

## **DR. YONG ZHAO: MEET TRUSTEE ACADEMY'S KEYNOTE SPEAKER**

Issue 02 Resources Trustee Academy 2015

October 29, 2015



Trustee Academy is just four short weeks away! You can find the updated program [here](#). We are so excited to present our keynote speaker, Yong Zhao. In next month's issue of *The Education Leader*, we will share an interview with Dr. Zhao, but in the meantime you can read more about his work and his background below!

The world needs creative and entrepreneurial talents who are globally competent to take advantage of the opportunities brought about by technology and globalization and tackle the tough challenges facing human beings. But our schools are being pushed to produce homogenous, compliant, and employee-minded test-takers, as a result of the seductive power of the traditional education paradigm. In this presentation, Dr. Yong Zhao challenges the traditional paradigm, debunks the myth of international tests such as PISA and TIMSS, and proposes a new paradigm of education aimed to cultivate diverse, creative, and entrepreneurial talents.

Dr. Zhao is currently Presidential Chair and Director of the Institute for Global and Online Education in the College of Education, University of Oregon, where he is also a Professor in the Department of Educational Measurement, Policy, and Leadership. He is also author of the book *World Class Learners: Educating Creative and Entrepreneurial Students*.

## KIDS CAN COPE: BUILDING RESILIENCY IN CHILDREN BY HELPING THEM MANAGE STRESS

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By Cindy Andrew, Program Consultant (Western Canada), The Psychology Foundation of Canada / John Hoffman, Freelance Writer and Knowledge Broker

It's time to take action on children's stress.

Stress is a normal part of life, and our brains and bodies were designed to help us deal with it. Certain kinds of stress are even good for us. However, chronic, unrelieved stress is known to contribute to mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, for both children and adults. High levels of stress can also affect children's ability to pay attention and learn.

Some child mental health experts, including Dr. Jean Clinton, of McMaster University and Dr. Stuart Shanker of York University, are reporting an increase in stress-related problems in Canadian children. In the 2009 Canadian Community Health Survey, 14 percent of 12 – 19 reported that they experience quite a bit or extreme amounts of stress in their daily lives. Noted child and adolescent psychiatrist Dr. Stan Kutcher says it's clear that severe and prolonged stress can affect children well into adulthood because of its impact on brain development.

The ability to deal with stress is strongly linked to self-regulation, the set of biological processes and emotional, cognitive and social abilities that have been shown to be more important for school success than intelligence. In fact, Dr. Shanker, who is Canada's leading expert on self-regulation in children, goes so far as to say that the crux of self-regulation is the ability to deal with a stressor and then recover.

In other words, addressing child stress and helping students develop the knowledge and skills they need to recognize and manage their own stress is one of the keys to enhancing children's learning, mental health and resiliency.

While parents and caregivers play a crucial role in helping children manage and learn to live with stress, so too can teachers and others within school communities (e.g., coaches, support staff, peers). Experiencing "normal" types of stress (like an upcoming test, immunizations or transitioning to a new school) in supportive environments helps children learn how to adapt to the world and deal with life's challenges.

However, in order to build children's capacity to manage stress we also need to consider the impact of adult stress. Almost one-quarter of Canadian adults report very high levels of stress in their daily lives (2009 Canadian Community Health Survey). High, ongoing levels of adult stress can create second-hand stress for the children in their lives and also affects adults' ability to address children's stress.

Schools are already leaders in supporting children's social/emotional development and mental health. Given the connection between mental health, self-regulation and academic success it also makes sense for educational leaders and policymakers to also play a lead role in terms of supporting investments in initiatives that build stress management skills in both students and the adults who work with them.

However, schools are not alone in helping adults and children improve their ability to understand and manage stress. The Psychology Foundation of Canada has a number of programs and resources that can help, including:

resources for the pre-school sector

grades K-9 learning resources

an array of practical and informative resources for parents

and a new tool for adults ([stresstrategies.ca](http://stresstrategies.ca)) as they too work to build their stress management skills.

<http://keltymentalhealth.ca/>

[heretohelp.bc.ca](http://heretohelp.bc.ca)

## DELTA SCHOOL DISTRICT ADDRESSES YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH IN ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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By Deneka Michaud, Manager of Communications, SD37 (Delta)

In the spring, roughly 250 students in the Delta School District came together for a day dedicated to addressing mental health for youth. The second annual Delta Youth Conference was organized by students for students, and it was students who decided that mental health needed to be the focus of the event.

“I’m glad we had mental health as a focus this year. It needs to be more present and talked about. The resources need to be available and all the kids need to know they are not alone,” said Hannah, one of the student event organizers.

The day consisted of a variety of presentations and workshops. Qmunity offered a session titled “Are you Queer Smart?” and Safe Teen presented two sessions titled “Power of Choice” and “My Body is not Your Playground”. Other sessions included Aboriginal Powwow dancing and yoga. A keynote presentation by Seaquam Secondary School alumni Steve Darling empowered students with the message that they can do whatever they choose if they put their minds to it.

The first annual Delta Youth Conference, which took place the year prior, also shared a mental health related theme of helping youth find balance in their lives. The conference receives support from the Delta School District, Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC, Delta Police and Ministry of Children and Family Development.

“The youth in our community recognize the importance of raising the awareness of mental health issues among children and teens. We are supporting them to reach their peers through this interactive conference. It is also an excellent opportunity for our school district to connect students to the

resources that are available to them,” said Maryann Cardwell, district vice-principal, special programs, Delta School District.

In addition to the student-led Delta Youth Conference, there are a vast array of initiatives, programs, resources and community partnerships geared at addressing youth mental health. These include:

Elementary Programs:

- Friends for Life
- Zones of Regulation
- Super Flex
- Worry Dragons
- Mindup (Social Emotional Learning)

Secondary Programs:

- Social Emotional Learning and self-regulation – there are learning supports for school teams, as well as alternate/Supportive Learning programs that are implementing Stanley Kutcher’s Mental Health Curriculum. This curriculum is used as a guide to teaching coping strategies to students as part of the curriculum in the Strategies credited courses.
- Supportive Learning programs – support students with anxiety so that they can remain in their neighborhood schools and continue to be integrated to the best of their abilities.
- Close partnership with the Delta Police School Liaison Officer program.
- Partnership with Corporation of Delta in hiring a family therapist to support families.
- Two District-Interagency programs for students requiring intensive wrap-around support.
- Child and Youth Care workers in every school – keeping connected with students who are struggling, and offering breakfast, lunch and after-school programs.
- Partnership with Child and Youth Mental Health – therapists in our schools running groups and seeing students.
- Child and Youth Mental Health Substance Use Collaborative

The Delta Board of Education is paramount to the support of mental health services to students in the Delta School District. School trustees in Delta recognize the importance of these services and resources, and allocate funds accordingly to ensure Delta School District staff are able to support students in this regard. Trustees also work to create inter-agency connections at the local, regional and provincial levels in support of mental health services. Another key role trustees play is the ongoing advocacy they undertake for additional resources required to help ensure student wellbeing. The Delta School District’s mission is to enable all learners to succeed and contribute their full potential to the future.

“As Trustees we are responsible for improving student achievement, and supporting students’ wellbeing is essential if they are going to achieve their full potential. Therefore, our Board of Education sees the provision of mental health supports as a foundational component of achieving our mission,” said Laura Dixon, Chairperson, Delta Board of Education.

## TEACHING MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Issue 02 Success Stories

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By Christopher Sun, Writer, British Columbia School Trustees Association

One of Angela Lawrence's clients is an anxious, self-critical teenage girl who manages anxiety by getting high and getting reassurance about herself from her boyfriend.

For Lawrence, a drug and alcohol counsellor at school district 73 in Kamloops, seeing teens relieve stress and anxiety by way of lashing out or through self-medication is unfortunately common. Even students coming from healthy backgrounds, who are not abusing drugs or alcohol, are ill-equipped in dealing with the pressures that come with school and life, sometimes causing panic attacks. To combat it, Lawrence teaches students to practise a rather simple technique called mindfulness, and it seems to work.

"It's the number one tool I use," Lawrence said. "It's the first thing I go to."

Mindfulness is a practice of being aware of the moment and meditating, with an emphasis on breathing and calming one's self down before tackling something that could cause anxiety and stress, such as taking an exam or competing in a sporting event. The practice is rooted in Eastern philosophy, notably Buddhism, but is taught and practised in the school district in a purely secular way.

"We keep Buddhism out of it. We don't ever enter into it," Lawrence said, adding she is also aware of the skepticism surrounding it.

"It may sound flakey and hokey, but there is more than 30 years of science behind it."

Mindfulness has been on the radar of psychologists and psychiatrists since the 1970s, due to American doctor John Kabat-Zinn's interest in meditation. Recent studies out of UBC, Harvard Medical School and University of Massachusetts have confirmed that mindfulness can reduce stress, anxiety and panic

attacks, along with treating addictions and eating disorders. In the early 2000s, a mindfulness program called MindUP was conceived in Vancouver by Hollywood actress Goldie Hawn, while she was temporarily living in the city with her family. Hawn's interest in Buddhism, research into producing a documentary about happiness, and the shock of 9/11 allowed her to meet various neuroscientists, psychologists and educators which lead to the founding of her Hawn Foundation and developing this social and emotional learning program. The 15-lesson "MindUP" curriculum is being used in schools throughout Canada, United States, United Kingdom, China, Serbia, Australia and Venezuela.

The research out of UBC on both mindfulness and MindUP has proven it works and has been used in Vancouver school for more than a decade.

In September, the Kamloops-Thompson school district started piloting MindUP at Summit Elementary, where many teachers were already teaching mindfulness in their classrooms. School and family consultant Tyler Van Beers said there was a tangible increase in focus, impulse control and academic performance in classrooms where mindfulness was being practised.

"Mindfulness is very critical to academic performance," Van Beers said. "It's a missing piece in the education of social and emotional learning."

Part of the curriculum requires students at Summit to take a brain break three times a day which involves asking everyone to get into their mindful body. This require students to sit up straight and close their eyes as a chime is rung, either by the teacher or a fellow student. Students are then instructed to listen to the sound of the chime, to be in the present and pay attention to their breathing.

"After a minute or two of listening to the chime and concentrating on their breathing, they are thanked for being mindful," Van Beers said, adding brain breaks are meant to calm nerves by regulating emotion and tension.

"It helps them be ready for learning."

The way mindfulness is being taught at Summit also teaches students about how the brain works. Students are shown which parts of the brain responds to various emotions such as stress, anxiety, happiness and memory.

"One favourite lesson is where students act like scientists and are given a scent like cinnamon," Van Beers explained. "They notice it, smell it and then they have to describe what it is using descriptive words and what it reminds them of. The memory of what cinnamon smells like and what it reminds them of is connected to the hippocampus and we teach them that."

Implementing social and emotional programs does have a cost and the MindUP curriculum, which is trademarked by the Hawn Foundation, is costing school district 73 about \$4,000 to use at the one school. Lawrence said this is no different than paying to implement other programs such as the Drug Abuse Resistance Education, known as DARE. She also said the price tag shouldn't scare others from teaching mindfulness.

"It doesn't have to cost anything at all," Lawrence said, adding it costs nothing to implement brain breaks and literature on the topic can be found online and in books. "What we are trying is more than the proprietary part of MindUP."



## HAVE YOUR STORY FEATURED ON THE LEADER

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We want to hear from you!

In honour of Mental Illness Awareness Week, which took place October 4-10 2015, we have focused this issue of The Education Leader on the mental health and well-being of students and educators in BC.

There is great work being done all across the province, and we want to hear about it! If you have a success story that you want to shine a light on, send an email to the editor so that we can share your story with trustees and education partners around BC.



## PROGRESS REPORT: AN UPDATE ON BCSTA AGM 2015 RESOLUTIONS

Issue 02 News & Events

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Following the 2015 BCSTA Annual General Meeting, the board of directors as well as BCSTA staff met in a series of strategic planning sessions to set the direction for next year's work based on the motions member trustees passed.

On the following link, is a tracking report of the activities that have taken place to support these AGM resolutions, but BCSTA would also like to share some of the important highlights below.

BCPSEA has, at the request of BCSTA, introduced a new advisory committee that includes seven trustee representatives chosen on a regional basis. Although creation of the advisory committee falls short of BCSTA's assertion that trustee governance must be fully restored to its employers' association, it is a significant step forward in providing boards of education direct input to provincial labour relations and human resource decisions. This does not mean, however, that BCSTA will stop advocating for a final resolution to a provincial bargaining structure, but it does strengthen its position of the rightful inclusion of trustees in their own employers association.

Last spring, trustees were frustrated by the lack of consultation and input we were being provided by the Ministry of Education and other parts of government. Since BCSTA's April AGM, a number of positive changes have taken place. There are now regular and frequent calls and meetings with the Minister and Deputy Minister to discuss issues and initiatives before decisions are made. BCSTA's board of directors now meets with the Ministry executive team for an extended time every three months.

All of these meetings have dealt with significant issues of concern to BCSTA and member boards. Finances and spending, implementation of new curriculum and procedures, shared services, local decision making and accountability have all been discussed, and actions have resulted. We have made

significant progress toward ensuring the voice of boards of education is heard and considered before government makes significant decisions.

BCSTA remains in discussion with the Ministry of Education as to the formal operationalization of the MOU. Guidelines are being established as to how co-governance should and must operate. While BCSTA may not support all of the decisions of government, it is establishing an agreement on how consultation, co-development and interaction must take place. When finalized, the association will have the policies and procedures in place to ensure co-governance of the K-12 education system operates as it should.

This is just a small cross-section of the many issues that matter to the BCSTA membership. Through AGM and Provincial Council resolutions, member boards help guide BCSTA's important work for the year ahead.

Thank you for your contributions to our advocacy efforts, and for all the hard work that you have already put in during the 2015/2016 school year.