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**"A MULTITUDE OF WEDGES:"
NEOLIBERALISM AND MICRO-POLITICAL RESISTANCE IN
BRITISH COLUMBIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS 2001-2014**

The 2013-2014 academic year was especially arduous for British Columbia's forty thousand unionized public school teachers. Fractious collective bargaining sessions between the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) and the provincial government's bargaining agent—the British Columbia Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA)—culminated in a full-scale provincial strike, keeping teachers and students out of classrooms for five weeks between June and late September 2014. An eventual settlement, brokered by veteran labour mediator Vince Ready, produced what the BC Liberal government touted as a "historic" six-year contract, ensuring long term labour "peace" and wage increases within the government's "affordability zone" (*BCTF members ratify*, 2014). Meanwhile, the BCTF lauded its members for extracting a negotiated—not legislatively imposed—settlement, and securing a significant bargaining concession: the removal of Article E. 80 from the proposed labour agreement. E. 80 attempted to obtain union compliance in nullifying a series of BC Supreme Court rulings for previous infringements on teachers' rights to strike and to negotiate class size and composition (Croll, 2014; Garossino, 2014).

In the wake of this recent chapter in British Columbia's public education labour history, I revisit key moments in a political narrative that has played out between the BC Liberal government and provincial public school teachers since the Liberals first majority election in 2001. Using a trifocal lens of historical, theoretical and reflective inquiry, I attempt to discern the effects of neoliberal strategies and techniques (Basu, 2004) on unionism, teacher identity and the public education 'project' over the past decade. I consider how critically-minded educators might disrupt the prevailing 'commonsense' of neoliberal discourse within BC's public education system (Ross, 2010a, p. 205). The Left, Foucault contended, has been "singularly ill equipped" to respond to neoliberal governance mechanisms, in part because it has "never possessed its own distinctive art of governing" (Gordon, 1991, p. 6). I posit that various micro-political strategies evident in British Columbia teachers' resistance to neoliberal education policies constitute "fresh acts of inventiveness" (p. 6) in the struggle to preserve public education as a space for emancipatory pedagogy and democratic culture.

NEOLIBERALISM AND BC'S PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

Neoliberalism has been described as "a complex of values, ideologies, and practices that affect the economic, political, and cultural aspects of society (Ross & Gibson, 2006, p. 1). It transects the political spectrum, and is characterized by the tenets of free market capitalism, where "individualism thrives and the collective is shunned" (Simmie, 2012, p. 489). Operating within a democratic context, neoliberalism promotes deregulation and entrepreneurship while diminishing authentic democratic participation and

state investment in the public sector. A historical survey of the BC Liberal government's education initiatives since 2001 reveals that, by placing limitations on teachers' collective labour rights, decentralizing fiscal responsibility, creating new public consultation channels, and implementing various austerity measures, the Liberal government has undermined the transformative role of British Columbia's schools as potential sites of "political agency and civic struggle" (Giroux, 2003, p. 94).

Between 2001 and 2012, the majority BC Liberal government enacted several key legislative bills curtailing teachers' former collective bargaining rights, as well as exerting extended managerial control over educational policy and governance (Basu, 2004, p. 625). Within months of winning a majority election in May 2001, the BC Liberal government, under the leadership of Premier Gordon Campbell, enacted various pieces of anti-labour legislation as part of its neoliberal "New Era" agenda, which "emphasized deficit reduction, lower taxes, deregulation, and the creation of a business climate conducive to economic growth" (Poole, 2007, p. 2). For public school teachers, one of the most significant amendments to the Labour Relations Code was the introduction of essential service language, restricting teachers' right to strike. In January 2002, following the breakdown of bargaining talks between the BCTF and BCPSEA, the Liberal government took only three days to move Bills 27 and 28 through the provincial legislature, imposing a new collective agreement and giving employers the right to determine not just labour management but pedagogical issues such as class size and composition, instructional time, workload and staffing. Over one weekend, "government used its legislative power to permanently remove some of the most contentious issues from the realm of negotiations" (Slinn, 2011, p. 67). When bargaining talks failed again in June 2005, the government used legislation to impose Bill 12, the *Teachers' Collective Agreement Act*, to impose contract extensions. With court challenges in progress, and a 90.5% strike mandate from its members, the BCTF launched an illegal ten-day strike—the longest teacher service withdrawal in the province's history to that point—in October 2005 (Ross, 2010b, p. 209).

These events highlight the BC Liberals' use of one of several key strategies identified by Basu (2004) to enact neoliberal policies in the educational sphere—the use of 'democratic' government procedures to subvert principles of civic participation, labour negotiation and community-driven consensus. Neoliberal strategy includes the use of democratic institutions, such as a provincial legislature, to curtail public opposition to state policy. Slinn argues that within a neoliberal paradigm, elected officials become "partisan actors mixing their managerial and governance functions, and are frequently unable to resist the temptation to exercise legislative power to reset labour relations rules to favour their managerial interests" (Slinn, 2011, p. 37). Despite a subsequent 2007 Supreme Court of Canada ruling upholding collective bargaining rights, legislation was invoked again in 2012 as the provincial Labour Relations Board (LRB) placed restrictive conditions on a BCTF 'job action', threatening significant fines for illegal withdrawal of services. In 2012, as collective bargaining negotiations between the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) and provincial government disintegrated into stalemate, unionized teachers voted in favour of a controversial protest held between March 7-10, 2012. The illegal job action, which incurred heavy financial penalties under amended labour legislation, was an unprecedented attempt to counter an aggressive neoliberal program of governance, fiscal and curriculum "reform" that had diminished teacher autonomy and labour rights over the previous decade.

By characterizing "big unions as foot-dragging impediments to economic restructuring and prosperity" (Basu, 2004, p. 626), direct appeals to the public and to union members themselves through the media and alternate communication methods are another strategy used to forward neoliberal education policies. The BC Liberals' promotion of a ten-year labour proposal, *"Working Together for Students"* (Province of British Columbia, 2013), is example of how parallel communication strategies work alongside and in conflict with existing democratic and union structures. Bypassing accepted communication protocols, the Liberal government appealed directly to teachers to consider a "fresh start" in the bargaining process (McRae, personal communication, January 24, 2013). In an email sent to teachers' personal school district accounts, Don McRae, then Minister of Education, wrote the ten-year framework would "offer B.C. public school teachers a voice in funding education priorities and a formal role in education policy decisions" (McRae, January 24, 2013). Addressed to "British Columbia Teachers," with no mention of the BCTF as their intermediary representative body, McRae suggested the framework would "build a stronger, more

effective relationship between government and teachers.” On the same day, Premier Christy Clark’s news conference downplayed ongoing negotiations between the BCTF and BCPSEA (Bailey, 2013)—dialogue that actually resulted in the creation of a successful bargaining framework announcement two days later (British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, 2013). The use of parallel communication strategies and “quangos” (quasi autonomous non-governmental organizations) gives the impression of public consultation and non-partisan regulation while acting as “instruments of control” that weaken democratic decision-making (Basu, 2004, p. 626). The establishment of mandatory School Planning Councils (*Bill 32: School Amendment Act*, 2002), an annual Learning Roundtable (Province of British Columbia, 2005), and a new Teacher Regulation Branch (*Bill 12: Teachers Act*, 2011) are further examples of how such “quasi-autonomous” mechanisms isolate the BCTF as a key stakeholder in educational policy within the neoliberal discourse of accountability and decentralization.

In addition to legislative interventions and decentralized governance mechanisms, a third neoliberal tenet evident in BC Liberals education reforms is the imposition of free market economic principles to public sector management (Basu, 2004, p. 628). This has manifested in a combined program of austerity measures and entrepreneurial incentives. Since 2001, provincial funding has not kept pace with inflation and other escalating cost pressures, resulting in consistent operating budget shortfalls (Beresford & Fussell, 2009, p. 5). As the provincial funding formula is tied to student enrollment, rather than a more comprehensive assessment of fixed and fluctuating costs independent of student population, declining enrollment has affected most districts in the province, especially in rural regions (Beresford & Fussell, p. 13). Districts have resorted to school closures, staffing cuts and reduction of services and supplies to balance annual budgets.

To complement austerity measures, the Liberal government has passed legislation enabling school boards to raise private funds through entrepreneurial ventures to make up budget shortfalls. Passed in 2002, Bill 32 enables school districts to create business entities as a means of generating additional operating funds (Poole, 2007, p. 2). As general funding from the provincial government has decreased and new costs are transferred to local boards, school districts have come to rely on these private revenue sources to maintain basic services. For example, between 2008-2012, the Liberal government required school districts to cover staff salary increases from basic operating grants under its *Net Zero Mandate*, causing unexpected shortfalls in budgets across the province (Province of British Columbia, 2013). In 2011, the government unexpectedly transferred insurance premium costs, previously covered by general state funding, after many districts had already ratified budgets for the upcoming fiscal year (Hyslop, 2011). The result of such austerity measures and unexpected budgetary shifts is perpetual fiscal uncertainty and inequitable distribution of funds, often exacerbating geographic disparities.

School district ‘companies’ now house various entrepreneurial enterprises, such as the operation of international schools, and the sale of in-house curriculum products, as in the case of North Vancouver School District’s reading and mathematics publications (North Vancouver School District, 2013). Since 2001, international student revenue has nearly tripled, generating almost \$140 million for school district operating budgets in 2011-12 (Kuehn, 2012). When anticipated business revenues fall through in a volatile global market, however, as was the case during the 2008 financial crisis, school boards face unexpected cost saving decisions. During that year, provincial international student revenue fell by 6% (Kuehn & Field, 2011). In January 2013, when international education revenues fell short of projected targets, Coquitlam School District, which runs the largest international program in the province, initiated an immediate spending freeze mid-way through the school year (*Coquitlam Schools*, 2013). In this unpredictable market-based culture, school districts compete with one another to attract foreign students, regularly sending district staff on recruitment jaunts and producing promotional materials to draw prospective fee-paying students to their jurisdictions.

NEOLIBERALISM AND TEACHER AGENCY

A decade of declining funding, staffing and resource cuts has made classroom teaching more challenging. Within a neoliberalism economic efficiency model, teachers are managed to ensure smooth delivery of curriculum and services in the “knowledge economy” (Province of British Columbia, 2011, p. 3). Neoliberal reform does not welcome “the central role teachers must play in any viable attempt to reform public education” and disempowers teachers at various levels (Giroux, 1988, p. 122). The success of neoliberal policies requires teachers to perform as “little more than cogs in the machine of a competitive smart economy” (Simmie, 2012, p. 486), subject to increasing state regulation and accountability measures. Such de-professionalization of teachers is aided by “the creation of prescriptive, outcome-based curricula and systems of accountability” (Phelan, 2010, p. 319). In British Columbia, the dissolution of the British Columbia College of Teachers, the use of standardized assessments such as FSAs (Foundational Skills Assessments), and legislated changes to class size and composition are all local examples of how teachers’ agency has been diminished. Policy changes regarding class size and preparation time have “had an effect of redistributing teachers’ energies and focus in a manner that militates against their entering into the deeply collaborative exchanges that characterized professional learning in British Columbia in the 1990s” (Grimmett & D’Amico, 2008, p. 26). In this context, teachers do not hold equitable institutional authority or decision-making power in matters of funding, curriculum development and implementation, or self-regulation. Further, a system that restricts opportunities for critical conversation and collectively constructed professional understandings threatens to cast teachers as technicians rather than critically reflective professionals.

However, the discussion of teacher identity is more complicated than the binary portrayal of teachers as either technicians and “structural dopes” (Hutchinson, 1996, p. 56), or as public intellectuals and union activists. Subjectivity is fluid, and one can hold various identities simultaneously, as one negotiates the “games of truth and practices of power” (Clarke, 2009, p. 188). Current discourse regarding the professionalization of teachers in British Columbia has polarized the relationship between the provincial government and union representatives, leaving teachers conflicted within these dominant constructions of identity. When a legislative decision directly curtails one’s democratic voice of protest, or when a union directive prohibits ‘the self’ from acting authentically in a pedagogical moment, ideology becomes a complex embodied experience that profoundly affects those tangled in its threads. Therefore, it is insufficient to leave a discussion of the events of the past decade to a historical account of undemocratic legislative processes or theoretical analysis of neoliberal strategy. By pausing the historical and theoretical treatment of neoliberalism for a reflective moment, one sees troubling personal repercussions for those implicated in discourse of neoliberal ‘reform’.

Schon argues that entering into a “conversation” with one’s pedagogical situation provides a much-needed space for “back-talk” that interrupts the flow of prevailing discourse, and allows the inquirer to invoke and then resolve uncertainty, if only momentarily (Schon, 1992, p. 125). Smyth cautions, however, that even reflective practice runs the danger of being co-opted by neoliberalism if teachers fail to recognize “the complex web of ideologies that surround them in their teaching” (Smyth, 1992, p. 295) and restricts their gaze to a functional examination of classroom practice. The emancipatory potential of reflective inquiry only becomes apparent when teachers use the incidents that “perplex, confuse or frustrate them” as catalysts for institutional reconstruction (p. 295). With that emancipatory intent, I provide a brief reflective account of my own lived “confusions” of the historical and theoretical narrative presented thus far so that they might serve as “springboards to new ways of seeing things” (Schon, 1992, p. 121) within the current political climate in British Columbia.

March 10, 2012. Spring Break. I made it, barely. Limped to the finish line. Did hardly anything the past two weeks at work. The strike, the attacks on teachers, the political scene here in Canada—with the destruction of the environment, erosion of social services, etc, has been very worrying and depressing. I have been sleeping when I get home, not exercising and not cooking much.

Financial pressures, work malaise. My lack of self care right now—not eating well, drinking a little too much, no consistent exercise. Not feeling constructive at work. I have gotten very little done. And it will only get uglier. (Hales, Journal Entry, 2012)

Working as a district curriculum coordinator for secondary schools, I found my role severely limited by the extended labour conflict during the 2011-12 school year, as teachers were directed to avoid district-organized meetings or professional learning opportunities. As a district ‘helping teacher’, I fell into a ‘grey area’ of institutional identity—neither classroom teacher nor administrator nor district support staff. The most commonly invoked identity discourses did not know what to do with me. Within the context of intense labour turmoil and legal uncertainties, therefore, the union erred on the side of caution, curtailing my staff/professional development work to ensure no teachers inadvertently participated in potential management-led initiatives.

This protracted conceptual and strategic battle regarding professionalism and identity within the teacher organization that was supposed to champion—not stifle—my ‘autonomy’, may have ultimately motivated me to step away from fieldwork to return to academic studies. Sachs describes professionalism as an “organizational strategy, shaping the patterns of power, place and relationships around which organizations are coordinated” (Sachs, 2001, p. 150). At times, one’s individual sense of professionalism is at odds with a collectively negotiated professionalism, as each discourse will “set the limits of what can be said, thought and done” (p. 150). The protracted job action found teachers juggling the activist mandates of their union, the legislative actions of their provincial government, and individual notions of professional and personal ‘responsibility.’ A draining year of labour and fiscal conflict took its toll collegially and emotionally. The prospect of becoming a doctoral student was appealing—far from the exhausting and contentious implementation of new Ministry curriculum, on the one hand, and relentless labour strife on the other. Caught between a majority government that seemed bent on using legislation to coerce teachers into regulatory submission, and a union that did not appear to welcome ‘complicated’ notions of teacher agency and professional autonomy, the well of scholarship beckoned. I had come to the end of my psychic and pedagogical reserves. Through theory, perhaps, I could begin to make sense of a decade’s worth of field experience, and move away from what seemed a dehumanizing discourse towards an exploration of new means of resistance. As neither neoliberal tenets nor union directives spoke to my pedagogical and professional sensibilities, I sought to articulate a new position from which to enter the conversation—where one could at once disagree with BC Liberal Party policies, and the BCTF’s responses to them.

RESPONDING TO NEOLIBERALISM: THE POTENTIAL OF MICRO-POLITICS

November 11, 2012. There has been a shift in my approaches and thinking. That we is more powerful than I. That I cannot change the bigger system and should just give up on that feeling of obligation. But I can work alongside people within my sphere of influence and model the ideas I believe need to be threaded in the larger system. Teachers feeling valued, teachers standing taller in their shoes, teachers seeing themselves as leaders in their professional spheres, and feeling and understanding the depth of their work. Being courageous and foolish enough to believe we have the power to put good practices in place, not just for now, but for later. The vision to plant trees under whose shade you will never sit. Traditions come from somewhere. We can start them. (Hales, Journal Entry, 2012)

Neoliberalism has proven a formidable strategic framework that uses a myriad of techniques to construct a “commonsense” reality of educational policy and school life in British Columbia (Apple, 2004, p. 47). Through legislation, economic and bureaucratic tactics, neoliberal principles have taken root as the normative space in which public educators work. As Basu argues, “neoliberal discourse is malleable and adjusts according to power dynamics which differ by the context, history and spatial dynamics of a place” (p. 633). Unlike the BC Liberals, who seem able to adapt to “constant flux” and produce “contradictory rationalizations” (p. 622), the BCTF has maintained conventional labour tactics within a new ideological

paradigm. In doing so, the BCTF may risk losing authority amongst some of its membership and within the public sphere, due to ineffective communication and reliance on traditional labour strategies. Principles rooted in theoretically and pedagogically emancipatory notions of democratic education, worker rights and social justice principles have too often come across as belligerent and unproductive rhetoric in the media, contributing to polarizing educational discourse that leaves teachers and the general public on the margins of the dialogue. How to counter the strength of hegemonic state and media structures while inviting the broader grassroots community back in?

The internal and externally-imposed challenges faced by the BCTF reflect a broader global struggle of teachers' unions to uphold the quality of, and support for, public education while advocating for their members' wages and working conditions. Stevenson argues that the neoliberal "attack" on teachers unions is particularly fierce as teachers still remain a large and highly organized occupational group relative to other professions and, therefore, present a potentially "dangerous" challenge to neoliberal governance and fiscal priorities (Stevenson, 2010, p. 2). A further danger, Stevenson suggests, is that teachers' work remains fundamentally ideological—in terms of pedagogical, professional and cultural practices—and therefore has the potential to either serve and reproduce neoliberalism's common-sense aims of education (if 'properly' regulated), or of transforming schools and communities by interrupting prevailing neoliberal discourses (p. 3). Stevenson suggests that teachers' unions responses to neoliberal regimes globally can be characterized in three ways: rapprochement, resistance or renewal. I argue that the BCTF's response to the BC Liberal government's legislative, labour and fiscal campaign embodies vital and laudable resistance, but that its long term ideological authority and viability will only be maintained through courageous institutional renewal.

Margaret Wheatley (2009) suggests that immediate change doesn't occur through "leaders or top-level programs or big ambitious plans" but rather when "everyday people gathering in small groups, notice what we care about, and take those first steps to change the situation" (p. 5). Change projects can begin with small gestures, or meetings of like-minded individuals wishing to provide meaningful learning experiences for students while acting on ethical and pedagogical beliefs untapped by prevailing institutional powers. As Hutchinson states, "individually the contributions are likely to be small, but collectively they may be quite significant even if negotiations are protracted and the pathways ahead are difficult" (Hutchinson, 1996, p. 44). Over time, small scale counter-hegemonic moments and projects become spatial and conceptual spaces for diverse groups of educational stakeholders, subverting existing institutional structures to re-make schools into "sites of possibility" (p. 56).

Rather than limiting change action to conventional macro-political tactics such as strikes, escalating service withdrawals and partisan media campaigns—tactics that the BC Liberal government has successfully thwarted through various legislative and judicial injunctions—the BCTF might do well to revisit, as Wheatley suggests, its localized approach to activism and social change. As Slinn (2011) documents, this approach worked for the BCTF in the past when it was a less formalized body than it is now. By embracing and celebrating a more complicated conceptualization of teachers as professionals, skilled practitioners, cultural workers and community members—while continuing to articulate a clear alternative view of the public education to contrast the model of neoliberal adherents—the BCTF may be able to delegitimize neoliberal policies and gain broader grassroots support. The key will be not just in revitalizing its institutional vision, but in the strategic inclusion and communication of that vision to a grassroots membership in the way repositions the BCTF as a catalytic driver of "collaborative, cooperative action between teachers and other educational stakeholders" (Sachs, 2001, p. 153). "Whatever one thinks of teacher unions as the vehicles (or not) for progressive thinking and action," Stevenson argues, "it will be teacher unions who will be in the forefront of the campaigns to defend public education" (Stevenson, 2010, p. 5). Therefore, as Freire modeled pedagogical praxis, so too might the BCTF must craft a new unionist praxis, combining counter-hegemonic ideals with more inclusive, localized and extended organizational reach, as it is best placed to stand in defense of public education.

Rottman (2013) writes that teachers unions' continuing relevance and "durability" may rest in "an acknowledgement rather than masking of micro-political tensions within the organization and support for

a diversity of perspectives and social justice commitments” (p. 43). In an examination of the micro-political culture of teacher unions, Rottman outlines the varying roles union members play in ongoing social justice work. Rottman suggests that higher profile “decision makers” who continue to work at the macro-level tend to “speak less about internal organizational conflict because they [believe] consensus would increase the power of their global struggle and benefit all teacher members in the long run” (p. 38). Hence, a strong strike vote, public solidarity and carefully controlled media releases are all strategic macro-level tactics that the BCTF employs to maintain a strong public front. But at what internal cost? Rottman suggests that “autonomous advocates”—those whose are “not always ideologically aligned with the federation” must be invited to “work within union structures to accomplish their goals” (p. 42).

Similarly, and more vociferously, Gibson (2010) points to the dangers of cultivating a culture of institutional conformity within teachers’ unions, pointing to the American National Education Association’s (NEA) various procedures and protocols which enable leadership “to silence debate about items they don’t like...something so contentious, irrelevant, repugnant, or unprofitable that nobody should discuss it” (p. 179). While the BCTF’s consistent acts of resistance to neoliberal tactics indicate a different stance than the ‘quisling’ complicity, or “rapprochement” (Stevenson, 2010, p. 3) with state labour and curriculum reforms that Gibson attributes to the NEA, it is fair to suggest that more open acknowledgment and constructive leveraging of *internal* dissent could prove highly beneficial for the BCTF’s organizational reform efforts. In a tribute to Freire, Apple writes one of his most courageous qualities was “his willingness to take a radical intellectual and political position in times of grave danger—when everything is conspiring against you— and yet to change his mind, to see where he might have been wrong” (Apple, 1999, p. 199). Acknowledging, addressing and leveraging dissension and diverse beliefs and approaches within the BCTF membership is a necessary step towards institutional renewal and authentic member solidarity.

In an address to the BCTF’s Annual General meeting in 2012, Mathison points to potential strategies teachers might enact to achieve an “authentic accountability” (Mathison, 2012, p. 73) discourse in schools and to shift the locus of activist work to local school communities, calling for a “person to person, organizing model” (p. 74). Such micro-political activity might engage grassroots community members, and more effectively illustrate for the general public the nature of teachers’ work and working conditions, class size and composition challenges, and funding gaps for basic services. Such transformative micro-political activism was already in evidence, I would argue, during the 2014 labour dispute. While the BCTF engaged in conventional province-wide labour strategies, individual teachers concurrently harnessed social media to express their personal frustrations and tell stories of their lived experiences with legislative policy that too often remains an abstraction. For example, a Grade 4 teacher’s photo of a patchwork ‘quilt’ (Figure 1) (Maxwell, 2014) representing the composition of her classroom enrolment went viral on Facebook, effectively illustrating the daily implications of class size (29 students, in this case) and composition policies. Similarly, a BC school psychologist’s public letter to his school board also went viral-- shared over 13,000 times on Facebook then circulated in the mainstream media (*B.C. teachers strike*, 2014). Kettner outlined how, after working over seventy hours beyond his usual assignment to provide crisis counseling to youth and families after a tragic accident, his salary was reduced due to the LRB ruling allowing school boards to dock 10% from teachers’ salaries—a calculation reflecting services lost during the ‘work to rule’ phase leading up to full withdrawal of services in June 2014. Facing considerable public criticism and negative media coverage, the Kootenay Lake School District later reversed Kettner’s pay reduction, describing his particular situation as one of the “exemptions/anomalies” allowable under the LRB ruling (*B.C. teachers strike*, 2014).

Such examples of micro-activism echo Mathison’s calls for localized efforts to disrupt prevailing narratives and to complement more commonly cited “large scale direct actions” (Mathison, 2012, p. 76) such as ongoing legal and bargaining efforts by the BCTF at a broader provincial level. When teachers personalize the lived implications of institutionally-mandated fiscal and labour policy, they insert an palpable wedge into what has proven formidably intractable neoliberal discourse.



Figure 1. Patchwork Quilt from K.D. Maxwell (2014)

The ideological and political struggles of the past decade have exerted a toll on the working conditions, professional identities and personal morale of British Columbia's public school teachers. In considering the massive task of unhinging a seemingly impenetrable hegemonic entity with more localized consensus-driven methods, an ecological metaphor may be helpful to demonstrate that significant change may not be as far away as it appears. In 2002, the Larsen B Ice Shelf, a 12,000 year old glacier, unexpectedly and dramatically collapsed within the space of three weeks. Examining the causes of the sudden implosion, glaciologists discovered the powerful disintegrating effects of liquid water, which "flowed down into cracks and, acting like a multitude of wedges, levered the shelf apart, almost in one fell swoop" (Larsen Ice Shelf, 2013). While nothing significant appeared to be happening at the surface, countless tiny fissures had gradually compromised the structural integrity of the monolithic geological formation. Small, almost undetectable channels, penetrating separately but in close proximity, bored away until a tipping point was reached. This geological analogy suggests a possible way forward for the BCTF and others working to reclaim British Columbia's public education project. Perhaps titanic macro-political battles between state and union, employers and teachers, are not the most effective way to undo hegemonic structures. Instead, social change may be carried by a thousand wedges—small but determined challenges to neoliberalism's ideological and tactical grip, until its centre can no longer hold.

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