

# BCTF Research Report

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## Professional Development/ Professional Growth and Engagement: What's wrong with the BCPSEA picture?

<http://www.bctf.ca/publications.aspx?id=5630>

Charlie Naylor, Ph.D.  
BCTF Research  
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This paper is written in response to two BCPSEA documents:

- *Teacher professional development: A question of development, growth and currency.* From the series of BCPSEA papers 'Perspectives in Practice.' <http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/documents/publications/03-HJF-Professional%20Development.pdf>, accessed in July 2011.
- *Professional growth and engagement.* BCPSEA: Tabled language, June 2011. <http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/documents/teacher%20bargaining/E28-CW-Professional%20Growth%20and%20Engagement.pdf>, accessed in July 2011.

It is common to hear that people resist change. In reality, people do not resist change; they resist having change imposed on them.

Capra, 2002

Each jurisdiction [Singapore and Finland] has developed and implemented policies that make teaching attractive, and these efforts clearly have paid off. In addition to offering rhetorical support, leaders have adopted policies to improve teachers' working conditions and sense of professionalism, elevating teaching to the level of other professions like medicine and law.

Finland has built professionalism into its system. Because teachers are so well prepared, they are also well respected and much trusted, receiving high status in the society and operating with significant autonomy inside the classroom.

As part of its efforts to professionalize teaching, Ontario ended several policies adopted in the 1990s, such as testing and evaluation requirements that teachers

had seen as punitive, which had led to an exodus from the profession. The incoming Liberal government, which took office in 2003, instead created a Working Table on Teacher Development that included teacher representatives, and adopted policies aimed at providing support and building teachers' capacity to teach more effectively.

Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011

## **Making change and building capacity in education systems**

The above quotes speak to existing knowledge about the imposition of change and to what is known from countries and provinces with high-performance education systems. The first point is that imposed and forced change in education rarely works and can cause damage which takes years to repair. The second reflects a small part of what is known about some of the world's best-performing education systems, namely that they build capacity through investments, support, and partnerships, rather than through focusing on narrowly-defined and imposed accountability which targets teachers as having deficits. Deficit-model thinking is widespread in the USA, with its 'name-and-shame' approaches, and was common under the widely-discredited Harris era in Ontario. The approach taken by BCPSEA in both its Discussion Paper and its tabled language ignores both of these areas of knowledge, and arguably reverts to a Harris-like vision of how education can be monitored and controlled, while keeping investments, support, and collaborations at minimal levels.

## **Some comparisons in PD funding**

To be a professional implies that each member of a profession undertakes professional development (PD). How such PD is conceptualized, operationalized, and funded varies across professions and within the education sector. While some professions or professional bodies set parameters in terms of focus or time, many encourage autonomy within those parameters and also fund professional development more generously than does the employer in BC's K-12 public school system.

As examples, tenured track faculty at Thompson Rivers University (TRU) in Kamloops have a 12-month sabbatical after six years' service to pursue their professional interests with full autonomy. Limited-term staff at TRU can also access PD funds of about \$1,400 per year, with that amount increasing by \$50 a year. Kwantlen Polytechnic University provides 21 PD days per year and \$550 per faculty member, with professional learning leaves provided for 6 or 12 months at 80% of salary. By contrast, in Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows School District, teachers can access \$75 per person for one year's professional development (and 30% of that is funded by the Maple Ridge Teachers' Association), while Sooke teachers get \$100. In Rocky Mountain School District, their annual PD funds are \$255 per teacher, and \$340 in Sea-to-Sky. Thus a Kwantlen teacher gets about four times the amount of PD days as teachers in public schools, and a TRU faculty member gets about 19 times the amount of PD funds as does a K-12 teacher in Maple Ridge, plus a full year (every sixth year of employment) to do research with full pay and no set parameters. Perhaps BCPSEA might like to offer similar amounts of funding and leaves to bring BC's public school teachers the same professional learning benefits allotted to university faculty.

In terms of the Finnish education system, BCPSEA may also wish to note that Sahlberg (2011) reports that the Finnish government plans to double the funding for teachers' professional

development by 2016, clearly respecting teachers' professional autonomy in its overall approach to education.

In Ontario, the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) was funded at \$15 million in its first year (2005), while its current level of annual funding (2010) is \$13.7 million. The Ontario government provided \$23 million to teacher unions for the provision of professional development in 2006, with a further \$4 million in 2009. It has also offered the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP) since 2007, with budgeted funding currently \$5 million per year. This program provides grants to experienced teachers to engage in advanced, self-directed professional learning.

Alberta's Initiative for School Improvement (AISI), with its major focus on supporting teachers' learning, although currently facing some reduction in funding, has received major support from the Alberta government:

Annual funding is provided to all provincially funded school authorities in Alberta (ECS to Grade12) eligible to receive AISI funding at the current (2010–2011) base amount of \$139.40 per registered student in Grades 1 to 12 in public school authorities, and \$69.70 for Early Childhood Services (kindergarten) students.<sup>1</sup>

Note that the funded amount provided to support school improvement in Alberta, primarily through supporting teachers' professional learning, is **per student**. Were the school district of Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows to wake up one day and find itself in Alberta, its funding for supporting school improvement and teachers' professional learning (based on 2008–09 demographics and the Grades 1 to 12 funding levels) would change from its current \$66,525 (887 teachers, \$75 PD funds per teacher) to \$2,137,699 (\$139.40 multiplied by 15,335 students). Maple Ridge (AB) would therefore receive 32 times the amount of funding to support educational change and teacher learning as Maple Ridge (BC), and the government would pay the full amount. While not all AISI funds support professional development, teachers' professional learning is a major component, and the difference in support between Alberta and BC reflects a damning indictment of current government funding approaches to support teachers' professional learning in BC's K-12 education system.

Writing of AISI, Dr. Jim Parsons (2011) of the University of Alberta argued for the creating of conversational pedagogical spaces when he said:

AISI research supports the power of collaborative, teacher-to-teacher professional development. AISI's grass-roots leadership has done a better job supporting learning than expert-driven, external professional development has. AISI research shows that site-based professional learning works when teachers discuss effective teaching methods and work together to solve problems.

Perhaps AISI's most valuable contribution has been to support teachers' professional learning. AISI shows that teachers are competent researchers and leaders. Given their front-line proximity to education issues, teachers are perfectly situated to innovate and implement positive action, track how their actions influence learning and determine the effects of change. (p. 10)

Thus, a case can be made that in Finland, Ontario, and Alberta, systemic (i.e., government) support for teachers' professional development and professional learning is substantial and

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<sup>1</sup> [http://education.alberta.ca/media/6446083/aisi\\_fact\\_sheet\\_2010.pdf](http://education.alberta.ca/media/6446083/aisi_fact_sheet_2010.pdf)

enabling, while comparable systemic support has not been provided in BC, nor is it proposed. The government of BC, and its agent, BCPSEA, are ignoring the lessons and the research from these three jurisdictions by their consistent refusal to invest in teachers' professional learning while at the same time attempting to control it.

## **Systemic support for PD, and what BCPSEA fails to mention**

Linda Darling-Hammond and Milbrey McLaughlin (1995) argued that for teachers, there needs to be systemic support for professional development, notably time, strategies, and resources:

Systems need to be in place allowing:

- blocks of time for teachers to work and learn collaboratively
- strategies for team planning, sharing, learning and evaluating
- cross-role participation (teachers, administrators, parents, psychologists)

District (or local authority) leadership must encourage and sustain schools as reflective communities and provide the necessary resources.

The above quote (taken from the same paper referenced by BPSEA) stresses systemic responsibilities for supporting teachers' professional development. Their paper is primarily about what needs to be in place to support professional learning. Thus, there are two areas of systemic support—the concepts and structures which enable professional learning to take place, and the funding which supports it. Yet the BPSEA papers omit any mention of systemic support in terms of time or money, showing little conceptual understanding of approaches and structures. The system, in their view, is there to monitor teachers' professional development. Indeed, as seen above, it is clear that resources for teachers' professional development in BC are woefully inadequate, and in most locals and districts have changed little since provincial bargaining was introduced (in 1994) to the K-12 public school system. BCPSEA also omits to mention that in 1972, non-instructional days were added to the school calendar by teachers to ensure time for professional development, a time commitment voluntarily offered to support PD:

In 1972, PD days (non-instructional days) were added to the school calendar at the request of the teaching profession after years of advocacy from the BCTF. The inclusion increased the number of days of work for teachers with no loss of instructional days for students. PD days in the school calendar recognized that teachers needed time during the school year to hone their skills, improve practice, and stay current with changes related to teaching and learning.<sup>2</sup>

## **The evolving PD literature: A shift away from bureaucratic control and deficit-model approaches toward reflection in community**

BCPSEA fails to demonstrate an understanding of the current professional development literature. The authors quote a few references but their ability to reflect the literature's content and ethos is poor. The concept of quoting from the literature is to provide evidence in support of an argument, but the quotes presented by BCPSEA and the case made in its Discussion Paper are diametrically opposite. Most analyses of the work of Linda Darling-Hammond would lead to a conclusion that her substantial body of work on teachers' professional learning is not compatible with the directions proposed by BCPSEA.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://bctf.ca/publications/NewsMagArticle.aspx?id=12792>

In addition, BCPSEA's 'Teacher Professional Development' web page<sup>3</sup> contains a total of four articles, none of which are Canadian, including "a review of the recent international literature published on models, factors and case studies of teacher professional development" that was published in 1993 by UNESCO. BCPSEA, which wishes to control teachers' professional learning, is therefore referencing literature that is both very limited and outdated to lay claim to its professional development expertise. Four articles from foreign sources, with no analysis or links to the BC context, neither reflect an understanding of the PD literature nor build confidence that they are contextually appropriate. BCPSEA also appears unable to demonstrate its own learning by failing to link evidence and argument, another indication that they should likely operate with a narrower focus on HR issues and keep out of professional development discussions.

In terms of considering the current literature, Mitchell and Sackney (2009) discussed schools as learning communities and argued for a holistic view of teachers' professional learning:

An assumption of schools as learning communities is that people in them learn and grow as they confront the learning challenges, successes and mysteries of teaching and learning. The living systems perspective sheds light on how this process might unfold. Capra (2002) contends that 'human beings, like all living systems, cannot be directed but can only be disturbed' (p. 154). He argues that different disturbances catch people's attention differently, and that, once our attention has been caught, we respond when we see compelling reasons to do so, and in ways that are personally meaningful. (p. 2)

This reflects a notion of professional learning as responsive to contexts in which challenges occur, but because those challenges are relevant and meaningful, then responding to them through reflection and inquiry with peers in learning communities becomes a primary approach to professional learning as articulated by Mitchell and Sackney. They argue against the "mechanistic view of schools as managed systems" (p. 173)—a position close to that of BCPSEA, with itself as the manager—towards 'an ecological view of schools as living systems' in which:

...the concepts of deep ecology frame descriptions and discussions of school systems in terms of the interconnections, reciprocal relationships and mutual influences that operate therein, but to engage meaningfully in such matters requires an interrogation of current educational assumptions and practices. (p. 174)

Thus, professional learning in their view must be linked to questioning assumptions and practices—an approach likely not endearing to BCPSEA, which wants professionals 'developed' in ways that fit organizational goals. It's a totally different notion of professional learning, one where Mitchell and Sackney explicitly connect to twenty-first century learning, economies, and ecologies, while BCPSEA appears stuck in a more industrial and mechanistic age, with a simplistic view of the concept and control of professional learning.

The BCPSEA paper also ignores the work of Donald Schön (1982), who articulated the ideas of the reflective practitioner in a manner supportive of Mitchell and Sackney and linked to the notion of professionalism. Schön argued against the kind of "technical rationality" which is close to the approach favoured by BCPSEA. Schön proposed "reflection-in-action," in which professionals identify the problems they wish to address based on their own practice, making the

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/resources/research-articles/11-02-07/Teacher\\_Professional\\_Development.aspx](http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/resources/research-articles/11-02-07/Teacher_Professional_Development.aspx)

setting of problems a key part of professional learning, supporting self-directed professional learning because issues for reflection are identified by the professionals, and are not defined for them:

From the perspective of Technical Rationality, professional practice is a process of problem solving. Problems of choice or decision are solved through the selection, from available means, of the one best suited to establish ends. But with this emphasis on problem solving, we ignore problem setting, the process by which we define the decision to be made, the ends to be achieved, the means which may be chosen. In real-world practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioner as givens. They must be constructed from the materials of problem situations which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain. (p. 39–40)

Webster-Wright (2009), in a paper which explored professional learning across a range of professions including education, stated:

During the past two decades, empirical research has demonstrated that effective professional learning continues over the long term and is best situated within a community that supports learning. (p. 703)

She makes a case that across many professions there is an unfortunate tendency to direct learning rather than recognize that professional learning is best when self-directed:

First, the term PD is part of a discourse that focuses on the professional as deficient and in need of developing and directing rather than on a professional engaged in self-directed learning. This discourse, and the professional context of control and standardization that perpetuates it, are rarely questioned in research or commentary about PD. (p. 712)

Standardization, Webster-Wright argues, is not the answer, nor are approaches common in many professions, that the ‘professional’ needs his or her container of knowledge to be continually ‘topped-up’ by professional development:

A focus on learning with a shift of emphasis from passive development to active learning implies a different conceptualization of knowledge. Implicit within much of the development discourse is the concept of the professional as a container for a commodity called knowledge. (p. 713)

Her argument supports Mitchell & Sackney’s view of professional learning in community. Webster-Wright argues for a reconceptualization which includes shifting the term “professional development” to “professional learning,” in which current knowledge about processes of professional learning are utilized rather than falling back on mandated and monitored approaches, a position echoed by Clark et al (2009). She suggests that many systems attempt to seek “certainty through regulation and control” by forcing ‘performativity’ in which employers decide what is to be learned:

The focus of many critiques of performativity is on power dynamics. In a performative working context, power resides with the employer to determine what is valued, rewarded, and considered justifiable to learn. Consequently, an issue of concern in CPL (continued professional learning) is the concept of ‘legitimate knowledge’ (Alvesson, 2004; M.W. Apple, 2000; Garrick & Rhodes, 2000a). Within a performativity discourse, learning outcomes related to legitimate knowledge are aligned to organizational goals with learning opportunities provided

to increase employees' 'capacity'. The use of language describing employees as resources is merely one example of the pervasive influence of the performativity agenda. Language is powerful; its regulatory effect is usually implicit (Brockbank et al., 2002). (p. 718)

The power of language, and its regulatory effect, should be considered in the documents produced by BCPSEA, in particular the continual use of the word 'employee', and the clear move towards regulation and uniformity which in both BCPSEA papers is implied in some sections and explicit in others.

Ranson (2003) also identified performativity as one of four types of accountability favoured by neo-liberal governments and their agents. Krasowski (2009), while discussing Ranson, refers to the lack of trust inherent in current accountability models such as performativity and argues for a return to "a public trust in the ethical purposes of educators' work and the principles of teachers' professional practice" (p. 106). BCPSEA's tabled language on professional growth and its Discussion Paper essentially reflect a lack of trust in teachers' will to engage in professional learning, so that it wants to replace it with a model which controls and directs such learning as deemed necessary by them as the employer.

BCPSEA states that professions "ensure their members stay up to date" by committing and ensuring that members engage in PD, which implies tight control over PD. BCPSEA fits itself firmly within the performativity paradigm, when its paper states that teachers' professional development goals "need to ensure that those goals are aligned with those of the employer", a concept clearly dismissed by a range of authors including Webster-Wright, who explains why performative approaches are being imposed by a range of employers who attempt to create standardized and structural solutions to complex problems:

In addition to viewing people and their knowledge as resources, another aspect of control of professionals is the increasing standardization of their practice (Freidson, 2001). Commenting on escalating control of higher education in Britain, Susan Weil (1999) proposes that one reason for increased regulation is an attempt to provide structural solutions to resolve complex challenges in practice arising from change and uncertainty. She states that "the tendency is to order the mess, through increasing standardization, specification of outcomes and centralized control" (p. 171). But as Linda Darling-Hammond (1997, p. 67) points out with respect to teaching practice, "bureaucratic solutions to problems of practice will always fail" because practice is inherently uncertain and unpredictable. (p. 718)

BCPSEA is an organization with a Human Relations mandate which appears to feel competent not only to address HR issues but also to control teachers' professional learning. They are clumsily attempting to impose a bureaucratic level of control on teachers' professional development while undertaking a perfunctory search through a limited range of literature and failing to understand what the literature they are quoting actually says. They consistently quote Linda Darling-Hammond, whose body of work is antithetical to BCPSEA's stance. Her list of six meaningful criteria is referenced by BCPSEA, but Darling-Hammond does not argue for them to be linked to employers' goals. In another paper, Darling-Hammond (1999) states that the:

...training model of professional development is often fragmented, relying on a collection of workshops and/or course offerings, as opposed to a continuous and ongoing program of professional development for teachers (Miller, Lord, and

Dorney, 1994). In addition, district policies take precedence over teacher learning guided by investigations into concrete problems of practice. Such staff development does not address teachers' various expertise and contexts or encourage diverse areas of professional inquiry. (p. 12)

Elmore (2004) continued the theme that the best professional learning is collegial and discursive, reflecting with peers rather than having teachers pressured into directed learning, while also recognizing the limited systemic support for such learning:

The problem (is that) there is almost no opportunity for teachers to engage in continuous and sustained learning about their practice in the settings in which they actually work, observing and being observed by their colleagues in their own classrooms and classrooms of other teachers in other schools confronting similar problems. (p. 127)

Hargreaves (2007) reinforced the need for teachers to be in control of their own professional learning:

Teachers will be the drivers, not the driven—using objective evidence to help them improve, but never undervaluing their own experiential knowledge because of it. Professional learning communities will not be places for devising quick-fix solutions to disturbing data exposed by test score results, but places where wise and critical teachers engage with each other over their accumulated (though not unquestioned) knowledge using a wide range of data (not just test scores) to devise more powerful strategies that help all children learn. (p. 37)

## **The best Mentoring and Induction programs support all new teachers and are not primarily used as disciplinary tools**

BCPSEA's connecting mentoring to proposed 'performance review processes' is also unfortunate, directly linking mentoring to an accountability concept where a teacher's performance has been judged problematic. That ten criteria of teacher competence are included in BCPSEA's tabled language also suggests a wide range of criteria that may be considered problematic in terms of triggering consequences for teachers, including dismissal. The BCPSEA approach contrasts starkly with that of Ontario, where:

The New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) supports the growth and professional development of new teachers. It is a step in a continuum of professional learning for teachers to support effective teaching, learning, and assessment practices. It provides another full year of professional support so that new teachers can continue to develop the requisite skills and knowledge that will support increased success as teachers in Ontario. By helping new teachers achieve their full potential, the NTIP supports Ontario's vision of achieving high levels of student performance.<sup>4</sup>

Whereas Ontario builds support for all new teachers through induction and mentoring and funds such programs with \$10–\$15 million annually, BCPSEA wants to use mentoring to address perceived deficiencies in teachers, thereby intending to create a deficiency-model program with no funding attached. Its position is that if mentoring is expanded, funds must come from existing budgets. In its Discussion Paper, BCPSEA states that “in-service professional development can

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teacher/induction.html>

take many forms,” while omitting to mention that in-service has all but disappeared from BC school districts as there is minimal funding to pay for it, and none is proposed.

In its Discussion Paper on professional development, BCPSEA correctly states that “Teacher Induction programs are considered a best practice in many jurisdictions,” yet they fail to propose any induction program in this province. So while BCPSEA invites a discussion about induction on the one hand, they fail to offer anything connected to induction in their tabled language. Thus there is little that enables teachers’ professional lives and work in their discussions or proposals, but plenty of direction, control, and monitoring of employees by BCPSEA.

## **Teachers are professionals, not just ‘employees’**

Another key problem with the BCPSEA paper and its subsequent tabled language is its continued labeling and categorization of teachers as employees. Teachers are, of course, employed, just as doctors are in hospitals, or judges in a court, but the sustained labeling removes any concept of professionalism from their role. The teacher as no more than an employee therefore places the teacher within the ‘master-servant’ relationship, denying both professionalism and reducing, if not eliminating, autonomy. Even ‘professional growth plans’ proposed by BCPSEA are defined to support ‘employee,’ not ‘professional,’ growth. Such placement well suits narrowly-focused HR control of those employed, but does little to build effective professional learning for teachers.

Whether HR bodies like BCPSEA should be influencing educational policy and issues of professionalism by stressing and attempting to mandate performativity approaches to teachers’ professional learning is a debatable question, but one likely not to be welcomed by BCPSEA as it “seeks to get the conversation started” in its *Perspectives on Practice* papers, while at the same time finishing the conversation with its tabled language. The focus might well be shifted from the artificial discourse with boundaries set by BCPSEA, to a consideration of their role and influence on the BC education system, an influence becoming increasingly pernicious.

## **BCPSEA argues for reduced school-district control and influence, and ignores current collective agreements already in place supporting teachers’ professional development**

The ethos of BCPSEA’s paper and tabled language proposals is one of direction and control. In the area of professional growth plans, the proposed changes also indicate increased power of school administrators as the employer’s agent who will monitor and enforce compliance. This also implies a reduction in control by the school district. Hence BCPSEA, as the supposed representative of BC school districts, appears to be reducing school-district control in two ways. The first is by identifying the school-based administrator as one of the two parties who can evaluate and give ‘feedback’ to teachers. Secondly, by developing a standardized growth plan to be used across districts, district autonomy and choice are removed. BCPSEA has also tabled language that states that if the parties are unable to reach an agreement, much of what they have proposed will be imposed, whether or not there is any agreement (Clause 4), a bizarre twist to bargaining or, more likely, a prelude to legislation which could over-ride bargaining. The plan may simply be for BCPSEA to table language so draconian in its demands as to be unacceptable, allowing the government to legislate when the inevitable ‘impasse’ in bargaining occurs. Hence the impasse is created by the government and its agent, BCPSEA, as a deliberate tactic as part of a strategy to legislate with language already prepared once the sham bargaining process is concluded.

It also begs the question of what role BCPSEA sees for itself, were its proposals to be imposed. Who is the employer when more decisions are removed from district control? The likely answer is that BCPSEA sees itself as the employer, enforcing compliance to its mandates across all districts. So while the tabled language ostensibly targets the BCTF, its other target may be the school districts of BC, which may either implicitly support this direction, or be unaware of its potential for changing the locus of administrative control while maintaining the appearance of a governance structure with little left to govern, except, possibly, which programs to cut. Or, perhaps, BCPSEA's actions are the precursor to the removal of school districts, with the potential of site-based management through AOs receiving instructions from and reporting directly to BCPSEA.

The BCPSEA approach contrasts starkly with some approaches and philosophies already developed by BC school districts and teacher associations and agreed-to in existing contracts. One example is in Richmond, where School District # 38 and the Richmond Teachers' Association have a professional growth clause in their collective agreement which states:

To this end the Board and the Association further agree to the following principles:

- a) Professional growth is a process of adult learning and professional development programs are most effective when the following principles of adult learning are acknowledged in planning and implementing such a program:
  - i) past knowledge and experience is taken into account and built upon;
  - ii) the ideas and shared experiences of the participants are validated;
  - iii) the process is interactive and social;
  - iv) participation is voluntary.
- b) Any new professional development initiative should begin with an explicit goal setting process by the participant(s) which not only considers present needs and interests but also attempts to build on previous experience.
- c) Planning for professional development should consider needs for material resources, human resources, organizational support and time for learning.
- d) Professional development activities should provide for a cycle of presentation, discussion, demonstration or modeling, individual practice, practice with feedback and reflective analysis both individually and with colleagues.
- e) All professional development programs should be evaluated for effectiveness by the participant(s).

This clause clearly builds on a recognized and coherent literature base, recognizes adult learning principles, and is essentially respectful of professionalism. It reflects a locally-developed approach which meets the needs of teachers as professionals and the school district which employs them. It is an approach which will be destroyed if BCPSEA's language prevails in future contracts. Richmond is also the site of several union-management areas of collaboration in professional development, with participation and funding from the Richmond Teachers' Association, the BCTF, and the school district, which have collaborated to support the Inclusion Review and the 'Assessment for Learning' project. Both projects involve the facilitation of professional conversations and learning, an approach in line with much of the current literature on professional learning. An appropriate strategy for the government to consider might be to

extend such initiatives and partnerships to build capacity and collaboration, rather than allowing BCPSEA to table language which divides districts and teachers.

Part of BCPSEA's approach is the implication that professional development, like teachers, needs 'fixing', yet they look for no evidence of existing promising practices, many current collaborations between union and school districts, reflected in a substantial growth in teacher inquiry across the province, in which hundreds of teachers are reflecting on their practice in collaboration with peers with support from the BCTF. Teachers are engaged in virtual book clubs, in Study Groups, and working with their Provincial Specialist Associations. They neither need nor welcome BCPSEA's interference in their professional development and learning. There are many examples of exciting and engaging professional learning taking place across this province, all ignored by BCPSEA as they seek to impose their vision of controlled and mandated forms of professional development.

## **An alternative vision**

Some components of a vision of what this province needs might include:

- building on and extending promising practices in professional learning
- enabling teacher-directed learning communities that value autonomy
- building networks of professional learning that engage teachers and link to their interests and needs as professionals while also supporting students' learning needs
- creating systemic support that includes adequate funding for professional learning.

In contrast, what BCPSEA wants is to turn back the clock into something close to the Harris years in Ontario, where organizational control takes precedence over professional learning and where BCPSEA ignores or misuses much of what has been articulated in a range of literature.

George Abbott, the Minister of Education, stated in the *Personalized Learning in BC* report (BC Ministry of Education, 2011):

There is much agreement in most jurisdictions that the way to get from good to great is through personalized learning. Personalized learning is an opportunity for every child, every student, every learner to do their very best in education.

The same document also argues for “professional development opportunities tailored to the individual needs of teachers.”

If the government wants its vision of personalized learning in the 21st century to be realized then it needs to provide evidence of its support for what it claims to be its belief in PD linked to individual teachers' needs. As it stands, BCPSEA and the government appear to be reading from very different scripts—one directive (BCPSEA) and the other (government) arguing for personalized learning throughout the system, for students and teachers alike, with PD to meet teachers' individual needs.

## Conclusion

This paper provides evidence that BCPSEA's position is antithetical to the research on professional learning, and to what happens in countries with high-performance education systems where teachers are respected as professionals. BCPSEA's Discussion Paper and its position in bargaining are highly confrontational, in that both directly attack teacher autonomy and shift the locus of professional development control from teachers-as-professionals to employers. Staff development, paid for by employers, is conducted during the regular work day at the employer's expense—an investment which BCPSEA clearly feels need not be made if it can seize control of teachers' professional development, including those PD days donated by teachers and voluntarily added to their workload. BCPSEA's position appears opposite to that articulated by the BC Business Council (2006)<sup>5</sup>, which made a strong case for employers to offer and pay for Staff Development:

It is up to employers to offer and pay for orientation training, health and safety and other regulatory training, informal training, and what is often termed 'firm-specific' training.

Support for investment is lacking in the BCPSEA documents, in terms of Staff and Professional Development. BCPSEA has actually reversed the Finnish philosophy. The Finns plan to massively increase investment in teachers' professional learning while also maximizing teacher autonomy in schools. BCPSEA, however, proposes no investment, reduced autonomy, and maximum employer control in a managerial model which has no credibility within the current literature on professional development. BCPSEA's position appears to be one approach to increasing their power and control within the K-12 public education system at the expense of teachers (in terms of professional development) and of school districts (in terms of AO roles and the control of districts' growth plans). While the attack on teachers is overt, BCPSEA's subversion of school districts is implied but no less real. Interestingly, of the nine-person BCPSEA Board of Governors, eight are representatives of relatively small and mainly rural school districts<sup>6</sup>, with only one from a metropolitan district. Thus BCPSEA's Board of Governors curiously appears to have been elected from rural BC, with the one urban representative of a political hue similar to that of the provincial government but among the minority in his own school board.

BCPSEA has a dual approach: offer to open up conversations through its Discussion Papers and then close the conversation by tabling language which explicitly states (in Section 4) that if there is no agreement then their language will be imposed, likely through legislation. "Let's invite a discussion so that it looks like we are in dialogue and consultation, and then do what we tell you to do," seems to be their approach. It's a stance that fundamentally disrespects both the profession and the collective bargaining process.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.bcbc.com/Documents/ES\\_20060912\\_ProvincialTrainingTaxCredits.pdf](http://www.bcbc.com/Documents/ES_20060912_ProvincialTrainingTaxCredits.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Revelstoke, Gulf Islands, North Okanagan-Shuswap, Rocky Mountain, Qualicum, Sunshine Coast, Bulkley Valley, Kootenay Lake.

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