



It isn't news (for some, anyway) that critical thinking is in the PLOs

The Ministry of Education defines critical thinking as "the ability to discern and discriminate through an individual thought process," and you'll find the term sprinkled throughout the Prescribed Learning Outcomes.

Social Studies K-7, in particular, puts critical thinking front row and centre in the PLOs across the grade levels.

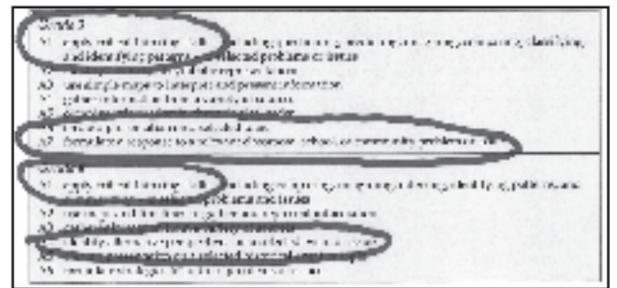
So why did CanWest media and CTVglobemedia Corporation media outlets kick up such a fuss in October when the very idea of teachers meeting to discuss how they might invite students to *gasp* do some critical thinking around issues pertaining to the 2010 Olympics? One minute a group of teachers thinks about holding a meeting – the next minute, the Premier, the Solicitor General, and VANOC CEO are chiming-in with shock and dismay. Pretty amazing, especially since the extent of VESTA's involvement was putting a link on our website.

Janet Steffenhagen, education reporter from the *Vancouver Sun*, expressed surprise as well at how inflamed the situation become – especially since her actual article was accurate. It was the publisher's headlines, not her article, that misrepresented the situation and began what became a growing snowball of hyperbole. Fortunately, when the dust settled, CanWest and CTVglobemedia looked pretty foolish.

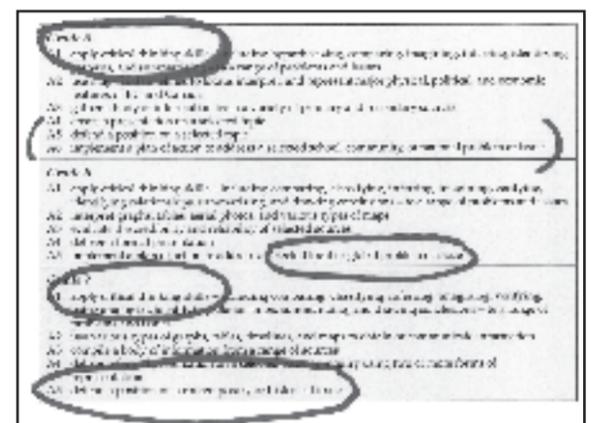
VESTA President Chris Harris addresses this issue in his "For the record" column on page 2 of this *VESTA News*. VSB Chairperson Patti Bacchus' articulate support in the media is notable, and is appreciated.

The opportunity should be taken to remind ourselves as teachers, though, that critical thinking is part of the curriculum in this province and is part of the learning process. Clearly, teachers have the right to take any event occurring in Vancouver as an educational opportunity, and they will do so in an appropriate manner. It's not something to apologize for or to hide from.

Glen Hansman
Vice President / Past President



The Social Studies K-7 IRP (2006) and its PLOs are full of references to critical thinking, implementing plans of action to address local issues, identifying alternative perspectives, and defining a position on a contemporary issue.



Public education is one of the cornerstones of our society. Let's advocate for it!

The BC Liberals made promises in the last election that education funding was going to be protected under their watch. It is unbelievable how things change so quickly after an election. What did they do? Here's some of it:

- Eliminated the Annual Facilities Grant to Boards of Education (\$10.6 million dollars for Vancouver alone!).
- Increased MSP premiums costing our district \$100,000 this year and double the next.
- Cut the Gaming Grants given to local PACs, meaning that Vancouver students will see \$500,000 less this year going to the schools.

So, at a time when families need more support, the government puts financial stress on an already poorly funded public education system? Parents and the general public rely on us to make sure that their children are safe and receiving the best education that we can provide. Teachers, as professionals, take that responsibility very seriously and it is time that the government did as well.

The Vancouver School Board will soon be publishing a joint letter from all stakeholders, including VESTA, admonishing the government in making a series of choices which have contradicted their promises.

Teachers, administrators, parents, support workers, and trustees are now, together, advocating on behalf of our underfunded system. It will take all of us to turn the tide and make government more responsive to the needs of a well run public education system.

Write to your MLA, send a letter to the editor of the papers you read, and make sure that you talk to your colleagues, friends, and family about the current situation in schools. We cannot afford to remain silent; for ourselves, for our students, and for the families that rely upon us we must all speak out.

Chris Harris
President

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For the record:

VESTA on Teaching 2010 Resistance

Reports indicating that the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association is associated with the Olympic Resistance Network are inaccurate.



A variety of over-the-top headlines were published. Newsflash #1: critical thinking is one of the PLOs in Social Studies. Newsflash #2: VESTA wasn't "urging" anyone to use any resource.



VESTA member Kelly Tate had this great Letter to the Editor published in the Vancouver Sun in response to CanWest's representation of the situation, including an article from Cam Cole in the Province in particular:

I am a teacher in Vancouver and a member of VESTA, the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association.

I have not been directed by any union to teach anything about the Olympics. I would need to find time in my already-full curriculum and very hectic day to do so.

I'm happy to hear that Cam Cole had a typical education from the early '50s, with all the features of a Norman Rockwell painting, where the happy, smiling teacher teaches wide-eyed, predominantly Caucasian students who have likely just finished saying the Lord's Prayer.

As a primary teacher in 2009 who is out to crush any illusions or dreams my students might possess with subversive, radical anti-Olympic teaching, I will need to get past a few hurdles. On the east side, where I teach, most of my students don't speak English. Their limited understanding will interfere with their grasp of the complex political and social elements of this radical curriculum.

Students who have arrived again without breakfast likely don't care who'll be dribbling caviar and champagne at the next shindig for Olympic VIPs. The special-needs students who are screaming because their aide must leave to work with one of the other 27 special-needs students in the school will likely not listen closely to the anti-big-business speech I like to give at the beginning of every Grade 1 year.

Recess arrives and the children are free of my tyranny. Unfortunately, our unsafe playground was removed this summer and will not be replaced, as there is no money for such frivolity. I can't get to my computer to download more complex radical ideas for these six-year-olds because that side of my classroom has been fumigated for cockroaches, bedbugs and mice, two of which we've named Gotcha and Don'tsumi. Yes, Mr. Cole, I agree that you are a lucky man to have been educated in a time of illusions and dreams.

Kelly Tait

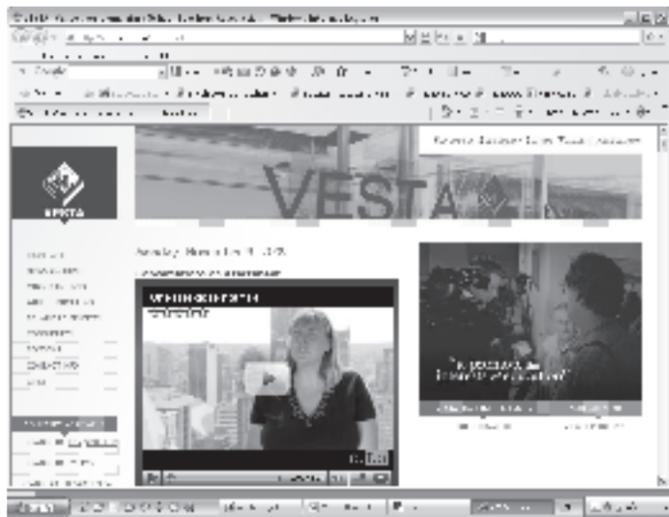
VESTA is not associated with the Olympic Resistance Network or the organization called Teach2010. VESTA has not endorsed any positions they have taken or any materials they have produced.

What VESTA did was provide a link on its website as an item that might be of interest to some members and provide information to staff reps that this event was happening. VESTA does this frequently for many community groups and events that relate to public education in Vancouver.

Neither VESTA nor the BCTF have taken any position on the 2010 Olympics. Many teachers will take the opportunity to use the Olympics as a teaching tool in the classroom with all of the resources available to them. They will do so as professionals and ensure students in Vancouver have the opportunity to learn about all aspects of the Olympics.

Chris Harris
President

Make the new www.vesta.ca your homepage at work



Daily updates and more

VESTA is looking for teachers who have earned a continuing contract through aggregate service with the VBE. For example, if you are a teacher who worked in a temporary contract which continued for more than one year of service, or you received two temporary full-time contracts in the course of one school year, you would have received a continuing contract. Please contact helen@vesta.ca if you did acquire your continuing contract through aggregation.

Helen French, WLC/B Chairperson

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VESTA's objectives

To promote the welfare of members;

To raise, by united effort, the status of the teacher profession;

To promote the interests of education;

To co-operate with other bodies in the advancement of the foregoing objectives;

To represent the Association's members and to regulate relations with their employer through collective bargaining of terms and conditions of employment.

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

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What's the union's position on _____?

The BCTF Members' Guide contains the policies and procedures of the Federation. These are decided by the BCTF Annual General Meeting, Representative Assembly, and Executive Committee. You can find a link to the Members' Guide at www.vesta.ca, or by going directly to bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/About_Us/Members_Guide/guide.pdf

An updated edition of the VESTA policy book is currently in the works, as well.

Prep time question

Elementary teachers in Vancouver get 90 minutes of preparation time per week. With a statutory holiday occurring next week, teachers are reminded that if their regularly scheduled prep falls on a statutory holiday, the prep needs to be made up within the next few days after that statutory holiday. In most circumstances, a TOC is brought in to provide the missed preps.

Did you know . . .

. . . that both the Adult Educator and the K-12 collective agreements between the union and the Vancouver Board of Education expire in June of 2011? Lots of information will be coming out about bargaining preparations, so make sure that your worksite has a communications plan to stay in the loop!

Eight years since BC last increased the minimum wage

November 1, 2009 marks eight years since BC last increased the minimum wage. Some facts:

- BC's minimum wage has gone from the best in the country to Canada's lowest.
 - More than 60,000 working British Columbians earn the minimum wage, while 293,000 make \$10 or less
 - two-thirds of minimum wage workers are women
 - British Columbia is the only province that hasn't raised the minimum wage in the last year – we now have the lowest minimum wage in Canada.
 - less than one third of all minimum wage earners are teenagers.
 - more than 30 other municipal councils, the Union of BC Municipalities, faith groups, and students' and seniors' groups have endorsed the call to increase the minimum wage to \$10.
- Find out more at bcfed.com/issues/minimum_wage

Educational Leave: Opportunities and Deadlines

Continuing contract teachers are eligible for a variety of educational leaves (Article G.9.):

1. Teachers with a continuing contract for at least five consecutive school years immediately preceding the date of requested leave may apply for a paid (60% of annual salary and allowances) education leave of one year. Teachers applying for an education leave of one school year must apply in writing to the Associate

Superintendent - Human Resources on or before December 15 for a leave commencing in September 2010.

2. Teachers with a continuing contract of not less than one year immediately preceding the date of the requested leave may apply for a paid (60% of annual salary and allowances) education leave of less than one school year, but longer than ten school days. Teachers applying for an education leave of one school year must apply in writing to the Associate Superintendent - Human Resources at least three months prior to the commencement of the leave.

3. Teachers with a continuing contract of not less than one year immediately preceding the date of the requested leave may apply for a paid (100% of annual salary and allowances) education leave for ten school days or less. Teachers applying for an education leave of one school year must apply in writing to the Associate Superintendent - Human Resources at least four weeks prior to the date of the commencement of the leave. Application forms are available from the Vancouver Board of Education's Human Resources department.

Pension Buy-Back

Since March 31, 2007, the time window for the purchase of pensionable service for leaves of absence has been set at five years by the Teachers' Pension Plan. This means that when a teacher takes any leave of absence without pay or with partial pay, including maternity and parental leaves, she/he has only five years from the end of the leave to purchase the service for that leave. It is generally less costly to purchase leaves of absence soon after the end of the leave, but individual circumstances will vary. Members can find additional information on the purchase of leaves of absence from the TPP website, www.tpp.pensionsbc.ca. Go to Teachers' Pension Plan and find Purchase of Service under Tools. The Tools also include a Purchase Cost Estimator.



There's always pro-d going on!

A list of Pro-D conferences posted on the BCTF website is just a couple clicks away. There's always being something being offered in the Lower Mainland. Take advantage of the offerings that are available. Visit bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Professional_Development/PD-Calendar.cfm

bctf-enfrançais

Le forum électronique bctf-enfrançais est une liste de diffusion ouverte aux enseignantes et enseignants des programmes français. À la page BCTF Public Mailing List bctf.ca/lists-public vous trouverez de plus amples renseignements à ce sujet. La page vous permet aussi de vous abonner ou de vous désabonner des différentes listes de la FECB.

VESTA General Meeting endorses BC teacher-librarians' position that the practice of levelling library books is misguided

Levelling books is not consistent with the values of teacher librarians, the BCTLA says, and the decision to acquire and build levelled collections in our schools may be largely budget driven. Read more at bctf.ca/bctla/pub/documents/Book+Levelling+and+School+Library+Collections.pdf



The Cuba Project

The BCTF has been offering professional-development workshops in Cuba for 10 years. These workshops focus on pedagogy for teaching English as an additional language. BCTF members with experience in second-language teaching offer these workshops in conjunction with the Cuban teachers' union (SNTECD). There are currently openings in the Cuba Project. Please complete the application form found at www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/SocialJustice/Programs/ISP/CubaProjectAppForm.pdf and send it to Anne Field (info on form) by November 30.

Staff Committee - Once a month or twice a month?

For K-12 members, Staff Committee is defined and described in Article A.5.5.c, pages 11-13 of the K-12 Collective Agreement. Adult Educators will find the Staff Committee language is found in Article 11.C, pages 55-57. The default language is for meetings to be held "once a month during the school year." The language does add, however, "except by mutual agreement." If your Staff Committee votes and decides to go twice monthly, that is the committee's decision to make. If your Staff Committee leaves it once per month, that is also the committee's decision to make.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I am a former employee of the VSB. Unfortunately, I moved to the US - Texas - the most sorry state for education. I have been trying for several years now to get back to Canada to work, unfortunately without success. My child is just beginning to go to school here, and I hate to think what will happen to his spirit of learning if we stay here.

In my Grade 5 classroom, I have 24 students. From this number I have 2 children who are being pulled out of my room for 1 1/2 hours for intensive, remedial instruction in math and language arts. Yet they are expected to keep up (and somehow I catch them up) with the Grade 5 curriculum. I have about 6 other students who are pulled out for about 45 minutes for either math or language arts, two others for dyslexia and another for speech. And of course, testing is the standard. In my district we are required to give formal reports to parents every 3 weeks. The district created tests in each subject area which the students must write 3 times during the year, plus there are practice TAKS tests in every subject (oh, this year they decided to give 2 practice tests in science this year), before the real thing in the spring. And, if students fail those they have to write them again (and again,...). But they are still passed!

Power to the union and do all you can to protect the rights of teachers and the education of the students.

Tamara Grottker

PS. If you hear of ANY jobs please let me know. My spirit is suffering.

I would like to congratulate the members of VESTA's Antipoverty Committee for putting together a stellar panel for its recent forum at Brock elementary school. Christine Stewart, Adrienne Montani, Sherman Chan and Clyde Hertzman provided an insightful and informative evening for those of us in attendance at this event.

The lively exchanges between members of this panel and the audience were stimulating -- in particular the moving, personal testimony of a teacher of Phillipino youth who works with these immigrant students at a local college.

As we are living in a province which has the dubious record of being the leader in child poverty for the sixth year in a row this workshop was particularly timely. And I do hope that VESTA's committee will continue to organize and focus our attention on this disgraceful situation that can only get worse as the current provincial government systematically underfunds our public schools. Bravo VESTA's Antipoverty Committee members for your fine work!

Sincerely,

Noel Herron

Noel is a former Vancouver teacher, principal, and trustee

A history of K-12 teacher bargaining in Vancouver

What is collective bargaining?

Collective bargaining consists of negotiations between an employer and a group of employees so as to determine the terms and conditions of employment. Teachers are represented in bargaining by their union. The result of collective bargaining procedures is a collective agreement.

The 1969 "Agreement"

As a group, teachers in Vancouver had a signed "agreement" with the VSB as far back as 1969. VESTA was not a union at the time, and "officially," a collective agreement couldn't be bargained, but this was a good first step.

The cover of the 1969 agreement



1987 - Unionization

VESTA recognized as a local of the BCTF, within a union model rather than an association model. Meant that VESTA + VSTA would officially be the exclusive bargaining agent for K-12 teachers in Vancouver as the Vancouver Teachers' Federation (VTF). Meant that we would have a proper collective agreement with all the rights & responsibilities that entails.



Our charter as a BCTF local from 1987 (above), and the poster from the celebration bash (below)



Full scope local bargaining

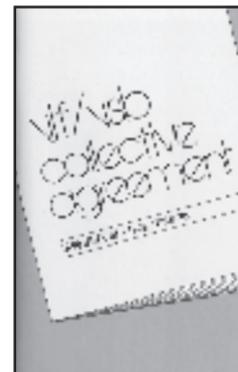
From 1987 onward, teachers in Vancouver made great gains through the collective bargaining process. The VTF bargained locally on the full scope of issues.

What does "locally" mean

It means that teachers in Vancouver, through the VTF, bargained directly with the Vancouver School Board. Teachers in Vancouver set the priorities for bargaining, and went to the table with those priorities as bargaining objectives. Teachers in Vancouver also were able to strike (independently from the rest of the province) on issues that were important in our community.

What does "full scope" mean?

All working and learning conditions issues were up for grabs at the bargaining table – things such as class size, special needs support, ESL support, supports to address split grades, leaves, posting and filling of positions, security of employment, length of work day, professional development, health & safety, professional autonomy, salary and benefits, etc.



The cover from one of our collective agreements during the local bargaining period (above)

Local bargaining encouraged member participation

Members were connected to the bargaining objective-setting process, and were involved with what happened at the table every step of the way. Attendance at meetings was huge.

Attendance at VESTA General Meetings was high during the local bargaining era, especially while bargaining was going on. This picture is from the late 80s (below)

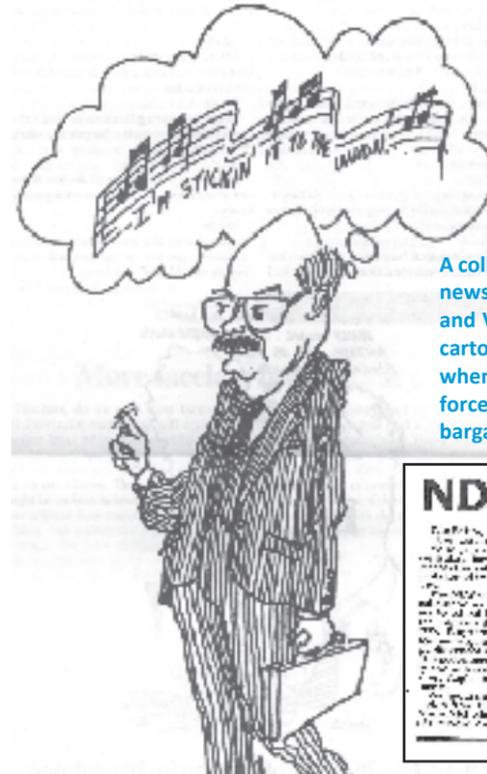


1994 - PELRA

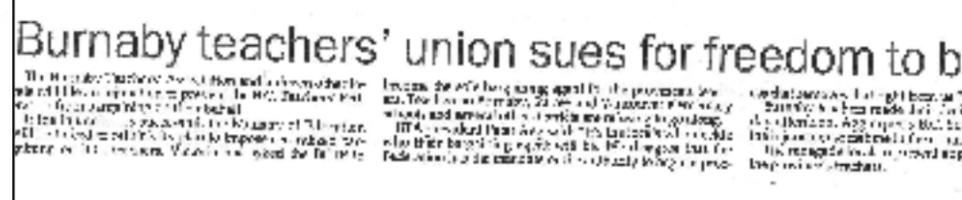
In 1994, the NDP-majority provincial government introduces the Public Education Labour Relations Act (PELRA) that creates a new provincial model for teacher bargaining in BC. The provincial government justifies this decision, basically, by citing how successful teachers have been doing in bargaining.

Provincial bargaining

Government created a new entity – BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) that would be the exclusive bargaining agent for all school districts in the province. At the same time . . . The provincial government designated the BCTF as the exclusive bargaining agent for all teachers in every school district in the province. In other words, the autonomy that locals had to bargain at the local level was removed.



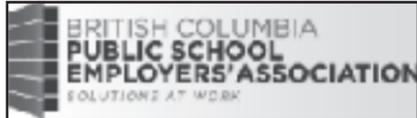
A collection of newspaper clippings and VESTA News cartoons from 1994, when the province forced provincial bargaining upon us



VESTA opposes provincial bargaining

Membership in Vancouver immediately took a position against provincial bargaining. Complicated by the fact that the BCTF Executive Committee of the day was complicit in the enactment of PELRA, VESTA and some other pro-local bargaining locals had to mobilize against the province & the BCTF.

With provincial bargaining, the BCTF and BCPSEA were given "bargaining agent" status -- instead of locals and school districts



The School Act and the Scope of Bargaining

While most other unions bargain under the scheme provided by the Labour Relations Code, teachers must also contend with the provisions of the School Act which prevails over the terms of the collective agreement.

It is a fact that teachers have to contend with social policy developed by the government whenever clauses to the collective agreement are bargained. As such, the traditional mode of bargaining that is described in the Labour Relations Code cannot fully describe what teachers contend with as bargaining with any employer in the public school context must also involve some level of bargaining with the provincial government—directly or indirectly. Further, collective bargaining for teachers also has to extend to the realm of social policy and legislation to have a purposeful effect for the membership. Section 27(2) of the School Act verifies specifically that a provision of a collective agreement that is in conflict with the School Act is void. However, most collective agreements have a "legislative change" clause that allows the parties to amend the collective agreement to address legislative change and still preserve the essence of the remainder of the agreement.

Section 27(3) of the School Act directly limits the scope of bargaining for teachers. Prior to 2002, this list only limited interference of collective bargaining on pedagogy and the employment of other employees in the school system—namely school administration and support staff. However, Bill 27 (2002) and Bill 28 (2002), which brought an end to the collective actions taken by teachers in the 2001–02 round of bargaining, deleted provisions in all local collective agreements and also imposed seven new restrictions on bargaining, greatly curtailing the right of teachers to bargain important working conditions such as class size, composition, and student loads. In its place, the provincial government placed some class size limits in the School Act under Section 76 and made this a matter of public policy.

To address these concerns, teachers were involved in various campaigns to try to restore those rights which culminated in a province-wide withdrawal of services in October, 2005. The strike was determined to be illegal by the Labour Relations Board and courts, but teachers continued with the strike along with support from other labour organizations. While the courts sanctioned the union and teachers, including a restriction on paying strike pay and a fine of \$500,000, Vince Ready was contacted to settle the dispute which was determined to be between the BC Teachers' Federation and the provincial government. A settlement was established which included an opportunity for teachers to affect existing legislation around class size and composition.

The Learning Round Table was initiated by the provincial government to address issues that it determined were a matter of public policy, such as class size and composition. The efforts culminated in Bill 33 (2006) which established a few more limits on class size and some soft limits on composition. **These did not restore the better provisions teachers had in their collective agreement, but did demonstrate that bargaining in the current form was incomplete and teachers could only address the legitimate interests of teachers through direct negotiations with government.**

1995 – Split of issues

"Locals for Local Bargaining" were not successful in getting an injunction against the province and the BCTF, and thus provincial bargaining became the norm. BCTF Executive Committee of the day negotiated a split of issues with BCPSEA that would allow some items to be still dealt with at the local level. All cost items (salary, benefits, leaves, etc.) are designated as "provincial matters". Some non-cost items (evaluation, harassment, etc.) are also designated as "provincial matters". This left very little available to be discussed at a local table. Until 2006, no deal was reached between BCPSEA and the BCTF at the provincial table. All of our collective agreements from 1995 until 2006 were imposed through legislation.

2002 – Bills 27 & 28

To further complicate matters, the Liberal-majority provincial government made it illegal for school districts to bargain class size and class composition issues with teachers. All language related to class size and class composition was stripped from our Collective Agreement. **In Vancouver this meant we lost ...** Guarantees and protections pertaining to class size and split grades. Guarantees and protections pertaining to ESL service and support for students with special needs. Guarantees and protections for inclusion of students, including integration of new students. Services levels for itinerant staff and non-enrolling teachers. Processes related to School Based Team and Central Screening. ... and more ...

Awaiting a decision from the courts

A couple of years ago, BCHEU won a groundbreaking case at the Supreme Court of Canada level that recognized similar provincial government strips to BCHEU's collective agreement as being illegal. BCTF is presently seeking a reversal of Bills 27 & 28 from the courts.

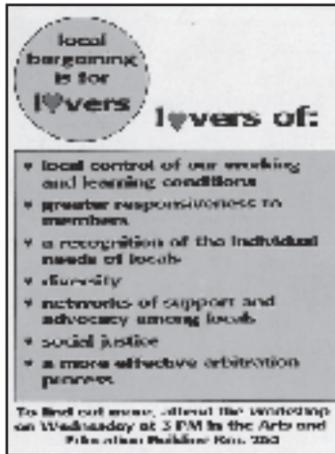
In the meantime, we still have a provincial bargaining model, and class size & composition is off the table

Vancouver teachers have not made any significant gains under the provincial bargaining model. Benefits have not seen an improvement since 1994. All cost items that don't "fit" into a provincial picture have not seen improvements since 1994 either. Gains in salary have not compensated for loss of stripped language, and we are grossly behind other provinces in terms of salary and prep.

Furthermore . . .

Provincial bargaining is far removed from the school level, making it difficult for individual members to participate in the process. Provincial bargaining creates "middle of the road" language that doesn't fit in local circumstances.

VESTA has been working closely with many other locals to renew efforts provincially to get changes in our bargaining structures that would increase local jurisdiction of bargaining for K-12 teachers.



VESTA and other locals loosely associated under the banner of "Locals for Local Bargaining" have continued the conversation about restoring local bargaining - or at the very least, shifting some of the "provincial items" in the split of issues back to the local table so that meaningful bargaining can occur.



Your pension: The future is worth thinking about

Over the course of three months this fall, the BCTF has been conducting a membership-wide consultation regarding your pension and the future of indexing. The consultation has been providing members with information about the challenge of continuing to provide inflation protection and some solutions. Members are asked for their input so that the BCTF can make recommendations, on members' behalf, to the Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees.

Please note that the basic pension you are granted at retirement is safe. The basic account is well-funded, with contributions adjusted as required to continue to guarantee the pension. *What is not guaranteed, and has not ever been guaranteed, is full indexing.*

What is full indexing? Each year, costs tend to rise. Gas gets more expensive, the cost of groceries follow. Real estate prices tend to go up and services that you purchase cost more. Statistics Canada has a shopping basket of 600 items that they price from year to year. This creates the Consumer Price Index (CPI). In the Teachers' Pension Plan, the indexing that is applied is either the change in the CPI at the end of September as compared to the year previous, or the amount that the fund can afford.

The Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees has, in the past, granted the increase in costs to the lifetime pension amount, which has allowed retirees to maintain their purchasing power over time. These increases have been granted because the fund could afford them; however, continued full indexing is unsustainable at the current contribution levels.

In real terms, look at what happens to an average pension over time. In 1990, the average pension granted was \$15,817 per year. By 2008, that pension had risen to \$23,440. That almost \$8,000-per-year raise does not make the retiree richer, it simply means they can buy the same amount of gas and groceries as they could in 1990. Without indexing, prices would have risen almost 50% and the pension would still be \$15,817.

This indexing protection is paid for from a special account, known as the Inflation Adjustment Account (IAA). The IAA receives contributions from both teachers and the employer, with the contributions used to pay indexing. Currently, some of these contributions are also used to pay Extended Health Benefits for retirees.

The IAA contribution rates are set out in the Joint Trust Agreement. At present, you—the teacher—contribute 2% of your salary to the IAA, and the employer contributes 1.13%. Those contributions are fixed. Any change must be negotiated between the two partners in the Joint Trust Agreement (the BC Teachers' Federation and government). From the outset, it was clear that the IAA, as negotiated originally, would not be able to guarantee paying full indexing in perpetuity. The reality is that with normal expected inflation, that account will be completely depleted somewhere between 2020 and 2035. If the account is depleted, indexing can continue, but will be limited to paying out the contributions that were received the previous year. As you can imagine, it will be extremely limited.

A second factor affecting the viability of the plan has been the plan demographics. As baby-boomers have been making their way through their teaching careers, the teaching population has aged. Only seven years ago, there were 2.6 working teachers contributing to the pension plan for every retired member; today that ratio has fallen to 1.7, and that number will continue to fall. As well, teachers are living longer. The average lifespan of a female teacher in BC (and women comprise 72% of the teaching population) is just over 88 years. Retirees can reasonably expect to collect a pension for almost as long as they teach. The third pressure point has been the rising cost of providing the Extended Health Benefits at no cost to the retiree. Each year, there are 7% more retirees receiving the subsidy, and the cost of prescription drugs has also been increasing at a rate of 10% per year. This has meant a rise in the premium costs to the Pension Plan. These factors, combined with recent volatile investment returns put added pressure on the IAA.

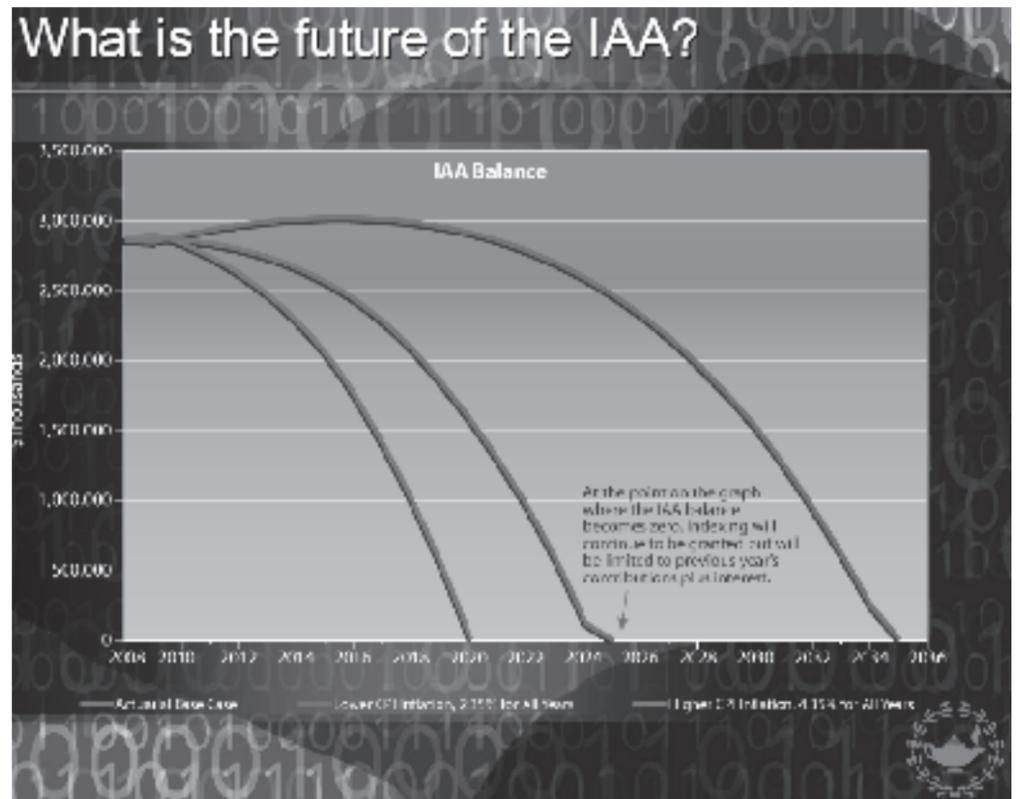
So what are the options? That is the purpose of the consultation. There are solutions to the situation that will extend the life of the IAA.

A rise in contributions is the simple answer. If the employer and teachers increase their contributions, the fund could be sustained in perpetuity. To guarantee continued full indexing, the contribution increase would need to be 4% of salary from each partner. Discontinuing the Extended Health Benefit subsidy would provide a small measure of inflation protection.

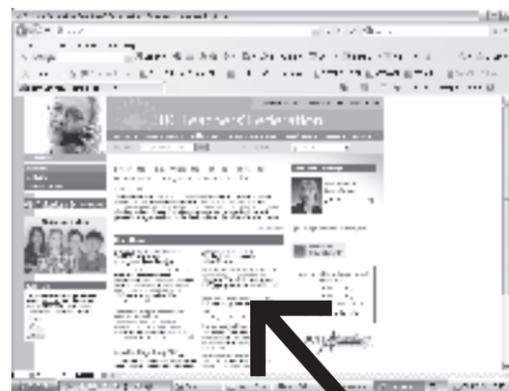
Other options include limiting indexing to a set percentage or limiting what parts of the pension receive indexing.

All of the factors leading to this situation, and the possible solutions will be covered much more thoroughly in the local pension consultation meetings. The information is also available on-line at bctf.ca and www.vesta.ca. Being well informed will help you give the BCTF good feedback regarding the future of your pension.

Rob Taylor
Assistant director, BCTF Income Security Division



Is indexing of pensions likely to be eliminated? It depends. The Inflation Adjustment Account provides for the provision of indexing. What it does not provide for is the promise of full annual indexing. That is the challenge facing the Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees and all members.



Q. WHAT IS "INDEXING"?

A. Increases in the monthly pension amounts based on the annual increase in the cost of living. Without indexing, your monthly pension would be the same from retirement until death.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE SURVEY ON THE BCTF WEBSITE

The purpose of this survey is to gather feedback from you, the members of the Teachers' Pension Plan, regarding the future of the Inflation Adjustment Account.

It is critical that you have a basic understanding of the history of the Inflation Adjustment Account and the challenges facing the future of indexing pensions before you complete the survey. The pension consultations in Vancouver have already occurred, so please review the presentation material on the BCTF website before completing the survey.

The data collected from the survey will be used by the BCTF Executive Committee to create recommendations that will go to the BCTF 2010 Annual General Meeting for consideration. Decisions made by the BCTF Annual General Meeting may then be forwarded to the Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees for their consideration.

Your input is important, as the data may help determine the future of indexing with regard to your pension.

The Pension Promise

Your pension promise is made to you the day you become a member of the plan, usually the first day you begin to work. What you get when you retire is based on a formula combined with other plan rules. The Teachers' Pension Plan is a defined benefits plan which means your monthly pension is predictable and stable. The monies you and your employer contribute are part of a very large pool of assets which is invested on behalf of all members of the plan and from which all members benefit.

What are the basic features of your pension?

Full retirement with your factor 90 or at age 65. Your monthly pension based on a formula

Additional features:

- Early retirement with possible reductions, but with a bridge benefit
- Survivor benefits for your spouse
- Disability pensions

Provisional options

- 5, 10 or 15 year pension guarantee periods should you choose
- Percentage of protection for spouses

Options available but not guaranteed

- Indexing of pensions
- Extended Health Benefits at a subsidized rate to the retiree
- Access to MSP, Extended Health Benefits, and Dental Benefits at group rates for the retiree, spouse and dependants

Basic Pension

The following pension formula determines your basic pension: $2\% \times \text{the average of your "best" five years of salary} \times \text{years of Pensionable Service}$

How much you pay

Active members contribute according to their income. Remember you are paying yourself for a future income, so it is not lost income. Think of it as deferred wages. Your employer contributes to your pension as well, at a slightly higher rate. The current contribution rates are as follows:

- Teacher contributions: 9.16% of salary
- Employer contributions: 12.29% of salary

When Can I Retire?

You can retire with an unreduced pension when you reach factor 90, (when your age and contributory service add up to 90). You may also qualify for an unreduced pension if you have vested in the plan (2 years of contributory service) and have reached the age of 60. If you reach age 65, you are eligible for an unreduced pension whether you have vested or not. An unreduced pension is not necessarily a maximum pension.

Everything you need to know about your pension can probably be found on the Teachers' Pension Plan website: tpp.pensionsbc.ca

Making sense of Palestine and Israel in an atmosphere free of intimidation

Whenever a discussion about one of the many complex parts of the struggles between and amongst the residents of Israel, and those of the not-yet-country of the Palestinian territories, many good people turn away. Speaking for myself, I know that I turned away from this debate in the past out of fear of being wrong, or inadvertently contributing to more suffering and more injustice through my ignorance. I worried about being a pawn of this group or that, and failing to hear or act on legitimate calls for justice as a result. Something I was never unclear about was that open frank discussion – free from coercion – would be the route to the most just result for all.

The Jewish people of Europe in the 1930's and 1940's knew all too well what it was like to have people turn away from them. At that time many people in a wide range of countries (including Canada) chose (willfully or benignly) to not hear the life experience, or narrative, of these Jews. This persecution was simply the most recent and most extreme form of hate and brutality that Jewish people had suffered, in many countries, over many hundreds of years. Sadly non-Jews had also ignored much of that experience.

Today, in 2009 in Canada, people who value human rights for all have committed themselves to keeping the memory of this obscene series of events alive, as a warning of where hatred and ignorance can lead. For this ongoing vigilance we must all be grateful.

In Canada, we know too well the impact of ignoring the narrative of an entire people. Our collective history shows how the lives and stories of Aboriginal peoples have been marginalized at best. At worst, we now clearly see, that the planning and implementation of the system of residential schools was nothing less than an active attempt to silence a people and remove their narrative from history. Many still bear the scars of this action, and our society still exhibits the profound lack of peace and understanding necessary to build a peaceful society for all. We must each take responsibility for seeing this, and work to correct it.

As I plan my actions, I want to remember the core of both of these lessons. As I think about the people who live in the occupied Palestinian territories and in Israel I think about what can be done. My priority is to focus on seeing and hearing the narratives of all of the groups involved. I want to ensure that my actions respect the past but do not make me a prisoner in the process.

I found myself moved by the experience of the parents of Rachel Corrie. They have said that the main narrative their family knew of in this region, was that of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, and this people's desire for a safe place, free from persecution. When their daughter, Rachel, went to Gaza, in 2003, to act as a witness to the suffering of the Palestinian people, their family was shocked and confused. Her actions led them to ask about the people who lived in the house Rachel stood in front of, before she was run over and killed by an Israeli Defense Forces bulldozer. This experience has subsequently led them to many new friendships and activities within both the Palestinian Territories and Israel. They have also sought out information about topics as diverse as what exactly happened in 1948 to cause 800,000 Palestinian people to leave their family homes of hundreds of years, and what daily life is like for families on both sides of the ever-growing wall.

There are many layers and many distractions that people of good conscience run into if they choose to develop their own understanding of these issues. One thing however is clear. Each person must be able to conduct his or her inquiry, discussion, and debate, in an atmosphere free from intimidation.

Many of the activists who have fought, and continue to fight, for human rights for all have been and will continue to be Jewish; as will they continue to be Islamic, Christian, Atheist and of as many faiths as there are on earth. For all of these activists, the key is not the faith you have as an individual, but rather the treatment people receive in their daily lives, and the respect and opportunity that is sought for all. Each human life must be equally valuable.

Sadly there are currently, in a number of communities across Canada, moves to limit discussion of the conflicts involving the people who live inside Israel and the Palestinian territories. These actions make any progress towards peace, tolerance, and understanding more difficult.

In Vancouver, a group of activists are being sued by the owners of the Vancouver Sun (Canwest Global) for producing a politically based satirical version of The Sun. They are not charged with slander or hate, but with the economic crime of stealing a trademark. This type of legislation was originally designed to help bring some rules to competing products that attempt to gain an increased market share by unfairly using the name or brand of another product. This type of lawsuit is called a SLAPP suit (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) and has been used on many occasions by companies that produced harmful products, (such as cigarettes) or polluted the environment, to distract and intimidate people from criticizing them publicly. (NOTE – BC was the only jurisdiction in Canada to briefly have anti-SLAPP legislation, and it was one of the first laws repealed (Aug. 2001) by the Liberals after they were elected, in May 2001.)

Students and teachers at a number of universities across Canada (such as Western, York, and the U of T) are having events to discuss this struggle banned. Professors who speak publicly in disagreement with the policies of the state of Israel (such as Norman Finkelstein in the US) have been fired. In the US this type of attitude has even gone as far as successfully calling for the cancellation of a speaking engagement by Nobel Peace Prize winning Desmond Tutu at the University of St. Thomas, in Minnesota. There he was called anti-Semitic for criticizing some policies that the state of Israel had instituted for Palestinian people.

At the national level in Canada, a group of MP's (acting outside of Parliament) that calls itself the "Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism" is pushing a call that would encourage all Canadians to redefine anti-Semitism.

Historically anti-Semitism has been understood to mean discrimination and hate against Jewish people in a secular state, or more profoundly an attempt to create a world without Jews. Groups such as this committee are seeking to alter the definition away from attacks on human rights for all, including Jewish people, to focus instead on criticism of the state of Israel. If they are successful, any person who does not accept that the state of Israel must be a Jewish state will be considered to be anti-Semitic. In practice this will mean that anyone who chooses to criticize the ideology of the expansion of the state of Israel will be branded as anti-Semitic. This policy does not have any room - by definition - for the narrative of the Palestinian people, whose lives are controlled by the state of Israel. It also profoundly limits the discussion of ideas and routes to peace, making it much more difficult for the inclusion of those that are rooted in the experience of the Palestinian people.

Many of the activists who have fought, and continue to fight, for human rights for all have been and will continue to be Jewish; as will they continue to be Islamic, Christian, Atheist and of as many faiths as there are on earth. For all of these activists, the key is not the faith you have as an individual, but rather the treatment people receive in their daily lives, and the respect and opportunity that is sought for all. Each human life must be equally valuable.

So as you think about the issues involving the residents of the state of Israel and those of the Palestinian territories, please use whatever resources you can to investigate the narratives of all of the peoples in this region. While you listen, discuss, and reflect, please also take time to stand for an open, respectful, exchange free of intimidation and threat. Silence can only fortify injustice, perpetuate ignorance, and prolong the time before a lasting and just peace can be reached for all.

I look forward to discussing this matter with you in person, and encourage you to come to the November VESTA Staff Rep Assembly, where there will be an opportunity to vote on a resolution opposing intimidation and coercion in the discussion of this important topic.

Bill Hood, Local Representative to the BCTF

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

NOVEMBER 23

Antipoverty Committee, 4 p.m. at VESTA.

Interested in addressing poverty at your school and in your community? Concerned about homelessness and shelter issues? Come join the activities of this committee to help make changes in Vancouver and beyond.

NOVEMBER 23-27

BC Federation of Labour Convention, Vancouver Convention Centre. Delegates have been elected by the October VESTA General Meeting.

NOVEMBER 25

Health & Safety Committee, 4 p.m. at VESTA.

Need help with your workplace Joint Health & Safety Committee? Have a health & safety issue you'd like discussed at the district level? Want to compare notes with colleagues at other schools? Then come to our first meeting of the year. Contact karin@vesta.ca for more info.

DECEMBER 7

Working & Learning Conditions / Bargaining Committee, 4 p.m. at VESTA.

DECEMBER 8

VESTA General Meeting, 4 p.m. at Tupper. This is the meeting called every December to make decisions as to what resolutions VESTA will bring to the BCTF Annual General Meeting. All members welcome to attend, with voice and vote.

JANUARY 11 & 12

Staff Rep Training on Assessment & Accountability Issues, series of four 1/2-day workshops at VESTA. Notice will be going to schools shortly. Release time will be provided for one person from each worksite to attend one of the 1/2-day workshops. Just in time for FSA season!

JANUARY 19

VESTA General Meeting & Staff Rep Assembly, 4 p.m. at Tupper. The General Meeting will elect VESTA's delegates to the 2010 BCTF Annual General Meeting.

MARCH 2

General Meeting & Staff Rep Assembly, 4 p.m. at Tupper.

MARCH 6-9

BCTF Annual General Meeting, downtown Vancouver. VESTA sends 30+ delegates to the BCTF AGM, which sets the objectives for the next year, changes priorities of the Federation, and elects the BCTF Executive Committee. Want more information? Contact glen@vesta.ca or donna@vesta.ca

MARCH 23

Staff Rep Assembly, 4 p.m. at Tupper.

APRIL 20

Staff Rep Assembly, 4 p.m. at Tupper.

MAY 18

VESTA Annual General Meeting, 4 p.m. Location to be announced.

JUNE 15

Staff Rep Assembly, 4 p.m. at Tupper.

Members are welcome to attend any meeting.

Create a Greener World

Downsize for a Day!

Do you wish that people would stop **talking** about climate change and **do something** about it? Here's your chance.

Join other Vancouver teachers in reducing your carbon footprint. Start small.



If you drive alone to work, carpool



If you carpool, take public transit



If you take public transit, can you ride your bike?



If you already bus, bike or walk to work renew your commitment

One action on one day can make a difference. Be part of the **solution!**

Ask your school's VESTA Sustainability Committee Rep, or a volunteer, to email Heather Allison, Sustainability Committee chairperson, heather@vesta.ca with an informal tally of participants from your school.

Results will be posted on the Sustainability Committee page of the new VESTA website, www.vesta.ca, by the end of November and in the next issue of the *VESTA news*.



Status of Women Committee Update

Monday October 5th saw the first of the monthly meetings of VESTA's Status of Women Committee. After much lively discussion, it was decided that our immediate focus will be to challenge sexism by strongly campaigning for an end to violence against women. This is a cause that must call us to action when we hear that any woman is subjected to violence. We cannot allow violence to continue (1 in 3 women are personally affected by violence), so we invite concerned women and men to join us as change-makers. Additionally, we will be working to raise awareness of how environmental issues affect women first and foremost. It is, therefore, fitting that we should be at the leading edge of climate change education and awareness-raising. Want to learn more? – Don't be nervous, step into the VESTA office to visit and join us on **December 7, January 11, February 8, March 1, April 12, May 3, and June 7, 4:30 – 6:00**. You can also check the VESTA NEWS and the VESTA website for events and updates.

Dorothy Smith
member of the Status of Women Committee

Letter to the editor?

Article you'd like published?

Send it to glen@vesta.ca for consideration