


Vernon Teachers' Association VOICES

Volume 78 February 2017
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professionalism

"Let us pick up our books and our pens," I said. "They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world."

"I raise up my voice-not so I can shout but so that those without a voice can be heard"

Speaking for Teachers in the North Okanagan



Reflections.....

Greetings Colleagues,

As a part of our Executive's work this year, we met on a Saturday morning in the fall to discuss the BCTF's 5 Year Plan and the BCTF's leadership priorities, and how those interface with our own local work and priorities. The discussion was thought-provoking, challenging, and inspiring. I want to recognize this group of people, and their commitment to our teachers and the education system.

We discussed key issues and objectives in our local:

- autonomy and leadership within curriculum change, and professional development
- developing improved climate, trust and support within schools and the district
- supporting new teachers, and helping them to feel included and involved in the local
- engagement in the upcoming provincial election, making education a top priority
- effective communication with members about local and provincial issues

The common theme that ran through the entire discussion was a focus on *enhancing and supporting professionalism and supporting the voices of our professionals*. This theme might seem obvious to some, but it was an invaluable process to examine the goals behind our work and our activism, and to be sure that we are reflecting those goals in everything we do. We work to take this goal with us into every meeting and committee. We repeat it as often as we can and it is infused into our interactions with management, the board, and parents.

As we navigate within the constantly evolving world of education, as professionals we are called upon to engage and grow. Sometimes we can do that in quiet reflection and other times we need to do that with the support or questions of our colleagues. Current models in professional development and curricular change have challenged us to use our voices to ask for what we need, and to share what we are thinking and learning. Lately, the union and the district have been calling on you for committee work - to have your voices heard to change policies, develop new practices and examine old ones, and to contribute to a positive climate in our work environments.

The problem is... all this takes time and thoughtful, engaged effort. We end our work days exhausted by the demands of the classroom and school. We are motivated by the students and by their learning. So what makes us want to engage in our district and local, in a deeper way? What makes us volunteer our time and energy after we finish those long days?

I believe, strongly, that we always need to leave a place better than when we arrived. We do that every day in our classrooms. But... we need to look at it systemically. What will make our school a better place? Our district? Our community? Our provincial education system?

Your voice. The voice of the professional educator.

In this issue of Voices, you will read contributions from the VTA executive about their experiences on committees, and in the union. For those of you who have volunteered your time for the collective this year, my gratitude. For those of you who wonder where you can contribute, I hope that you will reach out to your union with your ideas and your time. We are always building new opportunities to engage you in the conversation: What can we do to make it better?

In Solidarity,

Lisa

VT A AGM

May 15th, 2017 — 4:00 pm, VSS Theatre

Draft Agenda

♦ **Election of VTA Executive for 2017-2018 as per our Constitution:**

4(b) Election of Officers

- i. The Officers of the Association, except for the Past President, President and the TTOC Representative, shall be elected for a term of one year by secret ballot at the Annual General Meeting (AGM);
- ii. Nominations for President shall be made in writing and submitted to the Association's office;
- iii. Nominations for President will close two weeks (Monday, April 17th 2017) prior to election day. All candidates for the position of President shall submit a resume for publication at least two weeks prior to voting (no later than April 17th, 2017) . One day of paid release time will be provided for the qualified presidential candidates to visit the school sites prior to the election if they choose to do so;
- i. Nominations for all Officers except the President and TTOC Representative may be received from the floor of the AGM;
- ii. A school-based, secret ballot vote for President will be held two (2) weeks (Monday, May 1, 2017) prior to the AGM;
- iii. An advance poll and an election day poll will also be set up at the VTA Office to allow all Active Members, who either cannot or who choose not to vote at one or all of the school-based votes, to vote in the election for the President;
- viii. Officers of the Association shall take office on the first day of July following the AGM.

- ♦ **2016-2017 Executive Annual Reports**
- ♦ **Review of Proposed Budget for 2017-2018**
- ♦ **Adoption of VTA Fees for 2017-2018**

Come out, be sure your voice is heard and that your union is working to meet your needs and ideals! We look forward to seeing you there.



PROFESSIONALISM

What is Professionalism:

Professionalism is defined by the quality of a person's work, and includes conduct, demeanour and standards of practice. Professionals are characterized by the extensive knowledge they possess. This knowledge is both abstract and practical, takes a significant time to acquire, and is difficult to master. On a daily basis professionals are able to make effective, informed decisions regarding their practice. By this definition, teachers are educational professionals.

Why it's important:

Professionals are the recognized experts in our area of specialty. We have strong ethics, high standards of practice, exclusivity over our service, and high degrees of autonomy. Through demonstrated high standards of practice and conduct, teachers earn trust, respect, and autonomy. With professional recognition, we become leaders in professional development, instructional design, and assessment strategies.

What it looks like:

An overarching expectation is that, under the law, teachers are put on a bit of a pedestal where we are expected to conduct ourselves in an exemplary manner at all times. The standard is set by the community in which we work. We are teachers 24 hours a day and seven days a week.

Ruetter and Hamilton (Rights, Freedoms and the Education System in Canada – 1989) indicate that “It seems generally agreed among the courts that a teacher should serve as a good model for pupils.” The teacher’s “character of conduct may be expected to be above those of the average individual.”

What this means is that teachers are not free to act in public or in private as other Canadians might, because they have a responsibility to uphold a higher standard that non-teachers are not subject to. This duty to act responsibly places us in the company of such other professionals as doctors, lawyers, and the clergy. Each of these professional groups are expected to behave both on and off the job in ways above moral reproach.

As teachers, professionalism is demonstrated in various ways including:

Conduct:

Being ready for every class and every school day. Acting with integrity by role-modelling the positive behaviours that we would like to see on our students and wider society.

Communication:

Speaking with confidence and authority on educational issues. Using appropriate language and demonstrating knowledge with appropriate spelling, punctuation and grammar. Having a constructive approach to problem solving, while being open-minded and showing respect for those we are working with.

Advocacy:

Awareness and concern about education, not only within our classrooms but also in the broader arenas of the school, the district, and the province.

By advancing and maintaining a professional image, we ensure continued trust, respect and credibility. We continually face important issues in policy making, professional development, and accountability. The maintaining of autonomy in areas of professional growth is important and at the heart of the professional label. In a system that is based on trust, respect and teacher expertise, professionalism is our foundation.

Robyn Ladner, VTA Professional Development Chair

Meet Your 2016 — 2017 VTA Executive



From Left to Right: Chris Brandle, Local Area Rep; Sandy Klein, Member at Large; Barry Dorval, 1st Vice President; Robyn Ladner, ProD Chair; Ailish Mallow, Local Aboriginal Education Contact; Sue Ghattas, Social Justice Chair; Andrew Affleck, Secretary; Teresa Bigsby, 2nd Vice President; Verne Schier, Treasurer; Rhiannon Johnson, Bargaining Chair; Karyn Godard, Member at Large; Kevin Bader, Public Relations and Communications Chair; Cori Huizer, OC-TAV President; Craig Leverman Occupational Health & Safety Chair, Lisa LaBoucane, President



Log in to the MyBCTF portal to order your free BCTF membership card

Over the decades, the Federation has issued various cards or certificates as a show of solidarity and membership. This year, the Federation has brought back this tradition to commemorate the BCTF's 100th anniversary.

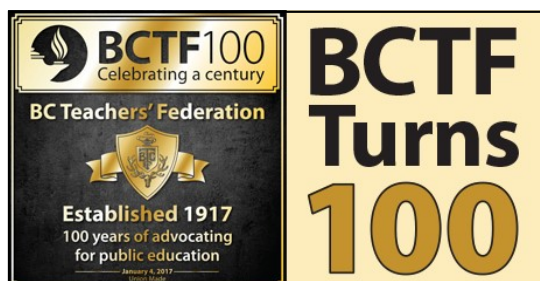


BCTF GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR EDUCATION CHANGE

Teacher engagement in education change is guided by and supports the following principles.

Education change must:

- be fully resourced in release time, in-service, funding, technology, and support materials.
- be recognized as a process that unfolds over time.
- consider and respect reasonable teacher workload boundaries.
- adopt clear guidelines for communicating student progress and focus on teacher-selected reporting tools that are timely, reasonable, and sustainable.
- respect teachers as professionals whose knowledge and input are actively sought and integrated.
- preserve teacher autonomy in selecting pedagogical, instructional, and assessment approaches and tools.
- support and advance equity in our schools and among students.
- support students with special needs.
- support the infusion of Aboriginal content and understandings throughout the curriculum.



Engagement and the VTA

As a new member to a community, life can be isolating, and I value having a voice.

I came from an educational world in another province where my voice counted: with students, with their parents, with other teachers and administration in the school, within the collegial atmosphere in the district. I was lucky to be included in educational discussions: heated, contentious, and always enlightening. I listened, I spoke opinions, sometimes I changed my ideas, and I grew as an educator.

When I arrived in Vernon, I wanted to continue experiencing this growth and the in-depth conversations around what education may look like. Since I didn't have a full-time position in one school where these conversations might have taken place, I searched elsewhere. The VTA became this place. This seemed a bit odd at first as I have taught for almost 20 years without having any involvement in any union work. However, the more involved I become, the more I think I should have been involved ever since I joined the teaching profession.

My VTA and BCTF experiences have allowed me to understand past and present union practices. I have learned which parts of the SD22 Collective Agreement are driven, negotiated and protected from the BCTF provincial level and which are local agreements within our district. Connections with other teachers in different areas of BC have also given me different perspectives on issues and concerns of educators. Through these connections, I have grown to understand how lucky Vernon is to have a strong local union who defends our Collective Agreement and always strives for better.

We are lucky to be teaching and living in Vernon where professionalism has been an on-going theme, and where participation in the VTA is valuable and engaging.

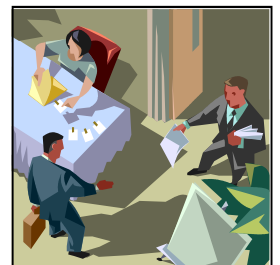
Cori Huizer
OCTAV President



Call for Nominations: VTA 2017 - 2018 Executive

The VTA Annual General Meeting is on May 15th. We will be electing our new executive at this meeting. If you or anyone you know would like to become a part of the VTA Executive (or have any questions about being a part of this exciting and powerful group) please contact Lisa LaBoucane (vtapresident@shaw.ca) or Barry Dorval (abdorval@yahoo.com).

Nominations (other than for President and OCTAV President) will also be taken from the floor at the meeting.



Professionalism, Advocacy, and the People Around Us

We have a hard job, made manageable by the relationships we build over our careers. Thinking of the connections between professionalism, teaching, and advocacy always brings me back to that fact.

In June of 2003, with no regrets, I left my first teaching job at Queen Elizabeth Secondary in Surrey. When I started there in September of 1998 there were two of us in the Industrial Ed Department: I was brand new, 22 years old, John H. was 39, but had only been teaching for a year after finishing his degree in music education. He was the department head, and taught Career Prep Auto Mechanics and Drafting, I taught Auto, Woodwork, Drafting, CAPP, and neither of us had the faintest idea of what we were doing.

In 1998 I wouldn't have considered having a cell phone, so I would return home from my final UBC B Ed courses and check the answering machine to see how many schools had called offering me jobs. There was no such thing as a part time job, unless you wanted one. Shop teachers were hired to full time continuing positions, even if you were qualified as a music teacher, and even if you'd never taught auto mechanics, even during your practicum.

The summer I was hired the school was about half- way through a major renovation, but the shops hadn't changed much. Our budgets for shop classes were significant, and support for the infrastructure was good. I needed a new hoist in one of my auto shops (there were two in the school) – and I was allowed to choose and order a \$14,000 hoist because I needed one. We had a separate budget of about \$100,000 to purchase other new tools and equipment.



All of the previous shop teachers had retired en masse, in protest. Their department head had applied, and not been selected, for the job as construction coordinator – someone who would do all the coordinating of rooms, liase with the builders, kind of keep the school functioning through the chaos of renos. The principal had recommended someone else, so, in solidarity, frustration, and with the encouragement of the early retirement deals available then, they all quit. John and I didn't know this until being invited to the LSA BBQ at another retired shop teacher's home at the end of that school year.

We worked like crazy through that first year and got things on track. I have never worked as hard, been so tired, so frustrated, and so ready to quit a career and look for something else to do. But I've never learned so much in such a short time, and had such a great work partnership.

The second year, we amalgamated with a junior high that was closing. We picked up about 600 kids, plus two more shop teachers who had both worked for many years and had confidence and skills to share. Len, the junior high woodwork teacher, taught me how to be organized, and that it's essential to have a life outside of school – how not to be burned out completely every night. He had been doing the same for John C., the other shop teacher from the junior high, for

the previous twenty years, without success. John C. is the most high-strung person I've ever met, but was the most entertaining teacher I've ever witnessed. He would get half way through a block before the kids would remind him that they were supposed to be learning electronics, not drafting. John C. taught me that the kids were the most important thing, and your job was to look after them. What he actually said was that the kids were the first thing everyone talked about and the last thing they cared about. He had grown a bit cynical... Still, the kids all recognized that John both talked about and cared about them, and they loved his classes despite the seeming chaos.



But I still couldn't shake the feeling that teaching should be a lot easier than it was proving to be, mainly because I'd often heard how easy teachers had it, short hours, limited responsibility, tons of resources and support. None of that was proving to be true, but I still expected it to be easier than it was, and couldn't shake the feeling that if only I was a better teacher it would be as easy as I felt like it should be. I was learning, but slowly.

We gained two more teachers for our department that year – our classes were becoming popular, kids were successful, so now there were six of us. Then down to five – John H. was in a really bad car accident on his way to school one day, and missed nearly four months of school. We shuffled around and re-jigged our classes for second semester, I took over his drafting, career prep auto mechanics, and department head work. By then there were just over 100 teachers in the school, and many hours were spent every week negotiating relationships and solving problems between people. I loved that aspect of my role at the school, and spent more time than I should have on it.

I was also introduced to the Surrey Teachers' Association through an amazing film and video teacher, and with her encouragement went to a couple of meetings. Union work did not appeal then, at all, but my sense of teaching as not just a job but as a profession worth being dedicated to was increasing, and, just as importantly, I saw and experienced first hand how important relationships are to surviving teaching. Despite the stress and effort of that time, I look back on it with happiness.

After five years it was time to move on. Kim and I knew we weren't going to stay in the lower mainland, so in June of 2003 we got prepared to move to Vernon, another move I haven't regretted for a second, and one that has had me re-engage in teaching and union work in, not a process that happened over night, but one that continues to keep me excited and motivated for what the future will bring. For the first time in a while teaching feels really exciting and full of possibilities – and it's only because of our relationships, our professionalism, and our advocacy over years that's made that possible.

Andrew Affleck
VTA Secretary

PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY

Much of our job satisfaction in teaching comes from exercising our professional judgment in order to meet the diverse needs of our students. The things we find most rewarding about teaching are things that we make professional choices about, choices that help a student learn, choices that make a difficult concept attainable, choices that make course work interesting and engaging for students. The professional autonomy for teachers to exercise their judgment and act on it is an important source of strength in a public education system, and as such, should be valued by the broader community and safeguarded by the members of the profession.

Most collective agreements contain professional-autonomy clauses. Ours says this:

ARTICLE F.20 PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY

1. Teachers shall, within the bounds of the prescribed curriculum, and consistent with effective educational practice, have individual autonomy in determining the methods of instruction, and the planning and presentation of course material in the classes of pupils to which they are assigned.

But, teachers had professional autonomy long before it was in collective agreements. Teachers have traditionally exercised professional autonomy, and there has been a long-standing societal understanding and expectation that teachers would exercise some degree of professional autonomy. It could be argued that many innovations in educational practice grow out of teachers' professional autonomy.



Our professional autonomy represents and reflects diversity and complexity, so it's not beyond comprehension that some pushback could occur. This could be calls from parents, management, the business community, maybe even some of our colleagues for us all to teach the same way. But standardization will not stop change. Nor will it guarantee that kids will be okay in a world of social upheaval, media, and easily accessed information. It is the very diversity and complexity involved in delivery of curriculum and what we learn professionally that will best support our students in a rapidly changing world.

We face frequent threats and limitations to our professional autonomy.

School Act and Regulations, Ministerial Orders, ministry policies

The School Act and Regulations, Ministerial Orders, and ministry policies put some parameters on teacher professional autonomy.

School-board decisions, policies

School boards often pass motions that may influence teachers' professional autonomy.

The "lighthouse" syndrome

School boards, district and school administrators often feel considerable pressure to do well in relation to current ministry initiatives or educational trends. ie. BC Redesigned Curriculum. Sometimes the pressure is obvious (e.g., Fraser Institute rankings). Other times, the pressure is subliminal but no less powerful.

Hidden threats

The Liberal government did not strip professional-autonomy clauses from teachers' collective agreements the way it stripped class-size language. But larger class sizes and fewer resources over the last 15 years have dramatically narrowed the range of teacher decision making. Teachers still have the right to exercise their professional judgment about which resources they use in their classrooms; however, greater diversity among students and less support means thinner access to resources which includes our own time and energy.



Colleagues' decisions

This is perhaps the most difficult one to navigate but in fact, dealing with it is the most "professional" of them all. School staffs and/or departments sometimes make decisions or develop practice that curtails the individual professional autonomy of teacher colleagues. There is no problem with such decisions if they are unanimous, but to protect professional autonomy, it helps to offer some provision for dissenters, if any, to opt out.

This can be difficult. There is a dynamic tension between individual professional autonomy and the fact that the most powerful locus of educational change is the group, school, or department, and not the individual teacher. This is a right-versus-right dilemma that does not have a clear or easy answer, so it is important that the issue of professional autonomy be an integral part of staff development and staff decision making.

As professionals we are constantly examining, reflecting, and learning about ways to improve or enhance our effectiveness. This is as diverse as the number of teachers in the system. There is no defence of professional autonomy more effective, more powerful, than its thoughtful use every day, by 43,000 teachers.

Robyn Ladner

VTA Professional Development Chair

com·mit·tee

kə'midē/

noun

1. a group of people appointed for a specific function, typically consisting of members of a larger group.

syn: board, council, task force

ant: individual, solo, one person



I've always held the belief that if I didn't like what was happening or that if decisions were being made that involved me then I should then BE INVOLVED. I've had the distinct privilege of having incredible colleagues and role models throughout my career. They've supported and encouraged my involvement through the union, in committee work both locally and provincially. I am always acutely aware that I walk into every meeting and gathering through the hard work of those who came before me.

The union has both been invited and fought hard to be in these rooms throughout the years so that the membership may be represented. Both the invitation and the struggle to be included honours the professional voice in decision making.

This is what I believe can be achieved by committees that are well run and fairly represented:

1. Pooling of knowledge and experience:

The skills of several persons are pooled together. Group deliberations, perspectives, and combined judgment of all the members are focussed on important problems. There is often a more realistic and objective analysis of the problem from all angles. This helps to improve the quality of decisions.

2. Shared leadership

I believe that as a result of the involvement of professionals, our system is better managed and decisions are more sustainable through the use of committees. Committee structure accesses our group's collective wisdom as well as spreading leadership over a number of people.

3. Improved communication:

Committees are an important means of communication between the members of an organisation. Information and ideas can be easily transmitted both upward and downward.

Unwritten policies and objectives can be explained effectively through deliberations of a committee. Creative ideas emerge from interactions among the members.

4. Healthy Relationships:

Participation in committee meetings promotes mutual understanding, team-work and cooperation among members. Dedicated members of a committee come to appreciate each other's point of view and pursue a common course of action.

5. Improved Morale and Climate:

Committees help to improve the morale of employees by providing them an opportunity to express themselves. Participating in a decision making process creates a sense of belonging. I think the quality of decisions is better and it is more likely that the follow through will be more

sustainable where the professionals have taken an active part.

Committee work is a complex balancing act. Being part of a committee is not about promoting self interest or personal gain but constantly keeping in mind the representation of the wider membership. Being able to listen but not be swayed by more vocal individuals is not easy. It's also not easy to be the dissenting voice in the room. It's risky and stressful at times. But the advantages of collective problem solving outweigh the frustrations and messiness of some committee work.

Committee work is time intensive and mentally taxing. But being an agent of change, being part of group working out a problem or moving toward a goal, being involved in making things better for everyone, being a professional and authentic voice, being a part of the solution instead of complaining about the problem, being in the room, at the table, in the conversation, being of service to my colleagues is often so worth the time and effort.

I'm on a lot of committees... It might be a problem. Or, it might be some of the best professional learning and skill development I've ever been a part of. Over the course of my career, but mostly in the last 10 years I've put my name forward or have been asked to contribute on many committees. Some of these are union committees, some district, some school-based, and some are provincial. All of them are a way to be engaged.

Here are a few:

- ◆ VTA Executive Committee
- ◆ District PD Committee
- ◆ Zone Conference PD Committee
- ◆ SD 22 Teacher Development Program Committee
- ◆ School Staff Committees
- ◆ VTA Bargaining Committee
- ◆ Compassionate Leave Language Interpretation Committee
- ◆ UBCO Practicum Redesign Committee
- ◆ Hiring Committees
- ◆ Calendar Committee
- ◆ Stakeholders Advisory Committee to the SD22 5 Year Strategic Plan
- ◆ BCTF Professional Issues Advisory Committee



As always, in solidarity,

Robyn Ladner
VTA Professional Development Chair

BC Teacher's Vitality Project

Living with balance

A six-week group program for teachers - Dates: April 5, 13, 19, 26, May 3, 17

(Dates fall on Wednesdays save for April 13 which is a Thursday)

Preregistration is Required

We are pleased to announce the return of the *Living with balance* group program. This program was initiated by the BCTF Rehabilitation Program and developed by the Occupational Rehabilitation Group of Canada, a long-established service provider to the BC Teachers' Federation. *Living with balance* is a six-week program, which runs for two hours once per week. It focuses on developing tools and skills related to improving one's vitality and resiliency. Our holistic approach to wellness will equip teachers to make simple lifestyle changes that will positively affect their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

This six-week group program will provide opportunities for:

- ◆ education, self-evaluation, and examining the importance of maintaining life-style balance
- ◆ discussing the importance of nutrition; exercise; sleep
- ◆ managing symptoms of low mood, anxiety, and stress; boundaries and managing conflict
- ◆ learning strategies that increase awareness of factors that contribute to fluctuations in mood as well as methods to manage them
- ◆ reviewing proven techniques used to improve self-esteem and self-confidence, and manage stress and low mood
- ◆ defining what work-life balance means to each of us and what happens when our roles collide, having good boundaries is often attributed to having clear values
- ◆ setting goals and achieving them
- ◆ discussing how to be intentional, creative and assertive when you need to be.
- ◆ learning the importance of social connections and community in building long-term wellness, understanding that social isolation is a significant health risk factor.



We will review the necessary interpersonal skills needed to build and sustain long-term relationships that will enhance your vitality and resiliency. *Living with balance* is a program that we hope will raise teachers' awareness and understanding regarding key concepts that affect one's physical and emotional health, while providing support and encouragement in recognizing that they are not alone. The primary goal is to improve one's health and well-being. Many BC school districts, the Federation, and teachers have recognized the need for a program like this that promotes healthy lifestyle choices and emotional well-being.

Note: Here are a few comments from teachers who attended the program.

"If not for this course, I might very well have wallowed in an unhealthy state until I slipped out of teaching. I now look forward to charging forth until I hit retirement running."

It forces you to sit back and analyze yourself in all areas and to make changes while getting the support of your "mentor" and colleagues. It is very beneficial to know that you are not alone in all of this.

It is encouraging to have help so readily available. I have been exposed to numerous and varied alternatives to my situation. I will endeavor to implement these changes in the coming days. Thank-you!

To register and for more information, please visit the link at www.vernonta.com

Note: The purpose of this program is not to treat, but to promote, healthy lifestyles and improve emotional well-being. Consult your physician for specific guidance on health concerns.