

Kilimanjaro

Trevor Stokes

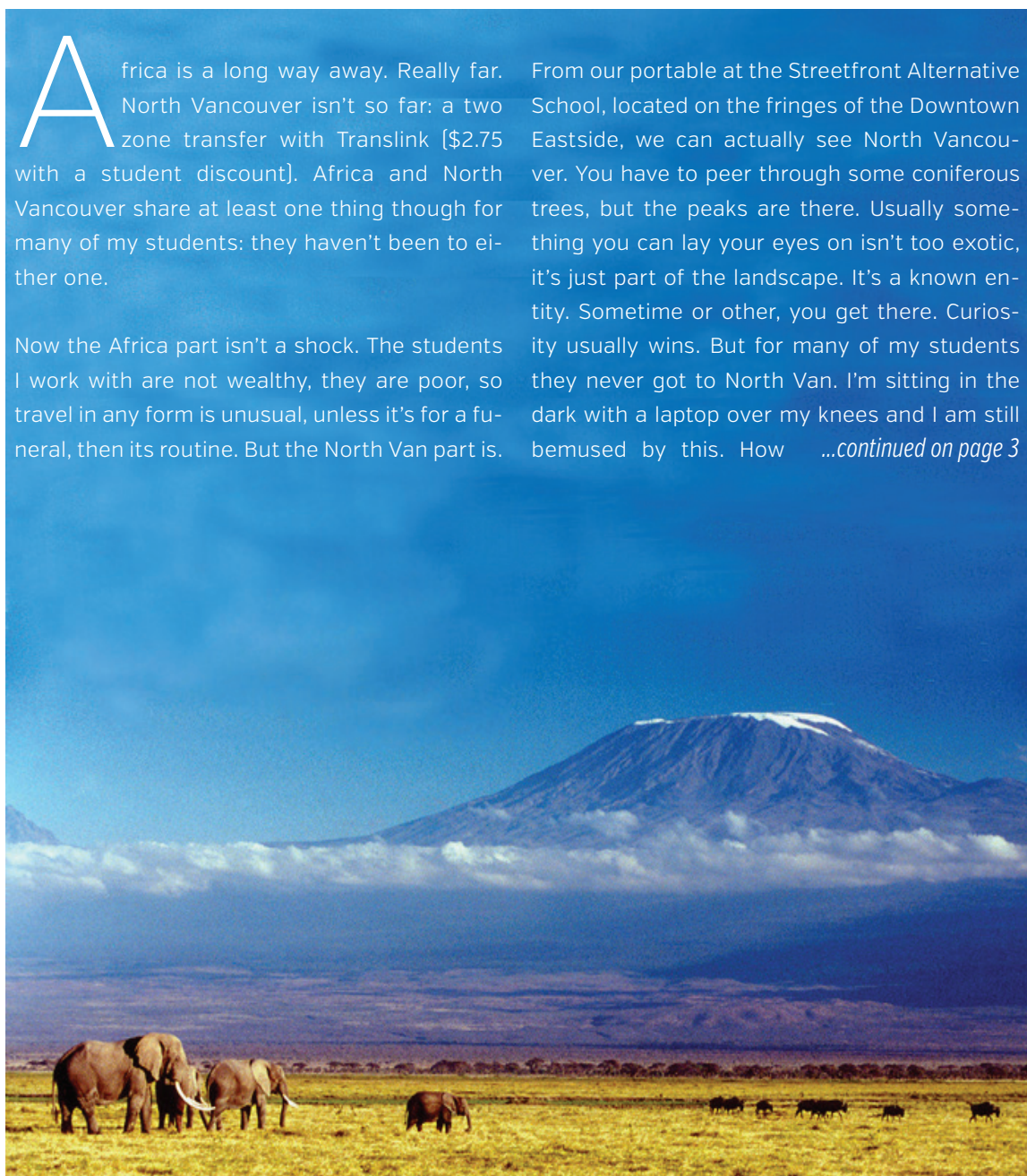
Africa is a long way away. Really far. North Vancouver isn't so far: a two zone transfer with Translink [\$2.75 with a student discount]. Africa and North Vancouver share at least one thing though for many of my students: they haven't been to either one.

Now the Africa part isn't a shock. The students I work with are not wealthy, they are poor, so travel in any form is unusual, unless it's for a funeral, then it's routine. But the North Van part is,

From our portable at the Streetfront Alternative School, located on the fringes of the Downtown Eastside, we can actually see North Vancouver. You have to peer through some coniferous trees, but the peaks are there. Usually something you can lay your eyes on isn't too exotic, it's just part of the landscape. It's a known entity. Sometime or other, you get there. Curiosity usually wins. But for many of my students they never got to North Van. I'm sitting in the dark with a laptop over my knees and I am still bemused by this. How ...continued on page 3

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From the Editor:

Greetings from Leanne Hagglund, the Newsletter Editor!

Our feature story, written by Trevor Stokes, sheds light on his school's upcoming trip to climb Kilimanjaro and the life altering impact of this opportunity for the students. He writes, "the real story is about kids believing they can climb the mountains they are to face in life and to not cower in their presence but rather stand atop and breathe in the air that's only reserved for the brave."

Our second article, by Omar Kassis, takes a look at the Hooksum Outdoor Education program and Indigenous ways of knowing. He states, "When an Indigenous teen from Vancouver attends Hooksum Outdoor School... they can be sure they are being valued, not just for who they are, but as a member of an ancient tradition of learning that is only now getting its share of credit in the mainstream world."

In the final article, Frank Luele makes a case for keeping education relevant in the context of alternative education, focusing on technology such as Prezi, Khan Academy and TED talks. He writes, we "have been reinventing ourselves year after year to try and marry the many challenges our students face in today's world along with the explosion of social media and technology..."

We are constantly on the search for insightful/thought-provoking articles to include in upcoming issues. My contact information is on page 20, so feel free to get in touch with me.

Happy Summer Holidays!

L Hagglund

President's Message

Mike Shaw



One of the great pleasures of the many I get from volunteering for the Executive of the BCAEA occurs just after Spring Break when the Awards Committee meets to go over the latest batch of applications for the \$7000 in bursaries, awards, and grants that we offer. We had a record 42 applications this year for the 20 student awards available, consisting of 5-\$500 Bursaries and 15-\$100 Student Achievement Awards.

It is always inspiring to learn a little about the many flavours of alternate programs offered around the province and to read about your students, their personal and academic struggles, and their incredible perseverance in the face of what sometimes looks like insurmountable adversity.

In past years, we have bent the rules when it came to making decisions on the winners, often going over budget, instead of trying to decide which five of the six applications for a \$500 bursary were most deserving. But with so many applications this year we couldn't do that, so we really had our work cut out for us.

And, unfortunately, we once again had applications that were incomplete and were therefore not considered. We hate having to do that!

We continue to tweak and streamline the application process, so the forms for next year will look a little different, and the requirements for each award have changed a bit. We have dropped the need for proof of enrollment, for instance, and will now require that all applications are scanned and sent as a single attachment to an email that also includes a digital head and shoulders shot of your student. If you don't have access to a scanner, you can still mail in the completed package. In addition, we have instituted a limit (5) on the number of applications one teacher can sponsor for a single award. This is an attempt to have you help us by only forwarding the applications of your top five kids for each award, because no one knows your kids better than you do.

Starting this year, we have also begun publishing the winners names on our website, as well as in the newsletter.

So I encourage teachers to take advantage of one of the perks of membership in the association and sponsor one or more of your deserving students for an award. We would be delighted to help you celebrate their success by recognizing their hard work, determination, and achievement. ♦

Kilimanjaro

(continued from page 1)

don't you get to North Van? Scared of bridges? I guess you don't get there if you don't need to go.

The world that my students occupy is tiny. For most, 90% of their travels will keep them within 40 square blocks. A trip to Metrotown is a big deal. Stanley Park? Most wouldn't be able to get there unassisted. The airport? That's laughable. Why would you need to go to the airport? Buses and your Aunt's car, that's how you get to a funeral in Fort St. John [getting back is an entirely different story]. Almost nobody has walked around Kitsilano, been to the heart of Richmond, heard of Steveston, or chased the tide at Crescent Beach. That's OK. They are great kids and the lack of travel doesn't matter—to them—but it matters to me.

My classroom is littered with posters. Bob Dylan, Mark Rothko, A Clockwork Orange, Malcolm X, Stevie Wonder, Billy Mills, Sonny Rollins, Joseph Heller, and Rene Magritte to name a few. Each one has a purpose. They all mean a lot to me, but I have one poster that's more important than all the rest: 101 Places to See Before You Die. It's covered with snapshots of the magnificence of this world: Petra, Ephesus, Angkor Wat, Tikal, the Grand Canyon, Everest. This poster is the first thing I see when I come into work. You can't avoid it. It's staring right at you. I want the kids to be confronted with it every day, every time they walk to their lockers, change their shoes to go on a run, every time they try to break up the monotony of my lessons with the oh-so obvious bathroom break. I hope they look at these places and dream. I hope they have a tiny itemized list of their favourite spots—an ad hoc bucket list. Some have. Some haven't.

I got six postcards over the past 9 months from former Streetfront students. I cherish those

postcards. Frankie Joseph sent me one from India. Jericho Cowell sent his from England. Dylan Gauthier dropped it in a mailbox outside of Tokyo. Corey Mellor's arrived courtesy of Beijing. Tony Xie sent me two: one from Seoul and one from Shanghai. I was thrilled to receive these for a number of reasons: [1] the kids figured out how to save enough cash to get out of Van (no small feat); [2] the kids spent their hard earned money on the idea that it would be cool to see another country, and [3] they didn't succumb to that lassitude and quicksand that East Van can foster. Unlike so many of their contemporaries, they caught a glimpse of a world outside of their own. That's why the poster is on the wall.

This desire to have kids expand their thoughts and dreams led us to a monumental day about 18 months ago. I was in the office at Britannia Secondary talking with my Vice Principal, Dr. Andrew Schofield, about important, transformative things one could do with students: field trips, international travel, experiences to be shared, that sort of thing, when he blurted out, "How about climbing Kilimanjaro?" He's from South Africa and known for some hyperbole so I just went with the comment and waited for the next part of the conversation to surface. I soon realized he was serious. He felt that one could pull this trip off. You had to have the right kids, and it had to be the right story, but it could be done. He thought the Streetfront kids would be perfect for such an adventure. I wasn't sold just yet, but I was curious.

Taking kids on any field trip is getting to be arduous. Permission for approval, consent forms, arranging transportation, food; at times it's enough to just stay in the classroom. A snowboard trip to Cypress Mountain is one thing. Climbing a 20,000 foot peak in equatorial Africa with a bunch of inner-city ...*continued on page 19*

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Indigenous Education in the Real World

Omar Kassis

This bias continues to have harmful effects on both peoples to this day

In a place called Ayyi'saqh, eagles circle overhead to spot food. Killer whales visit the bay regularly in majestic groups. Tides and wind re-shape the sandy beach day and night. The Charleson family lives and works on its traditional ancestral land located in beautiful Hesquiaht Harbour on the west coast of Vancouver Island, like it has since time immemorial. And young people come from far and wide to learn from the land, from the Charleson family, from each other, and from some amazing curriculum developed over the years by a team of fine people.

Before the European settlers arrived in what is now Canada, Indigenous people had their own ways of doing things, of learning and teaching, and even of knowing. There is a growing body of scholarly work emphasizing and clarifying what this Indigenous epistemology is. In the thick of a Masters of Education in Indigenous Knowledges and Pedagogies at UBC, I am well versed in the theoretical underpinnings of this strain of thought.

But for the East Van teenagers whom I've accompanied out to Hooksum Outdoor School every summer for the past four years, theory is unnecessary because the lived experience does more than enough to instill in them a sense of themselves in a very special place full of learning and wonder.

European-based knowledge obviously privileges reading and writing, and the most important forms of knowledge in those societies are based on written words, some so important as to be sacred: the Bible, the Magna Carta, constitutions of countries,



legal codes, history, curriculum for schools, legal contracts. When the era of colonialism introduced orality-based cultures to European awareness, they were seen as inferior, uneducated, prehistoric. This bias continues to have harmful effects on both peoples to this day: Indigenous people are marginalized and oppressed, including by self-oppression and lateral violence, and "White" people can be lulled into a false sense of superiority that leads to misunderstandings, war, and outright racism.

What is the reality of Indigenous knowledge then? Instead of literacy, traditional cultures were based on orality. Kids learned by listening, memorizing and repeating. Stories were told and retold, keeping the essential meaning but taking new shape with each retelling depending on the nature of the event, the teller and the audience. Major social contracts such as marriages, wills, agreements about property and territory were agreed upon orally and remembered.

On the West Coast, these agreements took the form of potlatches. Rather than get married under

the laws of the government of B.C, as couples do today, a husband and wife would make sure to invite a large crowd to their wedding, all linked through orally remembered bonds of family and clan, and their witnessing would form the binding contract that would prove the marriage to be true in perpetuity. Today, the ability to listen and memorize is one that many people in all cultures have been losing due to technology and changing habits, but the impact has been greater on traditionally oral cultures.

At Hooksum, Indigenous kids from the Vancouver School Board earn credit for a Board/Authority Approved course called Leadership 12 or Community and Recreation Leadership 12. There are no books or tests, and little in the way of reading or writing. But any teacher who has been privileged enough to lead a group on the annual Hooksum Outdoor School summer course can attest that the learning that takes place is enormous. Daily routines encourage healthy eating and exercise, self-reflection, and discussion of leadership concepts. The teachers, including a VSB teacher and chaperone from Vancouver, the Charleson family and their employees, and occasional visiting elders, are listened to, respected, and engaged in a reciprocal process of learning and respecting knowledge.

Teens attending the program undergo enormous personal growth and attest to it each year in written testimonies. Hard skills such as kayaking, tree identification, traditional survival and fishing techniques are taught too. A strong regimen of physical activity including overnight hikes, surfing, swimming, and running and games keeps

students in great shape and instills positive habits that many of them continue on their return to the big city. All these “learnings” are in sync with Indigenous knowledge and rely on listening and doing more than other ways of knowing that exist in a regular school setting.

The Hooksum Outdoor School belongs to Steve and Karen Charleson and their four children. It was originally part of the worldwide Rediscovery movement, then broke away to be more independent. Pioneers of the program to bring Vancouver kids there annually include teachers Steve Garrod, Trevor Stokes and Terry Johnston, youth workers Karen Woods, Barry Skilling and Gord Howey and globe-trotting green entrepreneur Ian Green [greenheart.ca]. I have been leading the VSB’s annual trip there since 2010.

Traditional Indigenous knowledge is also situated in the place where learning happens. Kids connect to learning that means something to them in their present reality. Much of the mainstream curriculum in the last few decades has actually been catching up to this Indigenous view- ...continued on page 18

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\$500 Student Bursary Winners

This year we had a record number of applications for our BCAEA Award—42 in total for the 20 student awards we give out—so the Awards Committee members had their work cut out for them. But after a marathon session in mid-April, the following students were deemed to be the cream of this year's crop. Congratulations to this year's winners, and congratulations as well to all those who applied: your stories make for inspirational reading!

We encourage teachers who are current members of the Association to sponsor their students' applications for these awards. Be sure to get the latest forms off our website as we continue to tweak and streamline the process each year.



Justin Beck

Justin lost his father at a young age, ran in to difficulties at school, and developed a drug addiction. But over the past year, since attending CAFE, he has quit drugs, worked hard at his dish washing job at Swiss Chalet, and is doing well in his courses. He is nearing graduation and is enrolled in the ACE-IT Electrical Program.



Chance Dargatz

After moving to Prince George from Chilliwack, Chance began rebelling, hanging with the wrong crowd, becoming heavily involved with the drug culture, ending up leaving school more than once, either by dropping out or by getting kicked out. He had an epiphany one day and realized it was time to change. He now has plans to pursue a career as a millwright or as an accountant.



Klæe Hansen-Phillips

Removed from her family at age 12, Klæe maintains a relationship with her parents despite their addiction and poverty issues. She has lived in a variety of circumstances, but recently moved into a semi-independent program. She works week ends at a bowling alley, and finds the self-paced nature of her alternate program suits her. A talented artist, she plans to study health sciences after high school.

**Alexis Malo**

Alexis is a wonderful example of resilience and growth, a true survivor of a number of hurdles in her young life, including three untreated concussions suffered while figure skating. She has been in an alternate program since Grade 9, and despite monumental challenges at home, has sought the help she needs to cope and succeed. She is already completing half days at North Island College, hoping to complete a social work or psychology degree.

**Mariyah Porter**

A tumultuous childhood with numerous moves back and forth between her parents has been Mariyah's lot in life. Currently on a Youth Agreement, she lives on her own in a much more stable and controlled environment than she was used to. Her attendance is excellent, and she looks forward to her June graduation. She plans on attending Douglas College to study Early Childhood Education.

Kathi Hughes Innovative Programming Award

Conrad Turner, CLA Music Program

The Awards Committee is delighted to announce that Conrad Turner and the music program at the Centre for Learning Alternatives in Prince George is the recipient of this year's Kathi Hughes Award. Over the last four years, the CLA music program has grown, morphed and become one of the pillars of the school while engaging students in ways to express their musical talent. Watch for an in-depth article in the fall newsletter.

\$100 Student Achievement Award Winners

Congratulations to each of the following students for making significant, positive changes in their personal and academic lives since enrolling in alternative education. Along with their teachers and peers, we are pleased to recognize those positive changes by awarding them each a \$100 Student Achievement Award, disbursed as a gift certificate to a store chosen jointly with their sponsor teacher. Kudos to all of them!



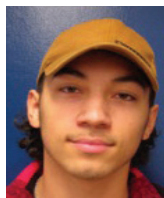
Julie Anderson

Julie has attended CAFE for the last two years and has demonstrated hard work and determination in the face of little other support in her life. She has made incredible efforts to change the path she was on when she first enrolled, and plans to pursue a business degree after graduation.



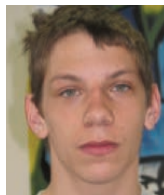
Cory Balazs

Cory fell behind in school in Grade 10, finding regular school discouraging and boring, but since starting at CAFE has developed both personally and academically. He enjoys the smaller class sizes and self-pacing offered and has caught back up again academically. He would like to open a store after graduation.



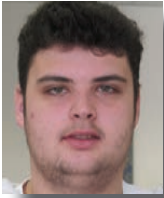
Bryden Brown

Bryden has worked since he was 15 and would often miss school for work, which caused him to fall behind in his studies. At CAFE his schedule allows him to work and attend school, and he has excelled. He volunteered to teach primary students to skate. He plans on becoming an arborist or linesman after graduation.

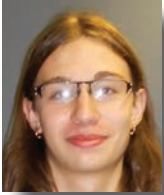


Corey Buchta

Corey has attended several alternate programs over the last several years, and has done well in all of them. This year at Salmon Arm Storefront he has won an attendance award and is a valued school community member. He loves all sports and plans on getting his scaffolding and rigging tickets so he can work up north.

**Tyrone Dhaliwal**

Tyrone dropped out of school in Grade 10 because he was bullied. He enrolled in the storefront school, first in Salmon Arm, and then in Enderby after moving there. He loves the smaller class sizes. He is an avid fisherman and would like to work in that field, or perhaps in video game design after he graduates this year.

**Luke Hartley**

Growing up in Hixon and attending high school in Prince George meant that Luke spent three hours a day on the bus. Moving around a lot for work meant that his attendance wasn't always the best. The relaxed attitude at TAPS and a flexible schedule accommodates working and allows him time to pursue interests in cooking and music.

**Vincent Hoang**

Vincent made bad choices and followed the wrong people at one point in his life, but he transferred to CAFE from a program in Burnaby, and will graduate this June. He volunteers at a local food bank and at an elementary school, while in his spare time he enjoys working out and reading Manga.

**Annie Kim**

Annie is a gifted artist who works hard to help support her family while also attending TAPS. She is honest, sympathetic, encouraging, and participates in many activities offered at the school. After graduation she would like to get an office job and continue to pursue her artistic endeavours in her spare time.

**Danielle Jaffray**

Danielle changed schools a lot in her early life as her home situation was tumultuous. She started skipping and eventually quit going altogether. Although reluctant at first, Danielle has become an active participant at Storefront, and has started to get back on track academically.

**Salehe Rehani**

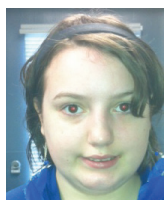
Salehe always had trouble focusing mainstream classes which translated into bad grades. He looks after a younger sibling and does chores and cooking for his family daily. He likes the flexible schedule and self-pacing at TAPS and has done well there. He dreams of becoming a famous Canadian rapper one day.

\$100 Student Achievement Award Winners Continued



Richard Rosi

Richard didn't do well in mainstream, but since transferring to the GOAL program has flourished, getting top marks on provincial exams and maintaining an impressive GPA. He volunteers as a middle school wrestling coach and plays for the Centennial rugby team, in addition to many other athletic pursuits.



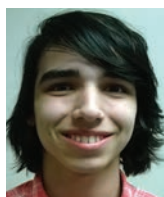
Khrystyna Schribar

Khrystyna has been in alternate programs for the last three years, and will graduate in June. She appreciates the self-paced nature of the Education Centre. She is bright, hardworking, and enjoys sports and the Cafeteria Program. She hopes to go to UFV after graduation.



Gillian Silzer

High school didn't go well for Gillian as her attendance plummeted and her grades dropped. She transferred into the Advantage Program and has turned thing around dramatically. She loves the caring environment and thrives on mentoring younger students. She plans to explore her talents as a singer and musician after grad.



Owen Stevens

Owen has made great strides in the Advantage Program since joining it in Grade 8. Now in Grade 10, he is a positive role model who brings life and laughter to any group. He is well on his way to achieving his Dogwood Diploma, and would like to become an auto mechanic after high school.



Cheyenne Tomiska

School was always a struggle for Cheyenne, but the White Rock Learning Centre has helped her to feel motivated to learn and work towards her goals. She has become more confident and social, even joining the cooking club and the community planning group. She wants to become a counsellor or therapist one day.

Keeping It Relevant

Franco luele

I often wonder if what I am doing in the classroom is impacting students in the most effective and positive way possible. With an eye on an ever-changing society and one on an education system that keeps playing 'catch up', we, as educators, are often faced with the challenge of using traditional teaching styles in the classroom while trying to incorporate modern technology for our digital students. Keeping the classroom relevant so that lifelong learning is inspired is a desired outcome for most educators. We all learn differently, and how we help make schools more relevant for students is critical. At the base of it all is creating a classroom environment filled with positive relationships and endless possibilities.

Think of your most influential teachers. What made them special? Was it something they taught you or was it how they made you feel? I ask this question of all young teachers who come visit us at The WEST Alternative Program to see how or what we do here with our 22 Grade 9 and 10 students and 3 staff. The gift of working in an alternative program is that you get to spend 6 hours a day with the same students, giving you a much greater opportunity to develop relationships. That emotional connection, which is critical to learning, can really flourish. Get to know your students at every turn, especially at the beginning of the year, and just as importantly, allow them to know you. Share your stories, your fears, your triumphs and your tears and relate everything you do to their stories and their lives, and the rest will take care of itself.

Adapting our classrooms to prepare our students for the world is not an easy task. As the business community places greater demands on the education system and post-secondary schools doing the

same, our job has become a complicated Picasso, especially when you factor in social-emotional and learning issues facing many of our teens.

Do we ever question if our students have been given enough time and opportunity in schools to discover who they are or what their passions really are? Will they have the skills to be creative, cooperative, and collaborative once they leave school and seek work? Will they be good problem solvers and communicators, not just for the world of work, but also for their relationships? Will they be ready to adapt to a quickly changing workplace? Can we provide the type of environment in our schools so our kids will develop these valuable life skills, and can we instill the grit to help them persevere through the many decisions they will make amidst the many influences out there?

At The WEST Alternative Program, we have been re-inventing ourselves year after year to try and marry the many challenges our students face in today's world along with the explosion of social media and technology that is at everyone's fingertips. A high level of respect amongst all is the basis for all that we do at WEST. Through story telling, humour, caring and role modeling, the classroom is set to take on any possibility.

Using the Five A's of Learning: Activity, Academics, Art, Attendance and Attitude we blend some traditional teaching techniques with the digital world to make our classroom an enjoyable place to learn.

Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning starts with silent reading. The day has a chance to begin in a calm and relaxed manner. It's important to have kids read a book so there is ...continued on page 12

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Keeping It Relevant

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a consistent story that they can look forward to on these days. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, 20 minutes of journal writing allows time to express oneself without prejudice. I love reading two novels out loud each year. “To Kill a Mockingbird”, “Tuesdays with Morrie”, “Night” and “Life of Pi” are a few of the books that have many

powerful themes. When reading short stories, we ask the kids to re-tell the story using video cameras. Being as creative as possible, small groups will need to cooperate, collaborate and problem solve during script writing, acting, filming and editing. Everyone usually has a special contribution to make, and the final product—requiring patience—is an amazing and memorable reward.

In math we are integrating The Khan Academy twice a week as a supplement to their regular math text book which they also work on twice a week. At The Khan Academy you will find many subjects with interesting, interactive lessons. For our digital generation who enjoy interacting with technology, we have found it to be an amazing tool in helping to get kids not just to do math, but to actually do more math. For the teacher it's simply fantastic. Once you set up your class list, all your student's work and time is tracked and available at your fingertips. Best of all, the kids enjoy it as it helps identify their strengths and weaknesses so they can focus their time on what's needed. Next year we're going to use the science and humanities areas as well.



For social studies, we have used the free online software, Prezi, to research and present current events or to do country or cultural studies. Prezi is a more interesting form of a Powerpoint presentation. You can include videos, pictures, graphics, writing, and virtually any information on easy to use templates. It's an “all on one page” pop out presentation. Visually, it's much more interesting than powerpoint but the real magic comes when the students do the research, insert their information and then present their “Prezis” to the class. Suddenly, the students become the teachers and the class gets to enjoy 11 different lessons on anything from natural disasters to controversial topics, which, I must say, are far more interesting coming from them than from the same old teacher. To supplement our pulse on the world we'll also watch many TED Talks videos throughout the year. You can't help but get inspired from experts covering a myriad of topics. They make for every very interesting class discussions.

Not a subject typically found in an alternative program, but possibly the most influential course we offer, I have made it a point to teach Business Edu-

cation to all of our students. Using the title of the Five Golden Circles of Financial Health, and the video series, The enRiched Academy, the students learn all about the power of forced savings (10% of all income), time, compound interest and investing. Bringing in ex-students that have applied these principles helps showcase that they work.

Of course, there are so many intangible areas that are present in an alternative program to help make them successful. You need a staff that has a buy-in to the overall philosophy of the program. Creating a "family environment" is also so critical for many of our students who don't actually have that at home. Using our food program funding, we at WEST are able to provide nutritional meals for our students every day. We sit and eat together, creating some of

the best educational moments in the program. The students have weekly duties and everyone learns to be responsible for some part of the school's well being. It empowers them and lets them know that this is 'their' school.

When these amazing students leave our schools, they need to feel more confident than when they arrived. They need to believe in their abilities and they need to celebrate their uniqueness in our world. If we can help ignite their spirit, then we will have given them the best chance to be who they wish to become. ♦

Franco Iuele teaches in Vancouver at the WEST Alternative program.

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For the last fifteen years, ProActive Curriculum has created self-paced, mastery-based courses covering Grades 7-12 that follow the BC IRPs in Applied Skills, English, Health & Careers, Math, Science and Social Studies. Our courses are used throughout the province as well as in the Yukon. We currently have more than 30 courses available.

Just released:

- Visual Arts 12 (Digital Photography & Imaging)

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27th Annual Challenge & Change Conference Highlights

Well! Wasn't the 2014 Conference wonderful? When the dust settled around the registration desk, 542 of you attended this year. That number would have been higher but for the atrocious road conditions some of you faced on Wednesday night trying to drive to Vancouver. It seems like the Coquihalla spent much of this year closed due to too many accidents, avalanches, and accumulations [of snow]. By all accounts those that did make it had a great time, attending a wide variety of interesting sessions put together by Karen Gadowsky. And for many, the highlight is always the Schmooze! Have a look at the pictures that follow and stir up conference memories. See you next year!









Indigenous Education

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point. Science and English curricula are retooled to reflect the issues and ideas that BC students face in their daily lives. Learning activities at the elementary level often highlight students' knowledge of their own geography and history.

At Hooksum, all the learning that takes place reflects the specific locale we are in. As family leader Steve Charleson says, “Don’t call this place the middle of nowhere. This is the middle of our civilization, and was very populated before smallpox and colonialism decimated the population. This harbour is our city, our library, our university.” These words sound surprising to a first time visitor—when you’ve just arrived there after a day-long voyage by ferry, car and water taxi or float plane to a very remote, beautiful wilderness area.

Another Indigenous way of knowing that is also enjoying a surge of acceptance in mainstream education is the emphasis on relationships. Every teacher can attest to how much easier it is to get across to students who trust you, listen to you and want to be in your class. Relationship building is seen increasingly as important in business and marketing spheres, too. Indigenous education has always privileged the importance of relationships between teacher and learning and in the total learning community as a crucial ingredient for success.

At Hooksum, great care is placed on making sure the students are

comfortable with one another and with staff before leaving the city, and the *modus operandi* of the Charleson family is to get to know every young participant in their programs and make sure each feels valued and included. This is a crucial element of safety when our “classroom” is located far from any phone range or transportation or electricity!

When an Indigenous teen from Vancouver attends Hooksum Outdoor School with the summer leadership course, they can be sure they are being valued, not just for who they are, but as a member of an ancient tradition of learning that is only now getting its share of credit in the mainstream world. They can come back to the city stronger, prouder and smarter. What they might only later come to appreciate is how they have participated in a renaissance of the kind of reciprocal, place-based, oral-centric education that is growing worldwide as Indigenous Epistemology. ♦

Omar Kassis works in Vancouver at the Cedar Walk Alternative School. Visit <http://Hooksumschool.com/>



Kilimanjaro

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alternative students? That's something different. As we Googled and searched for other high school groups that had climbed Kilimanjaro, we found that this was almost uncharted territory. I found a private school in England that had taken a group of students a number of years ago. I thought I had found a private school in Ontario that did it, but upon more research found that some instructors did it to fund raise for the school. So as far as I know, the Streetfront Alternative School could be the first high school group in Canadian history to climb Kilimanjaro! Remember, we are not talking about Upper Canada College or Crofton House, we are talking about some of the most disadvantaged and challenged kids in BC, bucking up and climbing a monster in Africa. Now I was really excited!

We chose Kilimanjaro as our first expedition because of its size and scope. Far too often at-risk students are denied the opportunities that other students are granted. Lack of resources and support leave them longing for the type of

students. They have already faced incredible challenges and obstacles and found the strength to climb those personal mountains. Our internationally recognized marathon running program (see Spring 2013 BCAEA Newsletter) has proven time and again, how when supported, the most at-risk students can achieve the greatest of accomplishments. I knew the Streetfront students would have the physical capacity and the mental toughness to tackle Kilimanjaro. We were going to do this!

We recognized early on that this could not just be a one-off trip, it had to have some staying power. We had to create a sustainable and lasting project that would produce outcomes that could be seen years, even decades from now. From this came the Street2Peak Project. In March of 2015, 18 students from Streetfront and Britannia Secondary School will travel to the upper highlands of Tanzania in order to climb Africa's highest peak. This trip is just the first in an ever-evolv-

life-changing experiences that are the privilege of the more fortunate. When deciding what the first trip would be—we could only decide on one thing—it had to be of such significance that the world would take notice of their accomplishments. This was nothing new for many current and former Streetfront

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ing series of expeditions that the Street2Peak students will participate in over the next decade. The purpose of these trips is to give disadvantaged students an opportunity to share their stories of struggle and success with the rest of the world and expose our students to those wondrous and beautiful lands outside of our inner-city borders. They will get to meet, firsthand, other indigenous youth from different countries and start to participate in a global conversation about what it's like to be a kid in an ever-changing and overly complex world. In so doing, we will be creating a leadership cohort that will take their experiences to students around the province, inspiring youth to believe in themselves and know that it doesn't matter where they come from—what matters is where they go.

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The Streetfront students who embark on this trip are carrying a lot of baggage with them. They are carrying their personal stories of triumph and pain but they are also carrying with them the hopes and aspirations of all alterna-

tive students. They want to present to the world that they are capable of amazing things and are not defined by labels but rather by their accomplishments. Street2Peak will also be a catalyst for our community. Streetfront is located in the Downtown Eastside where tragedy and sadness often become the only narrative that gets heard.

Our goal is to change this. Some will say the story is about climbing a massif in Tanzania, but it's so much more than that. The real story is about kids believing they can climb the mountains they are to face in life and to not cower in their presence, but rather stand atop and breathe in the air that's reserved only for the brave. The mountains aren't going anywhere but my students are, and I can show you the postcards if you like. ♦

Trevor Stokes has worked at Streetfront since 1999 and is always looking for the next great challenge.

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