

THE ALBERTA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

ATA Magazine

Fils

**francophones
dans le tissu
albertain**

**Francophone
threads in
Alberta's fabric**

WELLNESS

Rebalancing Indigenous wellness
through spirit, land and story

PAGE 12

IN PROFILE

Path to the classroom one of
discovery for Chestermere teacher

PAGE 54

MOST MEMORABLE LESSON

The legend of Sloof Lirpa spans
generations

PAGE 60

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Feature

20

Fils francophones dans le tissu albertain

Francophone threads in Alberta's fabric



Winter 2026 / Vol. 106/No.2

Feature

- 20** Fils francophones dans le tissu albertain
Francophone threads in Alberta's fabric

Outlook

- 4** Letters
5 From the President
Mot du président
7 Then and Now
8 Looking Abroad
10 Unsung Hero

Bulletin Board

- 3** Editor's Notebook
Note de la rédactrice
12 Wellness
14 Technology
16 Diversity
38 Research Insights
54 In Profile

Learning Commons

- 42** From the Bookshelves
44 Kid Lit
47 In Focus
En point de mire

Teacher to Teacher

- 51** Who's Out There
58 In my Humble Opinion
60 Most Memorable Lesson



UNSUNG HERO

Kerri Mckinnon: Cheerleader for inclusive education



RESEARCH INSIGHTS

Curriculum and assessment is contested ground in Alberta



IN MY HUMBLE OPINION

Strategies for connecting with quieter students

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[Alysée Thibault graduated from École Maurice-Lavallée in 2023 and is now pursuing studies in biomedical sciences at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières.](#)

KENNY M'PINDOU | p.33



Kenny M'Pindou est un athlète de bobsleigh de calibre national et le fondateur de l'Alliance des jeunes bègues de l'Alberta.

[Kenny M'Pindou is a national-level bobsleigh athlete and the founder of the Alliance of Young Stutterers of Alberta.](#)

KEVIN M'PINDOU | p.33



Kevin M'Pindou a grandi à Edmonton et a fréquenté, de la troisième à la douzième année, des écoles francophones. Il travaille aujourd'hui au Texas.

[Kevin M'Pindou grew up in Edmonton and spent Grades 3 to 12 in francophone schools. He now works in Texas.](#)

NANCY ROY | pp.34 and 35



Au cours d'une carrière de 29 ans, Nancy Roy a œuvré à titre de directrice d'école, de conseillère pédagogique, d'accompagnatrice pédagogique, d'enseignante et d'orthopédagogue. Elle est maintenant directrice de l'école Notre-Dame à Edmonton.

[During her 29-year career, Nancy Roy has been a school principal, student support consultant, learning coach, teacher and special education specialist. She is currently the principal of École Notre-Dame in Edmonton.](#)



JAMES MAY | pp.54–56



Flowers and hot dogs have their appeal, but James May likes to photograph people and places. A graduate of the professional photography program at Victoria's Western Academy, James lives in Calgary with his wife and son.

The Alberta Teachers' Association respectfully acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 4, 6, 7, 8 and 10 territories, the travelling routes, gathering places and meeting grounds for Indigenous Peoples whose histories, languages, cultures and traditions continue to influence our vibrant community. We are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us. We recognize the land as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on or are visiting.

Monique Gravel

Guest editor, *ATA Magazine*
Rédactrice en chef invitée de
l'*ATA Magazine*


PHOTO BY BIANCA HO

A time-tested fabric

THE COLLECTIVE FABRIC OF ALBERTA society extends to every corner of the province, woven together by our two official languages. While one became dominant, the other, the francophone thread, found itself in the minority, fighting for its social, cultural, economic and educational survival. This francophone thread has become intertwined with the deepest layers of the fabric, which has reinforced its strength and importance. Over time, it has been enriched by a flourishing cultural diversity that provides a source of dynamism and vitality.

Today, more than 1,000 teachers and school leaders dedicated to the education of 10,000 students across 49 francophone schools are key to this richness. The Campus Saint-Jean, ACFA, ATA and some 50 community organizations work alongside them to actively support this vitality, making them an essential collective force.

Despite these advances, historical underfunding and accessibility challenges are reminders of the constant effort required to guarantee that the Charter right to substantively equivalent programs and services is upheld. These issues demonstrate the perseverance of those who, day in and day out, defend the place of French in our education system. Francophone education is an enduring symbol of adaptation and continuity. It offers invaluable benefits, allowing a rich cultural heritage to be passed on, promoting lasting additive bilingualism and supporting identity-building among the younger generations.


In this issue of the *ATA Magazine*, we are proud to dedicate our main feature to francophone education in Alberta, a sector with unwavering resilience and exemplary determination as its underpinnings. I hope that this feature will inform, inspire and remind you of the importance of your role. As teachers and school leaders, you are the crafters of this precious fabric. Your daily contributions, through which you seek to promote the French language and build francophone identity and community, are essential to ensure the longevity of this shared family and to guarantee that its thread continues to be woven into our collective future. 

Un tissu éprouvé au fil du temps

LE TISSU COLLECTIF DE NOTRE SOCIÉTÉ albertaine s'étend vers tous les coins de la province, tissé par nos deux langues officielles. Tandis que l'une est devenue dominante, l'autre, le fil francophone, s'est retrouvé en position minoritaire, luttant pour sa pérennité sociale, culturelle, économique et éducative. Ce fil francophone s'est intégré aux couches profondes du tissu, renforçant sa solidité et son importance. Avec le temps, il s'est enrichi grâce à une diversité culturelle florissante, porteuse de dynamisme et de vitalité.

Aujourd'hui, plus de 1 000 enseignants et leaders scolaires dévoués à l'éducation de 10 000 élèves répartis dans 49 écoles francophones contribuent à cette richesse. À leurs côtés, le Campus Saint-Jean, l'ACFA, l'ATA et une cinquantaine d'organismes communautaires soutiennent activement cette vitalité et représentent une force collective essentielle.

Malgré les avancées, le sous-financement historique et les défis d'accessibilité rappellent l'effort constant nécessaire pour faire respecter le droit à l'égalité réelle des programmes et services prévu par la Charte. Ces enjeux témoignent de la persévérance des intervenants qui, jour après jour, défendent la place du français dans notre système d'éducation. L'éducation francophone est un symbole d'adaptation et de continuité. Elle offre des avantages inestimables : la transmission d'un riche héritage culturel, le développement d'un bilinguisme additif durable et la construction identitaire des jeunes générations.

L'ATA est fière de vous présenter ce numéro thématique de l'*ATA Magazine* consacré à l'éducation francophone en Alberta, un secteur porté par une résilience inébranlable et une détermination exemplaire. Je souhaite que ce numéro vous renseigne, vous inspire et vous rappelle l'importance de votre rôle. En tant qu'enseignants et leaders scolaires, vous êtes les artisans de ce précieux tissu. Vos contributions quotidiennes, qui visent à mettre en valeur le français et à développer l'identité et la communauté francophones, sont essentielles pour assurer la pérennité de cette grande famille et pour que ce fil continue de tisser notre avenir collectif. 

Letters

We want your feedback

Have thoughts on what you liked or didn't like?

Letters to the editor for possible publication can be emailed to

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR — GUIDELINES

Word limit: 300

Please include

- your first and last name,
- basic information about your teaching assignment (i.e. school, grade, subject).

All letters are subject to editing for length, clarity, punctuation, spelling and grammar.

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PHOTO BY ERIN SOLANO



Climate change content sparks student curiosity

I'm happy to share that I used the information contained in the climate change feature on pages 18 to 28 of the fall 2025 issue of the *ATA Magazine* in my Grade 6 classroom. I had the students read all the sections and use sticky notes to write down what they wondered or had questions about, interesting information, and any further research they would like to do.

These were the questions we answered.

- How do you feel about climate change? What questions do you have? Is there an area you are most interested in?
- What project could you do? What steps do you have to take? What research do you have to do first? How is it connected to our school?
- What impact will it have? What change are you hoping to make? How will you educate others?

We have just started the research pieces, and students are researching how changing sea levels are affecting aquatic life, how we can reduce emissions, how we can continue water conservation even after city water-use restrictions are lifted.

— **Antonia Kousouris,**
Grade 6 Learning Leader, Hillhurst School,
Calgary

Great work

Although I am neither a teacher nor a parent, I enjoyed several stories in the recent edition of the online *ATA Magazine*, such as the profiles of pioneer teacher Lillian Osborne, and the still-working Ben Galeski, who obviously was born to be a teacher. I also appreciated the scope of coverage and resources devoted to climate change.

Two years ago, I went with a friend down to a community hall in the foothills west of Fort Macleod to listen to 50 farmers and ranchers talk about water. At one point in the evening, I stuck up my hand and asked a rancher at the front of the room if he had noticed any impacts from climate change. He said, "Our wets are getting wetter, and our dries are getting drier."

We are ill-served by the wilful ignorance of our provincial government, and I applaud the ATA for teaching teachers that it's still important and possible to discuss climate change in the classroom.

— **Roger Gagne,**
Calgary

MISSED THE FALL ISSUE?

Catch the digital version here: <https://abteach.cc/MagazineFall2025>.





PHOTO BY RYAN PARKER

FROM THE PRESIDENT MOT DU PRÉSIDENT

Jason Schilling


President, ATA
Président de l'ATA

Vibrant curriculum creates a richer future

WHEN I TAUGHT high school drama, one of my favourite things was seeing students act out life through another's perspective. The act of creating characters for the stage, whether from a text or from improvisation, helps us shape our own perspective. I would tell my student actors that it was their job to create a character that is believable, and that this takes work. Actors need to read, research, observe and develop character attributes that exist beyond the page, such as the way the character walks, talks and interacts with the world.

When developing characters, student actors will often use what they are learning in school as a reference. This is why it is important for students to have a curriculum that is dynamic and vibrant. One of the biggest criticisms of the most recent updates to the Alberta curriculum is that it is too content heavy, too rooted in traditional ideas and lacking the creativity students will need once they graduate. Another criticism is that it also lacks authenticity when representing Indigenous and francophone cultures, histories and ways of knowing.

Given a curriculum that shortchanges the histories, stories, perspectives and experiences of Alberta's diverse people, students will not be able to understand and empathize with the many cultures that make up the fabric of our modern province.


Seeing ourselves in the lessons we learn and the people who teach us is vital. It helps create a solid understanding of the past along with a vision for the future. When we honour every story, we give young people the tools to imagine, empathize and create a richer future for all of us. If we want students to understand their world and each other, we must provide a curriculum that expands their world rather than narrowing it. 

Un curriculum vivant pour un avenir plus riche

LORSQUE J'ENSEIGNAIS l'art dramatique au secondaire, l'un de mes plus grands plaisirs était de voir les élèves jouer des scènes de la vie du point de vue d'autrui. La création de personnages pour la scène, que ce soit à partir d'un texte ou dans le cadre d'une improvisation, nous aide à mieux cerner notre propre perspective. Je disais à mes élèves qu'en tant qu'interprètes, ils se devaient de créer un personnage crédible, et que cela demande du travail. Les comédiens doivent lire, faire des recherches, effectuer des observations et développer les caractéristiques d'un personnage qui existent en marge du texte, notamment la façon dont le personnage marche, parle et interagit avec le monde.

Lorsqu'ils développent leurs personnages à titre d'interprètes, les élèves puisent souvent dans ce qu'ils apprennent à l'école. Voilà pourquoi il est important que les élèves bénéficient d'un curriculum dynamique et vivant. L'une des principales critiques formulées à propos du curriculum de l'Alberta récemment mis à jour est qu'il est trop chargé, trop axé sur les idées traditionnelles et qu'il ne favorise pas suffisamment la créativité dont les élèves auront besoin une fois diplômés. On en a également critiqué le manque d'authenticité dans la représentation des cultures, des histoires et des systèmes de connaissances autochtones et francophones.

Étant donné que le curriculum n'accorde pas aux histoires, aux récits, aux perspectives et aux expériences des différents peuples de l'Alberta la place qu'ils méritent, les élèves ne seront pas en mesure de comprendre les nombreuses cultures qui composent le tissu de notre province à l'heure actuelle, ni de faire preuve d'empathie à leur égard.

Il est essentiel que nous puissions nous reconnaître dans les leçons qui nous sont enseignées et dans les personnes qui nous enseignent. Cela nous aide à acquérir une solide compréhension du passé et à développer une vision pour l'avenir. Quand nous reconnaissons la valeur de chaque histoire, nous donnons aux jeunes les moyens d'imaginer, de faire preuve d'empathie et de créer un avenir plus riche pour nous tous. Si nous voulons que les élèves comprennent leur monde et les autres, nous devons leur proposer un curriculum grâce auquel leurs horizons s'élargissent au lieu de se rétrécir. 



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Archival issues of the **ATA Magazine** can be just as relevant now as they were when originally published, or they can remind us how far we've come. You decide.

Check out these items from the Spring 1996 issue of the **ATA Magazine**, which looked at the value of public education and the meaning of change in education.

To change, or not to change?

30 YEARS AGO

“

[W]hen we read the words “**educational change**,” we are **actually reading an oxymoron**. There is no such thing as educational change—at least in a philosophic sense. What we do when we educate is help our youth rediscover humanity.

— Dale Wallace,
“*Education is Art: Education is based on the principles of democracy and humanism*”

“

Change the curriculum if necessary. Change the resources, the requirement for advancement, the physical surroundings and the amenities. Change, if possible, the auxiliary activities that steal precious time. But do not change the teacher in the classroom. The teacher is the ruler in the kingdom of fantasy, fairy tales and dreams-come-true, and the creator of miracles.

Yet even makers of miracles have needs, and one of the most important of these is respect. Let us never forget to respect our teachers.

— Kathy Paterson,
“*Wizards of Wisdom: The teacher is the key to the enchanting world of the classroom*”



In Praise of Teachers

“

Early in my efforts to get teachers and schools involved in promoting public education, I learned that what we need to do is add in rather than add on. What I mean is teachers cannot add more to an already busy workload and continue to be effective in their job instructing students. What can be done is take advantage of the positive events that happen in school every day, and look for opportunities to add in a little promotion of these successes.

— Donna Swiniarski,
“*The Public Education Action Centre Works!*”



Women Lead for Learning

Why gender balance in educational leadership matters

Lisa Everitt

Executive Staff Officer, ATA

SINCE ITS FOUNDING IN 1945, the United Nations has worked to promote security, cooperation and human development across the globe. One of the UN's important contributions is the 2015 adoption of 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), which set out a universal framework for peace and prosperity. Each year, progress toward these goals is documented through a series of reports. Among them is *Women Lead for Learning*, a 2025 publication of UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring series, funded by a group of governments, multilateral

agencies and private foundations, including the Government of Canada. The report focuses on SDG 4—Quality Education—and highlights a striking reality: although women make up the majority of the world's teachers, they remain significantly underrepresented in educational leadership.

The report opens with an arresting statistic. Globally, there is a 20-percentage-point gender gap in school leadership positions (UNESCO 2025, 5). This gap persists across diverse contexts, from low-income nations to the

world's wealthiest education systems, and remains true even in countries where girls' access to education has improved. The findings underscore a critical point: gender parity in classrooms does not automatically translate to gender parity in leadership.

UNEVEN GLOBAL PATTERNS

The broader educational landscape helps explain these disparities. While boys and girls now enrol in primary education at similar rates worldwide, regional trends

differ. In eastern and southeastern Asia, Europe and North America, more boys than girls are out of school, signalling a shift in long-standing patterns of gender disadvantage. In contrast, in northern Africa, western Asia, Oceania and sub-Saharan Africa, girls are more likely to be excluded from schooling, though their participation is improving steadily. Tertiary education presents its own contradictions. Enrolment is rising across the globe, yet in low-income countries, young women remain significantly underrepresented, with only 77 women enrolled for every 100 men. In high-income countries, the trend reverses, with women outnumbering men in university participation, even as men continue to dominate vocational training pathways.

These differences shape how young people see themselves and what futures they imagine. As the report notes, gender disparities in education extend into “how boys and girls learn and imagine their futures” (UNESCO 2025, 18). Because leadership pipelines emerge from educational and occupational pathways, early patterns of participation can have long-term consequences for who goes on to lead schools, systems and ministries.

BARRIERS THAT BEGIN EARLY

A central message of *Women Lead for Learning* is that gender gaps in leadership rarely stem from a single cause. Instead, they reflect a web of social norms, organizational practices and life circumstances that accumulate over time. Research shows that children internalize gendered expectations at a very young age. As early as six, they begin associating leadership with traits typically coded as masculine, such as assertiveness or strategic decisiveness. These implicit assumptions shape how individuals view themselves, how others perceive their potential and how leadership qualities are evaluated in professional settings.

UNESCO’s analysis echoes the work of Alice Eagly and Linda Carli (2007), who argue that women face a “labyrinth” rather than a single barrier. Despite being as ambitious as their male peers, women are less likely to be encouraged

into leadership roles, more likely to be evaluated harshly for displaying assertive leadership behaviours and more likely to take on significant caregiving responsibilities outside of work. These factors not only delay women’s entry into leadership roles but also shorten the time they have to ascend to more senior levels. According to the report, “empirical evidence consistently shows that women enter education leadership roles later than men,” which results in fewer opportunities to advance to system-level leadership before retirement (UNESCO 2025, 43).

WHY WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP MATTERS

Beyond the clear issue of fairness, the report outlines compelling reasons to diversify leadership. When women are visible in leadership roles, it challenges entrenched assumptions about who leads and why. Girls see possibilities they may not have imagined, and boys witness models of leadership that expand their understanding of authority and competence.

Moreover, women’s leadership contributes substantively to how education systems function. Research cited in the report highlights that women leaders often prioritize instruction, professional collaboration, curriculum development and the cultivation of positive school cultures. At the system level, women in senior roles have been “found to influence national reforms, including funding decisions, teacher recruitment strategies, inclusive policy development, and child-friendly disciplinary practices” (UNESCO 2025, 35). In other words, increasing the representation of women in leadership strengthens not only equity but also the quality and responsiveness of education systems themselves.

BUILDING A MORE EQUITABLE FUTURE

To address these systemic challenges, UNESCO recommends a trio of solutions that are interconnected and should be implemented concurrently. First, education systems need better data. Without knowing where women fall off the leadership ladder, policymakers cannot target their efforts effectively. The “broken rung” phenomenon—the point early in a career where women are disproportionately excluded from advancement—must be identified before it can be addressed.

Second, systems must actively remove structural barriers. This includes improving recruitment and promotion practices, offering gender-bias training for hiring panels, and setting goals or targets to ensure women are considered equitably for leadership roles. Culture change is essential: women need to work in environments that not only welcome their contributions but also recognize their leadership potential.

Finally, women must be supported throughout their leadership journeys. Mentorship, coaching, peer networks and leadership development programs all contribute to a robust pipeline of future leaders. Providing these supports early and consistently increases the likelihood that women will pursue and succeed in leadership pathways. ^{ATA}

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Kerri Mckinnon: Cheerleader for inclusive education

Lindsay Yakimyshyn

Associate Editor, ATA Magazine

WHEN A STUDENT TURNED around and said “no” for the first time, Kerri Mckinnon and her colleagues cheered. It wasn’t a moment of defiance from him—it was a milestone—the first time the mostly nonverbal student had ever spoken to them. For Mckinnon, moments like this represent the heart of inclusive education: celebrating each student’s progress, whatever form it takes.

Mckinnon has been invested in inclusive learning practices since she began her teaching career in Athabasca more than two decades ago. Early on, she saw the diverse and complex needs in her classes and wanted to do whatever she could to ensure that each student had the best chance of success.

“I just always had that open-door policy, to be there for students and offer support if they needed that extra help,” she said. “My goal was always to figure out how we could get where we need to be, together.”


The daughter of two teachers, Mckinnon had sometimes resisted joining the teaching profession, but was drawn to education-related roles with organizations such as the Glenrose Hospital and the Royal Alberta Museum. Even more so, in each role she took on, Mckinnon found herself wanting to reach out to children and youth who required just a bit more support, patience and empathy.

“I was clearly heading toward teaching with every job I took, so I thought I might as well reroute back to where I’m meant to be,” Mckinnon said.

Now in her third year as education services coordinator with Wolf Creek Public Schools, Mckinnon leads division-wide professional development and offers in-school residencies to share inclusive education strategies and build confidence in school teams working to support complex needs.

“I always encourage teachers to lean into the challenges, as those tough moments or the reflections after are some of the greatest learning opportunities.”

Mckinnon believes that embracing the muddiness of inclusive education can lead to finding new ways to help students reach their next milestone, whether that is understanding a new math concept or verbalizing “no” for the first time.

“It’s not going to look the same for every student,” Mckinnon said, “Teaching in this context is about being aware of where the student is and figuring out how to meet them there.” 

► **Got an idea?** *Unsung Hero* is a space dedicated to honouring ATA members past and present who have had notable achievements, either in the ATA or in their private lives.

If you know of a member whom you feel should be recognized, please contact section editor Lindsay Yakimyshyn at lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.

Kerri Mckinnon

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educational improvement

ILLUSTRATION BY ANDIE BORBEVY



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Carrying our shawls

Rebalancing Indigenous wellness through spirit, land and story

Melissa Bird

Former Executive Staff Officer,
Indigenous Education, ATA

INDIGENOUS WELLNESS, FROM my perspective as ts'ékui (a Dene woman) from Tthebatthie Dénésuhiné Nation (formerly known as Smith's Landing First Nation) in Treaty 8 territory, cannot be easily defined or generalized. In fact, pairing "Indigenous" with "wellness" in a single term can feel limiting, as it risks simplifying something deeply personal, complex and relational.

Having been born and raised in amiskwaciwâskahikan (nêhiyawêwin/Cree—Edmonton) and currently residing in Treaty 6 territory, my understanding of wellness has evolved through my lived and learned experiences—professionally, personally and spiritually. For me, wellness is not something separate from my relationships to land, family, community or spirit. My wellness is bound up with my children, ancestors and the generations yet to come. It includes the lands I live on, the stories I carry and the truths I continue to uncover.

I've come to realize that wellness includes protecting and nurturing my spirit,

especially as I navigate colonial systems, microaggressions and the invisible labour of constantly explaining my existence and values in spaces not designed for Indigenous Peoples and Knowledges. Over time, I noticed my spirit had been slowly worn down. The realization came not just from professional burnout or advocacy fatigue but from deeper disconnection. It became clear to me that I needed to protect my spirit and intentionally rebalance my being.

During a graduate studies class, Elder Calvin Cardinal (Saddle Lake Cree Nation) said that instead of a "healing journey," we might think about "rebalancing," a continual tending to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual parts of ourselves. This teaching continues to resonate with me. It affirms what I have felt intuitively: that I had not been holding enough space for rebalancing.

One way I have reconnected is through fancy shawl powwow dancing. Each time I put on my shawl—its designs, colours and movement—my spirit is reflected, uplifted and protected. The beat

of the drum and melody of the songs are much more than music or an auditory experience; they are the heartbeat of Mother Earth, a return to the rhythms I first knew in my mother's womb. It renews and (re) awakens my dancing spirit. For me, dancing is not only ceremony—it is medicine.

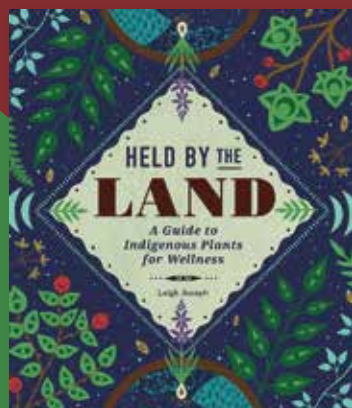
Even when I'm not dancing, I carry the shawl with me. I imagine it across my back as a symbol of strength, identity and presence. I try to live in ways that reflect what I've learned in the powwow circle—preparing, sewing, beading and caring for all aspects of my being.

For me, Indigenous wellness includes ceremony, land, movement and kinship. While therapy and medicine have their place in my journey, I know that they are not enough on their own. What sustains me is spirit work—connecting to who I am, where I come from and the responsibilities I carry. Wellness, for me, is an act of resistance, renewal and deep relationality. ^{ATA}

POINT OF REFLECTION:

What is your “shawl”? What do you carry that protects and reflects who you are?

Recommended resource



Held by the Land: A Guide to Indigenous Plants for Wellness

Leigh Joseph

Available through the ATA library.



Have you ever considered using a life coach?

Shelley Svidal

Staff Writer, ATA Magazine

A LIFE COACH IS A TRAINED professional who works with individuals to support personal growth, clarify goals, and navigate transitions or challenges. Their role is to help you gain a better understanding of what you want in life—in your career, relationships, health or personal development—then guide you in taking practical, forward-focused steps to get there.

Unlike therapists, who often address past trauma or mental health conditions, life coaches concentrate on the present and future. They don't diagnose or treat psychological disorders; instead, they focus on helping build self-awareness, setting achievable goals, and developing the mindset and habits needed to succeed.

WHAT CAN A LIFE COACH DO FOR YOU?

Clarify your vision: If you're feeling uncertain or stuck, a coach can help you define what matters most and what direction to take.

Create a plan: Coaches assist in breaking big goals into smaller, actionable steps.

Build accountability: Regular check-ins help you stay on track and follow through with your commitments.

Strengthen confidence: Through support and honest feedback, a coach can help you overcome self-doubt and trust your own decision making.

Improve balance: Coaches often work with clients to manage time more effectively and align their daily routines with their long-term goals.

Encourage growth: Whether you're trying to build better habits, take on a new role or navigate a major change, a coach provides the structure and motivation to keep moving forward.

IS A LIFE COACH RIGHT FOR YOU?

You might benefit from a life coach if you

- feel unsure about your next step or need help setting priorities;
- are motivated but struggle to stay focused or organized;
- want to make a change but feel overwhelmed by where to begin; and/or
- value external support and clear, action-oriented guidance. ^{ATA}

This article was drafted with the assistance of an artificial intelligence language model and reviewed and edited by the author.



CLEAR Thinking

A framework for AI use

Soroush Sabbaghan

Associate Professor, GenAI Educational Leader
in Residence, Werklund School of Education,
University of Calgary

This article draws on a workshop available for teachers and school divisions on evaluating AI tools with the CLEAR framework. For more information, contact the author at ssabbagh@ucalgary.ca

"By thinking through CLEAR, educators can cut through the hype, spot the risks and make sure AI enhances learning instead of undermining it."

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS ARRIVING in K-12 classrooms faster than most of us expected. Some tools promise efficiency, others creativity, but the question for teachers is always the same: Does this tool actually support my students' learning?

The CLEAR framework offers five principles to help teachers pause and reflect before adopting any AI tool: context, literacy, equity, agency and responsibility. It isn't a checklist for compliance; it's a set of guiding questions. By thinking through CLEAR, educators can cut through the hype, spot the risks and make sure AI enhances learning instead of undermining it.

Using the CLEAR Framework



CONTEXT

AI tools don't land in a vacuum. They enter classrooms shaped by curriculum, developmental stages and community values. What feels like innovation in a Grade 11 history course could feel overwhelming in Grade 3 math. Ask: Does this tool truly fit the subject I teach, the learners in front of me and the outcomes I'm responsible for? Or am I bending my teaching to fit the tool? When context is ignored, AI can distract rather than enhance learning.



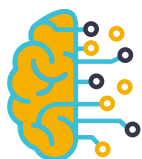
LITERACY

AI literacy is not about clever prompting; it's about critical use. Students need to know how AI works, when to lean on it and when to set it aside. Teachers, too, need that literacy to guide safe, thoughtful use. Ask: Does this tool help me and my students understand bias, limits and blind spots? Does it give opportunities to critique outputs and test alternatives? Without literacy, tools become shortcuts. With literacy, they become a way to teach discernment.



EQUITY

Equity is not only about who can access AI but also about who can use it well. A tool might be available to all students yet still create divides if only some know how to turn outputs into deeper learning. Ask: Does this tool give every student, not just the most digitally fluent, the chance to use AI to think critically, ask better questions and refine their own reasoning? If equity isn't built in, innovation risks becoming exclusion.



AGENCY


AI can either silence student voices or amplify them. If assignments stop at "what the AI said," students' reasoning disappears. But if tasks require them to critique, adapt and justify AI outputs, agency is protected. Ask: If students use this tool, what part of the work still belongs uniquely to them? How do I design assignments so they must make choices, explain decisions and defend their learning? Agency doesn't happen by accident. It must be designed into every task.



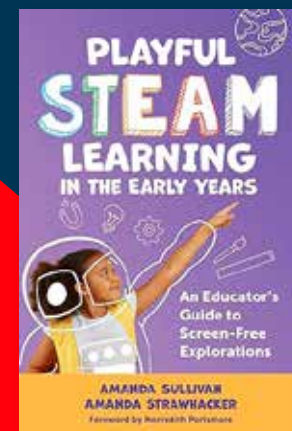
RESPONSIBILITY

When teachers bring AI into the classroom, we also bring responsibility. Students learn how to use these tools by watching us. If we model attribution, transparency and reflection, they will too. Ask: Does this tool let me model ethical practice, not just efficient practice? Does it open space for conversations about honesty, accountability and long-term consequences? Responsibility is not an afterthought; it's the anchor that keeps innovation tied to integrity.

Final thoughts

CLEAR is meant to be a way to slow down and ask important questions about AI use. By reflecting on context, literacy, equity, agency and responsibility, teachers can better decide which AI tools belong in their classrooms, how to use them and why. When we do that, we ensure AI serves student learning rather than the other way around. 

Recommended resource



Playful STEAM Learning in the Early Years: An Educator's Guide to Screen-Free Explorations

Amanda Sullivan and Amanda Strawhacker

Available through the ATA library.



FOUR TIPS FOR MANAGING EMAIL OVERLOAD

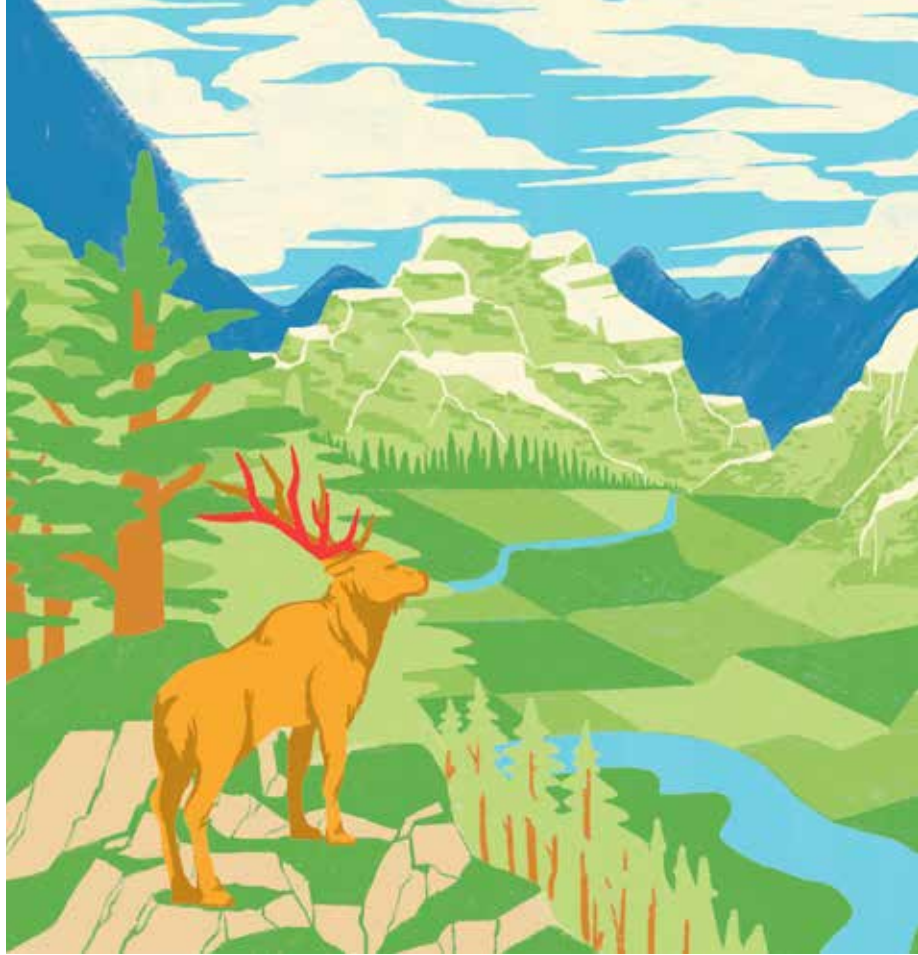
1. Turn alerts off.
2. Create blocks of email free time during the day.
3. Focus on key emails; file or delete as much as possible.
4. Develop a strategy for saying no.

Source: Timothy Caulfield. 2022. *Relax. A Guide to Everyday Health Decisions With More Facts and Less Worry*. Penguin Random House.

Taking the ‘person’ out of ‘personalized’ land acknowledgements

Melissa Bird

Former Executive Staff Officer,
Indigenous Education, ATA



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

have become increasingly present in our daily lives. These statements, which recognize Indigenous Lands, Peoples and Languages, and commitments to our relations, are often intended as gestures of respect and commitment to reconciliation. Land acknowledgements recognize numbered Treaties within Alberta, Métis Territories and Districts of the Otipemisiwak Métis Government and Nations, and communities from the places and spaces where they are shared.

As these acknowledgements become more common, many individuals and organizations have taken up the call to make them more meaningful and authentic. A common response has been to personalize them—injecting personal reflections or stories to avoid performative repetition. While this may be well-intentioned, it can inadvertently center settler identities and perpetuate colonial narratives.

Personalized land acknowledgements may risk recentring non-Indigenous voices rather than focusing on commitments rooted in relational responsibility.

RETHINKING PERSONALIZATION

Instead of personalizing land acknowledgements, what if we approached them as opportunities for **relational renewal**? This means grounding acknowledgements not in personal experience(s), but in shared responsibilities we hold in relation to Indigenous Lands, Peoples and Languages, including stories, traditions and knowledges.

Land acknowledgements, when grounded in responsibility, reciprocity and respect, move beyond symbolic gestures and become part of the ongoing work of unlearning colonial logics within education (and beyond).

Elder Dr. Vincent Stogan (Tsimilano) reminds us that these practices can be gratitude-grounding experiences—opportunities to “reach back and learn from those that have gone before us and then reach forward to pass on the teachings to those that are coming after us.”

PROCESS OVER PRODUCT

One of the challenges with land acknowledgements is the tendency to seek a

“right” or “perfect” version, something that can be read aloud with confidence. But this focus on crafting a polished product can interfere with the deeper, ongoing process of building relationships with the Indigenous Lands, Languages and Peoples being acknowledged.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND PRACTICE

- How can we ensure that land acknowledgements move beyond words into meaningful, ongoing action?
- What does it mean to shift from a personalized approach to a relational approach?
- What responsibilities do we carry because we live, work and learn on this Land?
- What specific actions can accompany land acknowledgments to uphold Treaty relations and relational responsibilities?

Land acknowledgements should be living practices, ever evolving alongside our




ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL PARILLAS

learning and relationships. They are not meant to be static scripts, but invitations into deeper understanding, responsibility and transformation.

BEYOND THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: REIMAGINING OUR RELATIONS

When treated as daily reminders of our collective responsibilities, land acknowledgements can counter the erasure of Indigenous Peoples and Knowledges. They can help us reimagine the story we tell about the Land—not as something owned or occupied, but as something to be in good relation with.

Ultimately, this means prioritizing the process of reconnection over performance, and committing to actions that reflect the values embedded within each word of an acknowledgement. 

Resources for further learning

ATA land acknowledgements

Pronunciation guides, videos and examples of land acknowledgements

ATA workshops

- More Than Words: The Significance of Land Acknowledgements on the Journey of Truth and Reconciliation
- Our Shared History, Our Shared Future —A Brief Introduction to Treaties
- Being in Good Relations —An Introduction to Cultural Protocols

ATA resources

ATA Stepping Stones Series

- Numbered Treaties within Alberta Treaty 6, Treaty 7 and Treaty 8
- Elder Protocol

View the complete workshop and resources series at:

www.teachers.ab.ca > Indigenous education and Walking Together

www.teachers.ab.ca > Workshops and presentations > Indigenous education workshops

Or email pd@ata.ab.ca for more information.

Indigenous Storywork
—Educating Heart • Mind
• Body & Spirit

abteach.cc/IndigenousStorywork



Forts, Curriculum and Indigenous Métissage,
Dr. Dwayne Donald

abteach.cc/Forts



We Need a New Story,
Dr. Dwayne Donald

abteach.cc/NewStory

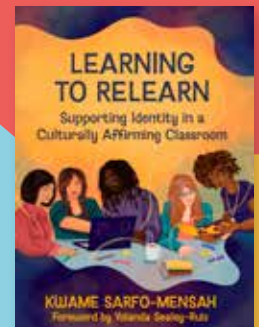


Defining terms

Personalizing: to design or produce (something) to meet someone's individual requirements or to make (something) identifiable as belonging to a particular person (Oxford Dictionary)

Colonial frontier logics: those epistemological assumptions and pre-suppositions, derived from the colonial project of dividing the world according to racial and cultural categorizations, which serve to naturalize assumed divides and thus contribute to their social and institutional perpetuation (Dr. Dwayne Donald)

Recommended resource



Learning to Relearn: Supporting Identity in a Culturally Affirming Classroom

Kwame Sarfo-Mensah

Available through the ATA library.



Geetha Ball

Retired Teacher and Principal,
Alberta Blue Cross Member



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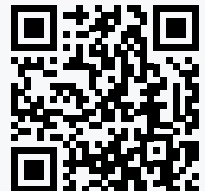
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Simon Pagé
Ancien leadeur scolaire
Former school leader

Fils francophones dans le tissu albertain

La communauté francophone de la région qu'on appelle aujourd'hui l'Alberta possède une riche histoire qui remonte à plus de 150 ans. Cette communauté est profondément enracinée dans notre système d'éducation publique et dans la société albertaine au sens large.

Francophone threads in Alberta's fabric

The area that is now Alberta boasts a rich francophone history that dates back more than 150 years. The francophone community is deeply embedded in our public education system and broader society.

1871

Majorité francophone

La population de 48 000 habitants des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (les T.N.-O. à cette époque englobent ce qui est aujourd'hui l'Alberta) compte environ 20 000 catholiques (majoritairement francophones) et 8 000 protestants (majoritairement anglophones).

French-speaking majority

In the North-West Territories (NWT, which encompasses what is now Alberta), the population of 48,000 includes an estimated 20,000 Catholics (mostly French-speaking) and 8,000 Protestants (mostly English-speaking).

1875

Écoles confessionnelles garanties

La Loi sur les Territoires du Nord-Ouest prévoit et garantit des écoles confessionnelles protestantes et catholiques.

Denominational schools guaranteed

The North-West Territories Act creates and guarantees Protestant and Catholic denominational schools.



1885

Montée des anglophones

Chez les francophones, la pendaison de Louis Riel et l'arrivée massive de colons anglophones suscitent un sentiment de domination anglophone.

Anglophone upsurge

Among francophones, the hanging of Louis Riel and an influx of English-speaking settlers create a sense of anglophone dominance.

1892

Anglais uniquement

Une ordonnance scolaire impose l'anglais comme unique langue d'enseignement dans toutes les écoles des T.N.-O.; l'enseignement en français est néanmoins autorisé pendant le « cours primaire » (les deux premières années d'enseignement).

English only

A school ordinance requires English as the sole language of instruction in all NWT schools; teaching in French is allowed during the "primary course" (first two years of instruction).



1884

Autonomie

Une ordonnance scolaire prévoit qu'un conseil de douze membres (six catholiques et six protestants) administre les deux systèmes scolaires, chaque système scolaire jouissant d'une autonomie totale.

Autonomy

A school ordinance ensures that a 12-member board (6 Catholics and 6 Protestants) administers both school systems, with each system having complete autonomy.

1905

Enseignement exclusivement en anglais

La *School Act* de l'Alberta stipule que l'anglais est la seule langue d'enseignement, mais autorise l'utilisation du français pendant le « cours primaire ».

English as sole language

The *Alberta School Act* maintains English as the sole language of instruction while allowing French in the primary course.



1925

Une heure par jour

Après plusieurs années de revendications, un nouveau règlement stipule que, dès la troisième année, le français pourra être enseigné une heure par jour. Si besoin est, des explications pourront aussi être données en français.

One hour per day

After many years of lobbying, a new regulation specifies that, starting in third grade, French may be taught for one hour per day and, if necessary, explanations may be given in French.

1915

Pas de bilinguisme

La proposition Michener, adoptée par l'Assemblée législative de l'Alberta, s'oppose à toute forme de bilinguisme dans les écoles de la province.

No bilingualism

The Michener Motion, passed in the Alberta legislature, opposes any form of bilingualism in Alberta schools.



1960

Révolution tranquille

À la suite des événements au Québec, les Canadiens anglophones deviennent plus ouverts à la langue française et au bilinguisme.

Quiet Revolution

English-speaking Canadians become more open to the French language and bilingualism, partly due to events in Quebec.



1968

Moitié-moitié

La *School Act* de l'Alberta est modifiée et permet dorénavant l'enseignement en français pendant jusqu'à la moitié des heures de cours, de la quatrième à la douzième année.

Half and half

An amendment to the *Alberta School Act* authorizes teaching in French for up to 50 per cent of class time from Grades 4 to 12.

1984

Premières écoles francophones

L'école Maurice-Lavallée à Edmonton et l'école Saint-Antoine à Calgary sont les deux premières écoles francophones publiques financées par le gouvernement albertain. Toutefois, elles continuent d'être administrées par des conseils scolaires de langue anglaise.

First francophone schools

École Maurice-Lavallée in Edmonton and École Saint-Antoine in Calgary become the first two publicly funded French-language schools in Alberta. However, they are still managed by English-language school boards.

1982

Droits garantis

La Charte canadienne des droits et libertés garantit les droits des minorités francophones en matière d'éducation.

Rights guaranteed

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the rights of French-speaking minorities in matters of education.

1990

Création de conseils scolaires francophones

La décision de la Cour suprême du Canada dans l'affaire Mahé a contraint le gouvernement de l'Alberta à établir des conseils scolaires francophones pour la minorité francophone, ce qui a été mis en œuvre en 1994.

Francophone boards created

In the Mahé case, the Supreme Court of Canada requires the Alberta government to provide the francophone minority with French-language school boards, which is done in 1994.

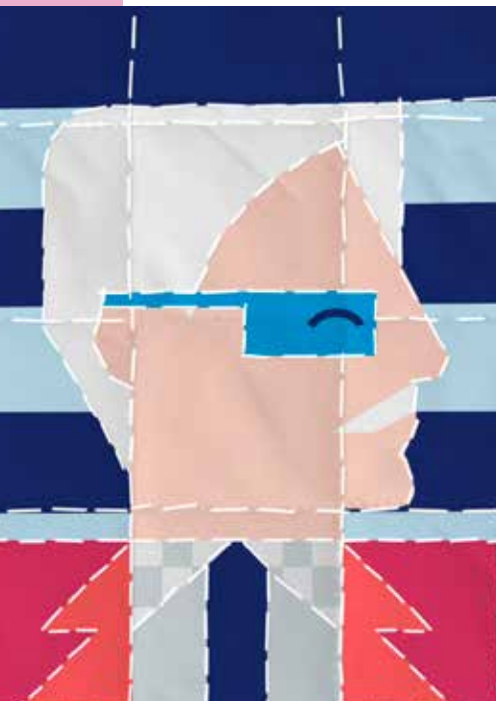
2026

Aujourd'hui

L'Alberta compte 49 écoles publiques de langue française réparties dans quatre autorités régionales de langue française, soit les conseils scolaires Centre-Nord, Centre-Est, FrancoSud et du Nord-Ouest. ^{ATA}

Today

Alberta has 49 public French-language schools spread across four French-language regional authorities: Centre-Nord, Centre-Est, Nord-Ouest and FrancoSud school boards. ^{ATA}



Henri Lemire

Ancien directeur général
Former superintendent

Le parcours de l'éducation francophone albertaine

Au début de votre carrière, quels étaient les principaux défis auxquels faisaient face les écoles et les autorités scolaires francophones en Alberta?

Au départ, les conseils scolaires francophones, fondés en 1994, devaient tout mettre en place : gestion scolaire, recrutement d'élèves, promotion et ouverture d'écoles, souvent dans des régions éloignées. Les premières écoles manquaient d'infrastructures de base (gymnase, bibliothèque, laboratoire) et étaient parfois mal situées. Malgré ces défis, il fallait rassurer les parents, souvent sceptiques, que leurs enfants recevraient une éducation de qualité équivalente en français tout en maîtrisant parfaitement l'anglais.

Dans quelle mesure ces enjeux ont-ils été abordés depuis lors?

Avec le temps, le gouvernement a progressivement reconnu son obligation de fournir aux familles francophones des écoles équivalentes à celles de la majorité. Aujourd'hui, l'Alberta compte 49 écoles francophones accueillant près de 10 000 élèves, ce qui représente une avancée considérable. Plus de la moitié de ces écoles ont été construites récemment et offrent désormais toutes les installations attendues : bibliothèques, gymnases, laboratoires, espaces récréatifs, etc., à l'image des écoles anglophones de la province.

Alberta's francophone education system, then and now

What were the main challenges facing Alberta's francophone schools and school authorities at the start of your career?

Francophone school boards were created in 1994 and had to put everything in place at the beginning: governance structures, student recruitment, school promotion and openings, often in remote areas. The first schools lacked basic infrastructure (gymnasium, library, laboratory) and were sometimes poorly located. Despite these challenges, we had to reassure parents, who often were skeptical, that their children would receive an equivalent quality education in French in addition to developing a perfect mastery of English.

To what extent have these issues been addressed since?

Over time, the government gradually recognized its obligation to provide francophone families with schools equivalent to those of the majority. Today, Alberta has 49 francophone schools serving nearly 10,000 students, a sign of considerable progress. More than half of these schools are recent builds and offer all the facilities that have come to be expected in the province's English-language schools: libraries, gymnasiums, laboratories, recreational spaces, etc.

Que faut-il pour que l'éducation francophone soit équivalente à l'éducation anglophone?

Pour assurer une réelle équivalence, les écoles francophones doivent disposer des mêmes infrastructures que leurs voisines anglophones : gymnases, laboratoires, bibliothèques, aires de jeux et autres installations modernes. Elles doivent aussi offrir une gamme complète de programmes. Cela inclut les cours avancés au secondaire, l'éducation à distance et des activités parascolaires variées. De plus, l'accès aux services de soutien reste essentiel : psychologues, orthophonistes et intervenants spécialisés, au même titre que dans les écoles de la majorité.


Quels avantages offre l'éducation francophone?

L'éducation en français transmet la langue, la culture et l'identité francophones. Elle renforce le sentiment d'appartenance des jeunes et leur offre un riche héritage culturel. Aujourd'hui, les écoles francophones reflètent une grande diversité culturelle : on y retrouve des élèves issus de partout dans le monde, unis par la langue française. Cette richesse humaine constitue une véritable force pour la vitalité et la pérennité de la francophonie albertaine. 

What is needed to make francophone education equivalent to the education provided in the English-language system?

To ensure true equivalency, francophone schools must have the same infrastructure as neighbouring English-language schools: gymnasiums, laboratories, libraries, playgrounds and other modern amenities. They must also offer a full range of programs, including advanced high school courses, distance education and a variety of extracurricular activities. Also, continued access to support services (psychologists, speech therapists and other specialists) is just as essential as it is in the schools of the majority.

What advantages does a francophone education offer?

French-language education preserves the French language and ensures that francophone culture and identity are passed on. It reinforces a sense of belonging among youth and offers them a rich cultural heritage. Today's francophone schools reflect a broad cultural diversity, with students from all over the world united by the French language. This wealth of human capital is a real strength contributing to the vitality and longevity of Alberta's francophone community. 

« [I] fallait rassurer les parents, souvent sceptiques... »

“ [W]e had to reassure parents, who often were skeptical...”

La francophonie albertaine est bien vivante

Pour desservir la population d'expression française en Alberta, une panoplie de services en français sont fournis par une cinquantaine d'organismes francophones, une quarantaine d'écoles francophones et un établissement postsecondaire. Voici un aperçu des organismes qui offrent des services et des programmes culturels en français en Alberta.

Alberta's francophone community: alive and well

Alberta's French-speaking population has access to a wide range of French-language services provided by approximately 50 francophone organizations and 40+ francophone schools, as well as one post-secondary institution. What follows is an overview of organizations offering French-language cultural programs and services in Alberta.

Accent

Répertoire bilingue conçu pour les communautés scolaires afin qu'elles puissent facilement trouver des activités et des ressources récréatives, culturelles et éducatives disponibles en français pour des élèves de l'Alberta.

Accent is a bilingual directory that allows school communities to easily find French-language recreational, cultural and educational activities and resources for Alberta students.



Sylvianne Maisonneuve

Présidente sortante de la FCSFA (Fédération des conseils scolaires francophones de l'Alberta)

Former president of the Fédération des Conseils Scolaires Francophones de l'Alberta (FCSFA)

Actuellement et à l'avenir

Quels sont les principaux défis auxquels font face actuellement les écoles et les autorités scolaires francophones?

Seulement environ 15 % des élèves ayant le droit de fréquenter une des 49 écoles francophones de l'Alberta y sont actuellement inscrits. Ce faible taux met en évidence les défis d'accessibilité et d'attractivité du réseau scolaire francophone, ainsi que le manque de sensibilisation de la population quant aux droits découlant de l'article 23 de la *Charte canadienne des droits et libertés*.

L'absence d'écoles francophones dans certaines régions de la province est un obstacle majeur. Il est crucial de permettre aux enfants de fréquenter une école francophone sans avoir à parcourir de longues distances. Par ailleurs, les écoles francophones souffrent d'un sous-financement historique, ce qui limite la possibilité pour ces établissements d'atteindre l'équivalence réelle.

Les écoles francophones font également face à un manque de ressources pédagogiques variées en français, ce qui pose des défis lors de la mise en œuvre de nouveaux curriculums. L'accès limité à l'éducation à distance représente un autre défi, notamment en raison du financement insuffisant du Centre francophone d'éducation à distance.

La pénurie d'enseignants, surtout dans les zones rurales et éloignées, constitue également un défi majeur.

Today, tomorrow and beyond

What are the main challenges facing francophone schools and school authorities in Alberta today?

Currently, only about 15 per cent of eligible students attend one of Alberta's 49 francophone schools. This low enrolment rate highlights the challenges of accessibility and attractiveness faced by the francophone school system, as well as the population's lack of awareness of their Charter rights stemming from Section 23.

The lack of francophone schools in some parts of the province is a major obstacle. It is crucial that children be able to attend a francophone school without having to travel long distances. In addition, francophone schools have historically suffered from underfunding, which makes it more difficult for them to achieve true equivalency.

Francophone schools also face a lack of varied educational resources in French, which creates challenges when implementing new curricula. Limited access to distance education is another challenge, in part due to insufficient funding of the Centre francophone d'éducation à distance.

Another major challenge is the teacher shortage, especially in rural and remote areas.

Enfin, il est essentiel de garantir un continuum éducatif fluide et bien financé de la petite enfance jusqu'au postsecondaire afin d'assurer un parcours harmonieux et complet à la population étudiante francophone de toute la province.

Comment souhaiteriez-vous qu'ils soient relevés?


Il faut maintenir une collaboration continue avec le gouvernement de l'Alberta afin d'améliorer le financement de base et d'augmenter le nombre d'écoles francophones. Il faudrait également revendiquer, au niveau fédéral, une part plus importante du financement du Programme de langues officielles en éducation.

Des partenariats avec d'autres pays pourraient aussi être établis pour contribuer au recrutement d'enseignants francophones.

Un partenariat avec les différentes parties prenantes en éducation et le développement de la francophonie provinciale sont essentiels. Par ailleurs, il est important de sensibiliser les parents aux services auxquels ils ont droit et de les inciter à y accéder. Une campagne de sensibilisation visant les jeunes, associée à des bourses d'études, les encouragerait à s'orienter vers la profession enseignante.

Enfin, l'innovation demeure cruciale pour faire évoluer l'éducation francophone, en gardant toujours l'élève au centre du projet.

Quels avantages offre l'éducation francophone?

L'éducation francophone favorise l'épanouissement des élèves, le développement chez eux d'un bilinguisme additif durable, de même que leur intégration culturelle et leur construction identitaire. L'école francophone soutient la réussite scolaire et l'ouverture d'esprit et multiplie les perspectives de carrière. 

Lastly, it is essential to guarantee a seamless, well-funded educational continuum from early childhood through to post-secondary education, in order to ensure the harmonious progression and comprehensive development of francophone students provincewide.

How would you like to see these challenges met?


Ongoing collaboration with the Alberta government is needed to improve base funding and increase the number of francophone schools. We should also advocate for a larger share of federal funding from the Official Languages in Education Program.

In addition, partnerships with other countries could be established to help recruit francophone teachers.

Partnerships with various education stakeholders and the continued development of the province's francophone community are essential. It is also important to make parents aware of the services to which they are entitled, and to encourage them to use them. An awareness campaign aimed at young people, combined with scholarships, would encourage them to enter the teaching profession.

Finally, innovation remains crucial to the evolution of francophone education, with the core focus remaining, at all times, on the student.

What advantages does a francophone education offer?

Francophone education fosters student growth, allows students to develop lasting additive bilingualism, contributes to their cultural integration and helps build their sense of identity. Francophone education supports academic success and open-mindedness, and offers greatly expanded career opportunities. 

Centre de développement musical (CDM)

Soutient le développement et le rayonnement des talents musicaux francophones en Alberta. Le CDM offre des formations, des ateliers, du mentorat et un camp d'été. Il soutient des artistes et des organismes en fournissant des services techniques, logistiques et des classes de maîtres. Il aide les jeunes artistes grâce à des événements comme Le Galala, La Chicane albertaine et Polyfonik.

CDM supports the development and promotion of francophone musical talent in Alberta. CDM offers instruction, workshops, mentoring and a summer camp. It supports artists and organizations by providing technical and logistical services as well as music master classes. It also provides assistance to young artists through events like Le Galala, La Chicane and Polyfonik.

Francophonie canadienne plurielle (FRAP)

Depuis 2014, cet organisme œuvre pour une meilleure représentativité des personnes immigrantes au sein du Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord (CSCN). La FRAP est un acteur clé de l'inclusion sociale, économique et culturelle des francophones nouvellement arrivés au Canada. L'organisme offre des services essentiels pour favoriser leur intégration dans un contexte majoritairement anglophone. La FRAP est présente à Edmonton, Red Deer, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie et Lloydminster.

A key player in the social, economic and cultural integration of French-speaking newcomers to Canada, FRAP offers essential services that help them find their way in a predominantly English-speaking environment. FRAP has offices in Edmonton, Red Deer, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie and Lloydminster. Since 2014, it has ensured that the immigrant community is better represented within the Greater North Central Francophone (GNSCF) school division.



L'éducation francophone en Alberta

Francophone education in Alberta

Pétronille Makuetche

Enseignante
Teacher



Avant de venir vivre en Alberta, je ne savais pas qu'il y avait des défis considérables du fait francophone. Née au Cameroun et ayant vécu en France, cette problématique ne se posait pas pour moi. Être une enseignante francophone en Alberta, c'est comme faire pousser un baobab dans le sable : il faut de la patience et une foi profonde dans ses racines.

Au quotidien, j'accomplis de petits gestes qui me permettent de contribuer à faire vivre le français en classe et à l'école : parler en français, valoriser les façons de s'exprimer des élèves, présenter des modèles inspirants francophones, diffuser de la musique francophone en fond sonore et célébrer les événements francophones. Ces actions demandent de l'énergie, de la passion et de la créativité. Ma vie en tant qu'enseignante francophone en Alberta est une expérience enrichissante.

Au cours de l'année scolaire, je travaille avec les élèves à travers ces petits gestes, et progressivement, ils reprennent confiance en eux. Ce que je trouve gratifiant, c'est de voir les élèves dont le français est absent à la maison s'approprier leur identité francophone, surtout lorsqu'ils reçoivent chez eux quelqu'un qui parle français. Un élève est venu me voir, tout joyeux et fier : « Madame, on a reçu les amis de mes parents cette fin de semaine. J'ai parlé français avec leur garçon parce qu'il ne comprend pas bien l'anglais ». J'ai ressenti une grande fierté. C'est dans ces moments que je réalise que mes petits gestes vont au-delà de notre communauté scolaire.

Prior to settling in Alberta, I was unaware that its francophone community faced considerable challenges. I was born in Cameroon and have lived in France, so I had never encountered this issue. Being a francophone teacher in Alberta is much like growing a baobab tree in the sand: you need patience and deep faith in your roots.

I do little things every day that help to bring French to life in the classroom and at school: I speak French, validate students' ways of expressing themselves, highlight inspiring francophone role models, play French music in the background and celebrate francophone events. These actions require energy, passion and creativity. My life as a francophone teacher in Alberta is a rewarding experience.

Over the course of the school year, I do these small things in working with students, and they gradually regain their self-confidence. What I find gratifying is to see students who don't speak French at home take ownership of their francophone identity, especially when a French-speaking visitor comes to their home. One time, a joyful student approached me and proudly announced: "Madame, we had my parents' friends over this weekend. I spoke French with their son because he doesn't understand English very well." I felt very proud. At times like these, I realize that my small gestures have an impact that goes beyond our school community.


« [C]’est comme faire pousser un baobab dans le sable :
il faut de la patience et une foi profonde dans ses racines. »

“ [It’s] much like growing a baobab tree in the sand:
you need patience and deep faith in your roots.”

Mon travail en tant qu’enseignante en milieu minoritaire, bien qu’enrichissant, présente de nombreux défis : le manque cruel de ressources pédagogiques en français adaptées à notre contexte, l’insuffisance de structures et de financement pour les activités francophones, et parfois la solitude professionnelle lorsqu’on est le seul membre du personnel francophone dans une école majoritairement anglophone. Je dois souvent encourager les parents à maintenir le français à la maison et les inviter à inscrire leurs enfants aux activités francophones.

Une fois installée en Alberta, j’ai découvert que la francophonie était un enjeu politique et linguistique. Il ne s’agissait pas seulement d’une question de langue, mais surtout d’identité et de droits. L’éducation francophone permet aux jeunes de se reconnaître dans une culture et de comprendre qu’ils font partie intégrante de l’histoire du Canada. Elle leur offre la possibilité d’être bilingue. C’est là que se trouve, pour moi, l’importance même de l’éducation francophone en milieu minoritaire ainsi que la motivation pour y contribuer à travers l’enseignement.


Un élève me disait qu’il n’aime pas parler français. Je lui ai souvent expliqué les avantages d’une éducation en français. Je ne me suis pas découragée. Nous avons travaillé ensemble, et j’ai découvert qu’il appréciait mon cours d’alimentation où nous préparions des pâtisseries françaises en écoutant de la musique francophone. Ses parents ont décidé de visiter la France. Ne parlant pas français, ils comptaient sur leur enfant. Une fois en France, l’élève s’est rendu compte de l’importance de maîtriser la langue du pays. Il est devenu le traducteur de ses parents. À leur retour, il est venu me voir : « Madame, j’ai parlé français pendant tout mon voyage. C’était vraiment bien. Mes parents ne comprenaient pas, et c’est moi qui traduais ». Il en était fier.

Ce jour-là, j’ai compris que l’éducation francophone venait de semer une graine dans le parcours de cet élève et que, même en milieu majoritairement anglophone, la culture francophone peut résister et permettre de préserver son identité si elle est portée avec patience, fierté et résilience. 

My work as a teacher in a minority setting, while fulfilling, presents many challenges: an acute lack of context-appropriate French-language teaching resources, inadequate infrastructure and funding for francophone activities, and at times, the professional isolation that goes with being the only francophone on staff in a predominantly English-speaking school. I often have to encourage parents to maintain the use of French at home and invite them to register their children for francophone activities.

After settling in Alberta, I discovered that there are political and linguistic issues surrounding the francophone community. It’s not just about language—more than that, it’s about identity and rights. Francophone education enables young people to connect with a culture and understand that they are an integral part of Canada’s history. It gives them the chance to be bilingual. To me, this illustrates the true importance of francophone education in a minority setting and provides the motivation to contribute to the cause through teaching.

Case in point: a student would tell me that he didn’t like speaking French. I had often explained to him the advantages of a French-language education and wouldn’t let this discourage me. As we worked together, I discovered that he enjoyed my food studies class, where we would prepare French pastries while listening to French music. When his parents decided to travel to France, they had to rely on their child, since they did not speak French. Once they arrived in France, the student realized how important it was to be fluent in the local language. He became his parents’ interpreter. When they returned, he came to see me and said, “Madame, I spoke French during the entire trip. It went really well. My parents didn’t understand, and I translated for them.” He was quite proud.

That day, I understood that francophone education had just planted a seed on this student’s path and that, even in a predominantly English-speaking environment, francophone culture can endure and francophone identity can be maintained with sufficient patience, pride and resilience. 

Francophonie jeunesse de l'Alberta (FJA)

Fondée en 1972, elle est l'organisme porte-parole des jeunes Franco-Albertains de 14 à 25 ans. Elle leur offre des occasions de s'engager dans des projets et activités. FJA encourage les jeunes à affirmer leur fierté francophone et à développer leur leadership dans tous les milieux de vie.

FJA represents Franco-Albertan youth aged 14 to 25 and provides opportunities for youth to participate in various projects and activities. Established in 1972, the FJA encourages youth to show their francophone pride and to develop their leadership skills in all they do.

Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta (ACFA)

Créée le 15 juillet 1926, elle renforce le sentiment d'appartenance à la communauté francophone en Alberta. Elle rassemble les acteurs clés de la société afin de préserver les acquis, faire progresser les droits des francophones et soutenir le dynamisme de la francophonie albertaine.

ACFA works to instill a greater sense of belonging among members of Alberta's francophone community. Established on July 15, 1926, ACFA brings together key stakeholders to safeguard past achievements, advance francophone rights and contribute to the vitality of Alberta's francophone community.

Fête franco-albertaine

Évènement francophone par excellence qui offre le plus grand rassemblement culturel mettant en vedette nos artistes franco-albertains. Le festival réunit des centaines de participants lors d'une fin de semaine de camping rehaussée d'une programmation artistique, culturelle et sportive entièrement en français.

The festival is the francophone community's premier event and largest cultural gathering, where Franco-Albertan artists are prominently featured. It brings together hundreds of participants for a weekend of camping, an experience enhanced by artistic, cultural and sports programming offered entirely in French.

Association La Girandole

Association qui se spécialise en culture et en danse canadienne-française. Elle permet aux jeunes des écoles francophones, des programmes d'immersion française et des cours de français langue seconde de vivre une expérience enrichissante de danse en français.

Association La Girandole specializes in French-Canadian culture and dance and provides a rewarding, French-language dance experience to youth attending francophone schools, French immersion programs or taking French-as-a-second-language classes.

Alliance Française d'Edmonton et de Calgary

Offrent la possibilité d'apprendre le français et de découvrir les multiples facettes de la culture francophone, telles que l'art, la littérature, la poésie, le cinéma, l'histoire, la gastronomie et l'actualité.

The Alliance Française offers opportunities to learn French and discover the many facets of francophone culture, such as art, literature, poetry, cinema, history, cuisine and current affairs.

Le Franco

Journal qui couvre l'actualité francophone en représentant les communautés dans différentes régions. Il forme des partenariats avec plusieurs organismes lors de la tenue d'événements ou afin de promouvoir des cahiers spéciaux.

The Franco newspaper is dedicated to current events in the francophone community, with coverage that includes communities throughout the province. The newspaper partners with various organizations during events or to promote special issues it publishes.

**La Fédération canadienne des
enseignantes et des enseignants**

Programmes offerts aux enseignants francophones

La Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants (CTF/FCE) offre plusieurs programmes et ressources destinés aux enseignants francophones.

Portraits de l'éducation

Cette série de fascicules offre des conseils pratiques pour l'insertion professionnelle des enseignants d'immigration récente au Canada. Créée par des chercheurs universitaires et des experts en éducation, cette série aborde des sujets comme le travail avec les parents, les approches interculturelles et le mentorat interculturel. La collection Portraits de l'éducation est disponible gratuitement sur le site Web de la CTF/FCE.

Pédagogie à l'école de langue française (PELF)

Cette ressource en ligne a été créée en collaboration avec des enseignants et des chercheurs en éducation. Elle est axée sur les besoins pédagogiques particuliers des écoles francophones en milieu minoritaire. Le site Web propose des ressources pratiques, notamment des capsules vidéos filmées dans des salles de classe à travers le Canada. Ces vidéos illustrent comment relever des défis tels que la promotion de l'identité francophone, le respect de la diversité linguistique et le développement d'un sentiment d'appartenance aux communautés francophones.

Programme pilote de mentorat

Ce nouveau programme s'adresse aux enseignants francophones d'immigration récente œuvrant dans des écoles francophones en milieu minoritaire. Le but de ce programme est d'offrir le soutien nécessaire à ce groupe d'enseignants ainsi qu'aux personnes qui travaillent avec eux pour qu'ils puissent vivre une insertion professionnelle réussie et choisissent de poursuivre dans la profession, malgré les défis uniques que pose leur intégration dans le système d'éducation de l'Alberta. La CTF/FCE mettra la documentation concernant le programme à la disposition des organisations membres à la conclusion du projet. ATA

Canadian Teachers' Federation

Programs available for francophone teachers

The Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF/FCE) has a number of programs and resources aimed at francophone teachers.

Portraits of Education

This series of booklets offers practical advice for the professional integration of teachers who have recently immigrated to Canada. Created by university researchers and education experts, this series addresses topics such as working with parents, intercultural approaches and intercultural mentoring. The Portraits of Education collection is available for free on the CTF/FCE website.

Pédagogie à l'école de langue française (PELF)

This online resource was developed in collaboration with teachers and education researchers. It focuses on the specific pedagogical needs of French-language schools in minority contexts. The website offers practical resources, including video clips filmed in classrooms across Canada. These videos illustrate how to address challenges such as fostering francophone identity, respecting linguistic diversity and fostering a sense of belonging to francophone communities.

Pilot mentoring program

This new program is for recently immigrated francophone teachers working in French-language schools in minority contexts. The goal of this program is to provide the necessary support to this group of teachers and the people who work with them so that they can successfully transition into the profession and choose to continue in the profession, despite the unique challenges of integrating into Alberta's education system. The material will be made available through CTF/FCE to the member organizations at the end of the project. ATA

**Pour aller
plus loin!**

**Explore
further!**



Portraits de l'éducation

[publications.ctf-fce.ca/collections/
all/portraits-de-leducation](https://publications.ctf-fce.ca/collections/all/portraits-de-leducation)



Pédagogie à l'école de langue française

pelf.ca

De l'école à l'identité

Témoignages d'anciens élèves

L'école francophone m'a permis de développer **un fort sentiment d'appartenance** ainsi que la fierté franco-albertaine, tout en me dirigeant vers de nombreuses opportunités où le bilinguisme est un atout. Mes années d'études m'ont inspirée à poursuivre ma formation hors province en français pour représenter ma communauté minoritaire. Je serai toujours reconnaissante des opportunités offertes et de pouvoir partager mes expériences en tant que Franco-Albertaine.

Alysée Thibeault

Je suis fier d'avoir fréquenté une école francophone. On peut parfois se sentir perdu dans une grande école, mais ce ne fut jamais mon cas. Les enseignants et conseillers ont toujours fait preuve d'une grande attention. **Leur dévouement a contribué à la personne que je suis devenu,** et je leur en serai toujours reconnaissant.

I'm proud to have attended a francophone school. You can sometimes feel lost in a big school, but that was never the case for me. The teachers and counsellors were always very considerate and attentive. **Their dedication helped shape the person I've become,** and for that I will always be grateful.

Kevin M'Pindou

From école to identity

Former student reflections

Francophone school helped me to develop **a strong sense of belonging and Franco-Albertan pride,** while paving the way for many opportunities where bilingualism has been an asset. My school years inspired me to pursue out-of-province training in French to give me the tools to represent my minority community. I'll always be grateful for the opportunities I was offered and to be given the chance to share my experiences as a Franco-Albertan.

Après l'école, je pensais que je n'utiliserais plus vraiment mon français. Mais avec le temps, de nombreuses occasions se sont présentées : aider quelqu'un, travailler avec des francophones ou créer des liens dans la communauté. Le bilinguisme m'a permis de partager mes expériences dans les écoles et de me **rapprocher de mes racines.** Le français fait partie de moi, même si je ne le parle pas quotidiennement. ATA

I didn't really think I would continue to use my French after finishing school. But as time went on, many opportunities to do so came along, whether it was helping someone, working with francophones or fostering relationships in the community. My bilingualism has allowed me to share my experiences in schools and **get closer to my roots.** French is a part of me, even if I don't speak it every day. ATA

Kenny M'Pindou



IMAGE FOURNIE PAR LE FLYING CANOË VOLANT / IMAGE PROVIDED

Canoë Volant Flying Canoe Volant

Organise une célébration hivernale à Edmonton avec de la lumière, de la musique, des légendes et de la danse. Le Festival du Flying Canoë Volant est une célébration culturelle créative et interactive conçue pour engager l'histoire locale et tout ce qui est génial dans une longue nuit d'hiver. Par l'entremise d'une expérience interactive qui encourage la participation, le programme scolaire multidisciplinaire partage l'histoire culturelle des communautés canadienne-française, des Premières Nations et métisse.

Flying Canoe hosts a winter celebration in Edmonton featuring lights, music, storytelling and dance. The Flying Canoe Festival is a creative and interactive cultural celebration designed to bring local history to life and make the most of a long winter's night. The cultural history of the French-Canadian, First Nations and Métis communities is shared thanks to cross-curricular school programming and interactive experiences where participation is encouraged.

Une mission pleine de fierté

A mission fuelled by pride



Nancy Roy

Leadeure scolaire
School leader

Il y a plus de 24 ans, je quittais le Québec pour m'installer temporairement en Alberta, pour deux ans tout au plus! Mon cœur a été rapidement captivé par la francophonie albertaine et par cette communauté qui œuvre sans relâche, depuis des décennies, à préserver la langue française, ainsi que la culture et l'identité francophones. J'ai choisi d'y rester, animée par le désir de faire partie de cette belle mission et de la transmettre à mes enfants.

En tant que directrice d'école, j'ai le privilège de voir la fierté briller dans les yeux de nos élèves lorsqu'ils réalisent la richesse de leur identité francophone. Contribuer à leur éducation et porter haut les couleurs de la francophonie est un sentiment puissant. En tant que leadeure scolaire, j'ai la chance de collaborer avec les élèves, les parents, le personnel et les organismes communautaires, tous travaillant main dans la main pour offrir la meilleure éducation possible. Chaque progrès, chaque mot prononcé en français, chaque projet communautaire qui voit le jour, est une victoire collective qui renforce notre détermination et notre fierté d'appartenir à cette grande famille francophone.

Bien que cette mission soit profondément gratifiante, elle n'est pas sans embûches. Nos élèves sont constamment exposés à

I left Quebec over 24 years ago to settle temporarily in Alberta, for what was to be two years at most! My heart was soon captured by Alberta's francophone community, which has worked tirelessly for decades to preserve the French language as well as its culture and identity. I chose to stay, driven by the desire to take part in this wonderful mission and to have my children carry it on.

As a school principal, I have the privilege of seeing our students' eyes fill with pride when they grasp the richness of their francophone identity. Contributing to their education while proudly representing the francophone community is a powerful feeling. As a school leader, I have the good fortune of collaborating with students, parents, staff and community organizations, all working hand in hand to provide the best possible education. Every step on the path of progress, every word spoken in French and every community project that takes shape is a collective victory that strengthens our determination and our pride in belonging to the greater francophone family.

This mission, while deeply rewarding, is not without its challenges. Our students are constantly exposed to the language of the majority outside of school, which can make it difficult to maintain French as the language of communication in the classroom. For them to fully embrace French, telling them to speak it does not suffice. We need to make learning a vibrant and joyful experience that incorporates humour, positive reinforcement and


« [L]’éducation francophone est bien plus qu’une simple transmission de connaissances. »

“ [F]rancophone education is much more than simply imparting knowledge.”

la langue majoritaire à l'extérieur de l'école, ce qui peut rendre difficile de maintenir le français comme langue de communication en classe. Pour qu'ils embrassent pleinement le français, il ne suffit pas de leur dire de le parler. Nous devons rendre l'apprentissage vivant et joyeux, en y intégrant l'humour, le renforcement positif et la découverte de la richesse culturelle francophone.

La construction identitaire francophone, particulièrement en milieu minoritaire, est un processus complexe et essentiel qui vise à renforcer le sentiment d'appartenance à la culture et à la langue française. Être directrice d'une école francophone en milieu minoritaire est un rôle exigeant qui demande non seulement des compétences en leadership et en pédagogie, mais aussi un engagement profond envers la vitalité de notre langue et de notre culture.


La diversité culturelle est une force immense dans nos écoles, notamment grâce à nos élèves originaires de différents pays francophones. Leur présence apporte une richesse inestimable à nos salles de classe et à notre communauté. Le partage de leurs traditions, de leurs accents et de leurs perspectives enrichit l'expérience scolaire bien au-delà du programme d'études. C'est une richesse que nous devons promouvoir et célébrer chaque jour!

Pour moi, l'éducation francophone est bien plus qu'une simple transmission de connaissances. C'est un pilier fondamental de l'identité culturelle et linguistique. C'est offrir aux élèves les outils non seulement pour comprendre leur propre héritage, mais aussi pour s'ouvrir à d'autres cultures et devenir de véritables citoyens du monde. 

an awakening to the richness of francophone culture.

Especially in a minority setting, francophone identity building is a complex, crucial process that aims to reinforce a sense of belonging vis-à-vis the French language and francophone culture. Being the principal of a francophone school in a minority setting is a demanding role that requires not only leadership and pedagogical skills, but also a deep commitment to the vitality of our language and our culture.

Cultural diversity is a huge strength in our schools, thanks in no small part to our students from various French-speaking countries. Their presence greatly enriches our classrooms and community. When they share their traditions, accents and perspectives, the school experience is enhanced in a way that goes far beyond the curriculum. We should promote and celebrate this valuable asset daily!

To me, francophone education is much more than simply imparting knowledge. It is a fundamental pillar of cultural and linguistic identity. It means giving students the tools not only to understand their own heritage, but also to embrace other cultures and become true citizens of the world. 

Unithéâtre

Offre une programmation théâtrale d'expression française en Alberta. Chaque année, un spectacle tourne dans les écoles francophones et programmes d'immersion, avec des matinées scolaires au Théâtre Servus Credit Union. Les élèves interagissent avec les comédiens après les représentations. Les pièces sont sous-titrées en anglais pour faciliter la compréhension.

Unithéâtre offers French-language theatre programming in Alberta. Each year, a touring production visits francophone schools and immersion programs, with school matinees also presented at the Théâtre Servus Credit Union. Students are able to interact with actors after performances, and plays are subtitled in English to make them easier to understand.

Société historique francophone de l'Alberta

Soutient et encourage la collecte, l'organisation, la recherche, le développement et la diffusion de l'histoire francophone de l'Alberta. Sur le site Web (histoireab.ca) on trouve des ressources telles que des albums photos, une carte interactive, des capsules historiques, des journaux historiques et des outils pédagogiques.

Société historique supports and encourages the collection, organization, development and dissemination of material related to, as well as research focusing on, Alberta's francophone history. Its website (histoireab.ca) includes such resources as photo albums, an interactive map, historical profiles, historical newspaper archives and educational materials.

Le Campus Saint-Jean

Où variété et possibilités vont de pair

Le Campus Saint-Jean est le seul établissement universitaire de langue française à l'ouest du Manitoba qui offre, exclusivement en français, une formation postsecondaire complète : un diplôme collégial en éducation de la petite enfance, des baccalauréats (B.A., B. Sc. et B. Éd.) uniquement en français avec une large sélection de majeures et de mineures, en plus de plusieurs baccalauréats bilingues offerts conjointement avec d'autres facultés de l'Université de l'Alberta. Le Campus offre aussi des études supérieures spécialisées : M. A., M. Sc., M. Éd. et Ph. D. Vous avez ainsi de multiples occasions de vous épanouir par les études postsecondaires au Campus Saint-Jean.

Programmes de B. Éd.

Le programme complet du B. Éd., élémentaire et secondaire, s'offre à Edmonton au Campus Saint-Jean et à Calgary dans les locaux du centre-ville. Il s'agit du programme incontournable pour les aspirants au métier d'enseignant et pour les professionnels du milieu scolaire en Alberta. En plus du B. Éd., le Campus offre le B. Éd./A. d. (B. Éd. après-diplôme) d'une durée de deux ans.

Études supérieures

La Maîtrise en éducation (voie cours, ou bien voie thèse et cours) offre une gamme de spécialités pour les enseignants. Six certificats d'études supérieures en sciences de l'éducation sont également offerts. Le nouveau programme de doctorat (Ph. D.) offre une opportunité unique de faire un doctorat en français dans la spécialité qui intéresse les étudiants en éducation. ATA

Campus Saint-Jean

Where variety rhymes with opportunity

Campus Saint-Jean is the only French-language university institution west of Manitoba to offer a complete range of post-secondary programs exclusively in French, including a college diploma in early childhood education and bachelor's degrees (BA, BSc and BEd) offered exclusively in French with a wide selection of majors and minors. In addition, several bilingual undergraduate programs are offered jointly with other faculties of the University of Alberta. Campus Saint-Jean also offers specialized graduate studies programs (MA, MSc, MEd and PhD). As such, Campus Saint-Jean offers many opportunities for growth through post-secondary education.

BEd programs

The complete BEd program for aspiring teachers and K-12 education professionals in Alberta (elementary or secondary education) is offered in Edmonton at Campus Saint-Jean and at the downtown Calgary location. In addition to the BEd, Campus Saint-Jean offers a two-year BEd-Ad (BEd After-degree) program.

Graduate programs

The master of education is offered as either a course-based or course- and thesis-based program, with a range of specializations available to teachers. Six graduate certificates in education sciences are also offered. The new doctor of philosophy (PhD) program offers post-graduate education students a unique opportunity to complete doctoral studies in French in their area of specialization. ATA

Depuis 2021...

le nombre de personnes étudiantes inscrites au premier cycle a doublé pour atteindre **1 440**

le nombre de personnes étudiantes inscrites aux cycles supérieurs a triplé pour atteindre **97**



IMAGE FOURNIE PAR LE CSJ/IMAGE PROVIDED

Since 2021...

undergraduate enrolment has doubled to **1,440**

graduate enrolment has tripled to **97**



PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

For Teachers and School Leaders

The Faculty of Education has a variety of programs to enhance leadership, knowledge and skills for robust learning communities.

- Master of Education in Educational Studies
- Graduate Certificate in School Leadership
This program fulfills the academic requirement for leadership certification in Alberta
- Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies
 - Contemporary Literacy Education K-9
 - Elementary Music Teaching and Learning
 - Indigenous Education
 - Indigenous Language Sustainability
 - Mathematics Education
 - Mentoring and Leadership
 - Science Education
 - School Librarianship
 - Structured Literacy and Reading Science
 - Teaching English Language Learners
 - Teaching Students with Complex Communication Needs
 - Technology in Education

Curriculum and assessment in Alberta

Navigating the contested ground

Phil McRae

Associate Coordinator, Research, ATA



Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”

—John Dewey, Philosopher, Psychologist, Educational Reformer

WITH MORE THAN 30 YEARS in teaching and educational leadership, I have come to know that curriculum is far more than words on a page, in a book or on a screen. It is a living ecosystem, shaped by the changing realities of students’ lives, families, classrooms, schools and communities and the emerging changes each day in the wider world.

The reflections that follow, first shared at the Association’s Curriculum Symposium in the spring of 2025, highlight key tensions on the contested terrain of curriculum and assessment in Alberta classrooms.

KNOWLEDGE VERSUS SELF-REALIZATION: IS IT WHAT YOU COVER OR WHAT YOU DISCOVER?

Over a century ago, the philosopher John Dewey asked whether schooling should focus on covering content or helping learners discover meaning. Alberta’s curriculum has long leaned toward Dewey’s vision, emphasizing competencies and big ideas. In recent years, however, our system has shifted under the influence of accountability demands and cultivated a “back-to-the-basics” approach that values lists of facts, itemized assessments and tidy benchmarks, as seen in Alberta’s unpopular K–3 literacy and numeracy tests.

These methods produce measurable outcomes but risk narrowing curriculum, reducing students to fact-regurgitators and preparing them for an outdated reality. In contrast, an inquiry-driven approach begins with students’ questions and lived experiences. It echoes UNESCO’s four pillars of education—learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be—and places trust in teachers’ professional judgment over standardized testing.

THE DATA DILEMMA: ACCOUNTABILITY OR RESPONSIBILITY?

School officials are increasingly asked to prove success with narrow measures and digital assessments, leading to rising challenges for teachers under expanding accountability pressures.



UNESCO’s four pillars of education

Learning

- > to know
- > to do
- > to live together
- > to be

Accountability (the ability to count) yields standardized provincial testing, comparative charts and neat targets that satisfy bureaucratic demands. Responsibility (the ability to respond) requires professionals who meet learners where they are with wisdom, allowing for the teachable moment and nurturing much deeper intellectual, social and emotional growth over time. We need to measure what matters, not just what is easy to measure.

THE SHADOW OF POLARIZATION AND PRIVATIZATION

Curriculum debates do not exist in isolation. In Alberta, they have become entangled with broader culture wars that intensified during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Disputes now include which histories to highlight in new curriculum, how climate and social justice are to be contested and minimized, or whether privatization should be framed over the public good.

In this polarized era, what students need most is the ability to think critically, engage respectfully and work across differences.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND SCIENCE IN CURRICULUM

Alberta schools are increasingly disrupted by wildfires, floods, heatwaves, evacuations and air-quality crises. Climate literacy can no longer be optional: it must be woven across all programs of study. This means combining systems-thinking science with local lived examples of adaptation, civic engagement (and emotional supports) so that students can move beyond fear and paralysis toward informed, collective action on climate change.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY

If machines can deliver content and simulate dialogue, schools must emphasize what artificial intelligence (AI) cannot replicate: creativity, empathy and the artistry of human relationships. The most enduring skills—creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, fine motor abilities and social-emotional intelligence—will remain uniquely human and be bottlenecks



Declaration on Curriculum

We, the teachers and school leaders of Alberta, believe:

- > Curriculum is about what should be learned.
- > Curriculum is not about how a particular curriculum outcome should be taught.
- > Curriculum belongs to and must be understood and supported by Albertans.
- > In matters of designing programs of study, teachers must take the leading role.
- > Business has a legitimate contribution to make, but curriculum must address much more than short-term economic objectives.
- > Curriculum should allow room for inclusion, local innovation and adaptation.
- > Curriculum design should be guided by a process of collaborative dialogue.
- > Assessment and evaluation must be consistent with the curriculum.
- > Curriculum implementation must be properly supported and paced.
- > It is the responsibility of teachers to support students toward a full understanding of the curriculum, and it is the responsibility of the government and school boards to support teachers in all of their efforts to do so.



- ▶ Read more about the declaration on curriculum by scanning the QR code, or visiting <https://abteach.cc/Curriculum-Assessment>.

to the coming displacement of AI. Our assessment must equally evolve in a world saturated with AI at every turn, shifting from multiple-choice testing to performance tasks, portfolios of original work and collaborative inquiries that mirror real-world problem solving.

KEEPING EDUCATION HUMAN

The curriculum and assessment debates before us are not simply about content, testing or policy. They are about the kind of future we want to build for Alberta and the kind of citizens we hope to nurture through our public schools. Our task must be to keep education a highly relational and human endeavour. Will students be asked only to memorize, or will they be empowered to question and create? Will we settle for what is easy to measure, or will we value what is essential for human flourishing in a fourth industrial revolution? ^{ATA}

“Assessment is not a spreadsheet—it's a conversation.

—Joe Bower (1978-2016)



Declaration on Assessment

We, the teachers and school leaders of Alberta, believe:

- > Assessment is about enhancing student learning. Its first task is to inform and help students grow and then to aid in teaching and learning.
- > Teachers are the assessment experts. They must lead in designing, implementing, interpreting and communicating the evidence of learning.
- > Assessment must be fair, engaging and inclusive, giving every learner multiple ways to demonstrate growth.
- > Ongoing feedback and diagnostic information guide learning; it is not for accountability.
- > Assessment data and information belong first to students, families and teachers and must never be used to publicly rank schools, judge teachers or drive funding.
- > Assessment must safeguard well-being. Learning is about relationships, and no measure or test should compromise mental health or limit future opportunities.
- > All assessments must provide meaningful accommodations, respect privacy and allow for student exemptions when a test is inappropriate.
- > Student test data is collected to support learning—never for sale or profit. Assessment data must be protected under Canadian privacy laws and destroyed when no longer needed.
- > Professional learning and support are essential. Government and school authorities must provide funding, resources, professional development and in-school time, so teachers can assess ethically and effectively.
- > Teachers, through their Association, must be majority partners in any provincial assessment program and must be given the time and resources to do the work.



► Read more about the declaration on assessment by scanning the QR code, or visiting <https://abteach.cc/Curriculum-Assessment>.

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Scan to learn more or go to
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AMA School Safety Patrol

Developing responsible leadership among grade 5 & 6 students and supporting little ones to safely cross the street.

School Garden Studio

A virtual space where teachers can access, explore, and share resources to teach food literacy through their own school garden programs.

AMA Driver Ed: School Edition

An online module-based program that you can use in your classroom to help students learn safe driving habits.

Check it out!

These resources are now available through the ATA library.

Have you ever used your ATA library? If not, you should give it a try. Books, DVDs, robots and more delivered right to your doorstep with return postage paid by us. Great teaching resources are waiting for you. Contact us at library@ata.ab.ca.

1. *Naturally Inclusive: Engaging Children of All Abilities Outdoors*

Students with special needs often face additional challenges when it comes to engaging with the outdoors. In this book, teachers will find practical advice for including all their students in their outdoor adventures.

2. *Enseigner les habiletés sociales aux adolescents : niveau de développement 13-18 ans avec la méthode GACS*

Le Groupe d'Apprentissage à la Communication et à la Socialisation (GACS) propose dans ce manuel un programme clé en main, séance par séance, ainsi que des fiches et des méthodes d'animation de groupe.

3. *La diversité en contextes éducatifs : regards théoriques et pratiques*

Le présent ouvrage souhaite mettre en avant la richesse qui découle des diversités, que ce soit pour le bien-être individuel ou collectif. Il s'adresse à toute personne désireuse de mieux envisager la diversité humaine et sa potentialité pour un meilleur vivre-ensemble.

4. *Teaching with Hip Hop in the 7-12 Grade Classroom: A Guide to Supporting Students' Critical Development Through Popular Texts*

You'll find practical lesson plans that you can use in many subject areas while engaging students in the culture and music of hip hop.

5. *Be THAT Teacher: Rehumanizing Education with Unapologetic Authenticity*

Having the confidence to be oneself without apology is one of the best gifts we can give our students. But how do we get them there? Author Dwayne Reed argues that we have to embody what we want to teach and gives teachers tools to do just that.



Information provided by ATA librarian
Sandra Anderson.

Your colleagues recommend

Melanie Hunt-Girouard

Currently reading *Cilka's Journey* by Heather Morris. (She also wrote *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*).

Jocelyn Arthur

107 Days by Kamala Harris. It's interesting to read about the behind-the-scenes events of the American election.

Chris Grzanich Campbell

Winter Garden by Kristin Hannah ★★★★★. I love everything I've read by this author!

6. *10 Days That Shaped Modern Canada*

Author Aaron Hughes selects 10 days in our recent past that he believes shaped the psychology of our nation. Do you agree with him, or do other days spring to your mind? You have to read it to find out!

7. *The Politics of the Canoe*

The canoe, often seen as a recreational symbol of wilderness escape, is also a political vessel — embodying Indigenous traditions, environmental ideals and feminist empowerment. This book gathers insights from advocates, academics and community leaders who reframe the canoe as a vessel for recentring and reclaiming Indigenous sovereignty.

8. *Race Rules: What Your Black Friend Won't Tell You*

A practical book for white people who want to be allies and to avoid race-based faux pas caused by their own inexperience.

9. *The #ActuallyAutistic Guide to Advocacy: Step-by-Step Advice on How to Ally and Speak Up with Autistic People and the Autism Community*

Allyship is not easy. Social pressures and backlash can make us prefer to be silent rather than to speak up. This useful guide will help you to find your voice as an ally and to speak up with understanding.



PHOTO BY BIANCA HO

Katrina McCracken

*The Frozen River** by Ariel Lawhon, *No-Drama Discipline* by Daniel J. Siegel, and *The Let Them Theory* by Mel Robbins.

*Content warning

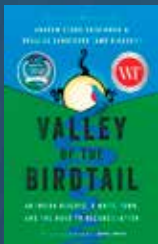
Patricia Gagnon

Nine Perfect Strangers by Liane Moriarty had an interesting premise and proved to be thought provoking.

Erin Colleen MacKenzie

The Women by Kristin Hannah.

What is your favourite nonfiction book to use with students?



Valley of the Birdtail

This book is perfect for teaching how past government policy shapes present realities. The true story of two neighbouring communities—Rossburn and the Waywayseecappo reserve in Manitoba—this is a must read for all Canadians.

Shelley Kirkvold, ATA Social Studies Council Past President



Haunted Canada

I really like using the *Haunted Canada* or *Ghost Stories of Canada* in my Grade 5 and middle school classes. Students are interested in them and we talk about what else could be happening in the ghost stories, connecting it to science.

Jennifer Lacourse, ATA Council of Inclusive Education President



What If? Serious Scientific Answers to Absurd Hypothetical Questions.

How fast can you hit a speed bump while driving and live? If there was a robot apocalypse, how long would humanity last? The answers almost always

predict big explosions and the annihilation of humans. Although I am not a science teacher, I found this book to be a great way to start a class and get students talking, especially the boys! It became a gateway book to many other nonfiction titles.

Carol Knott, ATA Council for Inclusive Education Coconference Director



This Is How We Do It: One Day in the Lives of Seven Kids from Around the World

This is a beautifully illustrated book that offers students a meaningful way to explore and compare daily life across different

cultures. It highlights both the unique aspects of each child's experience and the shared rhythms of daily life, helping students build empathy and a deeper understanding of the world.

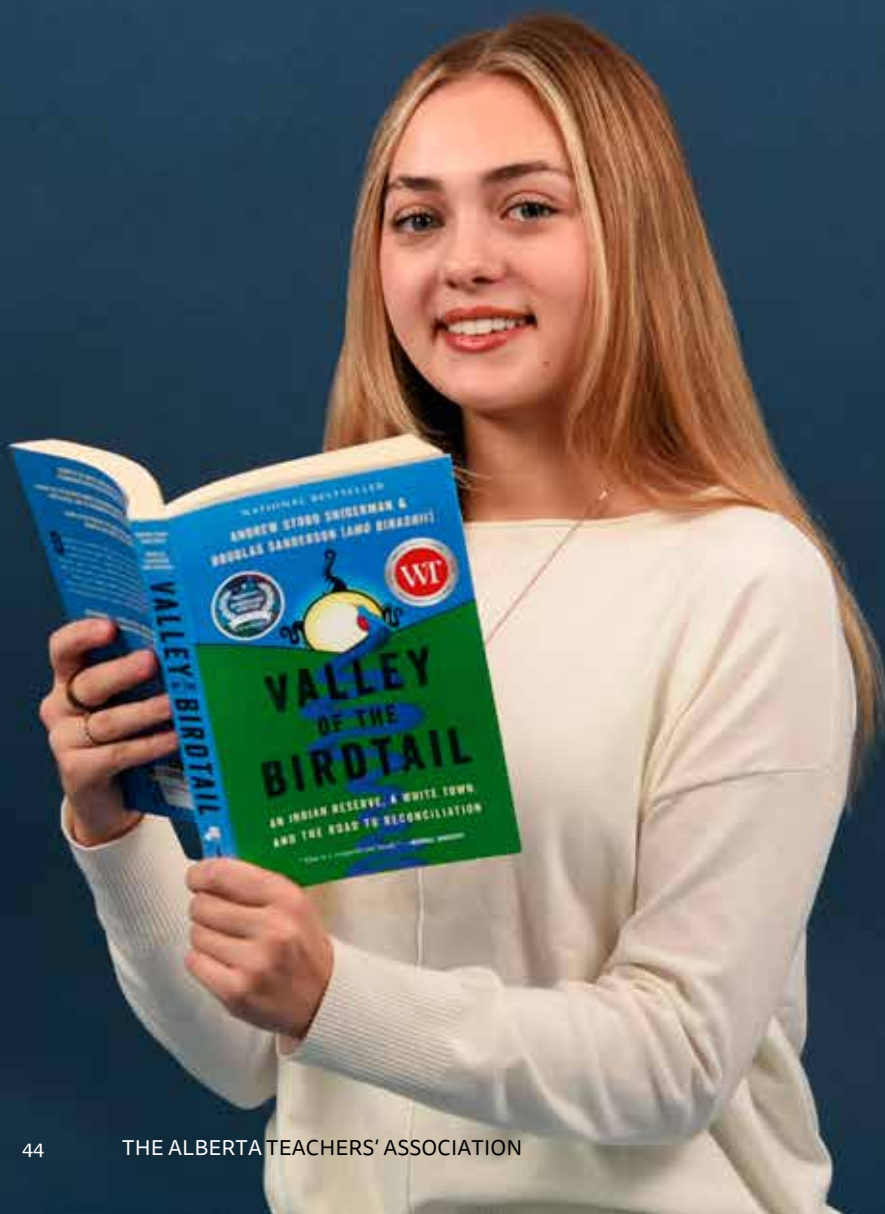
Meghan Clark-Jamieson, Early Learning Strategist, Early Childhood Education Council President



Terry Fox: A Story of Hope

Terry Fox's *A Story of Hope* is one of my favourites. Fox is one of the most influential people in our Canadian history. We have all heard of him, but a lot of young people don't know his whole story.

Jeremy Spink, ATA Middle Years Council President



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Supporting international opportunities for members

Educator Exchange Programs

The ATA's Educator Exchange Programs (EEP) offer Alberta teachers and school leaders professional development opportunities through reciprocal exchanges with partners from around the world. These programs aim to foster cultural understanding, enhance teaching practices and promote global citizenship by allowing participants to experience different educational systems and cultures.

IN-PERSON EXCHANGES

Structure: You will be hosted by your exchange counterpart abroad and then host your counterpart so they can experience Alberta's education system. During the exchange, which lasts one to two weeks during each part, participants arrange cultural visits to correspond with the interests of both parties.

Destinations: Spain, Germany, Australia and Iceland

VIRTUAL E-EXCHANGES

Structure: The e-exchange is a one-on-one virtual exchange that pairs you with another teacher or school leader with similar educational interests. Projects or other activities take place over four to six weeks. You and your exchange partner engage in discussions and video chats outside of class hours, much like virtual pen pals.

Partners: International partners in Spain, Germany, Australia, Mexico or with one of Alberta's accredited international schools

Focus Areas: Topics such as student wellness, instructional leadership, STEM, inclusion and global citizenship

LEARN MORE AND APPLY

More details about EEP are available on the ATA website under Professional Development > Exchanges.


CTF/FCE Teaching Together Program

The ATA facilitates Alberta teachers' participation in Teaching Together, a Canadian Teachers' Federation/ Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants program that connects Canadian teachers with educators in developing countries. With an aim to collaborate with educators to promote inclusive, high-quality public education, the program fosters mutual learning and contributes to the professional growth of both Canadian and international educators.

Structure: Projects take place in July, with participants attending a predeparture orientation in Ottawa to prepare for their assignments. Teachers spend approximately two weeks abroad.

Destinations: Countries in Africa and the Caribbean

LEARN MORE AND APPLY

More details about Teaching Together, as well as other international cooperation programs, are available on the ATA website under Professional Development > International opportunities. 



ISTOCK



Aider les membres à saisir des occasions à l'international

Programme d'échanges en éducation

Le programme d'échanges en éducation de l'ATA offre aux enseignants et aux leaders scolaires de l'Alberta des possibilités de perfectionnement professionnel grâce à l'organisation d'échanges réciproques avec des partenaires du monde entier. Ces programmes visent à favoriser la compréhension interculturelle, à faire avancer les pratiques pédagogiques et à promouvoir la citoyenneté mondiale en permettant aux participants de faire l'expérience de différents systèmes d'enseignement et de différentes cultures.

ÉCHANGES EN PERSONNE

Fonctionnement : Votre partenaire d'échange vous accueillera d'abord à l'étranger. Ensuite, vous accueillerez votre partenaire afin de lui permettre de découvrir le système d'éducation de l'Alberta. Durant l'échange, dont chaque partie dure une à deux semaines, les participants organisent des visites à saveur culturelle en fonction des champs d'intérêt des deux parties.

Destinations : Espagne, Allemagne, Australie et Islande

ÉCHANGES VIRTUELS

Fonctionnement : Dans le cadre de ces échanges qui, comme leur nom l'indique, ont lieu en ligne, deux enseignants ou leaders scolaires sont jumelés en fonction de leurs intérêts pédagogiques. Les projets ou autres activités réalisées se déroulent sur une période de quatre à six semaines. Vous et votre partenaire d'échange participez à des discussions et à des visioconférences en dehors des heures de classe; il s'agit d'une forme de correspondance virtuelle.

Partenaires : Nos partenaires internationaux se trouvent en Espagne, en Allemagne, en Australie, au Mexique et dans des écoles internationales agréées par l'Alberta.

Thèmes privilégiés : Le bien-être des élèves, le leadership pédagogique, les STIM, l'inclusion et la citoyenneté mondiale, entre autres.

POUR EN SAVOIR PLUS ET PRÉSENTER VOTRE CANDIDATURE

Vous trouverez de plus amples renseignements concernant le programme d'échanges sur le site de l'ATA sous *Professional development > Exchanges*.


Programme « Enseigner ensemble » de la CTF/FCE

L'ATA facilite la participation des enseignants de l'Alberta au programme « Enseigner ensemble » de la Canadian Teachers' Federation/Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants. Ce programme crée des liens entre des enseignants canadiens et des collègues de pays en développement. Grâce à une collaboration avec les enseignants dont l'objectif est de promouvoir une éducation publique inclusive de grande qualité, le programme favorise l'apprentissage mutuel et contribue au perfectionnement professionnel des enseignants du Canada et de l'étranger.

Fonctionnement : Les projets ont lieu en juillet et les participants se rendent à Ottawa pour participer à un stage d'orientation prédépart afin de se préparer à leur mission. Les enseignants passent environ deux semaines à l'étranger.

Destinations : Pays d'Afrique et des Caraïbes

POUR EN SAVOIR PLUS ET PRÉSENTER VOTRE CANDIDATURE

Vous trouverez de plus amples renseignements concernant le programme « Enseigner ensemble », ainsi que d'autres programmes de coopération internationale, sur le site de l'ATA sous *Professional development > International opportunities*. 



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MAR 9, 2026
10:15 a.m.



JESS CRAMP: THE UNTOLD STORY OF SHARKS

Curriculum connections: Life science, ecosystems, biological diversity, science/technology/society (STS), environmental impact, species at risk

MARCH 9, 2026 | 10:15a.m.



HEATHER LYNCH: PENGUINS OF ANTARCTICA

Curriculum connections: Life cycles & living systems, ecosystems, biological diversity, science/technology/society (STS), interconnectedness of land, animals & humans

APRIL 20, 2026 | 10:15a.m.



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Artists, programs, and dates subject to change.

Creative colleagues

Teachers have their own extracurricular activities. Some volunteer. Some write books. Others produce podcasts, create art or make music. Here are some endeavours undertaken by your colleagues “out there.”

MUSIC



Matthew and The Keys

In addition to being a teacher, Matthew Akplu is a pop/rock singer-songwriter who created the Matthew and The Keys project. As part of this project, Akplu recently released a six-song EP. The album's lead single “Take It” reached number three on the Queer Canadian Music Chart. Akplu had previously released a full-length album called *Victory* in 2021.

MATTHEW AKPLU

Shauna May Seneca School, Edmonton
mathekeys.com
@mathekeys
youtube.com/mathekeys

Sport and Recreation

Marathon Runner

When he's not teaching, junior high teacher Daylan Wizniuk is often found running. Wizniuk has been a marathon and ultra runner for 10 years, taking on everything from flat road races to up and over mountains for more than 100 kilometres. When it comes to his running, he enjoys being consistent—he has run at least a mile every day since November 2016—and continuing to get faster and stronger at a variety of race formats.

DAYLAN WIZNIUK

École Charlie Killam School, Camrose
@wizniukruns

BOOKS



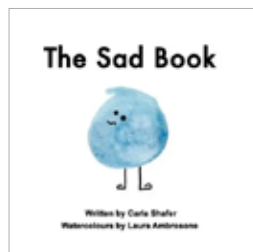
Haunted by Words Left Unspoken

Anna Marie Buonomo recently published a self-help book, *Haunted by Words Left Unspoken: How Speaking Your Truth Can Set Your Past Free*. Her book explores the complex weight of regret and invites readers to confront their truths, release emotional burdens, and move toward healing and self-compassion. It is deeply personal work that encourages growth through vulnerability and reflection.

After launching the book, Buonomo held five Indigo book signings to share her story.

ANNA MARIE BUONOMO

St. Elizabeth Seton School, Calgary
@annamariibuonomo
annamariibuonomo.com
FriesenPress



The Sad Book

Carla Shafer is a junior high teacher, author and mother of two boys—one here and one in heaven. Her journey through grief inspired her to write *The Sad Book* and later *The Mad Book*, stories that help children understand and work through sadness and

anger. These books encourage emotional awareness and resilience, offering tools to process big feelings rather than push them away. The stories remind readers that it's okay not to be okay, and that even the hardest emotions have something valuable to teach us.

CARLA SHAFER

Substitute teacher, Calgary School Division
WestBow Press
St. Rose of Lima Junior High School, Calgary
matteoshaferlegacy.com

- **What's new with you? Your colleagues want to know!**
If you'd like to make a submission for publication in *Who's Out There?*, email a summary (50–75 words) to associate editor Lindsay Yakimyshyn at lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.

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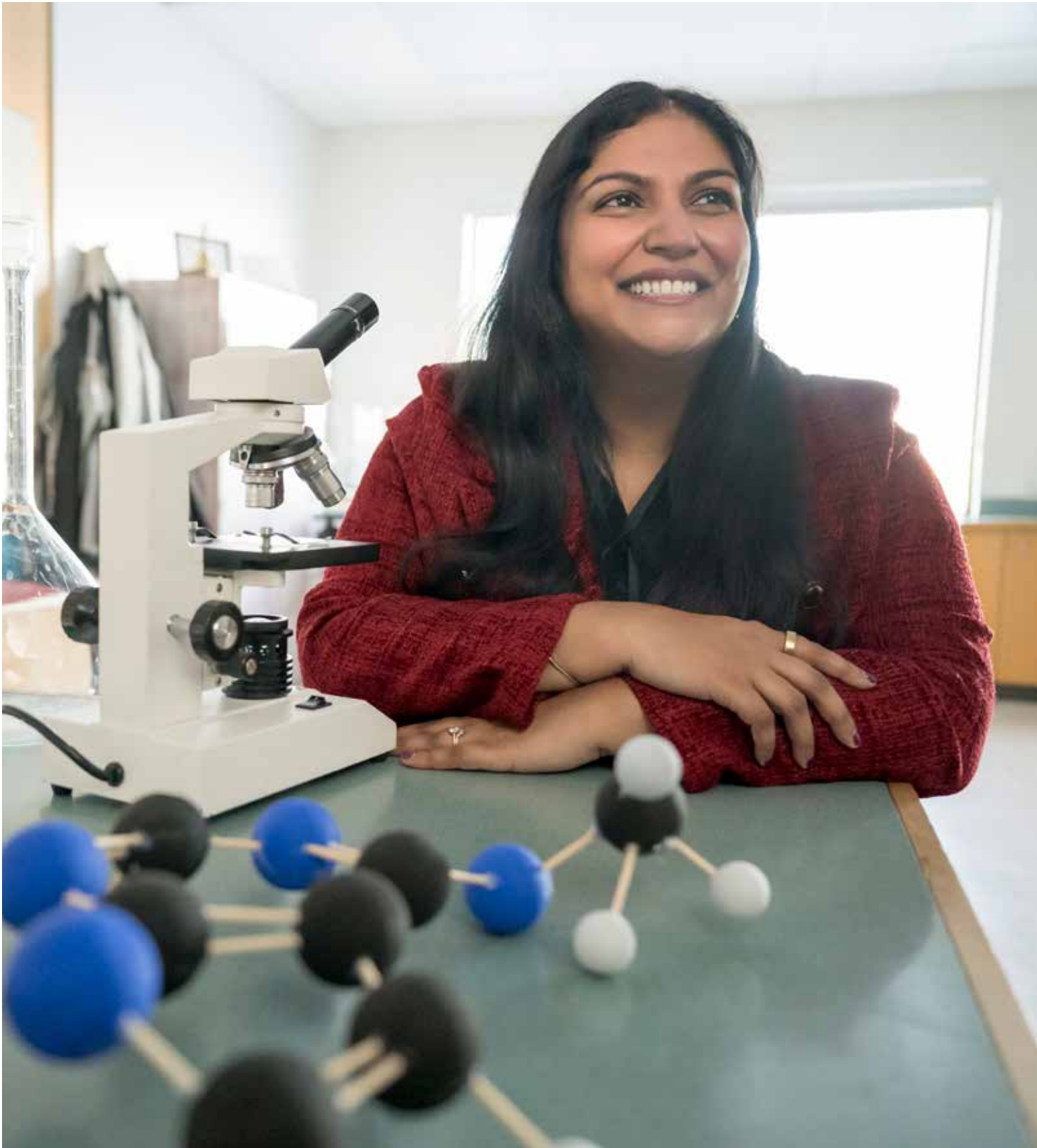
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To register, head to www.teachers.ab.ca and click the specialist councils link under the professional development menu.



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Her happy place

Suneet Kharey on discovering the teacher within

Lindsay Yakimyshyn

Associate Editor, ATA Magazine

AS A YOUNG CHILD, Suneet Kharey would spend weekend afternoons creating a school of her own.

The classroom: her playroom.

The students: a cuddly menagerie of stuffed animals, and occasionally her mom, whom Kharey would quiz to ensure she met the requisite learning objectives.

“To me, that was the most fun activity that I could do,” Kharey recalls with a laugh. “I should mention that I was an only child.”

Now a teacher at Chestermere High School, Kharey sees that she had the hallmarks of a teacher all along. It just took her awhile to fully embrace it.

WHERE TO?

Kharey grew up in Calgary, where her parents, immigrants from India, instilled in her the value of education. Post-secondary studies were an expectation.

In high school, she gravitated toward the sciences and initially set her sights on dentistry, starting a biology degree at the University of Lethbridge (U of L). Even as she began to question that path due to a lack of fulfillment, she stayed in the sciences, joining the U of L premed club and the iGEM competition team. This experience made her feel like she could make a difference and spurred an interest in bioethics.

Driven by that interest, Kharey completed her biology degree and began studying philosophy as a

step toward law school, before stepping back to consider where her skills and interests could make the most meaningful difference.

Unsure of her next step, she turned to a trusted academic advisor, who—to Kharey’s surprise—suggested she take the U of L’s Orientation to Teaching course. After all, she already had experience with the university’s science camps.

“I’d always respected teachers, but I never pictured myself as one, until I saw that I could be the representation I wished I’d had growing up.” She took a chance, signed up for the course and soon found herself in a classroom, loving every minute of it. Nice job, teacher

Right from the start, Kharey understood that teaching is about more than content.

“Teaching is really all about relationships,” Kharey says, “Even now, students come up to me and say they might not like math, but they’ll do it for me, because we’ve built that connection.”

Her mentor teacher, Tim Folkersen, quickly recognized Kharey’s ability to connect with students. In particular, he recalls how strongly one student who had lacked confidence in math responded to Kharey.

“This girl had to move, and I remember she was devastated, just devastated, because she wasn’t going to get to have Suneet as her teacher anymore. She had only been teaching a week, maybe two,” Folkersen says. “I said to Suneet, ‘Good job. Nice job, teacher.’”



Kharey was and wasn't surprised at her ability to connect with students. She had always loved math and science, and she revelled in sharing that joy with the next generation of learners. Somehow, the doubt that had crept in when she was pursuing dentistry or law wasn't there this time. She knew she was meant to be in the classroom, reaching these students.

"This was a pivotal moment for me," Kharey says. "I thought that just because I haven't had teachers who look like me doesn't mean I can't be that teacher for someone else."

ALWAYS ADDING

For Kharey, doubt looks different now. She knows that teaching is the place for her, but she hasn't always seen many people who look like her in the small communities where she has taught.

"I'm well educated—almost 10 years of university since I didn't know what I wanted to do—but when someone refers to me as a 'diversity hire,' I start to question everything."


In these moments, though, Kharey reminds herself that the work she does is important, that the relationships she is building with her students and the entire school community can make an impact.

"As a second-generation Indo-Canadian, it's about understanding the value of diversity and representation in education and ensuring that all students feel empowered to achieve their full potential," Kharey says.

She believes that her presence can help students celebrate their own value and navigate challenges within and beyond the classroom.

Each success Kharey shares can help students dream. Each roadblock can let them know they are not alone. She wants her students to feel safe to try new things, even if it means failing. She wants them to know that their education will always be there for them, even if it takes them time to find their way.

And Kharey has no regrets about taking her time to find teaching.

"My parents have always said education is one thing no one can ever take away from you. It always adds. So, this is where I'm meant to be." 

MEET AND GREET WITH

Suneet Kharey

What do you remember most about your first year as a teacher?

I started teaching during COVID-19, when learning was entirely online. It forced me to be intentional about relationship-building in a moment when students were isolated and overwhelmed. That experience fundamentally shaped my practice and continues to inform how I support students today.

Your journey has taken you from biology to law to teaching. Where next?

I completed my master's degree in critical studies in May 2025, and I plan to stay in education. Teaching is where my background in science and my interest in critical thinking and equity come together in a way that feels meaningful and sustainable. I want to be more involved in shaping the profession through ATA work, supporting preservice teachers and contributing to honest conversations about curriculum, power and whose knowledge is valued in schools.

What do you do to unwind?

I like quieter, creative ways of slowing down. I paint, garden, read, listen to podcasts, and spend as much time as I can in the mountains.

► **Got an idea?** In Profile features an interesting teacher in each issue of the *ATA Magazine*. If you know of a teacher who would be a good profile subject, please contact managing editor Cory Hare at cory.hare@ata.ab.ca.

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Quiet connection

What are your strategies for connecting with quieter students?



Trying to connect with any student comes down to finding something that they are interested in. I find that quieter students are tougher, but they are searching for a connection as much as other students. I leave my room open at lunch for my students to come in and hang out. I have been playing cards with the quieter students during this time and making these connections.

— Jeremy Spink



I love the 2x10 strategy. You take two minutes a day for 10 days and have a conversation with a student you want to get to know. I often have open-ended questions that get them talking about themselves. They get to see me valuing them, and I often take notes so I can commit their answers to memory to bring up in the future. It's also great to use with those students who struggle with behaviours or who seem to be seeking connection.

— Jennifer Lacourse

Having a therapy dog in our junior high school every few weeks had an amazing impact. So many of our quieter students gravitated to the dog and would become very talkative, opening up conversations between students and adults while petting or walking the dog.

— Carol Knott

I always meet students at the door. This provides an opportunity to connect right away. And I talk to them about preferred seating to help them feel more comfortable with their peers.

— Shelley Kirkvold

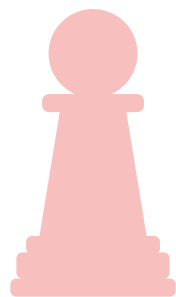


Connecting with quieter kids is incredibly important. The first step is being observant and truly listening. It's an essential skill for every teacher to develop: noticing the quiet ones and making sure they feel seen.

— Chris McCullough

We try to appeal to whatever their hobbies are, leave written comments on assignments that make them smile, and make sure we praise them for their efforts, although that last one usually tends to be one on one so that we aren't drawing attention to them if they don't want it.

— Victoria Holota



I prioritize building trust by getting to know each child's unique interests and connecting with them through activities they enjoy. This often happens best in one-on-one or small group settings, such as during outdoor exploration, drawing and colouring, board games or puzzles. In these moments, I intentionally follow the child's lead, creating a safe, joyful space where they feel seen, heard and valued.

— Meghan Clark-Jamieson



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The legend of Sloof Lirpa

Lesson on obscure explorer provides decades worth of memories

Jeff Spady

Executive Staff Officer, ATA



ILLUSTRATION BY ERIN SOLANO

THE CHALLENGE

Keeping up with a teacher who is on a completely different level.

WHEN I WAS IN GRADE

5 at Lamont Elementary, I had the incredible experience of having my dad, Mr. Spady, as my teacher.

On April 1, 1987, he taught my most memorable lesson, and it involved a little-known explorer named Sloof Lirpa.

The lesson began with Mr. Spady informing his students that we would be taking notes on an explorer, Sloof Lirpa. Back in those days the classroom had two chalkboards at the front, and Mr. Spady started filling the first one, very quickly. We tried our best to keep up, but, for some reason, Mr. Spady's pace was relentless.

The first chalkboard filled quickly, followed by the second and, before we could catch up, he erased the first and continued. This was highly unusual, and he was writing so quickly that, of course, the grumbings started. At first, students politely raised their hands and asked if Mr. Spady could slow down.

"We don't have time to slow down," he said firmly. Again, highly unusual.

“... the polite raising of hands was replaced by a barely contained mutiny.”

Mr. Spady continued to fill chalkboard after chalkboard, for a solid 45 minutes (in my Grade 5 brain it felt like three hours). By this time, the polite raising of hands was replaced by a barely contained mutiny. Students were calling out things like, “my hand hurts,” “even more!?” and “please make this stop.”

Very unlike his typical calm demeanour, Mr. Spady allowed the emotions of the class to rile him up and he was now demanding and unapologetic.

Nearing the end of the lesson, Mr. Spady stopped the class, had all of us put our pens/pencils down and gave us his full attention.


“This is the most important part of the lesson,” he said. “If there’s one thing you need to remember about this important explorer ...”

Speaking clearly and slowly, he delivered the final lesson as he wrote it on the board, at a normal pace this time.

“... upon Sloof Lirpa's death, they wrote his name backwards on his tombstone—APRIL FOOLS.”

For approximately three seconds, absolute silence. Then, pandemonium. Laughter, anger and relief. I'm not sure I've seen a more satisfied look on my dad's face as he witnessed the absolute gem he delivered upon us.

That memory has stuck with me in life and in teaching. Many years later, when I was teaching Grade 5, I got to teach the exact same lesson to my students, with the exact same result.

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