

It's the time of their lives as students, seniors bond

The greatest educational resources in our communities aren't found on a library shelf or website. Rich in history and experience, they're in the house beside us, or just down a street or two. They're BC's seniors.

Districts are taking the "gold" in golden-agers seriously, recognizing the value seniors can bring to education. In Vernon, as Board Chair Bill Turanski reports, an enterprising Kidston Elementary teacher set up her classroom right inside the Coldstream Meadows Retirement Residence.

Sharon Mackenzie and her students hold their classes at the residence for five weeks in the fall and three in the spring, Bill explains. "In addition to their regular classroom commitments, the students are integrated into the life of the facility by being actively involved in a variety of support activities at the residence. It was a bold initiative since no one could predict how the 60 senior residents of the facility would react to 30 excited and vibrant Grade 5-6 students being thrust in their midst.

"The results were truly amazing. Strong bonds were developed between seniors and students. Each group of students maintained their contacts with the seniors for the entire school year and in many cases well beyond. The lives of both seniors and students were greatly impacted and enriched as a result of this amazing learning experience."



NOT JUST FOR THE BIRDS: innovative projects in Vernon and Qualicum bring generations together in a mutual learning experience. Pictured here: two new friends at Vernon's Meadows Retirement Residence.

Photo: Sharon Mackenzie

As with any success story, news of the Meadows project carried like seeds on the wind. The project was mentored by the late Canadian social change agent, June Callwood, up until her death; featured on CBC Radio's *Sounds Like Canada*; and praised by Governor General Michaëlle Jean.

To paraphrase the song from *Gigi*, they're neither too young nor too old in Qualicum — all ages are coming together via a number of initiatives. Chair Rhonda Roy reports, "This year, we've developed a senior/teen project, which serves the needs of our 0-6 children and their families. 'C-Zone' (Construction Zone) brings seniors into one of our high schools to work on woodworking projects in Munchkinland (literacy initiative), or to bake nutritious snacks for children and families for the WOW Bus and Mother Goose programs.

"Seniors have an opportunity to learn new skills, to network, and to contribute to the community in an enjoyable way. High school students are connecting with seniors and some wonderful relationships have occurred as a result. Seniors are becoming a common sight in the high school, breaking down another generation barrier.

"We are hoping to expand the program to reach seniors who have difficulty getting out, or who may not feel comfortable going into a high school." Seniors have donated toys and even a Victorian playhouse to Munchkinland, Rhonda adds.

For more information on the Meadows Project, check out the documentary *Whose Grandma Are You?*, by filmmaker Jim Elderton (2007). +

BC launches First Peoples course with 'rich content'

Literature is our window on the world, as the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer observed. Stories are "companions, teachers, magicians, treasures of the mind."

If stories are treasures, BC secondary schools just got a whole lot richer. Starting this fall, many students will have the opportunity to take English 12 First Peoples, a course with a fresh approach to traditional Grade 12 English. Students can build their literacy skills through the study of First Peoples' literature and oral traditions from local, Canadian and international sources.

"The rigour of the course material is equal to or exceeds English 12," says Gordon Swan, the BCSTA Board of Directors' Liaison to the Association's Aboriginal Education Committee. "We hope that English 12 teachers

will incorporate some of the new course's materials in their classrooms, especially if their school is not offering English 12 First Peoples.

"Although the course has a focus on First Nations literature, it is by no means a course solely for First Nations students," Gordon emphasizes. "All students will benefit from the rich content of the course." Thirty schools have piloted the course, with an enthusiastic reception by students and teachers.

Concurring that the new course is written for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and teachers, Karmen Brillon of the First Nations Education Steering Committee notes that a resource guide has been developed for teachers. "The main reason for developing the guide was to assist teachers teaching this course for the first time. As many teachers are

non-Aboriginal, they were asking us for more support in regards to First Nations pedagogy, world views, etc.," explains Karmen, the course's Project Manager and FNESC's Coordinator for Curriculum and Standards. Aboriginal educators worked closely with English 12 specialists and Ministry of Education curriculum specialists on the course.

Its origins can be traced to the seminal 2006 jurisdiction agreement, *The British Columbia First Nations Education Agreement*, which reads, in part:

"... the content of this course will be based on First Nations and other appropriate learning resources, and will address learning outcomes consistent with those required for English 12. BC and FNESC may further agree to develop, implement or recognize equivalent courses in other subject areas." +