able to work the days that work for me. I am hoping that I can apply to full time and then declare my status once I've gotten the job.**

A. Likely there will be more part-time options than full-time. Once you have a part-time spot the schedule should be negotiable. Email [barbara@vesta.ca](mailto:barbara@vesta.ca) if you wish further information.

**TRANSFER CARDS ARE DUE APRIL 13th THIS YEAR**

## The Provincial Road Trip Noel Herron

**"Over the coming months the Premier and Education Minister will visit every school district in BC"**

**- Speech from the Throne, Feb. 14th, 2006**

So, Gordon Campbell and Shirley Bond plan to visit all 60 school districts in BC in the next few months to meet with "educators, parents and students to seek their ideas for positive change in education".

Let's hope they get an earful.

Promising "to listen and learn at the community level" this upcoming tour, on the face of it, could be a truly worthwhile endeavour; however, given the government's record on underfunding of our public schools, over the past four years, this is clearly a fence-mending exercise.

With the worst relations with the province's teachers of any provincial government, in the past four decades, culminating in bitter teachers' strike last fall, in which Victoria lost popular support for its hard-line stand, this government has to make up lost ground.

This is clearly one of the aims of the upcoming tour.

Sadly, the Liberal-*lite* speech from the throne continues its ideological battle with the provincial teachers' organization. By stating that it "ran on a pledge to communicate directly with all teachers in BC" and by boasting that it will hold "the first-ever Teachers Congress later this year" it risks a rekindling of animosities.

This is clearly an effort to sidestep the organization that officially represents the province's teachers and return to the Harris-like ideological battles. It hardly signals a government that "wants to learn".

But questions abound about both the upcoming tour and the provincial Teachers Congress: Who will be invited to the congress? How will they be invited? Will a selected, direct, invitation be issued to teachers or sent out through school boards? Will Victoria cover all the costs — including transportation, accommodations, meals? What is the estimated cost of the conference? Why not co-host, and co-operatively co-sponsor, and share expenses, for this event with BCTF? And will BCTF, in view of the calculated snub, boycott the conference and ask its members to do so?

Given the very strong support that individual teachers gave the BCTF, on a daily basis, during the strike, and their rejection of Victoria's efforts to demonize their organization, they will not take too kindly to the latest snub.

And what about the burning issue of class size and composition? The law-and-order lesson that the government has learned from its recently published data, as stated in the throne speech is that it "will ensure that all school districts live within the current class size limits established by law."

**So, Gordon Campbell and Shirley Bond plan to visit all 60 school districts. Let's hope they get an earful.**

This tired old chestnut is hauled out once again, and no doubt will be resoundingly repeated by Campbell and Bond, as they tour: blame those (underfunded) school boards for non-compliance with the law.

Hopefully, some participants in the province-wide tour will remind them of the recent ruling by the BC Human Rights Tribunal that the province discriminates against learning disabled students when it fails to give them proper support. Or, will a class action suit by hundreds of parents of learning disabled kids be needed to hammer home the message?

And hopefully, many parents who continue to fund raise for their local schools, will challenge Bond on her recent off-the-wall statement — one of many, as her ministry now pumps out record numbers of slanted press releases and newsletters — that due to the recent infusion of funds from teachers' salaries, withheld during

the strike, that "textbook shortages are now a thing of the past" in BC.

So as school boards prepare to welcome Campbell and Bond (it will be mostly Bond, as Campbell will be on a European junket with his health minister, visiting Sweden, Norway, France and the United Kingdom) they should remember that this provincial road trip has all the hallmarks of the previous provincial put-on, organized last fall by Bond's ministry, and use the occasion to provide a course correction for both of them.

**Noel Herron is a former Vancouver school trustee**



# The Joys of Social Justice

As teachers, we are always making the argument for inclusion, diversity and fairness in our classrooms. We know in our hearts and our guts the importance of creating schools that are based on concepts of justice and equality. We advocate for supportive conditions for our neediest students and develop practices that address all members of our classes. We know that our schools are microcosms of the larger society, and many of us take this activism outside of our classroom walls.

These issues are not different from the kinds of activism we do in our schools every day, but are another approach to creating a better world for our neighbors, our families, our students and ourselves. The Anti-poverty,

Aboriginal Education, Status of Women, Pride and Anti-Racism committees meet to discuss how these issues affect working conditions for teachers, learning conditions for students, and often how they play out in local and global social contexts.

When we address social justice in our communities, it affects the conditions in our schools. When we address social justice in our schools, it affects the conditions in our communities. We know this is true.

There are many similarities among how our committees approach social justice – surely we all desire equality and fairness, as well as helping to distribute

information and participate in active response to injustice.

However, based on how we understand injustice to operate, we have chosen different strategies on how to proceed. While we hold separate committee meetings on issues that relate to our communities, we often work together, as chairs on the executive committee, or in sharing ideas and strategies with other committees, and our work often overlaps. For example, on April 24<sup>th</sup>, the social justice committees have jointly planned a forum for teachers entitled: “Educating for cultural literacy and social change.”

Many of us have chosen VESTA as a site for doing such work because of the overarching efforts of the union to seek equality and empowerment for its

members, and also to inform VESTA of how to better fight for equality.

On behalf of other social justice committee chairs, I would like to invite members to join a social justice committee to explore the ways that social justice affects our members and students, and to take action to help create a better world.

Jody Polukoshko  
Dickens Annex  
Pride Committee Chair

BCTF  
Ra  
RAD  
AD  
Talk  
Stra  
From go  
Glob  
Visit [www.k](http://www.k)  
for more deta  
dues, and yo  
Workshops  
facilitated by  
in number, th  
school staffs,  
conferences  
Contact: PS  
1857 for more  
Jane Turner a

## Pride Committee

On the eve of a very important day in my life as a teacher – the day I finally am totally honest with the students at my school about who I am as a person, a lesbian – I think about what has changed recently that gives me the power to take this step.

Why has now become the right time for me to share who I am? It is very clear that becoming a member of the VESTA Pride Committee and also volunteering to take on the position of Safe Contact at my school has been that change. I am so very lucky, as a teacher in the Vancouver district, to have the needed support from the committee and the district to continue my coming-out process.

The Pride Committee, in just its second year, is working toward several goals that focus on teacher-support and education.

Our members are taking on the challenge of investigating existing VESTA/BCTF policies that address lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues in the workplace. If no such policies exist, we hope to develop the policies that will provide a safe and equitable work environment.

Plans are also underway to create a VESTA Pride website with links to community resources, information, and materials that will support both our teaching and personal lives. Creating resource kits containing books, videos, and lessons to be

placed in each school is also a goal we hope to achieve.

The committee’s most important work for me, though, happens when I attend the meetings and hear the stories from our guest speakers and other teachers in our community. It is this validation that I take back to my school that supports me and my work.

As I take on my role of the school Safe Contact person, helping to fulfill the VSB policy of providing a safe working and learning environment for everyone, I realize my place in this community. In providing support to the staff through the sharing of information, lesson plans, posters, and library resources, our school is becoming a more welcoming and inclusive place. This place can now support and include me, the lesbian kindergarten teacher.

Yes, there is support through VESTA and the VSB for every student, family, and staff member. Look toward your Pride Committee and your staff Safe Contact person for that support and help it grow in your school community. And if your school hasn’t identified a Safe Contact yet, come to a meeting and find out how to make it happen.

Come join us at our next Pride meeting on Monday, March 27, 4 p.m. at the VESTA office to hear guest speaker Debra Sutherland.

**Jeannette Blanchard**  
Carleton School

## Anti-Poverty Committee

At a time when federal, provincial and municipal governments are all implementing policies diminishing the ability of poverty stricken individuals to take care of their needs, the work of anti-poverty organizations is of great importance.

In VESTA, the anti-poverty committee has defined its mission statement as “*focusing resources and energy on eradicating poverty in Vancouver and beyond.*” The committee’s goal is indeed a broad one however, small local actions and dedication put institutional pressure on the necessities of a just society: access to affordable housing, sufficient food and clothing and a stable system of social programs that address the needs of all residents of Vancouver.

There are a myriad of local examples that depict the need for community pressure on governments to reinstate policies designed to support those in financial need. Massive program cuts to EI, welfare, legal aid and women’s shelters have had a substantial impact on the city in which we live. Poverty rates have drastically increased in a very short period of time (doubled in 3 years) which makes apparent the vast

number of citizens dependent on the system for financial support. One can not help but notice the abundance of shivering, homeless Vancouverites curled up in an alley in a soaking wet sleeping bag. How did they get there and why would they choose such a lifestyle ponders a concerned Gortex clad, mocha sipping resident. There are plenty of jobs in Vancouver. “Get a job,” others bark.

The mainstream ideology must change to one which realizes the heart of the issue: these are not individual choices but rather a societal decision to be placing these individuals in such a precarious

situation. Systemic policies which favour tax cuts over well funded programs play out drastic realities in the lived world of those dependant on the system. Strong welfare programs in Canada were fought hard for in the 1960’s in order to protect people from reliving experiences of the great depression. Neo-liberal arguments of

efficiency and free market capitalism have drowned out the voices of the disenfranchised. Our provincial government has chosen to close a majority of the mental institutions (1980’s), under fund the EI system (1990’s), cut welfare in ½ (2000’s) and made panhandling an illegal activity



**Dave Hama**  
Anti-Poverty

(2004). Our repeatedly av social housin number of in decisions ha our children a deplorable s individualistic We need understand one in which which address need to be a policies that sisters in situ We need to need before



# ice Committees

## 5 social justice workshops

**Mafa Rafa: Cross-cultural simulation game**

**RESPECT (Respect and dignity in class and life)**

**ADT (Anti-discrimination response training)**

**Breaking the silence:  
Talking about lesbian & gay issues in schools**

**"That's so gay" is not okay!**

**Strategies for discussing controversial issues**

**Poverty as a classroom issue**

**Social justice in every classroom**

**Address to cyborg: The changing roles of women**

**Global education: In and beyond the classroom**

**Global education for gender equality**

[www.bctf.ca/social/SocialJustice/programs/brochure.html](http://www.bctf.ca/social/SocialJustice/programs/brochure.html)  
Emails. These workshops are paid by your member  
You are encouraged to access them.

Workshops are booked through the PSID/Training Department,  
BCTF PD associates, for groups between 15 and 30  
Three hours in length. Designed for teacher groups,  
and intact groups, the workshops are available for  
and professional development days.

PSID Training Department support staff at 604-871-  
For more information call: Margaret Ross at 604-871-1879,  
at 604-871-1871.

## Anti-Racism Committee

The students who attacked and killed Mao Jomar Lanot at Tupper Secondary in 2003 were once students at our elementary schools. We have a problem that needs to be addressed.

We as teachers have the responsibility of teaching students how to identify and deal with situations that are racist, not only in school but at home and in the media. As educators, we should educate students not only in literacy and numeracy for their future, but we also need to ensure that they are educated concerning racism and that they are active participants in eradicating racism.

As stated by the VSB policy on multiculturalism, our roles as educators are:

- providing human, material, and financial resources to support the Multicultural and Anti-Racism policy;
- eliminating ethnocentrism, prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, and racism in any form;
- developing and supporting an environment that affirms, respects, reflects, and celebrates the racial, ethno-cultural, and religious diversity of our society.

Whether we are beginning teachers or master teachers we can all say that we have either heard or witnessed some account of racism between students in our schools and on the playground. The question is: What have we done about it and how have we responded to such incidents? Many students when asked whether they have seen racism in their schools have admitted to witnessing or being a bystander.

However, when asked what their response was the answer is simply "Nothing." As teachers, we need to teach students not to be passive witnesses but to be active in responding to racism or any form of discrimination. We have been socialized to ignore it and hope that it goes away. It won't. Unless we all try. Teachers are at the forefront of this battle. We have the power to educate our students to react in a proactive and positive manner.

The anti-racism committee at VESTA officially began in 1986. The committee now consists of anti-racism representatives from various VSB schools and the anti-racism VESTA chair and representative. The committee meets once a month

to discuss possible methods of how to implement anti-racism practices in the schools. If you are the designated Anti-racism representative please feel free to join us at the next meeting.

Recently, there was an ADT (Anti-discrimination Response Training) workshop given at the VSB, and many teachers, administrators, counselors, and members of the community were able to attend. It was a powerful and enlightening way to understand about the history of racism, and helps teach others how to respond when faced with racist comments or in difficult situations. There will be other training sessions to follow in the coming year.

The anti-racism committee is also presenting a workshop which will help teachers develop curriculum that will encourage the acceptance of all cultures and promote anti-racism.

If we're not part of the solution, we're part of the problem. We can make a change.

**Sarah Wang & Katherine Krausz  
Anti-Racism Committee**

## Status of Women Committee

As we celebrate March 8<sup>th</sup>, the date set aside for the celebration of International Women's Day, it is timely to examine VESTA's Status of Women Committee. This committee has been in existence for many years and has focussed on a variety of issues during that time.

Since the change of direction by the BCTF to incorporate all committees devoted to social justice under an umbrella group, the members VESTA's Status of Women committee decided to continue its work as a separate group rather than be incorporated into the wider group where it was felt that it would be difficult to concentrate on those issues which pertain more particularly to women.

While many of the issues being dealt with in other committees such as poverty, gay rights, the rights of First Nations people, and the fight against racism are all issues which Status of women support and are issues which deeply affect women, the desire was to focus more particularly on the rights of women.

The most recent focus of the group is on the situation of the polygamous community in Bountiful, BC, and to this end Daphne Bramham was invited to speak at a Vancouver restaurant on February 20<sup>th</sup> of this year.

Daphne is a journalist with the Vancouver Sun and has been writing about Bountiful for two years. She has helped to bring the attention of

the province and of Canada to this community where the elders among the men have up to thirty wives and one hundred children and where underage girls are married to men old enough to be their grandfathers and proceed to have many children from a very young age. Although there are two publicly funded schools in this community where teachers are not fully trained and where the provincial curriculum is not taught, these schools are still allowed to operate.

In recent years Status of Women has hosted dinners with guest speakers on many issues pertaining to women and children and also with female artists such as Nettie Wild, the film-maker, Cynthia Flood the Vancouver writer and Sheila Norgate who is a visual artist.

In addition to these dinner meetings the group has raised money to fund teachers for girls' schools in Afghanistan. It has organized conferences for grade seven girls. It has undertaken a letter-writing campaign to voice opposition to violence against women. Each year on December 6<sup>th</sup> the group commemorates the massacre of the women at the Montreal Ecole Polytechnique. We also celebrate International Women's Day.

If you wish to participate in the Status of Women group our meetings are held at 4p.m. once per month at the VESTA office. The next

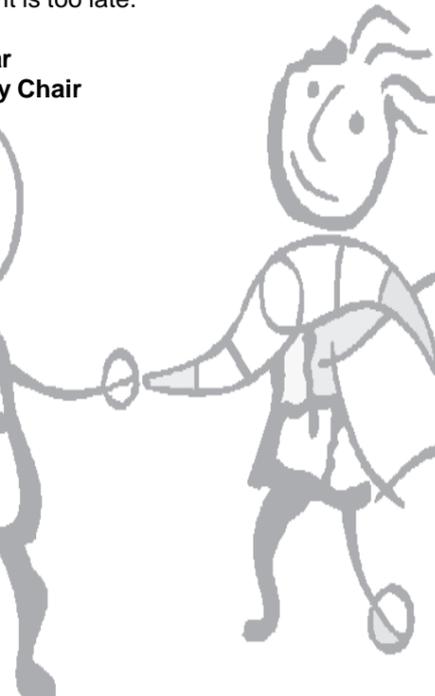
meeting will be on March 8<sup>th</sup>, International Women's Day. For further information please contact Vilma at the VESTA office.

**Maeve Moran  
Status of Women Committee**



municipal government has  
avoided funding enough  
ng to accommodate the  
need locals. All such  
ve a profound impact on  
and community. These are  
ocietal choices based on  
c ideologies.  
to push for a switch in  
ng from the current one to  
we all fight to build a city  
sses all members. We  
ctive. We need to fight  
entrench our brothers and  
uations of desperation.  
help those in financial  
it is too late.

er  
y Chair



# Member participation is important

## DO YOU JUST BELONG? from VESTA News archives

### President's Message Sept. 22nd, 1975

#### M. Alan Paterson

Since school opening I have had two or three phone calls concerning members, or groups of members, who are "anti-VESTA." Nothing specific is said about why these people are "anti-VESTA," just a vague generality that VESTA is too radical for them and does not represent their views.

I would like to challenge this generality on two grounds.

Firstly, during my first year as President, I recall very few activities that could be considered radical. Perhaps some consider our mass attendance at the October 7, 1974 Board Meeting as radical, but surely the large attendance showed membership support.

Perhaps some consider our refusal to do the Grade 6 writing test as radical but this refusal came as

the result of calls from many schools requesting that VESTA stand firm on the issue. Again, these calls and the massive support received at P.R. meeting showed membership support. [Editor's note: A P.R., or Proportional Representation Meeting, was the precursor of our current Staff Rep Assemblies.]

Beyond these two items, I recall nothing else that could be considered as a radical position taken by VESTA.

Secondly, and more importantly,

**I encourage you to take an active part in your professional association.**

is the fact that you are VESTA. You have access to VESTA Executive minutes, VESTA P.R. minutes, and VESTA General Meeting minutes. With the exception of the General Meeting decisions, the other decisions are subject to review and change at the next level of our democratic process. That is to say that the Executive decisions can be challenged at the Proportional Representatives meetings or at the General Meetings and that P.R. decisions can be challenged at General Meetings.

Therefore, the final decisions can be made by the general membership of which you are a part.

Of course, it is up to you to attend VESTA's General Meetings, voice your opinions, and vote as you see fit. If you attend the General Meetings you are an active part of any decision. If you do not attend you are bound by the decisions and may complain about them. However, no one forced you to miss General Meetings, and you decided that for yourself.

Your involvement, of course, is the key – and the following verse, taken from the Burnaby Teachers' Association Bulletin sums up my message very well:

#### Do You Just Belong?

*Are you an active member, the kind that would be missed,  
Or are you just contented that your name is on the list?  
Do you attend the meetings and mingle with the flock,  
Or do you meet in private and criticize and knock?  
Do you take an active part to help the work along*

*Or are you satisfied to be the kind who just belongs?*

*Do you work on committees – to this there is no trick –*

*Or leave the work to just a few, and talk about the clique?*

*So come to meetings often and help with hand and heart,*

*Don't be just a member but take an active part.*

*Think this over colleagues, you what's right from wrong,*

*Are you an active member or do you just belong?*

Colleagues, I encourage you to take an active part in your professional association. I welcome you as part of the decision-making process and as a member of one or more of VESTA's committees. I am looking forward to meeting you this year.

**M. Alan Paterson** was VESTA's President from 1974 – 1976. He was the second full-time president after current VSB trustee Al Blakey. While he has since retired, he remains active and lives in Vancouver. He is an honorary life member of VESTA.

## Delegates to the 2006 BCTF Annual General Meeting

This year's AGM should prove to be an exciting affair. With several contentious motions coming from different locals around the province, there should be plenty of interesting debate.

Feel free to come to the downtown Hyatt to check out the action, take part in the discussions, and see the democratic process at work. The following individuals will be giving up the lion's share of their March Break to proudly represent VESTA's membership as voting Delegates to the BCTF AGM:

Claudette Alain	Barbara Kay
Lorraine Baker	Gerry Kent
Carmen Batista	Janek Kuchmistrz
Karin Bernauer	Mary Locke
Janet Blue	Jack MacDermot
Donna Brack	Mary McDermott
Daria Danylchuk	Lorna MacDonald
Susan Davis	Scott MacDonald
Verena Foxx	Jane MacEwan
Doug Gauld	Christine McGrath-Agg
Pat Gudlaughson	Leslie MacKenzie
Allan Haley	Dawn McMillan
Glen Hansman	Suzie Mah
Chris Harris	Teresa Milden
Nancy Hawkins	Anastasia Mirras
Lisa Holman-Fyffe	Barb Parrott
Bill Hood	Jody Polukoshko
Elena Hutchinson	Laura Rudland
Susan Jardine	Sharon Wyatt

## Ten ways to grow the union you want and need

1. Go to meetings.
2. Go on time so that the agenda reflects and includes your concerns.
3. Even if the weather is rotten, go to the meeting.
4. When you attend the meeting, support the work of your colleagues. Propose changes thorough questioning, reasoned debate and amendment.
5. Seek out and accept a position in your local – a committee, a task force, a representative position – either school-based or district-wide. Start small but start.
6. If a specific position is already filled, apply for something else. Find yourself a spot.
7. When asked your opinion through surveys, at meetings, etc. give it.
8. Be ready to share your concerns and share the work that accompanies your concerns.
9. Remember talk is cheap but collective action with results takes time and money from the collective.
10. Bring along another colleague to the next union meeting.

Patricia Gudlaughson  
Pro-D Chair

### TOC Tax Workshop

Tuesday, March 28, 4-6 p.m. at VESTA.  
Please RSVP with Billy at  
wjyeh@yahoo.ca no later than Monday, March 20.

See you there!

**NEXT STAFF REP MEETING:  
March 28, 4 p.m. at Tupper**



# Staff Rep training



## Classroom size

**We've been talking a lot about class size averages, but what about the size of the classroom?**

This issue was brought forward by the staff at Sexsmith who are undergoing the beginning stages of having their old school building replaced with a new one, due to seismic upgrading.

The architects involved are using the BC government Area Standards for new school buildings. All new schools being built across the province come under these building guidelines. What has been discovered is that there is a huge discrepancy between what is being built and the number of students that are to fit inside.

The BC government's average class size for Grades 4 to 7 is 30 students. The VSB has lowered that average to 28. However, the Area Standards for new classrooms in the Grades 4 to 7 are being built for an average of 25 students!

There seems to be a bit of a problem here. If you are going to build a classroom to fit an average of 25 students then shouldn't the average class size be 25? Or, on the reverse of that, if the average class size is 30 then wouldn't you build a classroom to fit an average of 30 students?

This issue is being brought forward to the BCTF AGM as a motion to ask 'That the BC legislated class-size limits and the provisions of class size in the Area Standards for new students or renovations, agree with each other.' It is hoped that this motion will get approval for the BCTF to lobby the provincial government to make the two numbers agree with each other.

The issue has also been raised at Committee II (Planning and Facilities) where Don Teeuwesen made a presentation on behalf of Sexsmith school. The Trustees present at that meeting all spoke in favour of pursuing the issue at the BC School Trustees Association level.

A motion was wordsmithed by the Director of Planning and Facilities, Les King, and brought forward to the Board meeting on February 20th. All Trustees present voted in favour of it, and it will be tweaked again before being brought forward to the BCSTA AGM.

Hopefully, with support coming from two fronts, there will be some changes made. If you are interested in this issue, you could contact your local MLA or the MLA in the area of your school. Otherwise, if your school is on the seismic upgrading list and the decision is made to replace the school, be prepared for smaller classrooms!

**Karin Bernauer**  
Health & Safety Chairperson

## Delayed justice for students with special needs

**The Ministry and North Vancouver School District have filed an appeal in hope of overturning a decision of the BC Human Rights Tribunal, which found them to have discriminated against children with learning disabilities.**

The discrimination stemmed from budget cutbacks that disproportionately impacted children with learning disabilities, and from a failure to provide these students with necessary programs and services.

In December 2005 the Tribunal ordered the Ministry to fully fund all students with learning disabilities and to ensure that all BC school districts offer a full range of programs and services, including early intervention.

"We are extremely disappointed in the Ministry's decision to appeal," states Cathie Camley, speaking for the Learning Disabilities Association of BC. "This delays, yet again, the entitlement of thousands of BC

school children to have essential supports in place. We must remember that a child's education doesn't stand still while waiting for an appeal ruling. It has taken years to arrive at this decision – critical education time those children will never get back."

Camley acknowledges that some Ministry policies have changed since the Tribunal hearings were held, but offers that those changes didn't fix the discriminatory practices cited in the complaint. "In fact," she says, "in many ways, they made things worse."

For example, in one major policy change the Ministry eliminated the specific funding allocation for students with learning disabilities. Ministry data shows that in the year following the new funding policy, many school districts began failing to report all their students with learning disabilities. "When the financial incentive to report those students was eliminated, identifying and reporting those children dropped sharply, and along with it so did services," Camley says.

Sources: Globe & Mail, Learning Disabilities Association of BC

# Teachers' voices

## Meet... Dorothy Shaw, Oppenheimer

**You used to teach in Ontario before moving to Vancouver, right? Was it easy, then, to pick up and start looking for work in another province?**

I TOCed here for about a year and a half, then I started to get temporary contracts – but it still took me another three years before getting a continuing position. I had come from Ontario with 11 years of teaching experience in the public school system. It can be very demoralizing when you feel you are not recognized for your past experience or educational background. I had Special Education courses from York University, which are the required courses in Ontario, equivalent to a diploma here. But they were not recognized in this province, so I had to take a few over again. Also the College of Teachers didn't fully recognize my degrees from Queen's University, and I was told I had to take university-level math and science courses to teach elementary school here.

This was a financial hit — my lab course was \$800 dollars, while the stats course was just slightly less. It was also very stressful having to take these courses in addition to the other courses I was taking to get my specialist diploma here in Vancouver. I felt that taking these two courses was of no value, in fact completely irrelevant, to my work in the schools. I would have been happy to take something that might be useful, but that wasn't what the College of Teachers wanted.

My frustration with the College of Teachers was with the hoops and

red tape they demand teachers go through when entering BC. It seems discriminatory and counterproductive that movement is made to be so difficult. If one receives a teaching degree from a recognized Canadian university, I feel it should be honoured across the country. Mobility is a good thing. We should value people who come from other parts of the country. They can offer different contributions, with diverse perspectives.

**What are some of the differences you experienced coming from Ontario?**

I was teaching for the Peel District before coming here. There are so many differences! I had just come out of the Mike Harris era when I moved to Vancouver. Even with all the cuts, there is still more money infused into education in this district – more materials and resources to work with. In Peel under Mike Harris, we didn't have any supervision aides, and there were no limits on class size: intermediate classes were in the high thirties – even over 40 students in some cases, and kindergarten with numbers in the high twenties. We had five yard duties per week, all our professional days were cut, and schools became very autocratic places . . . Morale was rock-bottom low.



I wouldn't say there was anything better about teaching in Ontario, except for the salaries. The salaries and benefits were better, and we did get more planning time. . . . We were not to be using our time for prep, thus the term planning time. But there were no counselors, behavioural workers, and no speech-language pathologists. You were on your own.

When I go back and talk to my friends who are currently in the Ontario system, there is still so much dissatisfaction. Teachers are overworked, and continue burn out at a high rate there. Many of my friends they are so exhausted, the talk all about is what they'd do if they could get out of teaching, or in what year they can retire. So no, I wouldn't want to teach again in Ontario.

**What was your impression of last fall's job action?**

I had been through something like that already, and my past experience had been very negative. In Ontario, we *didn't* have public support, and teachers went back into the classroom after ten days of job action with no gains, no concessions, nothing. There was definitely some serious angst and low morale after that.

I had concerns last fall that we'd be experiencing the same thing. But I also felt strongly that *because* of what happened in

Ontario, we had to fight to at the very least, maintain what we did have here.

At Oppenheimer, the community was very supportive, as was our administrator. The staff consistently supported one another. There was definitely an upbeat, positive mood, especially compared to what I experienced in Ontario.

I also thought there was excellent communication between VESTA and the people walking the line. There wasn't anything like that in Ontario. The *Picket Line Bulletins* were great, as were the many visits from Zone Captains and the coffee van! They were much appreciated, and helped us feel connected to what was going on around the district.

Going on strike is always difficult though – emotionally and financially. I can understand the concerns people have about potential job action down the road. Everybody is still recovering from the last round, and there needs to be some time for healing, by us and the public.

But absolutely, if change does not come about, we have to fight again for what we believe in, no question about that. Going back to work when we did, it said a lot to the public. For the most part I believe they appreciated that we took a stand and fought for public education – and that we knew when it was time to go back to our schools and our students. If they understand that we're doing everything we can, I believe they will support us again.

with Glen Hansman, VESTA

## In brief

### BCTF New Teachers' & Student Teachers' Conference

March 24–25, 2006, Radisson President Hotel & Suites Vancouver Airport, Richmond. Visit [www.bctf.ca/newteachers/conference/](http://www.bctf.ca/newteachers/conference/) for registration and details

### Learning Round Table

The government's Round Table on Learning has met four times since it was established in late October. Teachers are increasingly concerned with the lack of progress. At the last meeting, over 90 minutes of a 3-hour meeting were given over to criticism of the BCTF's communications with members about the round table and class size/composition concerns. Instead, improvements in learning conditions for students must be the priority. The BCTF is calling on the government to establish guaranteed class-size limits and support for students with special needs.

### Bolivian president gives teachers half his pay

President Evo Morales cut his salary in half and declared no

Cabinet minister can collect a higher wage than his own, with the savings to be used to hire more public school teachers. The move followed a campaign pledge to tackle political corruption and restore honesty to the government of South America's poorest country.

Five days into his government, Morales announced at the end of January that his salary would be \$1,875 a month and that his Cabinet would also have their salaries capped at that figure as well.

Source: *BCTF Social Justice list-serv*

### Province opts out of completion certificates to students with special needs

The VSB Special Education Advisory Committee is writing to Education Minister Shirley Bond to ask for reinstatement of provincial school completion certificates.

The certificates have been awarded to students who follow and complete a modified curriculum; but the Ministry has now left this up to districts, rather than recognizing these students provincially.

Source: *Vancouver Courier*

**Do you have a comment or photo you would like to share in VESTA news? Do you have ideas for upcoming issues? Send your thoughts to [glen@vesta.ca](mailto:glen@vesta.ca)**

## Letters to the editor

I read with incredulous interest the articles "Support Interrupted" and "What's being done about the lack of TOCs?" in the February, 2006 issue of VESTA news. Why incredulous? I imagined I was reading the February, 1999 issue of your publication.

In that long-ago issue, Suzie Mah, then VESTA President, wrote an article entitled "No Teachers on Call." She outlined the exact same issues Mary McDermott outlines now. 7 years later! Galvanized by Suzie's article, I replied with specific conditions at my then school. Ill teachers remaining in their classroom, support staff having to cancel programs to cover enrolling positions, the VP canceling programs - it was happening in 1999 and it's still happening now.

I live and teach with this motto: "Do it better each day." These continuing critical disruptions and shortages disallow my belief. They truly do not allow all VSB teaching staff the opportunity to offer full, complete, realized programs. A

service interrupted is a service discounted.

Mary McDermott has inherited Suzie Mah's fight. And will her successor face the same?

**James Harcott  
Kitchener Elementary**

I wanted to thank you for taking a stand in support of teachers. I read your article in the latest VESTA News on the lack of TOCs. You are "right on" in your article. The lack of TOCs is, as you say, "unacceptable."

I share your concern as well and my concern extends to the lack of EOCs in regards to SSWs. At my school, since September there have been 22 occasions when no substitute was provided for our support staff. I do understand that in regards to these support staff personnel it is a CUPE matter.

All in all, thank you again for putting in writing your convictions.

**Larry Menard  
VSTA Executive**