

# ARE CORE & PLAP BAD FOR CHILDREN?

## Why are we asking this question?

The Ministry of Education is in the process of implementing a mandatory "Core" curriculum and is at the same time conducting a program of province-wide tests called the Provincial Learning Assessment Program (PLAP).

The BCTF has serious concerns about the harmful effects that "Core" and "PLAP" may have on the education of children.

On the surface, both appear to be legitimate attempts to improve the quality of education in B.C. Indeed the whole strategy seems simple and straightforward: implement a core curriculum and conduct a testing program to ensure that it is being adequately learned. The strategy is so simple, in fact, that it invites unquestioning acceptance.

**But it's too simple! Solutions to educational problems are not simple. They never were and they never will be. Simple solutions to educational problems are almost invariably gross over-generalizations which deny the complexity of the individual human person.**

Each child in our province has the right to an education which provides for the development of his/her fullest potential. But every child is different from every other child. Each one has a unique set of abilities (and disabilities), aspirations and interests. One child may be a literary genius without artistic ability. Another may be a mathematical whiz who is void of athletic prowess. Still another child may be a magnificent painter who cannot find the square root of nine. There is a place in our diverse society for every one of these children. Every one of them can contribute generously to their fellow humans.

Thinking people can see that it would be a grave error to devise an education system which operates as though all children are the same.

Just as grave would be the error of devising a system



## On school quality, curriculum and testing

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. . . but it rejects centrally imposed standards which deny differences in children, teachers and situations.

■ The BCTF favors a high standard of basic skills in reading, writing and computation so long as the high standard is based on each child's potential and recognizes the tremendous variance in potential between individuals. For example, the range of student reading ability in typical class is often as great as eight grade/year levels . . .

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Just as grave would be the error of devising a system which assumes that all children learn a particular skill in the same way, at the same speed, or at the same age. Masses of well-documented research have long ago laid these fallacious assumptions to rest.

Respect for individuality is a basic human right of every citizen of this province — man, woman and child.



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- . . . but it opposes centrally defined skills curricula and standards which imply that all children learn in the same way and at the same speed and should achieve an arbitrary level. Such a strategy is comparable to setting the high jump bar at four feet and expecting all children to jump it knowing full well that some never will make it while others will surpass five or even six feet.

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■ The BCTF favors constant upgrading of the competence of teachers and believes that a great deal of time and money should be spent on professional development . . .

. . . but it opposes forcing teachers to become technicians by allowing centrally imposed tests and curricula to dictate teaching methods. It is common knowledge that standardized tests originating outside the classroom cause teachers to "teach to the test."

■ The BCTF favors testing if it is classroom based so that it grows naturally out of the learning process and preserves the trust and confidence in the relationship between pupil and teacher. Testing which is diagnostic in nature can be very useful for identifying individual learning problems and finding ways to help each child to learn better . . .

. . . but it opposes province-wide and district-wide testing programs which invite invidious comparisons without recognizing a host of variables between individuals, regions, cultural groups and the like. Centrally prepared tests for a half million children makes a mockery of individualized learning.

■ The BCTF favors some of the skills and concepts listed in the Ministry's core curriculum statement. These have always been part of the school curriculum . . .

. . . but it opposes the limitations of such a statement and the fact that British Columbians have had little part in drafting it. To assume that a simple set of needs can be defined for all children, regardless of whether they live in a coastal village or the heart of a large city, is a mistake.

To prescribe that every child, regardless of mental/physical gifts or impairments, should focus on an arbitrary standard of achievement is also a mistake.

Provincially imposed tests further narrow and restrict educational opportunities. Standardized testing emphasizes the consumption of particular prescribed information and causes neglect of a whole host of educational experiences which are essential for children living in the complex society of today.

■ The BCTF favors involvement of parents, students and teachers in determining educational goals . . .

. . . and it opposes central determination processes which cannot adequately involve those whom the education system most directly affects.

■ The BCTF favors locally developed curricula which in providing for basic learning needs recognize the individuality of each child . . .

. . . and it opposes fitting children into the predetermined curricular molds of any special interest group.

■ The BCTF favors equality of educational opportunity which, because of individual and minority needs, may, necessitate unequal distribution of resources . . .

. . . and it rejects practices which provide inferior educational opportunities for those who are socially, economi-

■ The BCTF favors a curriculum which emphasizes learning to learn as a lifetime skill for continuous growth . . .

. . . and it opposes an emphasis on fact learning because of the high obsolescence rate on factual information and the impossibility of assimilating more than a tiny fraction of an increasingly enormous fund of information. The knowledge explosion relegated factual information (from being an end in itself) to being mere raw material for achieving human goals. A narrow curriculum is inappropriate to these times.

■ The BCTF favors developing each child's full potential through complementing natural growth with a wide variety of structured and unstructured learning experiences which will enable him/her to become a self-reliant, self-disciplined and participating member in a democratic society . . .

. . . and it opposes schools being used mainly to sort, classify and train the child as raw material for business and industry. It opposes a singular emphasis on material values at the expense of emotional, social, aesthetic, cultural and personal values.

## Who has the right to determine what children will learn and how well they should learn it?

The BCTF contends that concerns about curriculum and educational quality can be answered without violating the right of each child to a recognition and respect of his/her individuality.

Given the diverse nature of children, the complexity of learning processes and the variety of curricular needs, these concerns should be addressed at the most "grassroots" level possible.

Answering the concerns must become a joint venture involving home, school and community.

It has been said that educators must be accountable to society but in the end all who participate in educating must be answerable to each child who will become tomorrow's adult and citizen.

## What do you think?

If you agree that individuality must be respected, don't let silence be interpreted as a lack of concern:

- Attend local meetings on curriculum.
- Write to the BCTF, 2235 Burrard Street, Vancouver.
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■ The BCTF favors equality of educational opportunity which, because of individual and minority needs, may, necessitate unequal distribution of resources . . .

... and it rejects practices which provide inferior educational opportunities for those who are socially, economically or otherwise disadvantaged and for those who don't happen to "fit" the school system.

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