

LEARN, SHARE AND GROW: POWER OF OUTDOOR LEARNING AT STANLEY PARK

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A trip to visit Stanley Park has become an annual event for my Biology 11 course. This year, the trip was timed so that we could attend not only the Vancouver Aquarium, but also the fabulous intertidal zone exposed during the afternoon. We have to wait for a time when the tide is low on a school day during school hours. The wait was worth it – it was a great way to connect the material we study in the classroom to our local environment.

Students are always more engaged when they have a personal connection – seeing things with their own eyes, or, even better, touching specimens. The reality of using your own sense, rather than the filter of technology or print, is much more engaging. A live specimen that you can touch makes a stronger memory than anything presented through digital or print media. To make it more lasting, students often use their cell phone cameras to snap photos, and share with friends.

I've always seen scientific knowledge as a doorway to feeling more connected to the world we are part of. The more we understand the phenomena around us, the more we recognize the organisms we share our environment with, and the more likely we are to feel a sense of stewardship. I want my students to feel connected to the natural world around us. (We are “the Natural Place to Learn”.) If they feel connected and have respect for our local environment they will become better citizens, both locally, and globally.

It terms of what I have learned for my professional practice as a teacher from this annual field trip:

My first lesson was – don't offer it at the end of the school year, or you'll have poor attendance! I've also learned that no matter how wonderful I think the Vancouver Aquarium and intertidal zone are, some students will be uninterested. You can lead a horse to water..... It's always interesting to observe my students away from the classroom. I love to see them enjoying themselves, and see that 'inner child' allowed to come out to play, and to express joy and wonder.

Written by Laurie Louwe, Teacher, Carson Graham Secondary

THE WORK YOU'VE ACCOMPLISHED AT AGM 2016

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BCSTA Resolutions from AGM 2016

On Saturday, April 16, BCSTA member trustees came together in Vancouver to vote on motions and set the direction for the Association's advocacy work in 2016/2017. The carried resolutions are available online, and cover a range of topics, from funding to strategic planning. [View the 2016 motions here.](#)

Have you seen the BCSTA photo gallery?

BCSTA has a Flickr photo gallery which includes albums from our major annual events. We have just updated it with new photos from our 2016 Annual General Meeting, [have a look!](#)

DRUMMING HOME ISSUES: 24-HOUR DRUM PROVIDES NATION STUDENTS OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Aboriginal Education Issue 08

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As the rhythmic beat of drums grew louder, a group of aboriginal students from Squamish took a moment to reflect on issues that affect indigenous people today.

At the top of their minds were environmental change in B.C. and local language revitalization – the two themes of this year’s 24-Hour Drum put on by the Sea to Sky Aboriginal Youth Leadership group.

The Squamish students from Howe Sound Secondary, Don Ross Secondary and Learning Expeditions joined other aboriginal students from throughout the corridor at Whistler Secondary School on Friday to take part in the fourth annual event.

Skwxwú7mesh and Lil’wat Nations’ flags were raised to mark their shared territory and the beginning of the 24-Hour Drum. The students shared what they had learned about the importance of revitalizing indigenous languages, including Skwxwú7mesh, one of 11 Coast Salish languages in the area between the Fraser Valley, Central Coast, Vancouver Island and Puget Sound.

“In Squamish, there aren’t a lot of people who speak Skwxwú7mesh fluently, but people are working hard towards this,” said Ashleigh Giffen, a Grade 12 student and First Nations representative on Howe Sound Secondary’s student council.

She is applying what she has learned about the Squamish language to study the language spoken by Prairie Cree in Saskatchewan, the community that was the original home to her family.

“I’ve lived in Squamish my whole life, and it’s great because they’ve taken me in as an indigenous person, even if it’s not my own nation,” said Giffen.

Around 60 students from the Sea to Sky Aboriginal Leadership group presented projects on the environment and language revitalization to family, friends and the greater community through spoken word, poetry, film and art.

Giffen's project was on the possible effects of the proposed Garibaldi at Squamish ski resort, a \$3.5 billion project that was given provincial environmental approval in January. The resort, which would include ski lifts and runs and multi-purpose hiking and biking trails, would be complete in 20 years.

"I did a video of what's at stake if all the land gets developed," said Giffen, who hiked up to the proposed location 15 kilometres north of Squamish on Brohm Ridge.

Her classmates completed projects on the negative affects the ski resort would have on local bears and salmon.

Other presentations included the environmental effects of B.C.'s LNG industry.

During the ceremony, the students heard the stories of aboriginal elders who were born at Green Lake, the largest lake in Whistler. They then spent the night at Whistler Secondary to learn more about their heritage.

All proceeds of the 24-Hour Drum were donated to Res'eu Waternet Project, which provides clean drinking water to small aboriginal communities in B.C., including Lytton First Nation and Lhoosk'uz Dené Nation.

The nations are often located in isolated rural areas.

"A group of UBC engineers is using a community circle approach to problem solve how to provide clean water to these communities," said Susan Leslie, district principal for aboriginal education, adding the community circle approach combines traditional, cultural and scientific knowledge.

"We chose it because it's a great initiative that helps a lot of people."

Written by Michala Garstin, Squamish Chief

See more at: <http://www.squamishchief.com/news/local-news/drumming-home-issues-1.2252196#sthash.ajfm9mq0.dpuf>

SPOTLIGHT ON RURAL EDUCATION: TRUSTEES DISCUSS CHALLENGES AT NORTHERN INTERIOR FORUM

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Educating students in rural and remote places is challenging, as long-distance busing, maintaining schools during severe winters, and boarding students who live too far from school are costs that cannot be brought down, despite declining enrolment.

To showcase these unique challenges, a number of northern school districts are urging the province to bring back the remote and rural advisory committee, explains Tim Bennett, a Prince George school district trustee.

“One thing we are focusing on is when it comes to the funding model for northern school districts, the province’s per pupil funding model doesn’t quite work,” Bennett said. “The Prince George school district is 52,000 square kilometres in size and it takes five hours to get from furthest point to furthest point. It costs millions to provide transportation and that doesn’t change when educating kids living in rural and remote areas.”

Prince George school district’s geographic size is actually small compared to neighbouring Peace River North, which is more than 93,000 square kilometres. In comparison, Vancouver’s and Surrey’s school districts are 132 and 328 square kilometres, respectively.

Due to the geographic vastness of northern school districts, one school district boards students during the week as commuting daily on the school bus would take hours each day. In other rural and remote communities, school districts struggle with closing schools due to declining enrolment as it would drastically increase the commute to school. Such long drives can be dangerous in the winter.

“It makes sense to put more kids into one building, but to put them on the bus for one-and-a-half hours each way, what kind of quality of life is that providing to students,” Bennett said rhetorically. “We can’t put kids on the bus for two hours a day to get to school.”

In the urban area of Prince George, many schools are actually near or above 95 per cent capacity, a threshold that the Ministry of Education uses when it considers providing additional infrastructure funds. However, as a whole, the Prince George school district is not at that magic number. The high school in Mackenzie, a forestry town, can handle 800 students but currently has 200. In Fort St. John, which is in the Peace River North school district and is where a Site C dam is being built, they added 17 portables due to rising student enrolment.

“Rural communities are so important to the province and they are really struggling,” Bennett added. “They are directly impacted by the economy.”

Schools in the north face extreme weather, from hot, dry summers to temperatures below 30 Celsius in the winter, which takes a toll on aging school infrastructure. Factor in the ever-increasing cost of heating old schools that are not energy efficient or well-insulated, as well as increasing snow removal and transportation costs, and northern school district trustees struggle when balancing the budget each year with minimal effects to students.

To showcase their challenges, the North Interior branch, comprising of eight school districts (Cariboo-Chilcotin, Quesnel, Central Coast, Prince George, Peace River South, Peace River North, Fort Nelson and Nechako Lakes), held a forum on rural education last October. The eight school districts encompass more than half the province, geographically. A number of MLAs attended, including Education Minister Mike Bernier, who was new to the position at the time.

“Having these MLAs in attendance really was a highlight for many,” Bennett said. “The MLAs got to see what kind of work we are doing and it allowed us to have a two-way conversation about the challenges that are unique to our district.”

And the fact that Bernier is the MLA for Peace River South, as well a former city councillor and mayor of Dawson Creek, wasn’t lost on the attendees either.

“Minister Bernier was only on the job for a couple of weeks but he seemed very interested,” Bennett said. “It was great to have someone from the north appointed to this position.”

While the Northern Interior branch has not heard back from Bernier about reinstating the advisory committee, which is supported by the BC School Trustees Association, the branch will follow up with the minister.

“We have been advocating for years, calling for the ministry to re-establish the committee,” Bennett said. “The reason why is because we need to be more at the table to provide feedback on any new policies and directives because we do have unique challenges in the north interior.”