

alternate Newsletter

The BC Alternate Education Association: A PSA of the BCTF

Volume 31 Number 1, Spring 2020

Global Connection

Miranda Krogstad



Inside:

- 2 *President's Message*
- 4 *SKIDS into KIDS*
- 6 *Conference Photos*
- 10 *Award Winners*
- 19 *Contact Information*
- 20 *The Last Word*

Ah, technology. When it works, it can be such a gift to teachers and students alike. With more resources than ever, the increased accessibility to different learning styles and needs, and the power to visit museums and institu-

tions worldwide, the internet can certainly be a beautiful gift.

However, as we explore this new world of tech that we all find ourselves in, there are some inevitable frus- *...continued on page 3*

President's Message

Mike Shaw



I don't know about you, but I haven't had hair this long since 1976! Here it is, early June, and I haven't seen the barber since mid-February. My wife has caught me eyeing the cordless hedge trimmer in the garage thinking, "I wonder if ...".

Are you as sick of Zoom meetings as I am? It is interesting to see how the introverts and extroverts on my staff deal with the same exact same situation. As an introvert myself, when I log in to the Zoom meeting, the first thing I do is make sure the video and microphone is off. No one needs to see me taking a sip of coffee, looking out the window at the garbage truck picking up the week's refuse, or getting up and pacing around the den to work the kinks out of my back. It actually is refreshing to work from home for a bit.

For the extroverts, though, I think the current situation must be painful. The Zoom meetings allow them to see others, and from my point of view, they seem to enjoy the contact. Since they get energized by being around others, it must be hard working from home and isolated from their colleagues. They are the ones in Zoom meetings whose video is always on, whose microphone is never off, and who seem to get recharged

by participating in these seemingly endless online meetings we all have to take part in.

It is also interesting to see how students and parents have responded to the current school situation. I've had parents take more than a month to respond to an email! Some students have taken up the challenge and are even more productive than they were in the classroom, and they aren't necessarily the ones you would have guessed would rise to the occasion. Others are no more or no less engaged than they were before. They have their pace, and nothing is going to budge them from that. And finally there are the ones who have disengaged, citing a variety of excuses why for them, the school year has come to an early end. Sometimes you could have predicted who those would be, and other times it comes as a surprise.

Since so much of the success we achieve with our students comes from that personal connection we all strive to make and keep, it is frustrating to be so limited in how we can reach out, support, nurture, and encourage. Sometimes technology just doesn't cut it!

I wish you all the best as we restart school in a limited fashion for the last few weeks of the year. Take care of yourselves. ♦

Global Connection

(continued from page 1)

trations in the process. When everything is running perfectly, it can be a fantastic tool. But when you have a handful of students messaging you questions about how to get onto the call, another couple who have forgotten to mute themselves as they went off to get a snack, and that one who uses the chatbox for insightful questions such as “Did you see that TikTok video I posted?” it can feel like an uphill battle.

I'm not sure if everyone is quite as desperately lost with technology as I am, but there can certainly be moments where we feel like we're floundering. I blame it on Edna, my 80-year-old, tech-incompetent alter ego. She would rather drink tea and watch the birds out the window than jump on a video chat. She believes that talking louder to your phone or lifting it in the air will solve the connectivity issues. She needs you to remind her to take herself off mute when she enters the zoom call, and she calls the internet "the Google machine."

I can't decide whether I am too young to have an inner Edna. But I think each of us has one inside.

So perhaps the first step with this whole world of technology is accepting our “inner Ednas.” It's okay to not have it all figured out. It's okay to stomp away from your laptop. And for every moment that you're thinking “it can't possibly be this hard,” I

guarantee that there are others who are going through the exact same struggle. Go easy on yourself.

Now that we've accepted that technology will be frustrating at times, and that we will all have moments of muddling cluelessly through . . . what is all of this for? Why do we toil through these frustrations with technology? What's on the other side?

The answer is so much bigger than COVID-19. The skills we are learning right now are not just applicable to this 2020 crisis where we're forced to teach from home. How to keep the students focused, finding new and different ways to keep them engaged, adapting to new environments and platforms; this will all be useful when we return to the classroom. Having different methods for engagement [chat box, video, audio, etc] might increase participation from different students. Students with health conditions that don't allow them to be consistently present in class now have an “in” online. We have a plethora of resources at our fingertips to increase accessibility to students with different hearing or vision abilities, learning styles, and more. And these are just a few quick examples of how online teaching can enhance our lessons once we return to “normal.”

One of the things that struck me about the teachers at the BCAEA conference is how forward-thinking this *...continued on page 19*

*Perhaps
the first
step with
this whole
world of
technology
is accepting
our "inner
Ednas"*

Turning SKIDS into KIDS

Patrick Thomas

During two years of hands awkwardly putting mics on my collar and floating boom mics over my head, I often asked myself, “Why am I doing this again?” When answering myself, I would recall my administrative assistant saying, “there’s some guy on the phone wanting to talk with the Principal.” I remembered thinking, “great...I wonder what’s wrong or what bad has happened.” Somewhat reluctantly I answered, “put him through” and again, as all Principals must often do, I prepared my nervous system for the unknown.

A gentleman with a charming accent introduced himself as Gary Turner from Barber-shop Films and told me he was given my name by a colleague at a nearby secondary school. Gary informed me about a project he was undertaking. It was a loose original concept documentary intended to explore the culture of bullying within schools, and he had heard that the students and staff at Vanguard Secondary (Langley School District) had a very different perspective on bullying.

More importantly, he had heard we were developing a school that was reversing the negative effects of labels upon youth, and we had the neuroscience expertise to support it. The school was in its second year of development and was already earning a reputation for innovative trauma sensitivity and therapeutic programming.

Knowing how much work had gone into creating the school’s safe, therapeutic culture,

the vulnerability inherent in the willingness to be filmed fell into the realm of a challenging juxtaposition. I struggled with deciding if the value of a possible story was worth the potential negative risks to students and staff. There were many potential contrasting impacts in the filming process. I would often re-imagine that ‘Dummies Guide to Being a Principal’ that we don’t get, and thought of all that could go wrong. What confidentiality issues will be infringed? What child protection concerns need to be acknowledged? And of course, what are the FOIPPA issues I may have overlooked? Ultimately, I reminded myself of one of our District’s core values: courage. So, I sucked up my shyness and my hatred for the sound of my own voice and carefully, with the support of our District Office team, explored the permissions and processes required to tentatively support its production. In order to ensure safety for all, I made sure to position myself and our Superintendent with ultimate veto power over the final production.

The students, their families, staff members and District Leaders were consulted. Once most of the fears around the production were addressed, we had to trust the film crew and their sensitivity to uphold our school’s mandate: to overcome developmental traumas and their effects. With the intent to authentically capture what we were doing at Vanguard, the students and staff were filmed mostly candidly and without any script or direction from the film crew. Almost all conversations were ad hoc

*We
had to
trust the
film crew
and their
sensitivity*

and spontaneous moments, which could have led to many different stories and many different messages.

Once we trusted the process and the Barbershop crew, we were introduced to the themes being observed and captured on film by the producers and director. What the documentary showed us was who we – the students and staff of Vanguard – are. It confirmed what neuroscience has been telling us for years. All that neuroscience teaches us beyond the simplicity of ‘Occam’s razor’ is that basic, healthy humanity gives students what they need: it helps them balance their neurochemistry and recover from trauma.

Our team at Vanguard has slowly built expertise and practice, not in the multitude of textbooks and advanced degrees within our walls, but by being in the often-forgotten learning trenches within alternate schools. We have learned by unknowingly stepping into the war of attrition with every unhealthy identity that walked through our doors.

Of course, we need the Psych Eds, School Based Team referrals and resource interventions, but none of that matters if we fail to see the youth for who they really are, rather than who they are trying to be. We see and hear an identity, we are told by others within the system ‘who’ that child is, and even the child communicates to us their chosen identity, but we forget that they are only children. Some of our older youth look

and act like they have it all figured out. Often, they are burdened by developmental traumas, early learning challenges and addictions. As a result, their nervous systems and their complex interrelationships affect their emotional systems, confusing and ultimately delaying their identity development. For most youth, rebelling against adults is expected and is considered developmentally normal and a component of healthy identity development. For these students, rebellion reinforces their unhealthy concepts of normal, thus impairing their healthy identity development.

It is easy to get lost in the language of best practice and theory but, ultimately, we find it again in our humanity. We do this by treating every child like our own, looking beyond behaviour and its context within our own definitions of ‘normal’ and finding empathy, and more importantly authentic appreciation for that child’s strengths and resiliency. Within this, we cannot forget the adults. When you are in the thick of the battle, and in particular the frequency of very high stress situations experienced within alternate schools, it can be easy to overlook the complex neuroscience behind the incredible staff willing to work within these schools. They self-sacrifice daily and work incredibly hard to understand their roles and responsibilities in relationship to their students and families and each other, always while enduring the abusiveness of unhealthy, traumatized youth behaviours. We too need the same ba- *...continued on page 18*

For most youth, rebelling against adults is expected

2020 Conference in Photos

The 2020 Challenge and Change conference has come and gone, and 488 of you attended for one or both days. The keynote by Ivan Coyote and the rest of the sessions were well-reviewed, and the Schmooze was its usual success, ably catered once more by Chef Lori Piling and her amazing staff and students. Have a look at the photos and see if you find yourself or a colleague. We hope to see you next year.









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



Jack Ford

Jack was struggling with significant health challenges in his neighbourhood school, leaving several learning gaps, but at alternate school, he found the environment, patience and individual attention that he needed to thrive and fill-in some of these gaps. He was accepted in the district's trades preparation program, where he is excelling, and plans on attending trades college next year to become an electrician.



Gabriela Martinez

Gabriela is a 17 year-old student in grade 12, cross-enrolled at ILC. She is a creative, kind and hard-working student with many hobbies, including film making, art, and acting. She is also involved a lot in theatre, assisting acting classes at Theatre Skam. Gabriela's future goals are to attend the Vancouver Film School and use her creativity to make moving motion pictures that shed light onto today's world issues.



Chelsea Mosher

Throughout elementary school Chelsea experienced great frustration and anxiety, leading to serious behaviour outbursts. Her eyes couldn't track the words on the page. She started vision therapy and turned the page in her learning as she started reading. High school proved difficult and Chelsea fell behind in her classes. With hard work and determination she is flourishing in the alternate school environment and will be attending UBC Okanagan this fall.



Josh Shaffer

Josh's complex learning profile made school a frustrating place to be despite his success in the Royal Canadian Army Cadets. The alternate high school environment allowed Josh to flourish while maintaining his interests, especially in Canadian military history. He is now looking forward to an Archaeology Field Studies Program and History at Camosun College in the fall.



Astrid Sibbald

Astrid is a grade 12 student at the Individual Learning Centre (ILC). Her high school journey was complicated by significant mental health concerns. However, with incredible perseverance she has been able to overcome these hurdles and will be graduating in June. In September 2020 Astrid will be entering the Early Learning and Care program at Camosun College and hopes to pursue a career in Early Childhood Education.

\$200 Student Achievement Award Winners

Every year we award fifteen deserving students \$200 to recognize the positive changes they are making in their lives since enrolling in Alternate. Sadly, we had to reject several incomplete applications, but the completed applications were stellar, and it was very hard to whittle the list down from the nineteen applications received. So being alternate, we didn't and decided to award all nineteen! ♦



Jenna Berg

Jenna Berg, a grade 11 student in the Advantage Program in Comox, attends school faithfully despite facing seemingly unsurmountable obstacles. Even though she struggles herself, she takes the time to support fellow students and encourages them to attend Highland regularly as well. Jenna possesses the capabilities, insight and initiative to achieve her goal to be a mental health professional.



Briann Birkett

Briann is a 16 year old student at the Individual Learning Centre in Saanichton, BC. She has been enrolled at ILC since September 2017 and is currently on track to complete her grade 11 grad requirements. She excels artistically and her favourite mediums are watercolour and graphite sketching. In the future Briann hopes to pursue a career in the field of art and design.



Wes Clancy

Since beginning on an alternate high school path in Grade 10, Wesley has been able to surmount many of his physical and mental health barriers in accessing his education. He has worked through his frustrations and socialization challenges and has developed a higher sense of self-confidence as a learner. He is an avid member of a local football team and has goals of attending college.



Jadyn De Leeuw

Jadyn is a grade 11 student whose focus and commitment to her education are exemplary. She rarely misses a day of class and is working ahead of her grade level in English to prepare for a dual credit program. Jadyn has applied to the Health Care Assistant program through Camosun College for her grade 12 year.



Tyler Eagleheart

Tyler is a grade 9 student at the Individual Learning Centre. He takes pride in his First Nations culture and has enrolled in SENĆOŦEN, his Nation's language, as well as Indigenous Culinary Arts for next year. Tyler enjoys sports, especially basketball and lacrosse and it is common to see him longboarding to school.



Ruby Enns

Ruby is a grade 10 student who last year received a diagnosis of a significant nervous system disease. As a result Ruby missed a lot of school, which devastated her as she is committed student. To accommodate the fatigue from her illness she began to attend alternate school where she found the flexibility and support she needed to be able to reengage in her schooling while attending to her health needs.



Amber Fieldhouse

Before starting at alternate, Amber felt excluded at school, that she was being treated unfairly and that her learning needs were not being accommodated. At alternate school (ILC), Amber finds school more manageable and the teachers to be understanding and patient. Amber is thriving at ILC and enjoys the extra flexibility found only here. Amber wants to work with people in a helping role in the future.

\$200 Student Achievement Award Winners

(Continued from previous page)



Sunny Grew

When Sunny learned about alternate she liked what she had heard and thought that it would be a good fit. Previously, she had found that her neighbourhood school classroom could be disruptive to her learning. She enjoys the flexibility and kindness that has been part of her alternate school experience. She enjoys learning about mental health and wellness and wants to become a school counsellor.



Kirsten Heinz

Kirsten is a grade 10 student who is experiencing great success in alternate after struggling in a regular high school. At ILC, she is experiencing academic success and appreciates the alternative learning environment. Her creative interests include sketching, watercolours, charcoal, and poetry. Kirsten also loves spending time with her horse Archer and dog Rocky. Her goal is to one day become a psychologist.



Tray Huysmans

Tray was struggling in his neighbourhood school and experienced significant obstacles in his personal life this year. He has bounced back from each hurdle in remarkable fashion. He has made strong connections at alternate school, and has been vocal about how much the school staff have supported him. Tray loves playing lacrosse, and is hoping to become an electrician.



Jaiden Kuro

After anxiety started to get in the way of her learning Jaiden moved to alternate. A quiet but diligent student, she quickly demonstrated that the self-paced learning environment worked for her. Now in her grade ten year, she is demonstrating strong ownership of her learning and has almost perfect attendance! Jaiden loves art and animals and has plans to work towards a career in animal-assisted therapy.



Nero Levesque

Nero Levesque, a grade 11 student in the Advantage Program in Co-mox, is introspective and information seeking, with unique ways of looking at the world. Rather than allowing the personal struggles he faces to hold him back, he finds a way to look past the oppression and sees endless opportunities and possibilities. He aspires to gain employment in the mental health professions.



Regan Martin

Regan Martin is a grade 10 student who accesses support through the Advantage program at Highland Secondary. When Regan came to this school, there was some doubts about whether he could be successful, due to his history with his former school. Regan decided to prove to everyone (including himself) that he could rise to the challenge and has become a success story that we are proud of sharing.



Reilley Moon

Reilley Moon is a grade 9 student who attends the Advantage program at Highland Secondary. He is a gentle, sensitive and, caring individual who worries about his friends. Reilley's identified heroes include his older brother and best friend, who have changed their lives for the better and inspired Reilley's goals to do the same.



Sonya Mosher

Sonya is a driven young woman who takes on leadership roles at every opportunity. She is always willing to help out at the ILC, and offers to take on responsibility when she needs it. Her unique personality shines through, whether she is playing soccer, participating in musical theatre or leading a party through Dungeons and Dragons.

\$200 Student Achievement Award Winners

(Continued from previous page)



Holly Orlowski

Holly is a grade 11 student completing her third year at ILC. She is a kind, courageous, and resilient young woman. After a very challenging year of personal loss in grade 10, Holly is working hard to regain ground in her course completion. After graduating in 2021, Holly plans to attend Glo Academy to train as a make-up artist.



Nyah Van El

Nyah came to ILC in September of 2019. She was struggling with her attendance due to social and academic anxieties, attending only one class per day. Nyah's attendance is now near perfect and she's well on her way to meeting her grade 11 course completion goals, with 4.5 courses completed already. Graduation comes next year and Nyah is now confident that she will meet this goal too.



Stella Vidal

Stella was struggling in her grade 9 classroom so she began attending alternate school in February of 2018. Stella has had some serious health challenges and attending an alternate school has provided her with the quiet space and ability to work at her own pace that she needed. She continues to work away at her goal of graduating and completing the necessary pre-requisites to attend university.



Connor Wells

Connor found neighbourhood schools overwhelming; the volume of people, tricky social situations, heightened noise level, and other distractions made learning difficult. In alternate, he found the environment supported him, and he has started to make healthier life choices and achieve his academic/social goals. His experience at alternate school has inspired him to become a child and youth counsellor.

\$1000 Liz Louwersheimer Memorial Award

Awarded in honour of our dear friend and long time BCAEA executive member, this award is given annually to a deserving student who has attended an alternate program, is graduating, and is pursuing a career in the mental health or helping professions field. This year, we had two outstanding candidates for this award, and in true alternate fashion, we decided that both were deserving and so we awarded the full amount to each of them. Congratulations to the winners! Your stories are inspiring! ♦



Ella Hale

Ella is a vibrant young woman with a generous nature and a heart for advocacy. Through school and community initiatives, Ella is a champion for mental health, decreased stigma, and improved community resources. Despite experiencing breaks in her education for her own health, Ella is a determined student and a high achiever. She has applied to Camosun College for the Community, Family and Child Studies program as the first step toward a counselling career.



Ashlinn Karr

Ashlinn is a compassionate young woman who is sensitive to the needs of others. Despite childhood trauma and significant medical issues, she is a leader in the Salmon Arm Storefront school where she has studied for the last three years. Amongst her school initiatives are an indigenous story pole, Halloween dress up day, and providing advice on how to be successful to new students. She plans to attend Selkirk College to take the Social Service Worker program.

SKIDS

(continued from page 5)

It reminded our students and staff that we are all human

sics of humanity. While these challenging students test our own abilities to regulate emotions and reactions, we are equally responsible to be aware of our own neurological responses to stress, whether personal or work-related, and to know and meet our own needs accordingly.

The documentary's greatest and most unanticipated effect is that it reminded our students and staff that we are all human. While at times weak and exhausted from trauma and life's unpredictable events, we can also be strong. As our school's three-winged (Safety, Adaptation & Leadership) logo reflects, our students and staff have realized that we are all responsible for ensuring that we don't let labels and wrong assumptions make us feel unsafe and that we must continually adapt to each other's needs. We understand the importance of being open to and welcoming change, and that we are always influencing others, thereby leading.

Our students requested that the documentary be titled SKIDS, to symbolize and reflect a common, hurtful name that many in our society have used to label them. Rather than allowing that to stand alone, the producers and I chose to have the first 'S' disappear, because they are just KIDS. Kids that have grown up in a time where some have forgotten the basics of humanity, the fundamental importance of how we treat each other and how words and labels impact our identities and who we want to become. ♦

Patrick Thomas is the principal of Vanguard Secondary in the Langley School District.

PROActive

CURRICULUM

Since 1998, ProActive has created self-paced, mastery-based courses now rewritten to follow the latest BC Curriculum. These courses are in use throughout BC and the Yukon.

Now available:

Careers

- Career-Life Education 10
- Career Life Connections 12
- Child Development 12
- Interpersonal Relationships 11

English

- English 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12

Math

- Math 8, 9
- Math 10 & 11 Workplace
- Math 12 Apprenticeship
- Math 10 FPC
- Math 11 Foundations
- Math 11 PreCalculus

Science

- Anatomy & Physiology 12
- Earth Science 11
- Life Sciences 11
- Science 8, 9, and 10

Social Studies

- BC First Peoples 12
- Social Studies 8, 9, 10, and 11

Visit www.proactivecurriculum.com for more details.

Global Connection

[continued from page 3]

community is. These are teachers who are passionately curious, exchanging tips and tricks, and constantly evolving their concept of what education can look like. With that, I feel like you are all so equipped to deal with this. Teaching online - like any kind of teaching - is not about knowing all the answers right away. It's about asking the right questions, being curious to explore different ways of learning and engaging, and always being open to possibilities beyond what you've considered before.

So, while we all stumble through this awkward time of muted zoom calls and failed posts, this crisis has allowed us to redefine and expand our skills beyond what we would've achieved in "normal" life. While the current moment may have your inner

Edna rightfully cursing at your computer and pulling her hair out over that link that just won't work, be patient with her and help her through it. Because if and when we return to that "normal" life, we will have an expansive toolkit within the world wide web that makes us better and more capable educators. ♦

Miranda Krogstad is a spoken word poet and public speaker, Canada Council for the Arts grant recipient, and founder of the spoken word network, YYSpeak in Calgary.

BCAEA Executive Contacts

President

Mike Shaw, West Kelowna
president@bcaea.com

Vice President

Tianay de Andrade, Mission
vicepresident@bcaea.com

Treasurer

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



I hope this newsletter finds you well in these strange and trying times. I am sure that, like myself, most of you are finding it quite challenging. I have found myself working twice as hard to accomplish half as much and it can be frustrating at times.

Positivity is key and I remind myself that I am lucky to have a job, a roof over my head, and 3 square meals a day. This cannot be said about many of my students and their families and losing the consistency that school provided for them has not been easy. Although I am sure many students transitioned to online learning quite seamlessly, many of my students lacked the technology or even the internet connection to do so.

I applaud my district and the speed with which this concern was addressed. If you were in need of a laptop, you got one. They even made deals with internet service providers to subsidize costs for those who needed it. Paper copies of work and textbooks were delivered to those who could not get online. Food deliveries went out to those in need on a weekly basis. Zoom meetings were held regularly, both academic and social-emotional.

But all of this support cannot replace the security, familiarity, and consistency many of our students had come to depend on at school. I think that this pandemic has really opened everyone's eyes to just how important schools and teachers are. We often get criticized for how "easy our jobs are" or having summers off. We have all heard the old joke: "Those who can't do, teach." I think we can all hold our heads especially high after the year we have had.

Not only did we completely change the way we teach, but we did it almost overnight with little to no framework or guidelines. I commend each and every one of you for the work you have been doing and I can only hope that we can return to some semblance of normal soon. I miss my students. I miss my classroom. I miss interaction. I have a new found respect for DL teachers and the challenges they face. If I wanted to sit behind a desk at a computer all day, I would have gotten into a different line of work! ♦

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