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## Northwest Teachers Convention A Great Success

August 30, 2011

Over 400 teachers and staff attended the Northwest Teachers association conference in Lashburn last Thursday and Friday. This year's theme was 'In Our Own Backyard-Design and Innovation' with workshops focusing on the changes that are affecting teachers – new curricula and new ways of thinking about teaching and learning.

Teachers were treated to two outstanding keynote speakers. On Thursday Tom Hierck, the executive director of the B.C. Principal's and Vice-Principal's Association, delivered a dynamic and uplifting message that looked at the role of the teacher in helping students to reach their full potential and gain the attitudes and skill sets that will best help them deal with the future.

On Friday former NHL player Jim Kyte spoke at length and in depth about those attitudes and qualities of mind that are the keys to success in any endeavour: hard work, a positive attitude, preparation, perseverance and passion. Kyte, the first and only legally deaf National Hockey League player, played 598 games in the NHL with the Winnipeg Jets, Pittsburgh Penguins, Calgary Flames, Ottawa Senators, and the San Jose Sharks. In addition he has been very active over the years in charitable work with deaf and hearing-impaired children, and he drew on all of his life experiences to illustrate his points.

In addition to the keynote speakers teachers were also able to take advantage of excellent breakout sessions, many delivered by NWSD staff, that covered a wide range of topics: math assessments, global education, curricula change and implementation, nutrition for sports, graphing software, online collaboration and sharing, the nature quest program, aboriginal world view and curricula, peer tutoring, the use of test results to refine teaching, peer tutoring, personal health and wellness, track and field for elementary teachers, SMART Board use, signing and setting up classrooms for hearing-impaired children, teaching nutrition for the classroom, and Native and Métis story-telling.

“It's been very important for us to use the experts that we have in our division to run breakout sessions,” said convention chair Susan Plant. “Our keynote speaker today commented that we don't need to go overseas or down south [for workshop leaders] because we're already doing very innovative things in our division. It's great that we can support those teachers and let them shine and share their knowledge.”

One of the presenters, best-selling author Sigmund Brouwer, used a unique mixture of story and music (based on his non-fiction work *Rock'n Roll Literacy*) as he looked at the principles behind reading and writing, and provided teachers with ways to make their teaching of writing both fun and effective. Brouwer also pointed out that, thanks to a sponsor, children who access this link: [myrockandrollbooks.com](http://myrockandrollbooks.com), after September 15<sup>th</sup>, will be able to download his e-books free of charge.

This convention is the first one to be held before classes begin. “The decision to hold our convention at the start of the year was based on community input,” said Plant. “Parents wanted their children to start school a bit later than in the past few years, and this fitted in with our plans. We were happy to move it forward because having it at the beginning of the year connected it to the professional growth plans of teachers. Teachers get off to a fresh start with good ideas that they can consider implementing in their classrooms at the start of the year. It just made more sense to have it now, and that also allowed us to align it with the professional development plans of the division.”

“It also connects us to our admin team. We work together now rather than having a teacher’s convention that is separate from the professional development that the administrators prepare for us. It has truly become a joint project- they contribute to the cost of the convention now and they help us with a lot of the planning and logistics. It makes it easier for teachers and the extra money that we save has helped us to bring in some very big-name speakers over the years like Marcia Tate, Tom Hierck and Harry Wong.”

Director of Education Duane Hauk enthusiastically agreed. “The PD committee has made sure that the sessions and the speakers are aligned with what we truly do in our profession: they are student-centered, about understanding children and establishing relationships with them, and they’re focused on improving the craft of teaching and their profession. I’m so impressed that that’s the avenue they’re taking!”

“When I looked at the teachers yesterday and again this morning,” he continued, “there was such a positive buzz – people were so impressed with the quality of the presentations. They were walking out of the sessions excited and looking forward to kicking off the year. This is the first year that we’ve held the convention before the students start school and when you begin the year with these levels of excitement, well, kids are going to buy into that excitement and that’s going to bring nothing but benefits.”

“This is also our 5<sup>th</sup> year of holding our convention locally,” said Plant, “and I’ve heard nothing but positive feedback about it. There are so many advantages: we use our own facilities which is cheaper for teachers and the facilities are better; we get to visit our colleagues’ schools and that connects us, and promotes the growth of Division culture. Plus, it’s also nice to be contributing to the communities – often we ask service clubs or teams in the schools to do the food and the catering, and so we end up contributing to their budget for the year. It’s nice to be able to support the community that we take over when 400 of us show up.”



Tom Hierck



Leeanne Hann, Sigmund Brouwer

Jim Kyte



All photos: Murray McDonnell