Clark and Campbell Sitting in a Tree, C-U-T-T-I-N-G

By: Cheryl Aman, Theo Breedon, Cara Krmpotich

Prepared For: Professor C. Menzies
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Introduction

This term, we as Anthropology methods students, were given the task of understanding "change" in an overwhelmingly complex arena—that of the public education system in the province of British Columbia. To limit the field of inquiry to a time and place, our group was assigned the "West End" school districts of the city of Vancouver. Our task was to interview parents and teachers within this setting. The basic question was: how have you experienced the changes to funding and/or legislation? However, this straightforward question is a vortex from which a thicket of information, stories, histories, agendas, and rhetoric endlessly spin. As a small research team of three we not only had to negotiate a personal understanding of this material, we wanted to create a unified "picture" of its meaning. In many ways this was the most difficult (though rewarding!) aspect of the task. As Benjamin (1969:92) notes, "Thus traces of the story teller cling to the story the way handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel." The clay vessel we are now presenting is replete with many handprints: visibly, those of our interview subjects and ourselves are here, and less visibly, those of a shared authorship.

As we met and discussed our individual findings our different "takes" on the material emerged. Because we were exposed to different data sources and conducted interviews solo, responses to the material began to diverge. We each found much to confirm in listening to each other's commentary, yet different aspects of the "changes" were making an impact. A sense of how many isolated changes add up to a cumulative result became an important theme for Theo. Cara became aware of the broader, almost philosophic, statement these changes make about the value of children and education in our society. Cheryl was caught up in the paradoxical dance of change being both highly visible and explicit yet, deeply invisible. The interesting thing about these divergent

themes is how they emerged from our group discussion. It was almost as if the airing of concerns helped us see where the other team members were going. Our investigation began to be shaped by this bit of reflexivity performed on behalf of one another.

Points of Access

The project was initiated by Professor Charles Menzies, as a component for the graduate course “Anthropological Research Methods” at the University of British Columbia. There were two sets of goals for the project, the first set relating to the process of doing research, and the second relating to the gathering of topical information.

By participating in a “real time” research project, students would have the opportunity to practice and refine qualitative research methods such as interviewing techniques, writing field notes, implementing social networks, and analyzing data. Futhermore, these skills would be developed in the context of ethical, applied anthropological research.

Prof. Menzies requested students research the implications of recent political and funding changes to the education system within the Vancouver School District. In May 2001, a Liberal government replaced the previous New Democratic Party government in British Columbia. Funding cuts and increases in class sizes were two of the most publicized changes to public education with the installation of the Liberal government. Our research attempts to determine peoples’ receptions and perceptions of the types of changes occurring within schools and the impacts these changes have. Three student teams, each consisting of three members, directed their inquiries and analysis towards one of three focal areas or groups within the Vancouver School District: West Side, Inner City and Special Education. Our group focused on the impact to, and responses from, West Side parents, schools, teachers, and administrators.

As a research team, our backgrounds are varied. Within our team are:

- academic backgrounds in Anthropology, Planning, and Education
- teachers
- children of teachers
- former residents of Ontario and Quebec
- long-term residents of British Columbia
- parents of school-age children
- residents of Vancouver's West Side
- students within the public education system

The breadth of experiences and knowledge brought to the project by individual members enabled the team to have greater access to potential participants, and broadened the scope of our analysis of the data.

As our research progressed, we found it impossible to consider the "West Side" as an isolated unit. Our research questions and methods reflect a much broader casting of the net. In total, we formally interviewed three West Side parents who participated to varying degrees in their child's school; three public figures were interviewed formally including the Vice-President of the Vancouver Secondary Teachers Association, a former Deputy Minister of Education and a school administrator; two West Side teachers were interviewed formally, including one special education provider; over 20 informal conversations were had with West Side parents and teachers; 34 student teachers were polled as to their experience in the classroom; media reports, newspaper clippings, websites of various interest groups, public emails and correspondence from parent groups (PACs and SOS for example), and election pamphlets were also collected and analyzed; and in-class guest speakers from the British Columbia Teachers Federation and parent organizations rounded out the process.

Participants were gathered in a number of ways. Guest speakers were invited into the class by Prof. Menzies. In addition, an initial contact list of three West Side people willing to participate was provided by Prof. Menzies. The parent organization,

Save Our Schools (SOS), distributed a call for participants through their email list-serve. We received an overwhelming response from SOS members, as well as non-members who had heard about the project from friends, relatives, co-workers, etc. In some cases, individual participants recommended other people they felt would contribute to our research. We were also able to use our own personal, academic, and professional networks to make contacts with parents, teachers and administrators in the West Side.

Our research reflects only a small portion of the available information. Nonetheless, we do feel that a broad range of perspectives and experiences were collected. Parents assessed their own involvement in schools and/or activism (in terms of education) to be anywhere from “very inactive” to “extremely involved.” The information gathered from teachers also reflects a broad range of experiences and analyses of the situation, from those who did not perceive any changes, to those who are considering leaving the profession because of the changing demands of their job. Notes taken as the result of formal interviews were given to participants for verification and editing. Feedback on our analysis was received from participants and individuals who were not necessarily directly involved in our research during a presentation of our preliminary findings. Also, as noted above, we feel the “West Side” can not be considered in isolation. This opinion is supported by participants in the project. The information presented here should be considered alongside the work of our colleagues studying impacts on, and responses from, people associated with Inner City schools and Special Education.

A Picture Made Up of a Thousand Words

How parents, teachers and administrators tell their stories of the impact of funding and legislation changes is captured by words. Benjamin (1969:84) tells us “Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all

storytellers have drawn." Most of the information we collected was delivered through ethnographic interviews and oral accounts, where spoken words are captured by the devices of pen, paper, or tape recorder. However, there is an additional mediating technological vehicle – the Internet. We chose to follow how the story was told through the crossfire of e-mails and posted letters, newspaper articles, and speeches. What we found to be particularly meaningful about these messages was their explicit function of communicating to others. A content analysis revealed both expected and unexpected themes. What we were particularly interested in was the underlying metaphors, the play between emotions and politics, and the poetics of how individuals express themselves.

Sending out an SOS

It was clear in the analysis of this text that anger was the main emotional driver of the response to the initial struggle with the Liberal government. The government had recently announced that it would not be funding a teacher pay hike in the second and third year of the negotiated contract. This was perceived by parents and school boards to be an off-loading of expense to the local level which is legally responsible for submitting a balanced budget. Local school boards, generally acknowledged to be under-funded, now were forced to make staffing and program cuts or even school closures in order to make up the shortfall. "Hundreds of angry parents," "mad as hell," "upset and fearful," and "appalled" were some of the emotions referred to. But "angry," "angry," "angry" was the most prominent response. The expression of anger stemmed in part from a sense that a promise had been broken - the Liberal government had betrayed the public on an election promise that education would be left something vague like a "priority" and therefore untouched.

We were surprised to find that it was not frequently suggested that the public education was or would be in crisis. (Perhaps we have grown to expect this specific

term, because the system seemingly is in perpetual crisis. Perhaps teacher unions have co-opted this notion. Perhaps it has been in crisis for so long that it is a given reality . . .) Few references were made to the crisis state, but there was language about *saving* schools, programs, teachers, the public education system, hell, saving it all . . . The acronym SOS (Save Our Schools – a nonpartisan parent group) provides a good sense of the savior mentality.

Rhetoric meets Rhetoric

The defensive rhetoric from the Liberal government and supporters was utterly predictable, if slightly non-sensical. The government located the solution to educational issues to lie in "revitalizing the economy" and that "change is hard". They set up an image of "all stakeholders" and "being able to engage in entrepreneurial activities" and they indicated that "cuts put students first" and that "students were not shortchanged." Education minister Christy Clark was attributed with saying, "They (naysayers) can argue until they are in blue in the face that the education system is perfect and we can't do any better. I totally disagree." This language and argument is distressing, mainly because it is impossible to tell if this is a genuine misperception of the actual concerns of the electorate. The spectre of blue in the face of naysayers begs the question of whether there is anyone listening. This is a very painful separation of rhetoric from reality.

The angry, betrayed parents and their political supports have competing rhetorical claims, focusing on the moral high ground of putting kids first. "Kids are the centre," "only about the welfare of children," "really put children first," "our children are not expenses, they are our resources" are some of the phrases put forward. When kids are spoken about in this manner, the universality of all kids is emphasized. It is clear that there is an effort not "to pit one child against the other" but to "advocate" and "stand by"

all. “We want you to stand up for our children, every single one of them” and “these cuts will hurt all children,” use this mode of appeal.

Blood and Bones

A fascinating picture emerges of the damage done to the public education system. In the metaphoric language evident there may not have been crisis, but there is certainly a violent attack. The funding “cuts” even when somewhat benign (“Liberal cuts” or even “deeper cuts”) still bring to mind a bloody knife. These “cuts hurt all children,” are “massive cuts” “terrible cuts . . . our schools are already bleeding”. The weaponry becomes more sinister: “A systematic axing of support” and “axe all multicultural workers” results in a system “being gutted” a “planned dismemberment” and “evisceration of the public education system.” Enhancing this imagery of a body are references to fat and bone. These cuts strip budgets “to the bone” or “bare bones” and all “fat” has been long removed. This ‘languaging’ is very telling of the public perception of huge institutional budgets as being “fat” and therefore funding frivolous expenses. This makes us question our own assumptions about bodies, budgets and fat. It calls to mind the body/fat ratio as being continuously contested by such parties as the government, the public, the school board, teachers administrators, and unions. Why do we assume there is fat to begin with?

Power Structures, Voice, Vision, and Division

The last of the themes emerging from the content analysis provides a sense of the competing agendas writ through the private messages and public discourse. The government’s actions in the education arena seem to be understood as a “divide and conquer” strategy. There is a vague “war developing.” Explicitly the government is “seeking to divide” parents from teachers, their new boards create a “chasm” or “rift”

between these two groups. Whether or not this is a conscious strategy or the feared result is impossible to say. Government, through this talk, takes on a malicious "vindictive" presence. A morally (politically) pure, courageous group is needed to take on this force. Parent groups are accused of having invisible political affiliations, or being "in the pocket of" special interest groups. As the power shifts, splinter groups vie for it. To counteract this problematic flaw, other groups have "no ties" and are inclusive of those of "all stripes". Groups, associations, federations, committees all "speak for" and express "views." To what degree they are an "alternative" or "greater" voice is one issue, and to what degree they are "representative" is another. It would seem that voice/vision *particularly that of parents* is a contested quality. In contrast, it would seem that power is a finite resource that the government is in the position to "give." The newly created school planning councils are to "empower" parents. They take power away from one group, such as unions, and give it to another.

These on-line materials were revelatory and did inscribe the discourse of a reaction to change by those willing to be personally, accidentally or professionally articulate. As such they were an extremely useful data source. In contrast, the information collected through interviews with people, parents, teachers, and administrators reveals more about how individuals in *their roles* see change in the present moment.

Some Faces to the Story

Many parents I approached felt they had little to offer, that they "didn't really know." They presumed they lacked the expertise that they would find most helpful. Parents generally can give one or two very specific examples of change, but often seem at a loss to explain what effect this has in the big picture. Interviews were conducted at places that positioned the interviewer as a parent – a front room, a passenger seat of a

car, a soccer field. In these cases the interviews were heavily laced with detailed discussions of the unique characters of our children. After all, that's what we really wanted to talk about anyhow! This made us question what happens when one's child(ren) (and their experience, their educational history, their profile as learners) become(s) the tool of understanding a political, social, and philosophic event. In retrospect, information is heavily laced with details of specific kids. Names of teachers and principals also come to the fore. As parents we take whatever happens to these students (related to us intimately) via school personally. The struggle is restricted to one family, one outcome (helping this child or those in exactly the same circumstance).

The Unseen and Untold

However, the experience of change and the significance of change is not readily summarized and described by all players. As opposed to the articulate others featured through the Internet and the media, many in the parent group are distantly aware, partially informed, confused and uncertain and in a state of suspended hope and dread about the current state of affairs. As pointed out in class, the confusion and uncertainty over the location, significance, and direction of the change becomes evident. The extent of that change, whether visible or not in these interactions, was intriguing. It should be held as a cautionary note, that to a substantial number of parents, and potentially teachers and administrators, change is viewed through the impact of a particular student in one moment in time and is not a comprehensive view.

2+2=16: The Cumulative Effects of Educational Change

Our ethnographic research points to the degeneration of many of the services that the schools, at one time, were able to provide. What we have seen is a decrease in the amount of 'Learning Assistance Programs' (LAP) and 'English as a Second

Language' (ESL) programs that have either been drastically cut back or have been eliminated. Coupled with these factors are the added pressures on teachers to work with less, having their budgets for classes such as drama and the arts cut significantly. There are also issues of classroom size, safety and a decrease in the morale of teachers. In essence, we have seen that the cumulative effects of the cuts have resulted in added pressures for teachers, parents and the administration at all the schools that were involved in our research project.

Bill Bargeman, Vice-President of the Vancouver Secondary Teacher's Association (VSTA), was able to document this accumulation of stresses on teachers. What Bill states is that if one were to look at the statistics on paper, the cuts do not seem to appear as a major concern. There may appear a few more students per class, however, when considering the cuts to ESL and LAP programs, teacher's workloads increase significantly:

> Some schools have been hit harder than others. For example, Bing secondary was hit significantly hard. A social studies class has thirty-three students in the class, three of them with special needs and a reduction in special ed. A teacher has six other courses. If all the classes are up 2 students, marking load increases to potentially 20, with less time available for ESL and special needs, there is a heavy increase in workload and therefore heavy burnout. Last year there was a block of time for special needs, but this year the onus is on the teacher to set up a special ed appointment for the student. Last year the student was the one responsible for this. This year it is the teacher's responsibility. There is simply less time – the resource district teacher has less time and the teacher has much more responsibility.

Most of the classes at Bing Secondary have experienced an increase in class size. Class sizes in the Arts have all increased with Drama 8 at thirty-seven students, and Drama 9 at thirty-eight students (Bargeman, *personal communication* 2002). A Math 10 class had thirty-eight students at the beginning of 2002. A teacher that was interviewed from West Point Secondary said that he has sixty students in his music class. During the first class, a student had to go to the bathroom, and in order to exit the

classroom, had to crawl under a piano. The teacher consulted the administration who said that they were unable to do anything about the class size so the teacher went to the Save our Schools parent organization. They drafted a letter of protest regarding the class size and went to the media. An assistant was promptly hired although the teacher's workload is still excessive: "Basically there is now 1.5 teachers every second day for a class of sixty. It's become marginally better."

There has also been a decrease in other support services that schools used to provide. A Mount Pleasant School representative talked about when students have an altercation at school, a social worker is available to provide support to resolve the conflict. Students are taken out of the class so that they can solve their differences. With the help of a social worker, they can return to class feeling better about themselves and about the altercation. These services are experiencing similar cutbacks, the result being that students will not develop the skills to overcome personal conflicts in the future:

> It's one of the things that gets lost with education cuts. We're not just talking reading and writing, arithmetic here, we're talking about enabling kids to access those resources. If you have the cuts, what's going to happen later on? I'm very concerned about the ultimate – I think it undermines the fabric of society.

Safety first?

There are certainly safety concerns when there are sixty students confined to one classroom. A teacher participating in the project stated that there was hardly any room for students to move. When we conducted our interview with the teacher, we only noticed one exit to the class. As the teacher stated, "there is a fire/safety concern with the amount of students in the class at one time." The same teacher also stated that there was an increase in the number of students taking science labs, with students sharing equipment that had been previously, up until last year, available to each student.

The same issues are apparent in other disciplines. Bill Bargeman stated that there is a real concern with students that are taking courses such as 'workshop.' Traditionally, there was a limit of 24 students per class, as that was the number of workstations that were available. This year, for example, there are 27 students in a workshop at Templeton Secondary, with seven students that have special needs. This means that there are some students that will have to double up at workstations and the teacher will have less time to devote to each student. Moreover, the teacher will be limited in supervising the students to ensure a safe working environment.

What is perhaps more significant concerning the safety issue is the diversification of students from different years in the classroom. Up until last year, it was not unusual to have both Grades 9 and 10 in the same workshop class. However, the statistics that we observed at the VSTA showed that many workshop classes now have not only Grades 9 and 10 but will also consist of Grades 11 and 12. What is also of concern is the fact that the Worker's Compensation Board (WCB) does not cover the insurance for students, only the teacher.

"Choice and options mean less"

As the Liberal Government has framed the changes to funding as a step for greater choice and power within the school system, they have dissuaded the issue of funding, or lack thereof. However, what is often meant by greater choice and freedom, because of funding cuts and the cumulative effect that it has had on the schools themselves, is a curtailing of choices for students. Many secondary schools have forbidden students to take a full-time load as cutbacks have been made to certain disciplines, namely the arts. Instead they are guided toward peer tutoring where they meet with a councilor to discuss potential career choices. However, when this is

complete, students are often brought into other classes to act as tutors for students that are having difficulties with their studies.

There is a curtailing of other student classes such as the electives that students take in their final year of school. What were once "community services," where students would participate in community outreach programs, have now become 'opportunities' for students to answer the phone at the reception as every school has lost one secretary due to the cuts. This is what Bill Bargeman has called "bogus" courses. In fact, what Bargeman has heard from various schools is that students are being forbidden to take a full class load to opt out of their electives as there is now limited funding for such classes as drama, music, and the arts.

These cumulative effects of the cutbacks have had a dramatic effect on the extra-curricular activities that are often a major part of school-life for students, parents and teachers. Many teachers that we interviewed said they simply do not have the time to organize extra curricular activities. A parent from General Gordon Secondary stated that a two-day talent show that had been held every year for a number of years was not occurring this year and the band program has also been cut. The teacher that we interviewed from Point Grey Secondary has noted that there are "certainly fewer trips this year" than in previous years. He also stated that who he considers as some of the best teachers at Point Grey are simply not putting in the time for extra-curricular activities as in previous years: "As a teacher, when you're on, you're sweating blood. You want to give them quality time. We simply have less time to give" (2002).

Missing: Teacher Morale

What we heard from both parents and teachers is how demoralized teachers have been feeling over the last year and a half. One parent stated that there is a "general *demoralized* staff" at General Gordon Secondary. The teacher from Point Grey

Secondary found it very difficult to be constantly vilified by the government and the media. This teacher had felt great anger and frustration over the denigration of the profession. Another parent felt that with all the changes and the uncertainty of the future, teachers felt "lost." Bill Bargeman stated that by nature, teachers are accommodating and compliant, but fears that everything will "crash" in the spring: "teachers can simply not keep taking the brunt of all of these changes, especially when they don't know where and when it will end." Another teacher said that the level of morale would be clearer to gauge at the mid-term break: "it certainly bottomed out last year during the months of May and June."

It's Better to Burn Out than to Fade Away

Teacher burn out appears to be an acute problem facing public education. A teacher with eleven years experience told us, "I want out." Facing classes of 60 students, he felt the stresses of teaching were outweighing the benefits. Parents reported seeing top caliber teachers and principals take early retirement or resign from the profession due to work-related stress. In many cases, this stress was characterized as the result of larger class sizes, less professional support in the forms of aids, social workers, ESL providers, etc., increased work loads, and a lack of agency in combating changes.

Most participating parents were quick to note their support of their children's teachers, citing the preparation of luncheons, cookies or "appreciation days" during the teacher Job Action. As teachers are often the most tangible expression of public education, the perceived devaluation of teachers by society appears to be another signal to participants of the overall breakdown of the public education system.

"Public education is not about you or I, it is about Us."

A portion of the participants we talked with, particularly parents and people associated with policy, felt strongly that the values inherent in the *idea* of public education were being eroded. Central to public education was its function of reproducing society; and more specifically, reproducing a society based on values of equality, universalism, and community. One parent stated, “we’re not just talking reading, writing and arithmetic here”: in her opinion, students should learn skills such as conflict resolution, how to access resources, to value hard work, and develop moral and ethical systems. She would prefer to see government and society value education over financial profit; her fear is that students are being taught to value monetary capital as the sole measure of success.

The preference given to individual success over communal improvement was seen as a trend happening throughout our society. The emphasis put on the individual rather than the collective was seen to undermine the basis of public education. As one person stated, “Public education is not about you or I, it is about Us.” Participants saw a need to rectify the shift away from the collective towards the individual in public education (and other social institutions) to ensure the continuation of our society. Participants questioned the future of society if its members were students who felt neglected by the system, marginalized by public education, unable to read, write and do arithmetic, problem solve, cope with anger, overcome disabilities, excel in their strengths, be excited about learning or work with others. By not addressing these issues, by not recognizing the fundamentals of equal and universal access, we are, in the words of one participant, “forfeiting on the promise of Canadian public schooling.”

Just a Service We Pay For

The privatization of education was seen by some participants to be a signal that profit is being given preference in our society over education. Of even more concern to

participants was the direct challenge private education presents to the values of equity and universality endorsed by public education. Private education was not seen as the only agent in producing differences in educational opportunities and services. As funding for education decreases and at the same time becomes decentralized, participants were highly cognizant of the differences in abilities of parents to fundraise in their schools. Fund-raising makes available a host of supplies and services: computer hardware for core curriculum courses, outdoor education programmes, art supplies, textbooks, supplementing field trip fees for families unable to meet these costs, providing breakfast for students (and parents as was the case in an Inner City school), library books, special programmes such as the Point Grey Mini School, paper, musical instruments, etc.

One parent noted her obligation to sell wrapping paper as a fundraiser for two different schools and her concern that there are parents who will not be able to sell the required number of rolls of $11, $14, or $18 wrapping paper. Disparities in fund raising abilities within the Vancouver School District are feared to lead to differences in educational services being offered within schools in the Vancouver School Board. As one participant noted:

> The issue being faced is whether we're selling wrapping paper to families to purchase an education for our students, and therefore the other schools who don't have parents with the ability or time to flog paper or chocolates will end up with their kids having an inferior educational experience.

Insufficient funding for public schooling – and the resulting decrease in services - was cited by many as a key determinant in parents sending their children to private school. To maintain services within the schools, parents have been volunteering their time, money and energy, sometimes at their own expense (one family spoke of going into overdraft to be able to purchase the fundraiser item being sold at the child's school). Yet there was also concern that despite well-intentioned efforts, the acceptance of

parents to fundraise, provide supplies, extra-curricular programs, and services such as libraries or tutoring, may actually reduce the perceived need for educational funding. One parent told us:

> We are literally turning our lives over to the schools, sometimes in order to help them run well. But in doing so we may actually be undermining the support for public education in our society, taking the responsibility from the larger community and tax payers, and causing a disparity between what kids can get in one part of the city versus another. In other words, we wonder whether we are actually harming by trying to help.

As we have noted, the visible affects of the cuts to education funding are not always readily visible to parents and the public; would these affects be more visible if it were not for the extended efforts of teachers and parent volunteers to maintain a level of public education that approximates peoples' perceptions of what public education should be? The teacher's Job Action in 2001 made cuts to educational services highly visible, receiving a strong response from parents and the public. What would be the response if teachers took Job Action, and parents took Volunteer Action?

<u>We Need More Genuine Public Discussion… If we end Up in Certain Circumstances, it Should Not be by Default.</u>

For many people, participating in this research was a form of activism, an opportunity to engage in discussion, share opinions, or make suggestions for change. At the heart of this was a desire for there to be dialogue between politicians, policy makers, voters, tax payers, parents, and teachers. A primary concern expressed by one politically active parent was their desire for politicians, and particularly the Minster of Education, to acknowledge the thousands of letters that have been sent from across the province addressing the issue of funding cuts.

For some people, the desire for on-going, recurring conversation took this very tangible form of discussion between specific individuals. At the same time, other

participants seemed to place this “conversation” as a broader social phenomenon. Having the actual discussion was the first step, but this needed to be followed up by a critical reading of the deeper implications of education cuts, the role of education in our society, and the expectations we have of public education. These elements, as they were perceived, needed to be considered in the broader scope of social policy, and societal values.

Participants often criticized the cuts to education, yet often the sentiments expressed a deeper dissatisfaction with the cultural or social devaluation of education, which manifested itself as a monetary devaluation in the form of funding cuts. One participant stated “Education needs to be understood as social policy – it is not something you merely consume, like buying a new car, or getting a gym membership – it is not a commodity.” Similar sentiments were shared by other participants. One woman noted her desire to shift the way our society looks at education from “some service we have to pay for to looking at what we really want from it, and what it means to the future of our society.” One participant expressed the bleak outlook that “Perhaps as a society we do not like kids very much.” This extension of the devaluation of education to the devaluation of youth in our society demonstrates the complexities of the situation. It appears the decrease in funding, while harmful, is not necessarily the greatest problem; the underlying devaluation of education *as an ideal, as a reflection of our values* may be at the heart of these participants’ concerns.

Paradoxically, a revision of social attitudes and values is both the cause and solution of problems facing the public education system. One participant advised us that, whereas currently there is a movement away from the collective towards the individual, a return to the collective is necessary for the continuation and flourishing of public education. Replenishing funding is not the sole change needed to reclaim public education, we were told. Changes need to occur on a broader level in support of

education: children need to be well fed and healthy, families need to be above the poverty line, parents need to be able to leave work to go to their child's school without penalty.

Conclusion

This ethnographic research project has helped us recognize the myriad of social relationships that act and interact within any sphere of ethnographic research. The stories, interpretations, histories, metaphors and understandings from a diversity of actors constitute the very basis of an anthropological process of interpolation and analysis. What we have realized, in working together as a group of three students, is that we are able to cover more ground, to cross-reference the data, and to engage in dialogue to explore the deeper meanings of the stories that we have heard.

Our realizations from this project also acknowledge the fact that the web of relationships – societal, political, educational, and other – is one of complexity. We also realize that our own views and interpretations on the present situation of the Vancouver school system will have impacted our understanding of the data and, therefore, the outcome of the research paper. However, throughout this lengthy process of data collection and analysis, we were constantly engaged in a proverbial tug-of-war to debate and comprehend each other's opinions of the findings. There was a constant comparing and contrasting of texts, stories, and our lived experience.

Therefore, our story of the affects of funding cuts to public education is, as stated in the introduction to this paper, a clay vessel replete with many handprints. These handprints contain the stories of our interview subjects and ourselves as shared authors of this vessel. Our story is one of many stories that is being told. Our objectives have been to portray the multiplicity of stories in a concise, accurate and articulate manner to further understand the dichotomies involved within the context of the research area.

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