

The Salon Alternative

Cindy MacInnes

Hi Alice! Looking beautiful today!" "Abby! I have your book you lent me. Thanks so much; just what I needed." "Getting your nails done today, Bill?" I meet the most wonderful people when I walk into Christenson Village Seniors' Residential Care Home. Is it possible to describe how a face opens and smiles into my eyes, stirring my heart and spirit without sounding cliché? Around here I am known as Salon Teacher, or The-Little-One-With-Dark-Hair.

I love my greetings of hugs and handshakes, hands so comfortable and warm, with soft scents of light lavender and white Scotch mints, and eyes that smile and wink, reminding



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From the Editor's Desk:

Hello from Cindy MacInnes, your new newsletter editor!

This spring issue of our newsletter features the winners of the \$6500 in award money we distributed to a diverse group of students, from many parts of the province, that have worked hard over the year and have great plans and great futures ahead of them. Remember that the deadline for most awards is March 15th, except for Student Activity Grants which may be applied for during any time of the year.

This issue highlights two alternative programs on the Sunshine Coast that focus on hands-on learning. The Salon program is a school-to-work transition program that also features student feedback on hands-on learning in an alternative setting. The art teacher features some of his students' art recently featured in a local gallery art show, and discusses censorship and dealing with taboo subjects in the classroom. Our third article looks at "The New School of Google" and asks, "Why make students memorize facts easily found on the net?"

This is my first time editing a PSA newsletter and being on a PSA executive so this has been a steep learning curve! I teach on the Sunshine Coast and am thankful to my colleagues and students who have offered their writing and thoughts on what it is like teaching and learning in an Alternate School in British Columbia. I would like to ask our readers and membership to submit their stories for our next newsletter, as our stories are worth sharing. My contact information is on p. 16.



President's Message

Karen Gadowsky



Personalized learning is a hot topic nowadays! Video clips, sound bytes and articles galore, can be found highlighting the "innovations" that are occurring in schools throughout the province that allow students more opportunities to increase their engagement and personalize their learning. For this, I am glad, as it could be a strong indication that the philosophy of Alternate Education is on the brink of going viral!

I think increasing student engagement and personalizing learning is what we, in Alternate Education in British Columbia, have been advocating for the better part of three decades! Although historically Alternate Ed has been funded for the most vulnerable of the student population, I believe that the idea of working with children and youth in a more personalized manner is a cornerstone of Alternate Education, and I am sure that the tenets of this best practice that Alt Ed supports would be strongly recommended by our membership for any learning environment.

To quote Karen Hume, one of Canada's leading experts on 21st century teaching and learning who has long-championed differentiated instruction, "you've got to start where they are!" Starting from where the students are, focusing on who

they are and what they want, and helping them figure out how to get to where they need to be, is what Alternate Education continues to be successful at doing. The epitome of personalization I'd say, and for this, I commend you all!

I would also like to commend the dozens of people, who over the last two and a half decades have volunteered their time to put together and run the annual Challenge and Change conference. Their donation of countless hours to ensure that the Alternate Education conference delivers the quality we have come to enjoy is greatly appreciated by all of us who attend that incredible event!

As we look forward to Dr. Gabor Mate's Keynote and session presentations next year, I encourage you to not only attend the 25th Anniversary Conference, January 19th and 20th, 2012, but to help celebrate our myriad of collective successes by promoting this silver anniversary event to anyone you know who may benefit from the diversity of topics and high levels of presenter expertise that the Alternate conference has provided for more than two decades.

See you at the Schmooze! ♦

Salon Alternative

(continued from page 1)

me of my grandmother when I would visit her, so happy to see me and me to see her. I stop by to pet Lucky, the Jack Russell who is Robert's steady side kick. I stop to chat with the guys about those Canucks. Then there is the miniature black pug Pepsi, whose ear is always cocked towards Mike, the Maintenance Manager, always busy fixing something.

I venture downstairs and check in with Bruce, the Recreational Director and Volunteer Coordinator. "You're coming in to talk with the girls today?" I query, as I take out the day's course work and supplies. Bruce visits our class and shares information about volunteer practices, code of conduct, client confidentiality, professional ethics, and today it is about working with the residents with dementia.

Thursdays are one of my favorite days of the week working at the Sunshine Coast Alternative School because it is the day I teach the Salon program at Christenson Village. The seven girls in the program this semester travel from as far away as Sechelt or Port Mellon to learn about the salon industry in this locally developed career preparation course.

I am barely in the classroom when the girls burst into the building with youthful exuberance, smiles and stories of their week, clad with cell phones and their Salon kits. With a fedora and a striped scarf, Santana comes in with a jumbo coffee from Petro Can, and Michaela and Jasmine have their jumbo coffees from Mickey D's. Brandee, Celestine and Erin are usually there before me, and help me fold the towels and help me get set up while I make a big pot of King Cole tea. And Coho is usually rushing in, always in a hurry, and always so glad to be there. She is sporting a cast because she fell off her long board last week. "You can be the first greeter and assistant to your colleagues then, " I say, flying by the seat of my pants. Flying is some-

thing I learned long ago, probably on my first day of teaching when I was 23. That was 28 years ago. I've learned that time flies, too, especially when you're having fun.

The Salon Program is designed to introduce students to the curriculum they will experience should they enter a career in the Salon Industry and attend a community college in British Columbia. It is also designed to provide students with the practical skills required to work in an entry-level position in a salon.

"I decided to take the Salon Program because I have decided to become a massage therapist after I graduate. When my principal told me about the Salon course, I thought it would be a great chance to get some hands-on experience working with the public. And then you get work experience and school credit. It is a real win-win situation: the students get experience and the old folks get to have their hands done for free," says Michaela. Every student has their reason to come, whether it is to get work experience, to learn some employment skills, to do some career exploration, or to get out of the regular classroom and try something different.

When asked how the students feel about learning away from the regular school setting, Jasmine explains, "It is really cool to learn in an alternative facility rather than a traditional classroom. Learning in a classroom is a good structured environment and is good for the type of person who can sit and learn from a textbook. Not everyone can learn that way, which is why I enjoy the Salon Program. It's a hands-on experience that is always enjoyable and exciting. You learn far more than you expect about business, the salon industry and more importantly, yourself."

Class time in the Salon Program is part theory and part practical experience. ...continued on page 12

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—Erin

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The New School of Google

Nick Smith

I graduated in the early '80s, back when the net was what you used to pull fish out of the water. My fellow graduates and I had come to accept the "spray and pray" model of education used by our teachers: Spray us with facts for 12 years, and pray that enough of them stuck, that by the time we got the handshake and diploma we were well informed enough to survive the adversities of the real world.

Though my buddies and I may not have received a "good education," it was certainly good enough at the time. I was the only one of the crew who took up a career in teaching, yet we are all now teachers in a sense, as we help our own kids get through school.

Our generation grew up in a world of pinball machines, handwritten bankbooks, and record players. Yet here we are with receding hairlines and greying temples, watching our children spread the familiar textbooks and fill-in-the-blank worksheets onto the kitchen table. This should give us pause.

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Everyone
has a
need to feel
appreciated,
listened to,
and heard
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Our parents could never have guessed what kind of world our generation would encounter; the fate of our children is even less certain. We don't know what answers they will need to seek out—those facts might not even exist yet. We don't even know the questions they will have to ask. There is no worksheet or textbook that will prepare them for what lies ahead.

The real crisis in education today is that we continue to reward students for memorizing facts that they could easily look up, while failing to require them to develop the critical thinking

skills that they will require to make sense of a world more complex than we can imagine.

Revisiting a critical thinking mentor

Dr. Roland Case instilled in me the importance of critical thinking back at SFU, when I was a student teacher in the early '90s. He was kind enough to pick up the conversation with me when I called him recently.

"I don't think passing on information was ever taken by any serious person to be the main objective of schools," he tells me. "Rather, we are supposed to teach the facts through the skills and what emerges is understanding." He surmises, "Facts on their own are pretty useless."

Maeve Talbot-Kelly, a family friend who attends Grade 11 in Sechelt, agrees. "Most of the facts that we have to learn are seemingly pointless," she tells me. In particular, Maeve likes science, but cannot understand why she has to learn "tonnes of facts about atoms and tiny molecular things. It's such a waste of time," she confesses.

Despite being a bright student with high marks, Maeve has a hard time recalling when she was last really challenged to understand a concept at school and offers to get back to me. "It is always learning about a subject and being tested on the facts," she tells me resignedly.

Dr. Case points out that although the Ministry of Education will say that students must develop understanding of a subject, many educators misinterpret that to mean handing out information and asking them to regurgitate it.

I ask Dr. Case to help me probe around this one. If strict recall of information, as he says “is not the goal of education, has not been the expectation of ministries, it is not what has been asked for,” then why does it still take place in this system, especially in light of web browsers that allow students to look up far more than they could ever possibly remember?

He explains that multiple-choice tests that emphasize recall of information are easier for students to write and easier to mark. The high-stakes tests, such as the B.C. provincial exams, are largely multiple choice. “Multiple-choice tests signal to kids that much of what you have to do is memorize facts and then you can forget them the next day,” Dr. Case laments.

‘It’s on the provincial exam’

Maeve Talbot-Kelly tells me that her teachers will emphasize the importance of particular bits of information by telling students that “it is on the provincial exam.” Since her teachers are not allowed to know exactly what content will appear on the exam, she explains, “they have to teach us everything.”

The problem at this point seems straightforward: We ask for understanding, but test for memorization. What we should be doing is testing for the ability “to use that information in thoughtful ways,” as Dr. Case puts it. He feels that although the Internet has not created the deficit of thinking skills, the glut of information it presents to students who do not know how to make sense of it, “makes it even more unfortunate.”

It is interesting that when safety is at issue in the real world, we test people for what they can do, not for remembering facts. Apprentice welders have their work subjected to stress-tests, drivers must complete a road test, pre-service nurses must prove themselves in clinical.

Dr. Case and I discuss how students should be tested on what they can do, rather than just recall, in the academic areas. A provincial exam could look like this: We could give them a situation based on what they had studied, and then present them with a set of documents, and a problem to solve. He explains, “They would have to justify their answer in light of what they have learned.”

So, instead of being asked to circle the correct answer to a series of questions on Confederation such as “What year did Confederation occur?” students would be given some readings that give varying views on Confederation. They would then have to answer the question “How has Confederation affected you as a Canadian?”

To respond to this question, students would have to show that they understood what it meant. They could not just guess at the answer. “These authentic tests do not look like traditional ones, but they can be done in two hours on a large-scale basis,” he concludes.

Developing these skills will allow students to read various accounts of a news item on the Internet, then use those various perspectives to decide what they really think about the issue at hand.

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Bursaries, Awards, and Grants

Mike Shaw

Through careful financial stewardship, your association is in the enviable position of having the funds necessary to make \$6,500 available each year in bursaries, awards, and grants. As a teacher and BCTF member, if you also have current membership in the BCAEA, you are eligible to act as a sponsor on behalf of your students or your program. (Don't forget that attendance at the annual conference automatically includes membership in the association.)

The available awards are as follows:

Student Bursary

This bursary is intended for a graduating student who plans on attending a post-secondary institution or education/training program, and who is enrolled, or who was enrolled this school year, in an alternate education program. Five awards of \$500 are available, and the deadline for applications is March 15th each year.

Student Achievement Award

This award is available to an at-risk student currently enrolled in an alternative education program which has resulted in progress towards achieving their personal and/or academic goals. Fifteen awards, consisting of \$100 gift certificates jointly chosen by the student and sponsor teacher are available, and the deadline for applications is March 15th each year.

Student Activity Grant

This grant is available to fund an activity which will be of benefit to at-risk students in an alternative program. Four awards totalling a maximum of \$2000 are available. There is no deadline for applying; submissions are reviewed when received.

Regional Conference Grant

This grant is to support a regional alternative education conference that has as one of its goals the promotion of membership in the BCAEA. A single grant of up to \$500 is available.

Kathi Hughes Innovative Programming Award

This award is given to an alternative education teacher whose program innovation is deemed significant, and who is willing to share the details of their innovative work with our membership in a newsletter article. One award of \$500 is available, and the deadline for applications is March 15th each year.

Specific Projects Grant

This grant is to support an activity which furthers the goals of the BCAEA, such as curriculum development, policy or directory update, or membership recruitment. A single grant of up to \$500 is available.

Regrettably, this year we had to reject a number of applications because they were either incomplete, the sponsor was not a teacher or was a teacher but without current membership in the BCAEA, or the applications arrived after the deadline. We hate having to do that!

Application forms do change from year to year, as do the award criteria. Be sure to download the latest forms from our website. The address is at the bottom of this page. ♦

Mike Shaw is the Chair of the BCAEA Awards Committee, a Past-President of the Association, and the current Publications Manager. He teaches at a storefront school in West Kelowna.

\$500 Student Bursary Winners

For 2011, we are delighted to award \$500 Student Bursaries to the following individuals in recognition of their hard work, determination, and achievement of their goals. All are continuing their education or training after high school, and we congratulate each and every one of them for achieving graduation, such an important milestone in their lives.



Ashley Brenay

During her three years at the Golden Alternate Program, Ashley has developed into a very focused and dedicated individual. With considerable effort on her part, she has overcome numerous difficulties in her life which could have easily deterred her from succeeding. Ashley has chosen to pursue a career in Early Childhood Education after graduation.



Sarah Brown

Since starting in the alternate program at D.P. Todd in Prince George, Sarah has gotten back on track academically, and has found herself again. She achieves high marks and has a great attitude towards life. According to Sarah, Alternate has changed her for the better. She is looking forward to graduation and doing something special with her life.



Michael Cameron

Starting at Coquitlam's alternate high school last year, Michael has worked hard to get ahead. He is proud to be one of CAFE's early graduates this year. Around the school, staff and students alike know him for his great sense of humour and uncanny ability to recite lines from movies. Michael is already working in the flooring industry and will be using his \$500 bursary towards Carpentry at BCIT.



Savannah Davies

Savannah first experienced an alternative program when she was in Grade 10 and joined Nala'atsi Alternative Program for aboriginal students. After a year, she transitioned to a mainstream high school and was taking North Island Distance Education School, the Opportunities alternate program, and regular school classes at the same time. She plans to attend the Veterinary Assistance program at TRU.

\$100 Student Achievement Award Winners

Each of the following students has made significant, positive changes in their personal life and academic progress since enrolling in alternative education. Together with their teachers and peers, we are pleased to be able to recognize those changes by awarding them each a \$100 Student Achievement Award for 2011, which is disbursed as a gift certificate to a store chosen jointly with their teacher. Congratulations to all of them: Hard work and dedication does pay off!



Quinton Abbott

Quinton has excelled this year at TAPS. He is a kind, helpful student who does very well academically and has fabulous attendance. This year we have really gotten to fully see his sense of humor and who he really is. Quinton shows great promise in the area of English and aspires to be a writer; we look forward to reading his published works!



Patricia Archer

Patricia is a very hard working student who does not hesitate to ask for help when needed. She has participated in many of the activities we do and especially enjoyed the Physical Education classes and the backpacking trip to Mount Robson. Her career goal is to become a chef and she will start that journey with a diploma in Culinary Arts at the College of New Caledonia.



Dylan Arden

Dylan came to CAFE two years ago behind his peers, but he is set to graduate this June with the rest of his class because of all his hard work and dedication. Dylan credits CAFE with giving him the right tools to succeed; the smaller environment of the school supported one-on-one instruction and provided the opportunity to build solid relationships with other students and staff.



Stryker Arrowsmith

Stryker has been attending TAPS for two years. This year he has taken on two electives which he has really enjoyed and his attendance has improved immensely. He has both organized and participated in the many activities we do and has been a positive role model for other students. His long term goal is to become a teacher, a career we know he will excel in.



Chantel Fowler

Chantel has undergone a lot of changes this school year and has really blossomed into a confident, motivated young woman. She has contributed her time and effort into school events like Remembrance Day and is recognized by staff and students as a great member of the school community. Chantel is kind, accepting, and always happy to help other people. She will be putting her award money towards a new laptop.



Adam Green

Adam is a grade 10 student at Highland Secondary who has shown significant growth in the last two years. He has shown himself to be a more mature and focused student. He stays organized with assignments and keeps track of due dates. Success at school is important to him. He has also become a great reader.



Elizabeth Houg

After being out of school for a while, Elizabeth recognized the importance of graduation to meet her future goals. She thinks creatively in all her classes whether they are Studio Arts, Leadership or English and also fosters a real desire to make the world a better place. It is not surprising that her future goal is to complete a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree. She will excel!



Jakob Jensen

Jake Jensen is a real example of resilience and growth. He is creative and puts lots of effort into producing 3D projects. He is also an avid reader. He is presently completing grade 10 at Highland and hopes to soon start apprenticing to be a mason with his Dad.



Lacey Lefevre-Wildeman

Lacey is a mature helpful student who excels academically. She shows great patience and kindness towards others and can always be counted upon to help. Lacey is very creative and dependable and thinks outside the box. As a Leadership student, she is very focused on the tasks she volunteered to do and she works well with other students.



Kylee McFadzen

Kylee started TAPS two years ago and is a great spokeswoman for our program! She is kind, helpful and a great role model. Kylee has excelled in whatever task she takes on, and perseveres when she has to. Kylee is one busy girl! She is a fully certified lifeguard and swimming instructor and still manages to find time to volunteer with seniors at the YMCA.

\$100 Student Achievement Award Winners



Vanessa McGowan

Vanessa has thrived this year at TAPS. She was first accepted to TAPS over two years ago and left behind the bullying she experienced in regular school. She feels TAPS has been successful for her because of the understanding staff, the access to community programs and the comfortable environment (and great food!) She is a very active girl and is a faithful attender of the 7:30 am Phys. Ed. class.



Nerissa Muxlow

Nerissa came to TAPS two years ago. She is a kind, helpful student who is a driving driving force behind Leadership class activities. She has initiated several projects and enjoys volunteering in the community. She loves to learn new things and works well with others. As a student, Nerissa is conscientious and hard working and a pleasure to have in class.



Darleen Parker

Darleen is an extremely driven student who has had an amazing first year at Glacier View Secondary Center. The alternate environment has allowed her the flexibility and comfort to show her true colours and meet her true potential. Not only has she accomplished academic milestones, she has also taken courses like Photography and Food Safe offered through the school.



Marisa Schorno

Marisa is an artistic, musical, and athletic student who has a resilient spirit and charismatic personality. She has been on the school volleyball team, been a finalist in Valley Idol, and been on the school's honour roll. She is presently completing grade 11 at Highland Secondary and will be starting a culinary apprenticeship in the fall.



Jake-Nathan Willman

Since Jake came to CAFE Secondary in April 2010, he has thrived and grown into the man he wanted to be. He came from a rough and turbulent past in East Vancouver. He spends a lot of his spare time volunteering at the Thunderbird Community Center in East Vancouver, and wants to become a youth worker so that can give back to the community that gave him so much and never gave up on him.

Alternative School Art Program

Kevin McEvoy

Students in the Sunshine Coast Alternative School Art Program work in a variety of media from glass lamp working to silver smithing, toilet paper couture to photography, as well as the staples of drawing and painting. The age group of our students spans from grade three to grade twelve. Every student comes with different skill sets and we strive to meet them at their level. Interests vary, from painting tribal art on their skateboards to making rings to present to their moms. Every student is invited to work at their own level doing projects that are meaningful to them.

For me as instructor, it is important for students to feel safe in the art room, and that means around taboo subjects and censorship. At-risk students are often censored and are not free to express themselves. Sometimes images might appear that serve as “red flags” as to the student’s state of mind. One way or another, it opens up dialogue. My bottom line

involves images that seriously represent potential threats to the student or others. In school, if there are too many taboo subjects, there isn’t much meaningful expression. And if there isn’t meaningful dialogue with our students around these topics, how do we expect them to learn? Art pushes the envelope, moves the spirit, engages the viewer, changes hearts and minds.

Three times a year, the students are invited to display their work at the two public art galleries on the Sunshine Coast. These displays allow students to receive feedback from adult members in our community. The newspaper often praises their efforts and this makes the students feel proud to be an artist.♦

Kevin McEvoy is a Fine Arts teacher and artist living on the Sunshine Coast. Visit his website: www.kevinmcevoyart.com/

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Salon Alternative

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—Santana

By the end of the course, students have enough material to put in their professional portfolio, which is part of their assessment in the course.

“What I like about the Salon program is that we learn in a seminar format. So it’s more like group discussion rather than listen then raise your hand. We learn about topics that you wouldn’t expect would be relevant to salon. But they are, and really anything you learn can be relevant to a profession where you work with clients. For instance, we had an informative and interesting guest speaker from the Opt Sexual Health Clinic. Clients can sometimes tell us personal things and we can discuss these things better when informed,” states London born Erin, a student new to the program and British Columbia. “We also studied personality types. If you can recognize a person’s personality, you may find them easier to talk to.”

Santana adds, “A program like this offers many opportunities to students. It allows students to have hands-on learning experiences with our elders in the community. The class is in a discussion format, which allows easier understanding of the materials. Certificates, such as WHMIS and First Aid are earned and given. Near the end, we create our resumes and portfolios, which aid us in looking for a job.”

“I am looking forward to our field trips to VCC and the Powell River Salon Ace-It Program,” says

Coho, an academic and fine arts student who has studied modeling and photography.

Seminar topics do range from everything one can imagine. I use the medicine wheel as my guide and try to balance the topics based on the student’s need to know, interest, the curriculum, and what is happening in the industry. Topics include: Work Safe BC Orientation, Healthy Mind and Body, Effective Communication, Human Relations, Study of Nails and Skin, and Professional Relationships. I use a constructivist approach to teaching, so the issues that are happening in their lives are the same issues they will have to deal with in the industry. And the best way to start dealing with them is now, in a safe place. The program gets constantly tweaked, in response to the steady feedback from the students, the residents, and the staff.

Christenson Village is a relatively new facility, which offers residents three levels of support in a unique community setting. The residents are included in the events of daily living to the extent





that they are accustomed and able. The Salon Program has been working out of Christenson Village since its opening in 2006. We just helped them to celebrate their fifth birthday at their big community bash last month!

“It is so great to see the young people,” says Pat, a resident and loyal Salon customer. “They bring a vitality to our place.” “And you give the girls great advice,” I reply, “in a way that they will listen.” The girls have shared with me how they feel heard and valued and their efforts appreciated. Far too often, students can feel left out, isolated, undervalued and unheard. It is amazing what unconditional positive regard and human touch and connection can do for the teenage spirit. And for my spirit, too.

The Salon students mainly work with the residents living in Assisted Living, which consists of 60 one-bedroom suites and is intended for those who can no longer live independently in the community. They also work with the residents of the three dementia care cottages just outside the main facility.

we work with the ladies doing hand and nail care. The ladies are awesome. I’ve made close connections because the ladies are very encouraging and it makes me want to do more and more. My favorite customer said to me, ‘I want to wrap you up and take you home.’ She has helped me a lot, more than words can say.”

From the Program Guide for Ministry Authorized Workd Experience Courses:

The primary goal of the work experience is to help students prepare for the transition from secondary school to the world of work. Through work experience, students have the opportunity to observe and practice employability skills required in the workplace, as well as technical and applied skills relating to specific occupations and industries. Other goals include helping students to:

- connect what they learn in the classroom with skills, knowledge and attitudes needed in the workplace,
- gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to be successful in the world of work,
- develop job readiness skills for specific occupations and careers, and

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The success of the program is the protected work place environment. Often beginning work experience students do not have the sufficient support in the workplace or the confidence to handle difficult situations and they get discouraged and drop out. “I was really scared at first, but then I got to know my clients. The studies in the morning really helped for the afternoons when

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- understand the similarities and differences in behaviour standards between workplace and school.

So not only do the students learn about the industry and the world of work, they have a safe place to have their first work experience in a protected environment.

Most of all, I love observing the students with their clients in the afternoon. Sometimes the residents are waiting and we get line-ups. The work experience starts promptly at 12:30 after lunch. Tammy Saigeon, the Child and Youth Care Worker, assists the students to get ready and to set up the Salon. Coho meets and greets the customers, and then dashes in the back to put the warm towels in my crock-pot to keep them warm. Brandee is opening the windows for ventilation, Jasmine is sanitizing the tables, Santana is setting up all the nail polishes in a long line. Michaela sets up the chairs. Celestine and Erin put up tables. It is so wonderful to see the girls work together as a team. And when salon student and client get together, the conversations, the energy, and the feeling of community equals magic. "When I massage a person's hand, I feel a connection," Erin tells me. "It's interesting when you look at a person's hand, because it shows all their experiences, like a life story." I feel honoured to observe the process.

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—Erin

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"Being able to interact with clients during the

process of learning gives us more confidence and a taste of the salon industry offers. We get to meet and challenge ourselves every session to better our learning and skill building. Hands-on learning helps with knowing what to do, then doing it, rather than just reading a book," explains Brandee, an adult student who is planning to go to VCC in the fall. "When you give something your all, rewards come flying into your life with and by making healthy choices. I am glad I am making this one."

And so there you have it, the nuts and bolts of what I do and why I love Thursdays teaching at the Alternative School's Salon Program. I would recommend any alternative program to try such a course as it creates such a win-win opportunity in your community, for your students, our seniors and us as teachers. Ready to fly? Contact me at cmacinnnes@sd46.bc for more information. ♦

Cindy MacInnes is a teacher for the Sunshine Coast Alternative School, the new editor for the BCAEA newsletter, and the president of the BCAEA LSA for the Sunshine Coast School District.



School of Google

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It will also allow them to read a blog posting and decide for themselves whether or not the writer is drawing upon appropriate evidence to reach particular conclusions.

Where we need to go

Though we might agree that deeper understanding of content and critical thinking skills are what are needed for today's students to make sense of what they find online, fundamental changes such as this will require a lot from everyone involved and will undoubtedly draw resistance.

Dr. Case recalls developing critical thinking measures for the Ministry of Education some years back. Eventually, "they pulled them from the survey, because the teachers thought that the kids would not do well on these items and certain officials did not want to have measures that would show up these shortcomings."

This raises a valid point. We can require a certain depth of understanding and test for critical thinking, but what will we do if the students are just not up for it? Dr. Case recognizes this and says that our goal must be to make learning "more enticing," not harder, if we want school to remain relevant in the face of the plethora of information that students are encountering online. Too many students, he tells me, are under the impression that education is about finding a fact in a textbook and moving it to a slot on a worksheet. What is required are "more challenging tasks," he says.

Don't cover the subject, uncover it

There is an adage in education that teachers should be "uncovering" the curriculum rather

than merely "covering" it. The complaint from teachers has been that there is not enough time to really explore any subject in the depth required to really get students thinking about it. The ministry has recently reduced the amount of curriculum that teachers have to cover in most subjects so that they can do just that. As Dr. Case articulates, "The danger in trying to cover all of the facts is a paradox – you miss what is important."

For example, a Social Studies 11 curriculum document makes clear that students are expected to be able to "explain how Canadians can effect change at the provincial and federal levels." Understanding this is necessary, but it is not easy for the average sixteen year old. In order to really get it, they must go through the process of identifying unfair laws, then impressing their point of view on those who can do something about it. This takes time. It is so much easier to just assign a passage from the textbook, give them a worksheet to fill in and draw up a list of terms to remember for a quiz sometime down the road.

Hopefully, an exercise like the former, that might have them emailing an MLA and posting a response to an article will engage students more than the strictly academic exercise of putting the right word into the correct slot. If so, then young people might accept the learning they acquire at school as relevant in that it will help them in their lives beyond high school. ♦

Nick Smith is a teacher and writer who lives on the Sunshine Coast with his wife and two boys. This article was first published February 3, 2010 in the Tyee.

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Our
goal must
be to make
learning more
enticing, not
harder if we
want school
to remain
relevant
”

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