



alternate Newsletter

The BC Alternate Education Association: A PSA of the BCTF

Volume 29 Number 2, Fall 2018

Super Shy

Dr. Deborah MacNamara

Inside:

- 2 *President's Message*
- 4 *Baby Hugging*
- 5 *Sharing the Warmth*
- 6 *Local Solutions*
- 10 *Financial Statement*
- 10 *Budget*
- 11 *Association Goals*
- 11 *Contact Information*
- 12 *The Last Last Word*

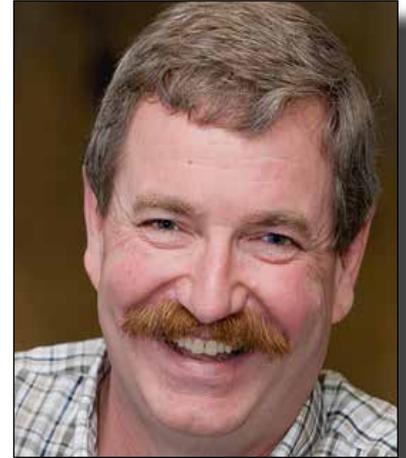
Shyness isn't a problem, but we sure treat it as one. Shy kids can be called rude and antisocial especially when their reaction to people getting too close can mean hiding behind legs, sticking out their tongues, making strange faces, or even refusing to speak when spoken to. Since we typically tend to place high value on qualities like independence and social sophistication, the actions attached to shyness, especially in children, remain terribly misunderstood. Shyness isn't a problem

to be fixed, rather it is the part of healthy development meant to ensure our children trust the right people.

Shyness is an instinct that moves a child to resist getting close to people who are outside of their relational village. Children are not supposed to follow just anyone and need to be led by those who are responsible for them. Shyness closes the door to attachments that compete with a parent for their child's attention ...continued on page 3

President's Message

Mike Shaw



Is it just me, or is time going faster these days? It seems like the school year just started a few days ago, and yet the 1701 count is done, SLPs and IEPs are finally looking manageable, the first term is coming to a close, and report cards are looming. All in what seems like the blink of an eye. At this rate, grad will be next week!

I know time marches on. The ever increasing amount of grey hair and wrinkles I have are a testament to that! But one thing never seems to change no matter how fast the days fly by and the tally of school years spent in alternate inexorably increases: The never ending stream of needy youth that present at the door, looking for a version of school that fits their unique circumstances.

Those of us for whom Alternate is a passion are all too familiar with the seemingly endless litany of reasons for the seemingly endless stream of students. Dysfunctional families, multi-generational poverty, mental health concerns, substance abuse issues, teenage parenthood, and problems with the law are just a few of the reasons.

I have noticed over my several decades in alternate that the problems facing our kids are ever more convoluted and difficult. The

number of issues they present with certainly seems to have increased, along with their complexity. Where previously I might have “shared” a kid with a probation officer or social worker, now the size of the team working with a youth often times can’t be counted with just the fingers of one hand.

And yet each one of the students attending our classes is unique, and presents with a unique set of circumstances and issues. There is no magic formula or recipe that guarantees success. Our job, of course, is to try to find a way in, to get past the protective barriers they have put up and to make that connection so that proffered help, whether from the teacher, district specialists, or the greater community is accepted. It isn’t always easy to do!

So despite the at times daunting challenges we face and the inexorable rush of time, we also need to take a moment just for ourselves. Breathe. Practice mindfulness. Celebrate victories large and small. Remind ourselves of the incredible rewards we get from working with society’s most vulnerable youth.

Because we do make a difference in their lives. They know it and so should we. ♦

Super Shy

[continued from page 1]

and guidance, and it keeps a child at home where they are safe and will be cared for.

Shyness instincts emerge between 5 and 6 months when they start to display stranger protest and separation anxiety. Before this age they can happily pass from one person to the next until their brain develops the capacity to lock onto the primary attachment who best meets their needs. When a child's brain decides on a primary attachment, often they will automatically start to resist contact and closeness with others. The only people a child will usually accept at this point are familiar ones to whom their primary attachment has introduced them.

Why Shy?

You might wonder why nature created shyness instincts in the first place. To understand shyness, you have to make sense of how it protects and preserves a child's greatest need: attachment. Shyness is meant to close the door to relationship with some people, so that it can bring the people you are attached to into better view. Shyness sets up exclusivity in a relationship, allowing it to become deeper and more personalized.

When a young child is shy with other children, parents may worry that their child isn't making friends or fitting in socially. Young children don't really need attachments with peers in order to grow; they need deep connections with adults. The

pressure for early peer socialization is not in keeping with developmental science, which tells us that children need to first know who they are before they can be a good friend to others.

The focus for young children should be on knowing their own dreams, desires, needs, and preferences before they are made to focus on other people. Shyness with other children in the early years keeps the focus on their development and cuts out competing stories that would prevent them from forming their own.

Labels of shyness usually come from adults who don't know a child and who are held at a distance by them. My children's teachers would often remark at how quiet my children were only to be shocked to learn they were loud and boisterous at home. What we fail to realize is that children should be wary of sharing themselves with just anyone – shyness ensures they can trust the people they open up to.

Shyness isn't a mistake. It's nature's way of ensuring that the adults who are responsible for a child have the most influence on them. The biggest mistake we make is trying to talk a shy child out of their instincts – making them feel uncomfortable with who they are. This is a dangerous message that can serve to override the natural instincts that are meant to guide them, keep them safe, and allow them to operate with integrity. The real problem *...continued on page 11*



Shyness is meant to close the door to relationships with some people



Baby Hugging

Cheryl Thompson

As an alternate teacher, I am always looking for opportunities for my students to have experiences outside of the classroom that are relevant and meaningful. Sydney and Tori are high school students that are often looking for the chance to work with children and teachers in the form of job shadows and volunteering.

When I heard that The Bridge, a family support center, was looking for "baby huggers" I thought of them. It has been an incredible arrangement for all involved. As "baby huggers" the girls are required to show up weekly to monitor babies while moms are in counselling and group sessions. The experience has exceeded all of our expectations.

The girls have developed an incredible sense of responsibility and commitment. In addition to always arriving early, Sydney and Tori never miss a day, and continue to volunteer over spring break, Christmas holidays and summer vacation. The girls are enjoying volunteering at the Bridge so much that they are now helping with the toddlers in the parent support group once a week. Sydney and Tori have gained many things from this "baby hugging": confidence, positive role models, appreciation, resume building, networking, and of course, the satisfaction and pleasure of knowing that what they are contributing is valued and important.

Research has shown when alternative students are able to do altruistic work it helps to

develop protective factors towards resiliency. We are thrilled to say the girls are not only exuding resiliency, they are focused on school and optimistic about achieving their goals to become teachers. This fabulous collaboration has resulted in a wonderful success story and reaffirmed the benefits of volunteering and community involvement for all students. ♦

Cheryl Thompson has taught in a variety of alternate programs over the years and currently works at the Rutland Learning Centre, a satellite location of Central Programs & Services in Kelowna.

“
They
are
focused
on school
and
optimistic
about
achieving
their goals

”



Baby Hugging

Sydney Nicholson and Tori Alexander

Hello, our names are Sydney Nicholson and Victoria Alexander. We are students at Rutland Learning Centre, an alternative school in Kelowna, and we are baby huggers! Being a baby hugger has been a great experience in many ways. What is a baby hugger, you may ask? We volunteer at the Bridge Youth and Family Services on Wednesdays and Fridays. Wednesdays is a postpartum depression group. We hold and care for the children when the moms go to group. And Fridays is parent talk, which gives people tips on parenting and also just general support.



We were given this wonderful opportunity because we want to have careers in child care once we have graduated from high school. We also do this volunteering because we want to help out the moms and families in the community. Additionally, it also benefits us in a lot of different ways, especially by reducing stress. We look forward to the days we go there. Seeing all the amazing children we get to spend the mornings and afternoons with, and having a connection with all the kids is really special.

Having this opportunity has taught us a lot, especially about children and different coping methods. We have been volunteering here for so long we have learned how it feels when people depend us. We can also tell we are appreciated, and we have responded by being responsible, always being there on time and being prepared. We have felt acceptance and nurturing by working with adults that care so much. The staff have become role models for us and we are more committed to completing school and following our dreams to work with children,

Baby hugging has been a great opportunity for us. We have developed lasting relationships with the babies, the moms, and the staff. It really has been a life changing experience, and we don't think we ever want to leave. Everyone has really made it feel like a second home to us! ♦

Sydney and Tori attend Rutland Learning Centre in Kelowna.

“

We have responded by being responsible

”

Finding Local Solutions

Paul Britton

A mid-sized, dual-track (French Immersion and English) School in Vernon, BC, W.L. Seaton is located downtown with a diverse mix of students that have a large range of skills and abilities. Seaton has the largest number of indigenous students in SD22 and it also has a majority of students from the Okanagan Indian Band which is an important cultural addition and adds to the richness of the student population.

The challenge: inconclusive data

W.L. Seaton as a whole had a fairly comfortable profile in terms of student achievement and success. However, the overall data

didn't illuminate the challenges that some students were having with successfully getting through the bottleneck of grade 10 and there were students with multiple at-risk factors in their file that were not achieving the success of other students and who teetered on the edge of becoming dropouts. The data was an inverted bell curve. The generalization was that the students in the French program tended to have higher levels of success and the students that came to Seaton from our English feeder schools were less likely to have the same levels of success. So, how could we ensure that we were providing the best learning environment for all students?



The data didn't illuminate the challenges that some students were having



Prototyping and exploring

The exploration for solutions had groups of colleagues attend other schools' academic intervention programs, pull out systems and collaborative approaches. When the academic intervention and pull out models were put into play at Seaton the overall impact was lackluster and the interventions seemed to only help a few kids. However, there were some glimmers of success through the collaborative model. A colleague and I spent a semester collaboratively teaching math and science to 60 Grade 8s. We had the students for half days every day for a semester and we were able to plan and coordinate thematic units as well as core learning such as problem solving, resilience and literacy skills throughout. We saw students collaborating and having more success with challenging problems.

The beginning of a long term solution

In late winter I approached our then principal with a pitch: What if I took 30 Grade 8 students that were on the academic fence and we ran an integrated program? The hope was that through creating a community of learners, we would be able to create a tipping point. It was suggested that we put this to staff and in the subsequent conversations with teachers it was determined that we should try this interdisciplinary approach with all of our Grade 8 English language students.

The initial concept was to collaboratively teach the students English, Math, Science and Social Studies in as integrated a fashion

as possible. A significant imbedding of indigenous content and ways of knowing was also a design consideration. We would make inquiry a central practice and provide space and provocations for learners to engage with their natural curiosity. By forming a community of learners we were hoping to intervene with the risk factors and disengagement that were plaguing students in previous years.

A Lasting Legacy

The Jr. Academy is now in its seventh year. Amongst other celebrations, we have seen increased completion rates and larger grad classes from our students. Many lessons have been learned, and the program continues to evolve. The team has experienced staff turnover and managed to maintain its philosophy and student centered approach. One of the more recent successes that the team has had was to transition to a gradeless reporting system. The last school year saw the program grow to an elective Grade 9 year. This model has continued to be revised and the colleagues teaching in the program have done a substantial revamp of its design to better incorporate the inclusion of year two students.

Keys to success and continuing challenges

We attribute our success to a number of things:

- Team approach: Each teacher brings their strength, knowledge and leadership abilities to the table.
- Shared prep time: *...continued on page 10*



We have seen increased completion rates and larger grad classes



Sharing the Warmth

Cassie Westergaard

The North Peace Secondary School (NPSS) Senior Alternate program has successfully been working on projects to benefit both Fort St. John, and the international community. Right now they are wrapping up a year-long project to help the homeless in our community.

Throughout this past school year the program has completed projects such as sending Christmas shoeboxes, which are small boxes filled with gifts, to less fortunate children of Africa. The program also sponsored a family during Christmas and bought them Christmas dinner and gifts which hopefully helped the family have an amazing Christmas.

In addition, they have also cleaned up the school grounds and they have brought greeting cards to the seniors at Peace Villa Care Home to brighten their day.

Earlier this year the class held a clothing and coin drive to provide warm clothing and supplies to the shelter. Walmart Canada also contributed a \$1000 grant to this project.

Currently Ronin Medcalfe, who is the lead organizer for the homeless project, is working on getting lockers for the homeless living in our community to use to keep their belongings safe.

He's been working on this project since last year when his proposal letter was read at City Council.

"They need somewhere to put their stuff where it won't be stolen; their wallets, ID's, things that they treasure most," said Medcalfe. Right now he is working on the final stages of buying the lockers and getting them installed at the homeless shelter.

"Every homeless person in Fort St. John who uses the shelter will have access to the lockers," said Medcalfe. The Salvation Army was more than happy to work with Ronin and the other students on this project.

"Receiving these donations means a lot to the community that we serve," said Cameron Eggie, Executive Director for the Northern Centre of Hope. "It shows our guests that people do care about them and it shows our frontline staff that the community supports their work." ♦

Cassie Westergaard is a 16-year-old who enjoys helping others. Along with her classmates, she has accomplished many great things in the Fort St. John community. She now lives in Williams Lake, BC where she will graduate this year before continuing her education and becoming a lab technician through Thompson Rivers University.

““
It
makes
them
feel good,
like
somebody
cares

””

"I think it makes them feel good, like somebody cares," said Ronin Medcalfe.



Two New Awards Available!

Sean Blake

We are delighted to announce two new awards this year.

The first, intended for students, is the \$1000 Liz Louwersheimer Memorial Award, created in honour of our dear friend and long-time BCAEA Executive member.

The second, intended for teachers or programs, is the \$1000 Anita Chapman Alternate Curriculum Award honouring a retired teacher, union activist, friend, and champion of alternate education.

Full details are on our website. ♦

Local Solutions

(continued from page 7)



The team has been able to plan and design together (reflexive, reflective and responsive). This is the best professional development a teacher could ever wish for.

- Commitment to community: Significant time was spent on building relationships, working on expectations and learning about how we work together.
- Starting from where the students are: Gathering evidence of student growth required baseline data and an opportunity to track and celebrate success.
- Allies: Support and validation from school and district administrators as well as UBC-Okanagan faculty. The hurdle is to identify the program as a legitimate educational model.

But challenges still remain. Among them are:

- Resisting the underlying block rotation.
- Finding natural cross curricular fits (this is easier in the new curriculum).
- Finding a way to more intensively support literacy and numeracy without pull out intervention.
- Demonstrating the significance and its impact on the learning community over time. As the program ages and becomes “normal” it is often questioned if it is still making a significant impact on learners to warrant the effort required to maintain it. ♦

Paul Britton is an educator and curriculum coordinator in School District 22. He was one of the brains behind W.L. Seaton's Jr. Academy and was instrumental in making the vision a reality.

Super Shy

[continued from page 3]

is our own impatience with and misunderstanding of shyness.

Well That Didn't Go Well...

There are many unhelpful responses to shyness – notably ones that suggest there is a problem with a child.

Some people will crash into a shy child with forceful interactions, making statements like: “Look at me when I’m talking” or “What is the matter with you that you can’t say hi?” When we force a child to engage and don’t honour their shyness instincts, it can lead to pushback or alarm in the child.

With my own kids out in public, it was inevitable that a friendly person would say hi to them. Their responses ranged from yelling, “Go away!” to hiding behind my knees, or my eldest would move in front of her sister to protect her. I often wanted to tell people that while I understood their intentions were friendly, kids are not programmed to warm up to strangers for very good reasons. When strangers push a young child’s boundaries, threatening their sense of self, it makes them more resistant to connecting with new people.

When we don’t understand the function that shyness plays, it can make it hard for other family members who want a relationship with a child. If Grandma or Grandpa hasn’t seen a young child in a while, there can be a strong shy response when they visit. Hurt feelings can ensue with complaints that

there are not enough visits happening. The solution is to help them develop relationships rather than disparage their shyness.

The more adversarial or demanding a person becomes for a child to speak up, the more a child will resist talking or sharing their ideas. This is often the case in the classroom when a child feels coerced to speak up but doesn’t have a solid connection with the people they are speaking to. Shy children are often mislabelled as anxious in these contexts when the truth is they lack a relationship that would bring them out of their shell. It is not a child’s job to build a relationship with an adult – it’s up to the adult to invite the child, patiently, into a relationship with them.

A Natural Transformation

Just as nature built shyness instincts into kids, it also provided a natural resolution to it. While the instinct to shy away from others may never leave, the simultaneous push towards wanting to relate to others helps to counteract it.

The more a child becomes their own person, the more they form their own ideas and desires, many of which include interacting with others. If they love playing soccer and want to join a team, natural shyness instincts will take a backseat. The more a child loves to act and sing, the more their shyness instincts will be overrun by the desire to be seen and heard on the stage. There are many young children *...continued on page 12*



Help them develop relationships rather than disparage their shyness



Super Shy

[continued from page 11]



who, despite the instinct to shy away from others, will proclaim that they are ready for school and bravely climb on the bus for that unforgettable first time.

**Rituals
and
routines
can help
a child
feel
comfortable**

Healthy development is the answer to dealing with shyness instincts. As a child's dependency on their adults decreases, their willingness to seek the guidance and company of other people increases. The more mature they get, the more they can disagree with their shyness instincts as well. While one part of the child might be inclined to avoid contact, another part longs to reach out and share experiences with others around them. We don't have to force a child out of their shell – nature has a plan to help them emerge naturally.



Connecting With Shy Kids

When you understand the purpose of shyness instincts, you are less likely to make matters worse and can use these strategies instead.

Be a matchmaker

The key to matchmaking is to use current attachments to form new ones. New people need to get an introduction to a shy child through someone they know and trust. When we share our childcare responsibilities with others, we cannot leave it up to chance that a relationship between the child and the caretaker will form.

We can foster relationships between a child and an adult by focusing on something they have in common and by having the child see

that we like the person we are connecting them to. When the child notices that the caretaker is endorsed by their trusted adult, their shyness instincts won't be as necessary and they will be better able to follow and connect with their new person.

Develop transition rituals

When shyness instincts are present, rituals and routines can help a child feel comfortable and settle more easily into someone's care. When we take time to say hello to their caretaker, allow some time to adjust before leaving, and then head out in a predictable manner, it can help a shy child feel more at ease with their teacher or babysitter, knowing how the day will progress.

A daycare director I work with was delighted at the new pick-up and drop-off area she had renovated in her centre. One staff member was always assigned to greet kids and help with the task of putting their things away, saying hello and goodbye to their parents, and leading the child to their classrooms. Having a special space to orchestrate this transition and a ritual around it was transformational. The staff, parents, and kids all found their rhythm in entering and leaving the centre.

Build bridges and normalize shyness

If a child is reluctant to talk to you then wait some time, chat casually with their parent, and convey that you understand that it just doesn't feel right to say hello yet.

When I went for a meeting at a colleague's house one day, he tried to say hello to my

young child and engaged her eyes to get a smile. When he was met with a “stay away from me” face, he gently said, “She has lovely shyness instincts in her,” and he let her be. As my daughter saw me engage with my colleague, who wisely bridged the distance by showing acceptance rather than opposition, she naturally let down her guard and followed suit.

Our children need to feel secure with the adults who are responsible for caring for them – this wasn’t meant to be left to chance or move from person to person, but is part of nature’s design to ensure they don’t follow people to whom they are not

attached. If our social expectations were in keeping with what children really need, we wouldn’t see shyness as a failing but would recognize it for the important role it plays in allowing them to develop their values, relationships, and sense of self at their own pace and under their trusted caregivers’ watchful eyes. ♦

Dr. Deborah MacNamara is the Director of Kid’s Best Bet, a family counselling centre, on Faculty at the Neufeld Institute, and is the author of *Rest, Play, Grow: Making Sense of Preschoolers (or anyone who acts like one)*, which has been translated into seven languages. Reprinted by permission.



Children
need to
feel
secure



PROActive CURRICULUM

For over twenty years, ProActive Curriculum has produced self-paced, mastery-based courses that follow BC Curriculum standards. Those courses used with great success in programs and classrooms throughout BC and the Yukon.

We are updating our course offerings for the New BC Curriculum, and have many newly rewritten or newly revised courses available now, with more under development and coming soon. We offer generous discounts for those wanting to update previously purchased courses.

Visit www.proactivecurriculum.com for more, or contact me directly: mike@proactivecurriculum.com.

2018 Financial Statement

Statement of Receipts and Disbursements¹ for the Year Ended June 30, 2018

Balance, July 1, 2017 185,220.54

Receipts

BCTF grant	5,250.00
Membership/subscription fees	22,760.00
Interest	2,086.67
Exhibits/Sponsorships	3,085.00
Conference fees	88,395.75

121,577.42

Disbursements

Meeting - Executive	11,734.93
Meeting - Subcommittee	3,659.76
Meeting - AGM	1,633.40
Meeting - TTOC costs	6,880.19
Publication - Newsletter	1,576.62
Operating	6,945.42
Scholarships	2,800.00
Miscellaneous	178.33
Conference-Operating	7,046.69
Conference-Facilities	3,185.00
Conference-Catering	18,324.18
Conference-Printing	1,680.70
Conference-Promotions	2,453.88
Conference-Committee costs	3,941.70
Conference-Entertainment	12,662.79
Conference-Equipment rental	5,269.54
Conference-Speakers	16,793.92
Set Up Costs	[6,887.00]

[111,342.64]

Balance, June 30, 2018 \$195,455.32

¹ Note: This statement reflects only funds held by the BC Teachers' Federation on behalf of the BC Teachers of Alternate Education.

2018-19 Budget

Income

99921	Income surplus	195,455.32
99923	Conference surplus	6,522.47
99930	Membership	14,382.75
99931	BCTF Grant @ 20.00 each	7,000.00
99932	Back Issues	0.00
99934	Interest	1,100.00
99940	Conference fees	80,000.00
99943	Conference Exhibitors	2,500.00
	Total Income	306,960.54

Expenses

99950	Meeting - Executive	20,000.00
99953	Meeting - Subcommittee	5,000.00
99954	Meeting - AGM	5,000.00
99958	Meeting - TOC	12,000.00
99961	Publications - Newsletter	3,000.00
99962	Publications - Other	100.00
99970	Operating	5,000.00
99971	Equipment	5,000.00
99972	Chapter support	1,000.00
99973	Affiliation fees and meetings	3,000.00
99978	Scholarships	20,000.00
99979	Miscellaneous	1,000.00
99980	Conference - Operating	25,000.00
99981	Conference - Facilities	5,000.00
99982	Conference - Catering	20,000.00
99983	Conference - Printing	2,500.00
99984	Conference - Promotions	2,500.00
99985	Conference - Committee	10,000.00
99986	Conference - Entertainment	20,000.00
99987	Conference - Equip. rental	10,000.00
99988	Conference - Speakers	30,000.00
99989	Conference - Start-up costs	0.00
99998	Conference - Hold	0.00
99999	Conference - Misc	10,000.00
	Total Expenditures	215,100.00

Expected Surplus \$91,860.54

2018–19 Goals and Objectives

Goal	Objectives	Activities	Evaluation
Promote alternate education.	Network with other PSA's and programs that support the Association's goals.	Free conference registration for PSA presidents. Send Newsletter to interest groups. Maintain website.	PSA Presidents attend conference. PSAC receives newsletter. Website updated as necessary and used by members..
	Network with organizations that deal with alternative education programs and students.	Liase with AbED and DL PSAs. Provide related workshops at conference.	Ab Ed and DL presence and workshops at Alt Ed conference.
	Engage and dialogue with Ministry Staff as appropriate.	Communicate with Ministry Staff. Invite them to participate at annual conference.	Session held. Member feedback received.
Support and promote PSA membership, networking, and professional growth.	Promote PSA membership.	Include membership in conference registration. Encourage non-members to join by extolling the benefits of membership.	Membership increased or maintained.
	Support regional development. Promote local chapters of the BCAEA	Provide expertise and financial support for regional conferences. Provide startup and maintenance grants to LSAs.	Membership increased or maintained.
	Support professional growth.	Hold annual conference. Provide information about exemplary programming, services, and curricula.	Conference held. Exemplary program and services workshops in conference program.
Communicate and engage with members.	Communicate with members.	Maintain website, maintain ListServ, publish newsletter, use Twitter.	Website visited, ListServ used, newsletter read, Twitter account followed.
	Engage with members.	Send welcome letter to new members. Invite them to join List-Serv. Send communications to members three times per year.	ListServ membership active. Email campaign effective.
Provide services to members.	Maintain provincial directory of Alternate Programs.	Maintain a list of all Alternate Education Programs in the province. Provide access to members through the website.	Directory accessed by members.
	Provide Student Activity Grants.	Provide Student Activity Grants	Student Activity Grants awarded. Winners provided write-up for newsletter.
	Provide Innovative Programming Award. Provide Anita Chapman Award.	Provide Innovative Programming Award. Provide Anita Chapman Award.	Innovative Programming Award granted. Anita Chapman Award granted. Winners provided a write-up for the newsletter.

BCAEA Executive Contact Information

President

Mike Shaw, West Kelowna
president@bcaea.com

Vice President

Position Vacant
vicepresident@bcaea.com

Treasurer

Tianay de Andrade, Mission
treasurer@bcaea.com

Secretary

Michele Genge, Courtenay
secretary@bcaea.com

Registrar

Mike Shaw, West Kelowna
registrar@bcaea.com

Conference Coordinator

DJ Pauls, Abbotsford
conference@bcaea.com

Speaker Coordinator

Karen Gadowsky, Delta
speakers@bcaea.com

Newsletter Editor

Sean Blake, Kelowna
editor@bcaea.com

Publications Manager

Mike Shaw, West Kelowna
publications@bcaea.com

The Last Word

Sean Blake



Resilience is one of the buzz words that has been thrown around a lot lately, especially in the alternate streams of education. Its meaning, while being extremely pertinent, has also become watered down due to overuse. I found that I had been using the word without thinking about its implications until recently.

It has been a long and arduous year dealing with changes and challenges I have not previously faced. A loved one has been struggling with mental health and I have come to view it through a very close and personal lens that I had previously been blind to. It was during these times of anguish and distress that I realized, perhaps for the first time in my life, just how much I lean on the support of my family, friends, colleagues, and mentors. I have woven an intricate tapestry of supports during my life, often without even knowing I was sitting at a loom, and I didn't know how much I needed them until the time came. I had always considered myself a resilient individual but I did not realize how big a role my support team played in that resiliency.

It was during this difficult time that I got to thinking about my students and how

they lacked these support systems that I had taken for granted for so long. I thought about the events of the past year and, in comparison, they are dwarfed by the everyday lives of some of my students. The kids we work with on a daily basis are some of the toughest, most resilient people I have ever come across and a lot of them do it without any supports whatsoever.

I believe it is our job to build these supports for our students and be the positive role models in their lives that they need and deserve. Even on days when they push us away and tell us they don't want or need our help (usually in much more colourful language). We need to persistently be there for them and prove to them that not every adult in their lives will walk away. Be the shoulder to cry on, be the helping hand, be the boost they need to get over that next hurdle.

Resiliency is a great thing to have; being able to pick yourself up and dust yourself off when times get hard. That being said, there is nothing wrong with asking for a hand up when you need it. With our support, their resilience becomes brilliance. ♦