

# alternate Newsletter

The BC Alternate Education Association: A PSA of the BCTF

Volume 30 Number 1, Spring 2019

## Holding On to Our Kids in a Digital World

*Deborah MacNamara*

**D**igital devices provide kids with the capacity to connect with each other like never before. No longer confined by geography, classroom walls or home, they have unprecedented access to a constant stream of friends, information and entertainment. While our kids emerge as savvy inhabitants of this digital world, parents are left to monitor, negotiate, and police their child's online interactions and activities.

While it is clear the digital age presents new challenges to parents in terms of holding onto their kids, what is often missed is how this is colliding with the phenomena of peer orientation. Traditionally, children have oriented around their adults but in the last 50 years many are taking their cues, values and bearings from each other and at the expense of adult influence. There are many reasons contributing to the *...continued on page 3*



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# President's Message

Mike Shaw



Those of us who teach English classes, or who have memories of what was taught in high school when we attended those same classes, will undoubtedly remember the plot diagram. It attempts to help you visualize the events of a story, including the exposition or setting the stage, the rising action, the climax, the falling action and the denouement.



I have come to realize that that same plot diagram can also describe the school year in Alternate. In early September the exposition occurs. We set the scene, usually with a mix of new and returning students, but we don't know how the story will unfold.

The rising action takes place over the next several months. The characters in this year's story begin to reveal themselves, some entirely predictably [stock characters], and others as more round or dynamic characters who develop and grow over time. Some characters leave the story entirely, new ones are introduced, and the plot continues to develop as the events of the year unfold.

The climax can occur at various times of the year. Sometimes it doesn't occur until closer to grad, and other times it occurs far earlier in the year, especially after a significant event. Some years, the climax occurs just after returning from Spring Break. It becomes obvious by then which kids have connected with their teacher enough and put in effort enough to achieve their academic and social-emotional goals.

The falling action takes place after the climax, and if the climax is grad, then the falling action has only a few short weeks at the end of the year to occur. For those who have achieved graduation, it is a time of excitement. What are the plans for post-high school life? Further education? A job? Resumes and applications for post-secondary education or training are the order of the day.

And finally, the denouement happens. This takes place towards the end of June. Goodbyes are said to those kids who are graduating, plans are made for next fall with those returning, and loose ends are wrapped up. And another installment of the story comes to an end.

What was your school story like this year? I'm sure it was fascinating; I know mine was. Have a restful and relaxing summer! ♦

# Holding On

*(continued from page 1)*

rise of peer orientation stemming from changes in family structure, economics, and increased geographic mobility.

Children have become increasingly separated from the adults who are responsible for them, leaving them with relational voids that are often filled with peers. As if in a perfect storm, our children's enhanced capacity to use digital devices comes at a time where their drive to be with one another is at an all time high. When our kids prefer to be with their peers they can feel miles away from the adults who care for them. They occupy themselves in connecting to people and places in a digital world that many parents feel they are shut out of.

The answer to keeping our children close lies in cultivating deep, strong, caring relationships with them. You cannot take care of a child if you do not have their heart. Parents need to take up the responsibility for the relationship with their kids – but what are some of the ways this is lived out loud?

## 1) Collect Our Children

Collecting a child is an attachment ritual used to activate relational instincts to depend on, look up to, trust, and follow. In collecting a child we seek to get in their face in a friendly way and try and get a smile, a nod, and an overall sense of warmth and connection between us. In pursuing them in this manner we gather them to us and invite them into relation-

ship. The warmth, delight and enjoyment we express conveys we are the one who will take care of them and provide for their relational needs. It is this collecting dance that builds the deep, caring relationships parents need that will help them hold onto their kids.

## 2) Nurture to Fulfill Attachment Hunger

Parents can best nurture their children when they seize the lead in the attachment dance. Reading their child's need for contact and closeness and providing generously for them conveys they are holding onto them and are their best bet. The provision of care parents offer needs to be greater than a child's pursuit for connection, that is, if they need a hug, we have three in return. When a child feels there is a generous invitation to exist in their parents presence they hold onto them in return, seeing them as the ones to take care and nourish them.

## 3) Preserve the Connection at All Times

There are many things that can come between a parent and child including behaviour, unmet expectations, and strong emotions. While adults need to convey rules and reminders of appropriate conduct when infractions have occurred, they must also communicate through words and deed that the relationship is still intact. If behaviour or conduct has come between us, we must find a way to hang onto a child and impressing upon them that our desire to take care of them remains unwavering. To *...continued on page 18*

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# Behaviour Management Systems: More Harm

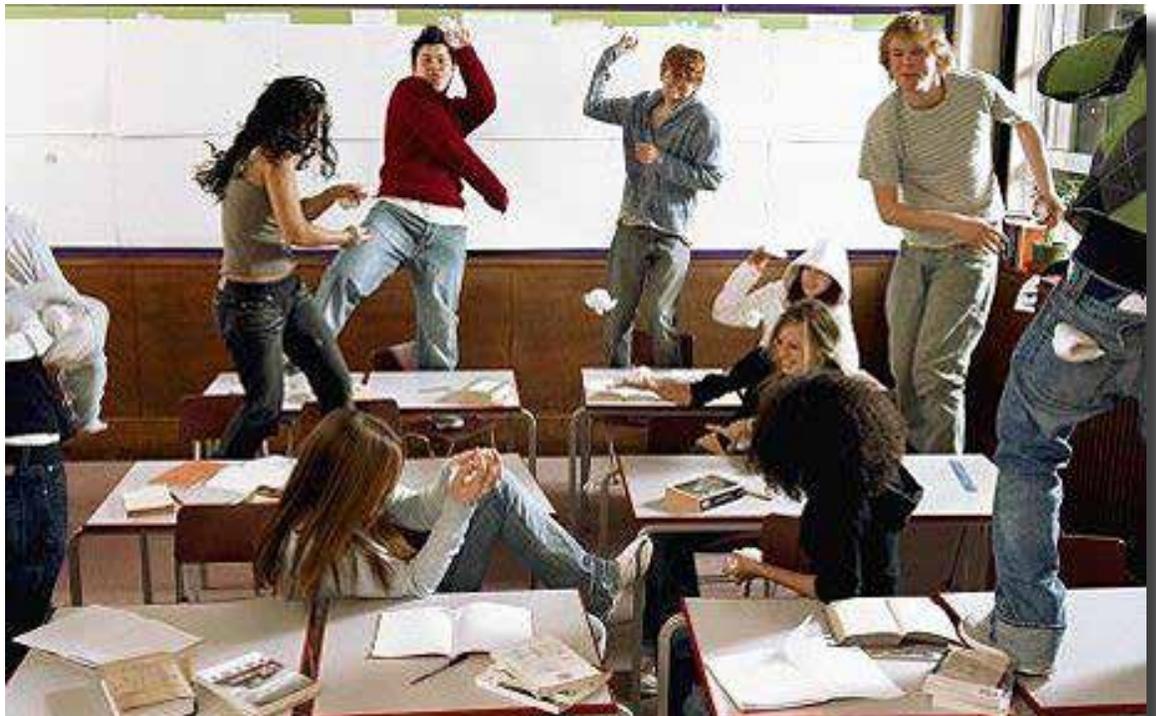
*Dr. Eva de Gosztonyi*

**A**s I deepen my knowledge and understanding of the optimum conditions for helping our children reach their full potential, I have come to realize that development comes in a context of rest. Recent research on the importance of sleep serves to support this conclusion. The Neufeld developmental paradigm reminds us that children can be at rest only when they can count on the adults in their lives to care about them unconditionally and to take charge of them and keep them safe. It is coming from this perspective that I have become very concerned about a new development in classroom management, that is, the emergence of digital behaviour man-

agement systems. Without reference to any specific one, I want to alert those working in schools to some unanticipated side effects that would warrant a re-examination of the use of these programmes.

It is understandable that when teachers are faced with an unruly and difficult-to-manage group of students they want to find an effective and fast-acting solution. After all, if students constantly interrupt, don't follow directions, and frequently bother other students, teaching becomes nearly impossible.

These digital behaviour management systems are relatively easy to use. They usu-



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# Than Good?

ally allow teachers to use their smart phones and/or Smart Boards to track children's behaviour in the classroom, and they have many features that make them very attractive to adults and students alike. In the short-run, teachers see results quite quickly as their students respond to the immediate feedback about their behaviour and the rewards given. And so their popularity has dramatically increased as teachers share with each other their satisfaction with this new intervention.

There are aspects of these programmes that I find of interest. Teachers can use them as a way to securely share with parents photos and videos of the activities that they are doing with their students in class. Parents appreciate the fact that they can "see" what their child was doing throughout the day. And these photos and short videos can be great discussion starters between parent and child.

However, there are other features of these programmes that are of concern, even though on the surface they may seem to be simply an extension of common classroom management strategies, i.e. positive reinforcement systems for encouraging appropriate classroom behaviour. Behavioural and learning theorists have long advocated that if we wish to change a child's behaviour, this happens best with immediate feedback and positive reinforcement of the desired behaviours.

When using one of these systems to "enhance" student behaviour in the classroom, the teacher can record when she notices

the child using the expected behaviour by tapping on the child's name, or in some cases, a "persona," as she circulates in the classroom, smart phone in hand. By using a smart phone, the teacher is able to provide frequent and consistent feedback on the targeted behaviours. The results are recorded on a digital chart, which at times is made public on a Smart Board, so that at the end of the day each child knows how many times he or she used the expected behaviours. This information can also be shared with parents via their phones.

Initially, when these programmes are used, the children are entranced by their persona (if that is part of the programme) and they enjoy being acknowledged for their behaviour and seeing their points appear on the Board. Children are encouraged to try harder each day to earn as many positive points as they did the day before. And many try to do as well or better than their classmates. In some systems, children can trade in their points for tangible rewards. And, so, of course, behaviour in the classroom improves. The children become more conscious of the expected behaviours and engage in them to receive external acknowledgement and rewards. The classroom environment improves and the teacher now believes that he or she can start teaching again.

But let's take a more in-depth look in what else might be happening.

One of the features making a system like this so attractive is that the *...continued on page 16*

*Using a smart phone, the teacher can record when she notices the child using the expected behaviour*

# Beyond Drugs: The Universal Experience of A

Dr. Gabor Maté

**W**ith the carnage imposed by the current epidemic of opioids and associated overdoses across North America—many dozens of people dying every day—public alarm around addiction is focused almost exclusively on drugs. For all the anguish around substance dependence, addiction cuts a much broader swath across our culture. Most addicted people use no drugs at all and addiction cannot be understood if we restrict our vision of it to substances, legal or illicit.

Addiction is manifested in any behaviour that a person craves, finds temporary relief or pleasure in but suffers negative consequences as a result of, and yet has difficulty giving up. In brief: craving, relief, pleasure, suffering, impaired control. Note that this definition is not restricted to drugs but could encompass almost any human behaviour, from sex to eating to shopping to gambling to extreme sports to TV to compulsive internet use: the list is endless.

“I’m not going to ask you what you were addicted to,” I often say to people, “nor when, nor for how long. Only, whatever your addictive focus, what did it offer you? What did you like about it? What, in the short term, did it give you that you craved or liked so much?” And universally, the answers are: “It helped me escape emotional pain... helped me deal with stress... gave me peace of mind... a sense of connection with others... a sense of control.”

Such answers illuminate that the addiction is neither a choice nor a disease, but

originates in a human being’s desperate attempt to solve a problem: the problem of emotional pain, of overwhelming stress, of lost connection, of loss of control, of a deep discomfort with the self. In short, it is a forlorn attempt to solve the problem of human pain. Hence my mantra: “The question is not why the addiction, but why the pain.”

And the source of pain is always and invariably to be found in a person’s lived experience, beginning with childhood. Childhood trauma is the template for addiction—any addiction. All addictions are attempts to escape the deep pain of the hurt child, attempts temporarily soothing but ultimately futile. This is no less true of the socially successful workaholic, such as I have been, than of the inveterate shopper, sexual rover, gambler, abject street-bound substance user or stay-at-home mom and user of opioids.

Not only is the urge to escape pain shared by all addicts, substance users or not, the same brain circuits are involved in all addictions, from shopping to eating to dependence on heroin and other opioids. The same brain circuits, the same brain systems involving pleasure and reward and incentive, the same neurochemicals—not to mention the same emotional dynamics of shame and lack of self-worth, and the same behaviours of denial and dishonesty and subterfuge.

It is time to realize, then, addiction is neither a choice nor an inherited disease, but

*Childhood trauma is the template for addiction - any addiction*

# Addiction

a psychological and physiological response to painful life experiences. It can take many forms, but whatever form it takes:

- it employs the same neurological pathways and emotional patterns;
- the damage it does extends well beyond the suffering imposed by drug use specifically;
- to ostracize the drug addict as somehow different from the rest of us is arrogant and arbitrary;
- to criminalize certain substances, say heroin, while allowing the profitable distribution of more deadly products such as cigarettes is irrational and harmful—yes, though it may be a startling assertion it is medically a simple fact: heroin use, short of overdose, is far less lethal than cigarette smoke;
- to treat the addiction, which is a symptom, without treating the pain that underlies it is to deal in effects rather than in causes, and therefore dooms many to ongoing cycles of suffering.

Finally, a word about childhood trauma and its relation to addiction and the use of opioids. When people see this word, they often—perhaps naturally—assume that we are speaking of terrible events, such as abuse, sexual exploitation, the death of parents, violence in the home, and so on. And surely, as the research abundantly shows, the more such experiences a child has to endure, the exponentially greater his or her risk of addiction. But trauma is not restricted to horrific experiences. It refers

to any set of events that, over time, impose more pain on the child than his or her sensitive organism can process and discharge. Therefore, trauma can occur not only when bad things happen, but also when the parents are too stressed, too distracted, too depressed, to beset by economic worry, too isolated, etc. to respond to a sensitive child's emotional need to be seen, emotionally held, heard, validated, made to feel secure. Such is the reality behind many a story of "happy childhood." In fact, the denial of one's pain, the splitting off of distress from conscious memory, is one of the outcomes of trauma.

As the astute trauma pioneer Peter Levine has written, "Trauma has become so commonplace, that most people don't even recognize its presence."

Not all traumatized people become addicted, but all addicted people, including those addicted to opioids, were traumatized in some way. That is the reality of our culture, where addiction, like trauma, is so commonplace that most people also don't recognize its presence. Yet it surrounds us, engulfs so many of us, that our near-exclusive focus on the troubles of drug addiction is itself but another escape from reality. ♦

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**Dr. Gabor Maté** is a renowned speaker, best-selling author, and is sought after for his expertise on addiction, stress, and childhood development. Reprinted by permission.

Trauma has become so commonplace that most people don't even recognize its presence

# Alternative Practices

Lowell Orr

**T**ake a drive—a long drive—up Western Canada’s Highway 19 into the rarely visited parts of Vancouver Island and turn sharply left at a backwoods junction onto a logging road called Zeballos Main, and a few flat tires and near-death experiences later, you will find yourself in the sparkling glacial fjord in which sits the sleepy town of Zeballos.

A mining boom early in the last century brought a few thousand inhabitants to the area, and today in the village proper there is little left but an echo of that boom. The town has dwindled to 107 lively and resolute permanent residents.

Nearby, on the same inlet, stands the Ehattis reserve where live the Ehattisaht people, and twenty or so kilometres further up the road, on another inlet, stands the Oclucje reserve, home of the Nuchatlaht. The high school at Zeballos Elementary Secondary School serves the youth of these reserves and class sizes are in the single digits.

Such small classes offer both challenge and opportunity for a teacher at the beginning of his or her career, and I have found that what some call “alternative practices” are pretty well standard here. Our ‘options’ section of the day is particularly fertile ground for sowing the seeds of self-regulation, inquiry, and experiential learning.

Back in January, our community was roused at 2:30 am by the sound of an air-raid siren, signalling a possible imminent tsunami. We were all evacuated and spent two and half cold and rainy hours in the darkness of the nearby wilderness, lamenting all of the things that we had forgotten to bring with us, lest it go out to sea with our homes.

Today, with a group of intrepid students and an enthusiastic set of teachers, we started cutting trail into the woods. This way, we will be able to get to high-ground quicker and save time to save our things. Students are learning the challenges of working with their hands in the wilderness, and they will face the difficulty of maintaining the trail in a wilderness which strains at our efforts with perennial vivacity.

The breadth of the students’ interests is truly staggering. This week, some students will be off campus learning GIS so as to map culturally significant paths, areas, and places. Some students are using our make-shift recording studio to create rap tracks. Others are using this time to take up Italian language, Greek mythology, still-life drawing, novel-writing, poetry, University entrance applications, pod-casting, letter-writing, driving-tests, work-experience, and more.

Perhaps most importantly, the students have chosen to learn that which interests them: to develop skills and knowledge that

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they can see are relevant. It is a real cornucopia of learning, and I find the days rushing past in the flurry of activity.

Here, my role as teacher is, among other things, the role of a facilitator. I cannot presume to have a working knowledge of everything that these students want to learn. In fact, I find them teaching me a myriad of new things every day! Rather, I can see my

practice developing into something I am truly proud of; I am here to present the opportunity to learn, to foster creativity, to nurture joy, to laugh when it is time to laugh and to listen when it's time to listen. I am a guide, a facilitator, and a mentor, and I love it. ♦

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**Lowell Orr** teaches at Zeballos Elementary Secondary School on the west coast of Vancouver Island.

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# Student Awards

*Tianay de Andrade, BCAEA Awards Chair*

Over the next few pages, we are delighted to present to you the winners of the BCAEA's 2019 Bursaries, Student Achievement Awards, and the Liz Louwersheimer Memorial Award. As always, it is a delight to read about the positive changes the students have made in their lives since joining an alternate program, and the impact that dedicated teachers and a caring, supportive school environment can have. Their stories truly are inspirational, so heartfelt congratulations to each and every winner! ♦

## \$1000 Bursary Award Winners



### **Jennifer Dayton**

Jennifer was struggling in her neighbourhood school; the large population, noise, and tricky social navigations caused a lot of stress. At alternate school she found the environment, patience and individual attention she needed to thrive - so much so that she was able to graduate early! Jennifer is prospering in a new post-high school life and is planning to continue her post-secondary journey in the social sciences.



### **Angelica Paraguas**

Angelica is a student in the Power Program in New Westminster School district who is graduating in June of 2019. Angelica is a kind, caring and empathetic person. She views punctuality and attendance as important to her academic success. She is conscientious and always follows through on any responsibility she takes on. Angelica is looking forward to studying psychiatric nursing at Kwantlen Polytechnic University.



### **Kerice Wadsworth**

Kerice began attending alternate school in grade 10. Due to her learning disability and mental health struggles, completing homework, advocating for herself, and peer relationships had been very challenging. With the self-paced environment and wrap-around support she's received, Kerice has experienced tremendous growth over the last 2.5 years, and will be graduating in June. Her plan is to explore nursing.



### **Mercedes Williams**

Mercedes is graduating from the SD63 Individual Learning Centre. She is a committed student with a warm and welcoming nature, and an integral member of our school's Indigenous leadership group. As the mother of an infant son, Mercedes is determined to further her education to build a life of opportunities for both of them. She has been accepted into the Indigenous Studies program at Camosun College for September.



### **Jewelia Wilson**

Jewelia is a committed, hard working young mom from the Tsawout First Nation. She returned to school after a few years away raising her family, and strives to provide a better future and to set a positive example for her three boys. Her quiet, caring manner, combined with her fierce determination, makes Jewelia an excellent role model and will help towards her pursuit of a degree in Early Childhood Education.

## *Liz Louwersheimer Memorial Award*

**A**warded to honour the memory of our dear friend and long-time BCAEA Executive member Liz, we are delighted to provide this \$1000 award to a student pursuing a career in the mental health or helping professions fields. We are pleased that its inaugural presentation is going to a very deserving student. ♦



### **H'Bet Kopa**

H'Bet was born in Vietnam and came to Canada at the age of eleven in 2010. She joined the Heron's Nest program in September of 2017 and arrived with her seven month old son, Aaron. She will be graduating in June having completed Biology 12, English 12 and Foundations of Math 11 in order to enter the VCC practical nursing program in January.

## *\$200 Student Achievement Award Winners*



### **Will Bird**

Will, a grade 12 student in the Advantage Program at Highland Secondary in Comox, is completing a welding program at North Island College. He is a very bright student and independent thinker who excelled in school once he got a career focus in place and learned strategies for managing his learning disability. He will make a fine pipe fitter. We will miss his quirky intellect and dry sense of humour.



### **Hannah Clark**

Now in grade 11, Hannah came to Alt Ed in grade 9. She never felt like she "fit in" at school; low grades, isolation and a learning disability made it challenging. But 1:1 support and a self-paced environment improved Hannah's progress and achievement. She has enjoyed participating in offsite yoga, our after-school group activities, and other in school initiatives within our small school community.



### **Liberty Devlin**

Liberty left her neighbourhood high school at the end of grade 9 due to anxiety and not feeling able to attend school in a regular classroom. She then began taking Math and English through distributed learning which started strong but didn't work out so she began attending alternate in grade 11 year and has had tremendous success catching up in her academic courses with a plan to graduate on time in 2020.



### **Grace Gribbon**

Grace has experienced significant gaps in her schooling due to health issues, but since starting at our school, she has impressed us all with her commitment to her goals and her ability to advocate for herself. She is a frequent participant in our extra-curricular opportunities and continues to challenge herself academically and socially. She is an excellent example of a student with a "growth mindset."



### **Keani Hilber**

Keani came to ILC a shy and prickly grade 9, and since then has blossomed into an engaged and hardworking student. She has overcome significant obstacles in her personal life and is working hard to improve her attendance. She wants to pursue professional cook's training at Camosun College and dreams of one day opening up her own bakery.



### **Roan Koch-Gerritsen**

Roan's grade 9 year was tough. He attended three different schools, was entrenched in unhealthy behaviours and mostly didn't attend. He had lost confidence in his ability to learn. Now, though, he attends consistently, is completing his courses and is on track to go to an Auto Mechanic program next year. The relationships he's made and the support he's received in alternate have made the difference for Roan.



### **Hailey Merk**

By making excellent use of the wrap around services provided to her, Hailey has overcome some major health issues and has made tremendous academic progress this past year. The growth in her confidence and self advocacy have been incredibly inspiring to watch. This growth has allowed her to focus and Hailey is now in a position to graduate this year. She can be proud of her accomplishments.



### **Tanysha Mino**

Tanysha has struggled with consistent school attendance for the past few years. However, this year she has made huge efforts to re-engage with school and is now one of our best attenders. She is a social "connector" at our school and thrives at building positive relationships with peers and adults alike. Tanysha loves the theatre and has plans to make that a large part of her grade twelve experience next year.

## \$200 Student Achievement Award Winners

*(Continued from previous page)*



### **Edan Odgers-Stedman**

Edan is a grade 11 student whose journey through middle and early high school years was not always easy, but since starting with us he has demonstrated that he is an exceptional leader amongst his peers. His positive energy, engagement, and inclusive attitude help enhance our school community. He will enter our trades foundation program in September and is striving towards a career in the automotive sector.



### **Austin Orritt**

Austin Orritt is an enthusiastic, curious, and engaged Grade 10 student who embraces new experiences. He has participated in high ropes, backcountry hiking, weight training, and trades skills development. He is our exclamation mark in this program, as his genuine delight in new learning is palpable and infectious. We are fortunate that he transplanted from the Interior to the Comox Valley.



### **Wyatt Rich**

Wyatt is attending alternate school as a result of skipping, engaging in unhealthy behaviours and not completing coursework. Since arriving here Wyatt has turned things around - he is attending consistently, has completed Math 11 W already, and is focused on applying for the Horticultural Technician program at college. Wyatt really appreciates the self-paced nature of the learning and the one on one support.



### **Jamie Trivett**

Jamie began attending an alternate school in his grade 12 year as he struggled to learn in a traditional classroom environment due to a learning disability. Jamie found success in an alternate setting with the supportive staff and connections he made with teachers. Jamie will be graduating in June of this year and looks forward to building his skills in the workplace as well as pursuing a trade in the future.



### **Ethan Vossen**

Ethan Vossen, a grade 11 student in the Advantage Program at Highland Secondary in Comox, is a true gentleman. Soft spoken and polite, he has taken to wearing ties and sharp shirts to present himself. He is sought after for yard work by staff as he is known as a hard worker who can do the job of two without complaint. With his mindset and work ethic he has a bright future in the trades.

## *Kathi Hughes Innovative Programming Award*

**T**his award was created to honour Kathi Hughes, a now-retired alternate teacher from Prince George who served as a long-time Executive member of the BCAEA. We offer this award every year to a program that has come up with an innovative idea that promotes student engagement and involvement in school, increases their sense of connectedness and well-being, and fosters greater student success,

We are pleased to announce that this year we have awarded the Kathi Hughes Innovative Programming Award to the Advantage Program at Highland Secondary in Comox. Watch for an article on the program's innovation and why it was chosen in an upcoming issue of the newsletter. ♦

# Behaviour Management

*(continued from page 5)*

teacher can monitor and give feedback on behaviour from any spot in the room or the school and in the moment when it happens.

I ask myself, “How well would I perform if I knew someone was watching me and recording how well I did all the time?” Even if I could “get it right,” how much effort would it take and how would I feel? Think back to the last time that you noticed a police vehicle following you. All of a sudden you started to focus on all the tiny and specific aspects of good driving behaviour. It was exhausting, even if that is how you normally drive. When the police vehicle turned away, what a huge sense of relief. Is this how the students feel when their behaviour is continually being monitored, recorded, and reported?

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The child in such a classroom is now very aware of what behaviour is expected, and wishing to be “acknowledged” will put a lot of effort into acting in a way that will get noticed by the teacher. But our brains are not all that great at multi-tasking. When children focus energy on acting appropriately, it is likely that they will have less energy to engage in real learning. They may look more engaged in the task assigned, but are their brains fully engaged in the learning process?

Even though teachers assure us that they are only recording and reinforcing expected behaviours, children are very aware of how much more they could do; of how others are doing, and of what is expected of them. Even our “good” children, for whom behaving ap-

propriately is usually not a problem, become worried about not doing well enough.

What if a child is having a bad day [they are tired, feeling sick, were just rejected by a friend]? What if a child is immature and over-reactive and finds the behavioural demands of a full day in school overwhelming? What if a child is trying very hard and the teacher doesn't notice? What if a child consistently receives fewer points than her classmates? And, ultimately, what happens when this information is given to the parents?

Now, instead of a “happy face” that summarizes the day, Mommy and Daddy can know exactly how many times the child behaved appropriately. A child said to his mother, “Mommy, I could have gotten 45 points today, but I only got 35 points. Can you still love me?” Of course, his parents were appalled that their child thought that he had to earn their love by his “good” behaviour. However, this response is not surprising to a developmental theorist. Humans are wired to be sensitive to disruptions in their attachment relationships. When we put a lot of emphasis on how we want a child to behave, it is natural that the child will focus on the obvious and come to believe that his or her behaviour has a significant effect on the quality of the relationship.

Of greater concern is that communication with parents can also be about what is not going well. Some systems allow a teacher to digitally alert a parent via their smart phone or computer when their child has behaved “inappropriately” as soon as it

happens. Imagine knowing that your parent is aware of your “inappropriateness” at 10 a.m. and that you still have a whole day to get through. For the immature and/or over-reactive child, or even for a well-behaved child, this is very distressing.

Now think about how the parent must feel, knowing that their child is in “trouble” at 10 a.m. Often the context is not reported and so the parent can only imagine the worst. They spend their day ruminating about what else they need to do to “fix” their child.

Both parent and child are in a state of alarm, a state which is difficult to tolerate. This can lead to frustration, which can lead to eruptions (both child and adult). Children who can hold themselves together at school will often have long and prolonged tantrums at home. Others, fearing the reaction of their parent, will erupt at school.

Because the message has been transmitted via the smart phone, other school personnel, who are unaware of this previous communication, might not understand why the child is blowing up in response to what seems to be a simple request or a simple denial. The real reason is that the child has been worried for hours about their parent’s reaction to what happened earlier in the day.

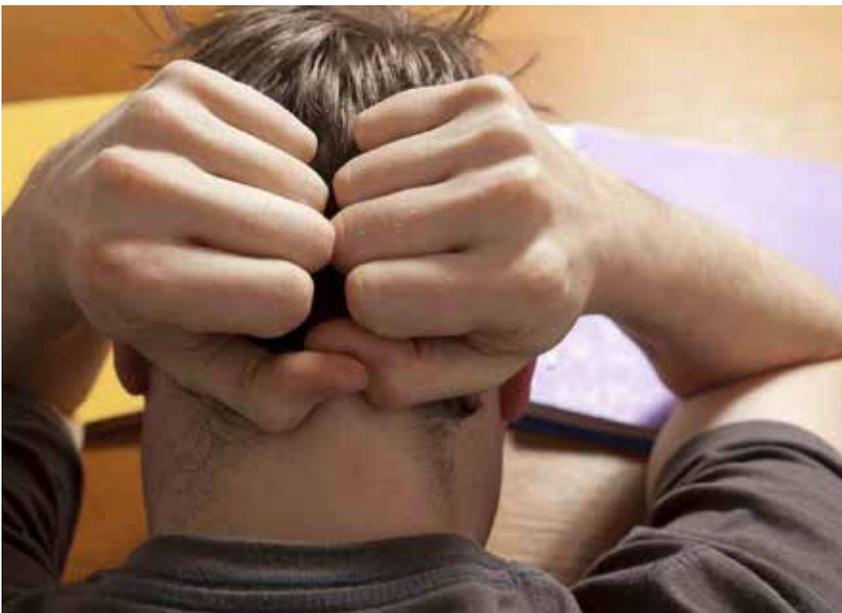
To those in the helping professions, I would like to suggest that if a parent comes to see you with a child who seems to have just recently become significantly more anxious, it may be helpful to ask if one of these systems is being used in the classroom. I have heard of children who, especially on Sunday nights, have trouble falling asleep, experience nightmares, have a recurrence of bed-wetting, and other symptoms indicative of alarm. Some children are able to voice their

worry about not being able to “behave well enough” in the coming week, but many children cannot. Nevertheless, their behaviour is indicative of an increase in alarm that may well be based in what is happening in their classroom.

Ultimately, we need to ask ourselves if this focus on “good”

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***Both parent and child are in a state of alarm, a state that is difficult to tolerate***



# Holding On

[continued from page 3]

send them out into the world hungry for connection due to perceived breaks in our relationship pushes our children into connection with each other and out of orbit with us. Parents must assume their rightful position as being responsible for the parent-child relationship, especially when faced with conduct that is less than ideal.

#### 4) Protect Against Competing Activities and Attachments

Keeping children close in a digital world requires the conscious creation of structure and rules around the use of communication devices and peer interaction. Why would we allow children to use their devices at the dinner table where we were meant to collect their eyes and listen to their stories? Why would we allow them to retreat to their room with their devices seeking connection with others and eroding their appetite for interaction with us? We must consciously create rules and structure around the use of digital devices and peer engagement that will preserve and protect our relationship with them. As we set rules and rituals around technology use, parents must lead by example. We cannot let our love for our new tools blind us to the responsibility we have in creating a context for their safe use in and out of the home.

#### 5) Matchmake to Build a Village

We cannot leave it in our children's hands to build the village that will raise them. Parents need to take an active role in introducing and match making their children

to adults who are responsible for them. Coaches, teachers or extended family members are potential attachment figures that can provide for a child's needs rather than leaving them to their own devices and often in the hands of their peers. By matchmaking we set our children up to fall into attachment with other adults, drawing attention to similarities between them and the warmth that is there.

Social media and the enhanced capacity to keep one's peers close was born from relational hunger and fuels it today. The best inoculation against losing our children to their peers and the online world are deep nourishing relationship where parents present themselves as the answer to their child's needs. If we hold onto our children they are more likely to hold onto us and see us as their best bet. May we remain conscious enough of the challenges that lay before us so we can steer our children into the digital age while at the same time holding onto our relationships with them. ♦

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**Dr. Deborah MacNamara** is the Director of Kid's Best Bet, a family counselling centre, is 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.

Think  
back to  
the last  
time you  
saw a police  
vehicle  
following  
you

# Behaviour Management

[continued from page 17]

behaviour is in our children's best interest. Can positive reinforcement really grow a brain up? Is a constant preoccupation with getting recognized for behaving well conducive to learning in the classroom? How can a child rest in adult relationships when everything that they do is being continually monitored and reported?

Is this what was intended? I don't think so, but unfortunately many who work in schools are noticing an increase in alarm, agitation, and anxiety. It is ironic that an intervention that was meant to improve the classroom environment seems to be having this unintended side effect.

There are no easy answers. Growing children up requires the patience of a gardener.

Just as with the tomato plant, whose flowers are yellow and spikey but whose fruit is round and red, we must believe that given the right conditions – strong, safe, generous attachments with caring adults – children will ultimately grow into mature human beings. They need rest in order to grow and they need to be able to make mistakes. Let's find better ways to help them to manage the behavioural expectations of school. ♦

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**Eva de Gosztonyi** is a psychologist who has worked for over 40 years in schools across Canada, including Quebec, Manitoba, northern Saskatchewan and Yukon. Presently she works as the Coordinator of the Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Management in Québec. Reprinted by permission.

## BCAEA Executive Contacts

### President

Mike Shaw, West Kelowna  
president@bcaea.com

### Vice President Elect

Tianay de Andrade, Mission  
vicepresident@bcaea.com

### Treasurer Elect

James Martyn, Abbotsford  
treasurer@bcaea.com

### Conference Coordinator

DJ Pauls, Abbotsford  
conference@bcaea.com

### Secretary

Michele Genge, Comox  
secretary@bcaea.com

### Speaker Coordinator

Karen Gadowsky, Delta  
speakers@bcaea.com

### Registrar

Christine Thygesen, West Kelowna  
registrar@bcaea.com

### Newsletter Editor

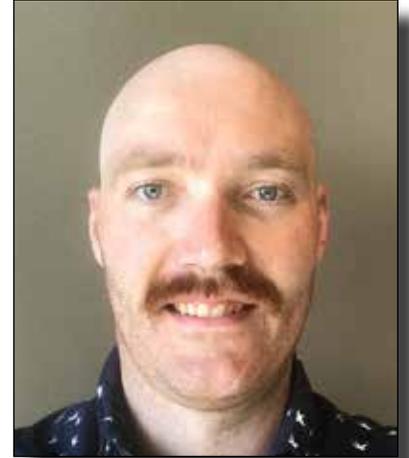
Sean Blake, Kelowna  
editor@bcaea.com

### Publications Manager

Mike Shaw, West Kelowna  
publications@bcaea.com

# The Last Word

*Sean Blake*



This year marked my second BCAEA conference and my first as an executive member working behind the scenes. Being at the conference as an attendee, everything flowed so smoothly I didn't even question what was happening on the back end. It was truly an eye opening experience to see just how much hard work and dedication goes in to putting on such a large and engaging conference. The members of this Executive Committee are some of the most passionate and driven educators I have ever had the pleasure of working with and it is an absolute honour to be a part of this team and call them my friends. I have found my experience as an active member in a PSA to be a very fulfilling endeavor and I would encourage every teacher to explore the many different ways they could participate in the vast number of PSAs in our province.

With that in mind, one thing our Executive Committee has really been diving into lately is how best to serve you, our members. We feel that we provide some great membership benefits for belonging, including—but not limited to—the annual conference, teacher grants and awards, student bursa-

ries and awards, and this wonderfully edited newsletter [wink wink]. But what else we can do for our members?

Alternate education can take so many different forms that our Executive Committee is limited in our viewpoint by our own experiences. At our spring executive meeting recently, we began brainstorming ideas, but felt it would be more powerful if we got input straight from you. We don't pretend to know all the answers, and so we would love to hear from each and every one of you to gain some insight into what you think we should do.

So send us feedback as to what you would like to see the BCAEA do to better support you in your many different versions of Alternate educators.

And as always, I encourage anyone who is interested in submitting an article for our newsletter to send it my way. My email address is [editor@bcaea.com](mailto:editor@bcaea.com) and I look forward to hearing from you. ♦

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**Sean Blake** teaches at the Rutland Learning Centre, part of Central Programs and Services in Kelowna.