

"Language does not
exist merely for the
sake of naming
things."

KENNETH KAYE



Language

Flip your script

Learn about an innovative youth literacy project designed to *flip* negative experiences and self-perceptions into stories of strength and possibility.

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Reframing the debate

Andrew Pask and Murray Dobbin take a look at the language of politics, and the politics of language.

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What is in a word? The evolution of disability language

The history of language around people with disabilities is a reflection of the long-fought battle for respect, equality, and inclusion.

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A citizen's guide to planning jargon

Ever wondered what the Official Community Plan was? Or what FSR stands for? Find out in our peek into the cryptic language of planners.

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Finding community in language

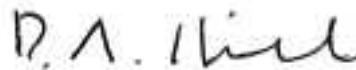
THE QUOTE ON OUR FRONT COVER begs the question: if not just naming, what else do we use our language for? Foremost, we use language to share ideas and communicate abstract concepts. And as such, language is the foundation of culture and communication, one of the cornerstones of civilization. But language—and indeed the way we think—is imperfect, and sometimes inadequate, and its mastery the work of a lifetime and more. But language is by its nature shared, and has a collective nuance and structure of representations that it itself can shape the very way we think about issues. When we reflect on the great orators and writers of our time, we recognize the power that lays in the masterful command of language. But we've also all had the experience of someone talking "technical" to us, and are aware of how much of a barrier that kind of language can be to communication and participation. That's why we chose the theme of language for this issue—to explore, illuminate, and *communicate* how language is used in community development and social justice in our province.

On the back cover of this issue are the three simple, powerful words of the annual fundraising campaign for the United Way of the Lower Mainland, where I sit on the Board of Directors.

SPARC BC is proud to be a long-term member agency of that organization and we are grateful for the support we receive from them.

SPARC BC continues to support communities throughout B.C. in all kinds of ways. We have renewed our Community Development Education project, responding to the learnings we received from the study done of the project, and will be presenting workshops for seven different rural and northern communities.

We heard such energy and commitment to community development at the Community Social Planning Network conference in the summer—it was inspiring. I've thought about the strength of our communities in B.C. and the work that we're doing that continues to build capacity, even as we have watched the natural and social devastation in the Gulf Coast states in recent weeks. How many times have we heard the phrase, "there are no words to describe..." and how inadequate is language to convey the concern and empathy we have for their situation?



DANIEL HILL
PRESIDENT, SPARC BC

HOLIDAY CLOSURE NOTICE

The SPARC BC offices will be closed for the winter holiday from December 23, 2005 to January 2, 2006. It will be business as usual on January 3, 2006.



OUR MISSION

The Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia works with communities in building a just and healthy society for all.

ABOUT SPARC BC

SPARC BC is a non-partisan, independent charitable organization. Since 1966, SPARC BC has conducted public education and advocacy on key social issues, focusing our efforts on the areas of:

- Income Security
- Accessibility
- Community Development



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SPARC BC conducts public education and advocacy on the priority issues identified by a provincial Board of Directors and volunteer committees. SPARC BC's Research and Consulting Services, Parking Permit Program for People with Disabilities, Community Development Education Program, and other programs contribute to the goals of fostering the social and economic wellbeing of individuals and communities in BC.

SPARC BC gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support of over 15,000 members and donors, and the United Way of the Lower Mainland. Membership in SPARC BC is open to all persons who support the mission and goals of the organization.

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MUNICIPALITIES VOTE 2005

The province-wide municipal elections are scheduled for November 19, 2005.

SPARC BC has once again assembled an election information package called *Municipalities Vote 2005*. You can find the package as an eight-page insert in the centre of this issue. You can also download copies of the package from our website at <www.sparc.bc.ca>.

We encourage you to use

Municipalities Vote to foster debate and get social issues on the political agenda in your community!

Call or email us if you would like additional printed copies to use in your area:

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If you're really keen, consider organizing an all-candidates meeting—see our guide to hosting one on *page 34*.



Literacy is central to complete participation in society. The *Flip Your Script* project, undertaken on the Sunshine Coast, was an innovative youth literacy project that supported participants to reframe their experiences of learning based on their interests and own reality. **BY KARI WOLANSKI**

Flip your script

In 2004/2005, the Sunshine Coast developed an innovative youth literacy project model called *Flip Your Script*. The name refers to a central strategy of supporting participants to *flip* negative self-perceptions into new stories of strength and possibility.

The project was initiated in response to a local needs assessment that found that nearly one quarter of students on the Sunshine Coast did not complete high school within six years. Among aboriginal students, the proportion was much higher. In 2000/01, 56% of First Nations students on the Coast did not graduate within six years. In 1999/2000, it was 88%.¹

Youth literacy issues are not unique to the Sunshine Coast. The education system is clearly not meeting the needs of aboriginal students, despite attempts to remedy this situation. One factor is the devastating impact of residential schools on the extended families of many students, affecting parents' relationships with education and their ability to support their children's learning. First Nations children also face considerably higher than average rates of poverty.

Alden writes that, "Illiteracy does not cause inequality; rather it reflects it, and to some degree helps to reinforce it."² Growing up in poverty, for example, creates barriers to a child's access to education. This in turn increases the likelihood that once grown, he or she will live in poverty. In 2003 in Canada, adults with level-one and two numeracy skills were nearly three times as likely to have been unemployed for half the year, and nearly five times as likely to have collected social assistance as people with higher level numeracy skills.³

Some literacy issues stem from learning disabilities. Others have to do with constraints on children's ability to learn due to undernourishment, frequent disruptions in education as a result of unstable housing, or lives with significant upheaval and stress.

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- 1 School District No. 46. 2002. *District Performance Plan 2002/2003*. Sunshine Coast.
 - 2 Alden, Harold. 1982. *Illiteracy and Poverty in Canada: Toward a Critical Perspective*. M.A. Thesis, University of Toronto.
 - 3 Statistics Canada and OECD, pp. 124 & 178.

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By the time youth reach high school, their behaviour may present barriers to learning. Substance use interferes with some high school students' learning process. Skipping classes, suspensions, absences due to early pregnancy, or leaving school altogether can also influence the literacy levels of youth.

Education theorist Paulo Freire wrote that, "The point of departure must always be with men and women in the 'here and now,' which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene."⁴

Flip Your Script supported participants to reframe their experiences of learning based on their strengths, interests, and immediate realities.

The project had outreach, recreation, community liaison, and research components. Youth workers were available through local community schools to provide outreach support in addressing barriers to learning such as lack of housing or personal crises. We offered recreation 'clinics' to create opportunities for learning that would be different than the traditional school setting. The most successful clinic combined deejay lessons and zine-making, a fantastic literacy exercise in which participants used collage, art, and writing to compile a 'zine.' The community liaison component raised awareness about literacy issues

among front-line workers who work with youth in crisis.

The primary goal of the pilot, the research component, was to develop a recreation-based upgrading project model in consultation with youth that would be effective in rural communities. Conceptually, *Flip Your Script* had three integral design elements: narrative therapy, multiple intelligences, and harm reduction.

"Schooling tends to focus mainly on linguistic, mathematical, and spacial intelligence, to the detriment of students whose strengths are in other areas."

Narrative therapy

Our approach was based on the work of White and Epston in *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. Their premise is that people give "meaning to their lives by plotting their experience into stories, and that these stories shape their lives and relationships."⁵ Life stories that are full of 'problems' can become self-fulfilling prophecies. Intervention, then, should emphasize opportunities to change their relationship with barriers and challenges. Support workers can do this by drawing participants' attention to 'exceptions' to a 'problem-saturated story.' As an example, our recreation-based programming created opportunities for youth to succeed, to enjoy learning, and to experience support. This

4 Freire, Paulo. 1996. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Ed. III. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company. p. 66.

5 White, Michael, and David Epston. 1990. *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. p. 79.

helped to shift negative self-perceptions such as, “I hate learning.”

Multiple intelligences

Education theorist Gardner contends that humans have at least eight types of intelligence. These are: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, naturalistic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal intelligences.⁶ Each of us exhibits these intelligences in differing configurations and thus learns differently. Schooling tends to focus mainly on developing the first three forms of intelligence, to the detriment of students whose strengths are in other areas. Thus, students who struggle in school are likely to feel that they are not intelligent and to develop a dislike for learning. Our project was designed to cater to strengths such as musical and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences in order to introduce different entry points into literacy and learning.

Harm reduction

Harm reduction models stress education and a non-judgmental attitude toward clients' use of substances. Rather than isolate those who use substances and increase the likelihood of risky behaviours, the goal is to maintain supportive connections and to empower clients to make less harmful choices. We used a harm reduction approach in order to acknowledge the interconnectedness between substance use and low literacy levels. Youth may misuse drugs and alcohol

as a coping tool to face the very barriers—such as learning disabilities, poverty, and racism—that contribute to low literacy levels. Low literacy may also be a result of sustained substance use, especially where being under the influence has affected a youth's learning in school or where a youth has been expelled due to drug-related behaviour. Excluding youth from participation because of their misuse of substances would likely alienate precisely the population we hoped to include.

Flip Your Script was a project for youth who had left high school prior to graduation. Participants enjoyed that we consistently engaged them with respect for their abilities as opposed to assumptions about their deficiencies.

In the end, our community had to flip *its* script. According to one Sunshine Coast youth who had left high school, “as soon as kids are not in school, society turns its back.”⁷ The final project event was a community workshop. Rather than looking at what is wrong with youth that is causing them to drop out of high school, we looked at how our community alienates youth and developed strategies to become a more inclusive community. ■

6 Gardner, Howard. 1999. *The Disciplined Mind: What All Students Should Understand*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

7 Anonymous in Wolanski, Kari. Jan. 2003. *Engaging Youth in Learning Through Recreation*. Sechelt: Sunshine Coast Social Planning Task Force and Sunshine Coast Literacy Advisory Council.



Reframing the debate: Rewriting the language structure of social issues

BY ANDREW PASK AND MURRAY DOBBIN

BEFORE WE BEGIN, George Lakoff would like you to take a moment to *not* think about an elephant—whatever you do, please *don't* think about the elephant.

Having trouble? Lakoff would not be surprised. He is a cognitive scientist working to understand how the brain processes language and structures thought. Lakoff and others like him are beginning to spell-out the relationship between language and thought, not only in terms of understanding our neural activity but also in terms of the implications for how we interpret and act on every-day matters—things like politics, economics, and social justice.

Years ago, sociologist Erving Goffmann popularized the idea that language and the brain interact to make *frames*—lenses that we use to understand and engage with the world. Fast-forward to Lakoff and his colleagues and we've entered the world of *issue framing*, where the way we think about issues is consciously manipulated by exploiting the way we think.

This has broad implications for the use of language in politics and the discussion of social issues. The key is to understand how issues are framed, and how to shift that frame for yourself.

Issue framing

Issue framing is about how issues are presented

for discussion and debate. Frames are part of the cognitive architecture that forms the basis of the way we think. As the painterly metaphor implies, the idea of framing describes the way a given issue is perceived and mediated through the confines of a conceptual window. We don't ever see the totality of a subject, or comprehend an issue from all angles. Instead we adopt a 'point of view' on a subject—often quite unconsciously. The concept of framing is obviously not new, in fact we frame issues all the time whether are conscious of it or not.

Further, decades of social psychological research have shown that the human brain is very good at selectively filtering the world around us in a way that fits our existing mindset. We find it easier to agree with an idea that fits with other ideas we might have. In other words, our world-view is a self-reinforcing entity. It's not unchangeable—in fact, it changes continuously—but it's definitely a challenge for people to be receptive to facts and ideas that counter their established perceptions.

Framing politics

You might be wondering how we are to make the leap from elephants and cognitive theory to social issues. The leap—even for our pachyderm—is actually an easy one. The people work-

ing to shape political perceptions are keenly aware of framing and how it works—and, much like advertisers trying to use lifestyle associations to sell a product—are attempting to exploit it at every turn. The crafty ones do this quite subtly, the less skilled in a more transparent fashion.

This is where things get interesting, for the various sides of any debate are trying to ensure that they have the dominant frame. We are now in an era of “framing wars” to use the military metaphor adopted by the author of a recent *New York Times* article. And this means that the framing of issues will often be competitive and highly polarized. Experts on the subject know that if you control the frame you control the debate.

Lakoff tends to structure his own arguments on political framing in terms of “progressive” versus “conservative” values (a re-statement of the left-wing versus right-wing dichotomy). At any rate, under his framing of the debate, we can see that the dynamics of issue framing are a great challenge for progressive politics at the moment. The “right” in his view has done a superlative job of defining the language and structuring of the political landscape over the last few years, not because their policies and programs are better for people, but because their framing resonates more strongly with voters.

In contrast, rather than advancing their own alternative frames with which to define issues, the social justice community has often limited themselves to trying to rebut the frames advanced by neo-liberalism—in effect asking people not to think about elephants.

Given the success of the conservative agenda over the last few decades, Lakoff and others like him are starting to look closely at this issue. There is growing consensus that, compared to their tax-cutting, social-service eliminating counterparts, progressive organizations and political parties in Canada have not addressed this important communications concept systematically enough—and are weaker for it.

For organizations and individuals concerned with the social well-being of British Columbians,

“Effectively challenging dominant ideas is virtually impossible when others have defined—and thus control—the language of that debate.”

there is much to be gleaned from looking at the dynamics of issue-framing. Much the importance of this arises from the recognition that the right has been successful in dominating the political debate not because their ideas are more worthy, but because they have been eminently successful in framing political debates from their perspective. Effectively challenging their dominant ideas is virtually impossible when they have defined (and thus control) the landscape of that debate.

The Process of Framing

To illustrate, let’s take an example from the language of taxation, specifically the idea of “tax relief” and the concept of a “tax burden.” Years ago, American author Oliver Wendell Holmes

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noted, “Taxes are the price we pay for civilization.” Holmes was commenting on the many great benefits that are derived from a collective pooling of resources—hospitals, roadways, education, safety, public peace, and so on. Despite the fact that taxation, as the fundamental fuel for the engine of governance, allows us to address many of our social needs, the language of the conservative parties has constructed taxes as a substantial problem. Canadian politicians have adopted this language wholesale. The language of “tax relief” and other related terms have been bandied about with much regularity—with the net effect of subsuming Holmes’ viewpoint to the extent that the state is seen as a thief—a scoundrel trying to empty the pockets of hard working men and women.

Repeated over and over, the idea of a “tax burden” creates a frame for the practice of taxation. Taxes framed thus imply a form of weighty affliction, a loadstone that threatens to break us, and something from which we need relief. This in turn, paints anyone who can promise to cut taxes

in a positive light.

Further, in this frame it is difficult to argue against “tax relief.” The language used to construct the frame leaves critics and dissenters at a disadvantage. How can relief from something be a bad idea? Even arguing against relief implies an acceptance of the idea of burden. As a consequence, those who deny relief are easily cast as uncaring.

If the issue is reframed, for example, as “paying our dues for living in a civilized society” the debate shifts to connect with what we know are most people’s values—that is, their support for democratic government and strong social programs.

The same dynamic of framing replays itself across a range of issues, from health care, to poverty, security, education, and the environment. For example, in the 1990’s, the Conservative government in Ontario framed a massive land-use strategy under the green-friendly title of “Lands for Life,” even though the strategy would open an unprecedented amount

ELEPHANT HUNTING

Let’s revisit our elephant—the one you weren’t supposed to think about—and see how it illustrates some of the central maxims of framing theory.

Negating the frame evokes the frame. By now it should be obvious that it is impossible not to think of the elephant when told not to, that is, “in order to purposefully not think of an elephant, you have to think of an elephant.” Talk about how bad tax cuts are, and you just reinforce the idea of tax cuts.

Every word evokes a frame. If frames represent the conceptual structure that guides our thinking, then words are the means to trigger these structures in our mind. As Lakoff says: “the word *elephant* evokes a frame with an image of an elephant and certain knowledge” that we might have about elephants (like size, characteristics, behaviors, etc.)

Words defined within a frame evoke the frame—meaning that words that are connected with a given frame will, when used, bring that frame to mind. Again, Lakoff’s example: “Sam picked up the peanut with his trunk.” The word “trunk” is a link. We don’t need to directly index the elephant frame with our language in order for its existence to be connoted by association. Here, the idea of associations is very important. Much of our language works on metaphorical and associative forms of thought—which means that much of the way we view the world does as well. The trunk is part of an elephant, and in the above sentence, the trunk “part” elicits a sense of the whole. The power of suggestion inherent in this is key to understanding how frame theory comes to play in defining social issues.

Evoking a frame reinforces that frame. Whether through association, negation, or direct referencing, any time a frame is raised, it’s conceptual status in the brain is reinforced. It becomes more ‘real’ to us.

of the province's Crown Land to large-scale industrial extraction processes. The government's quick move to frame the debate meant that anyone taking issue with the initiative was taking issue with the conservative frame—which was pitched as being pro-environment, about “life,” “wilderness protection,” the province’s “legacy,” and a range of other devices.

Reframing

The solution is not to engage with an existing frame but to reframe an issue all together. Much of the work of Lakoff and others has been geared towards exploring how issues are framed, and the effect of conservative frames on the erosion of collective, nurturing values and support systems. Reframing issues so that they reflect the values of social and environmental justice is a necessary step toward reclaiming the political space that has been lost.

Table 1: A brief primer on reframing poverty: Changing the Poverty Frame²

Frame From	Frame To
Poverty	Economics
Individuals	Places, conditions, systems
Fixing people	Fixing things so people can benefit
Punishing laziness	Rewarding/incentivizing work
Getting people to work	Getting work to pay people
Making people equal	Making opportunities equal

To reframe an issue, start by identifying the relevant core values that underscore the issue for you (e.g. the need for equitable work, opportunities for social advancement, etc.). In so doing, you will start by developing the moral component of your framework. This is very important: the moral fabric of the frame adds strength and tends to resonate far more than solely fact-based arguments or appeals to intellect. The narrative

support for your frame will become bolder, the story you present richer.

Once you have the moral architecture of your frame worked out, work to articulate your position within this framework. Identify the key facts, arguments, and consequences that are attached to the frame—remember, this is about your frame, not theirs. Finally, work to define a sense of “us and them” from within the perspective of your frame. This is your territory. From within your frame, contrasting ideas should seem as nonsensical as arguments against “tax relief” or “lands for life.” ■

Further Reading

- Matt Bai. “The Framing Wars” in *New York Times Magazine*. July 17, 2005. Pp 38-71.
- Fred Block. “The ‘Thing’ Economy and the ‘Care’ Economy.” *AlterNet*. <www.alternet.org/story/17146/>.
- George Lakoff. *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*. New York: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004.
- George Lakoff. “Simple Framing.” <www.rockridgeinstitute.org>.
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- Frameworks Institute. “Child Poverty” in *Kids Count E-Zine*. <www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/issue5poverty.shtml>

1 George Lakoff. “Simple Framing.” <www.rockridgeinstitute.org>.

2 Adopted from the Frameworks Institute. “Child Poverty” in *Kids Count E-Zine*. <www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/issue5poverty.shtml>



The history of the language around disabilities is disempowering. A social model of disability language brings with it language of equality and inclusion. **BY GLENDA WATSON HYATT**

What is in a word?

The evolution of disability language

CRIPPLE. HANDICAPPED. DISABLED. Physically challenged. Person with a disability. It doesn't really matter what term is used, does it? After all, is not a rose by any other name still a rose?

Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski suggested that “language and culture are indivisible, our language is our culture and how we use it reflects on our culture.”¹ Through history, culture has dismissed, discounted, and discarded those seen as different or disabled. Preoccupied with physical perfection in ancient Greek times, infants who did not measure up were drowned in the river. In medieval times, the disabled, feeble-minded, and malformed were court jesters and exhibitions at freak shows—*things* to be laughed at, ridiculed, and feared. More recently, the disabled were the first group to be murdered by the Nazis.

An indicator of a society's regard for the disabled lays in the terms used to label them. For example in English, *invalid* means “not valid” or “not acceptable.” *Handicap* conjures up an image of someone on the street corner with “cap in hand,” begging for handouts and charity. These

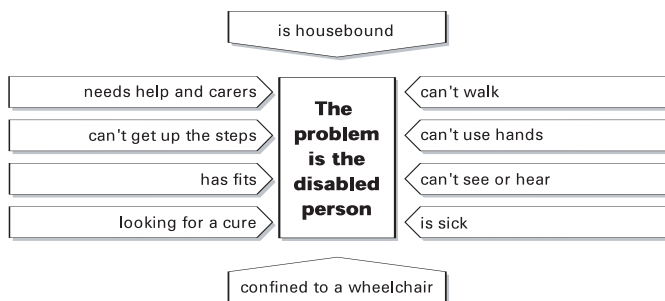
labels degrade individuals by focusing on their differences or incapacities, rather than on the individuals themselves. Labels link individuals to stereotypes, and often trump other indicators of identity. People use labels as a form of mental shorthand, for example, “the disabled,” “the homeless,” “single-parents,” and so on.

Until recently, the prevalent model of disability has been the medical model in which the disabled person is seen as the problem: “We are to be adapted to fit into the world as it is.”² In this model, terms frequently used include *confined to a wheelchair*, *housebound*, *suffers from*, *stricken with*, *needs help*, *needs a cure*, *can't walk*, *can't talk*. Usually the focus is on the impairment, rather than the needs of the individual. This language emphasizes dependency, pity, fear and patronizing attitudes and reinforces negative stereotypes of disabled people. In this model, “most disable-

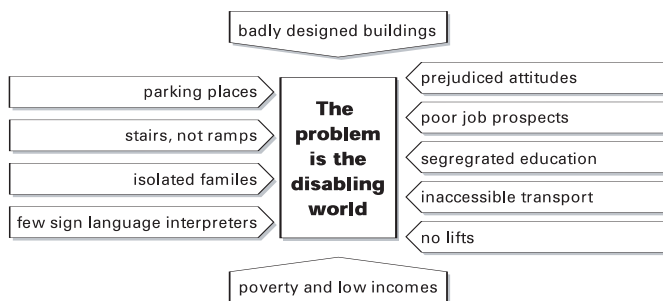
1 Balandin, Susan. “Transitions – A lifelong journey.” School of Communication Sciences and Disorders: The University of Sydney.

2 Self Direction Community Project 2000 – 2001. Disability Awareness Training <www.selfdirection.org>.

The Medical or Individual Model of disability



The Social or Structural Model of disability



From the Disability Rights Commission lesson on Citizenship and Disability. See <<http://www.drc-gb.org/citizenship/lessonplans/citizenship>>.

ment is created by oppressive social systems.”³

In the late 1980’s, largely influenced by people with disabilities themselves who argued that *disability* is a socially constructed concept and society itself creates the disability, there was a shift from the medical model to the social model. In this model, prejudice, discrimination, and inaccessible environments are the disabling factors, rather than the medical conditions.

The social model of disability highlights the use of language to disempower, as the medical profession and government imposed limiting and negative labels. This type of language is used as a way to control, dominate, and subtly or blatantly discriminate.⁴ This model gave way to the empowerment of people with disabilities through the development of a vigorous disabled identity and self-advocacy movement.

Then, language around disability began to change:

“...we are not ‘the disabled.’ We are disabled people, or even people with disabilities. It is important that we do not allow ourselves to be dismissed as if we all come under this one great metaphysical category ‘the

disabled.’ The effect of this is a depersonalization, a sweeping dismissal of our individuality, and a denial of our right to be seen as people with our own uniqueness, rather than as the anonymous constituents of a category or group.”⁵

For the first time in history, people with disabilities were finding their voice in determining which terms would define them. The result was a widespread social realization that the disabled population is not a homogenous group, but rather a group of individuals often lumped together—as many stereotyped groups are—despite differences in experiences, beliefs, needs, and goals.

Society no longer knew what to call these

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³ Ibid.

⁴ Simpson, Sam and Carolyn Cheasman. “A social model of stammering.” *Signal*. Issue 13, Spring 2000. <www.fluencysig.org.uk/new_page_5.htm>

⁵ Brisenden, Simon. “Independent Living and the Medical Model of Disability.” *Disability, Handicap and Society*. Volume 1 (2) pp. 173-8, 1986. <www.leeds.ac.uk/disability-studies/archiveuk/brisenden/brisenden.pdf>

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newly empowered people. Not wanting to upset or offend them, society grappled for more *socially acceptable* terminology: physically challenged, visually impaired, differently abled, disAbled, and so on. Canadian songwriter Jane Field expressed this sentiment in *The Fishing is Free*:

*No one knows just what to call us
which label should befall us,
And they're some dandy terms from which to choose.
My favourite's "wheelchair-bound" 'cause it has a
bondage sound.
Oh it's fun to guess what term they're going to use.⁶*

Although the terms used to refer to people with disabilities are evolving, the language used to describe their experiences seem to be still somewhat medicalized. Able-bodied individuals *exercise, workout, and have personal fitness trainers*, while individuals with disabilities get *rehab, therapy, and have physiotherapists*. Able-bodied children *take* music lessons, children with disabilities *receive* music therapy. Able-bodied children *do* swimming lessons, children with disabilities *get* hydrotherapy. Such language still implies a sense of dependency and inferiority; a sense that the experiences are happening *to* the individual, rather than the individual being *actively* involved.

There is still some distance to go before people with disabilities are acknowledged as equals in society. The use of language and choice of words go a long ways in empowering and liber-

ating, and thus, creating equality. For example, one wonders if the labels *Olympians* and *Paralympians* are viewed equal, as having the same high-quality of athleticism, determination, and commitment. Is this differentiation between athletes necessary? What purpose does this distinction serve? What stereotypes are reinforced?

Words can hurt or they can heal; they can disempower or empower; they can reinforce negative stereotypes or enlighten. Consider the language you use everyday. Does it convey the right message? ■

Empower Your Words

When communicating, choice of words can be quite empowering and liberating.

Words like 'gimp,' 'cripple,' and 'handicapped' convey a different image than 'a person with a disability,' 'a man with multiple sclerosis,' or 'a businesswoman with cerebral palsy.'

If you are unsure of what terminology is appropriate, keep these three simple tips in mind:

1. Put people first, not their disability.
2. Individuals with disabilities have different preferences regarding terminology. To ease awkward situations, simply ask the individual what he or she prefers—if such terminology is even necessary in the situation.
3. Remember, we all have names. If the particular situation does not require disability-related terminology, simply use our names, please.

The key is to speak to and refer to people—all people—in a respectful manner.

⁶ Jane Field, "The Fishing is Free," quoted on www.independentliving.org/docs3/brown98a.html



The language of land-use planning is a vernacular mine field of jargon, acronyms, abbreviations, and legalese. This brief guide to the language of planning will serve civilians as well as those on the front lines. **BY SARAH SLACK**

A citizen's guide to planning jargon

PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE OFTEN SERVES as a timesaving or potentially life-saving shortcut for communication among those in the know. Think of a surgeon who must ask a nurse for a specialized instrument during a surgery. We want her to be able to describe the instrument in one word rather than six when time is critical to saving a life.

When professionals use jargon with those unfamiliar with the vernacular, it can be a way to exercise power or control over knowledge of a situation or decision-making process. Land-use planning has quite a bit of jargon that can be difficult for the average citizen to understand. It is especially important for municipal planners to use clear and understandable language when they interact with the public because municipal land-use planning has a tremendous impact on the life of every resident of a city.

This article is a guide to planning jargon for citizens who may be baffled by the terms used by land-use planners. The article focuses on land-use planning because it has a number of fre-

quently used terms that are not in common use. Becoming familiar with some of these key planning terms will help you if you've been in a room where a planner sounded like he was speaking a foreign language, or if you want to be able to

communicate and negotiate with planners more effectively.

Becoming familiar with some of the terms defined below will enhance your knowledge of land-use regulations and decisions your municipal government

might make. Understanding these terms can also help you in your efforts to improve the well-being of your neighbourhood and city.

THE COMMUNITY CHARTER is a new piece of legislation that replaces *in part* the Local Government Act. *The Community Charter* was passed in January 2004 and sets out authorities for every municipality in B.C., except for the City of Vancouver. It is a change from the type of legislation like the *Local Government Act* that includes detailed lists of very specific powers municipali-

“Land-use planning has quite a bit of jargon. Becoming familiar with key planning terms will help you communicate and negotiate with planners more effectively.”

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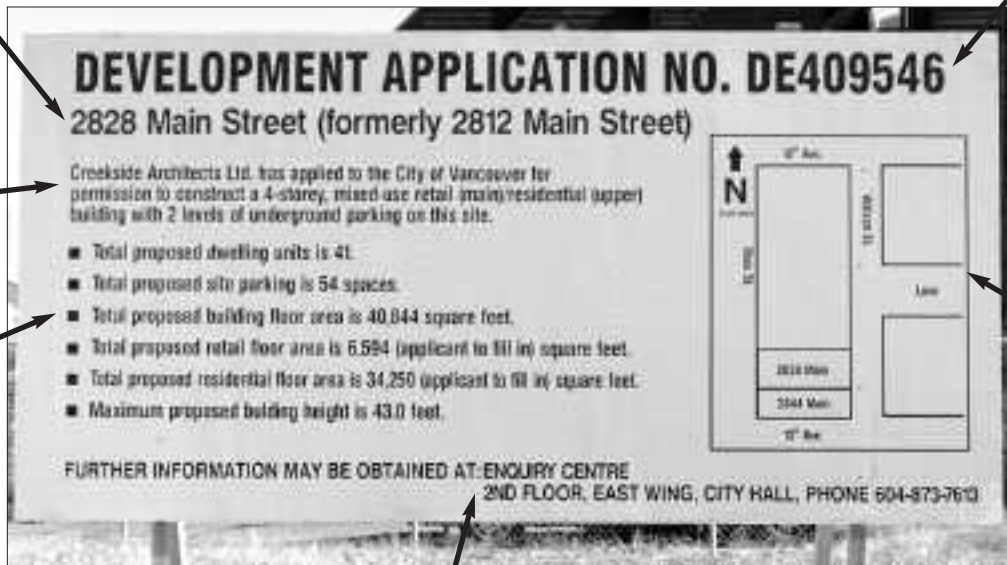
Anatomy of a Development Application

The development application sign must be in prominent view on site and remain in place for a minimum length of time.

Every application has a unique identification number. Use this to find out more information about a project.

The development company and description of the building.

The detail here is mandatory and varies by development size and type.



All development applications are filed at city hall. Anyone can view them.

Every application must include a map depicting the location and orientation of the development.

ties have. *The Community Charter* provides municipalities in B.C. broader scope of powers. *The Community Charter* explicitly states that the purposes of a municipality include “fostering the economic, social and environmental well-being of its community.”

VANCOUVER CHARTER applies only to the City of Vancouver and sets out the powers and responsibilities that this municipality has. Four cities in Canada have special charters like this: Saint John, Winnipeg, and Montreal are the other three. Only a very few parts of the *Community Charter* apply to the City of Vancouver.

LAND-USE PLANNING is the type of planning at the municipal government-level that deals with the

way in which private and public land can be used and developed. Smaller municipalities may have only one planner or a very small planning department. Larger cities such as Kelowna, Prince George, and those in the Lower Mainland often have two types of land-use planning departments: policy planning and development planning. Long-range or policy planning is responsible for developing official community plans, neighbourhood plans, and other policies related to environmental protection or heritage preservation. The other type of land-use planning department is often called development planning, implementation planning, or current planning. This branch of planning deals with things

like development applications, rezoning, and subdivision.

OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN [OCP] or **OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN [ODP]** is a document that sets out the general policies and plans for where and how land-use and infrastructure, like sewers, parks, and transportation, will develop in the future. The creation of an OCP legally requires public input and it cannot be changed without public consultation. All bylaws created after an OCP is adopted must not contradict the plans and policies in the OCP.

BYLAWS are the laws passed and adopted by a municipality using the power they have been delegated by the provincial government. Municipalities have bylaws that give their zoning districts, official community plans, transportation plans, and other policies teeth, so that they are able to enforce the rules and regulations set out in those plans and policies.

ZONING DISTRICTS set out the kinds of development and uses of land that are allowed in different parts of a city. In general, zoning districts are labelled as follows:

- **R** – Residential, with further distinctions for areas where single-family homes are permitted and where multi-family dwellings (duplexes, townhomes, apartments, etc.) are allowed to be built.
- **C** – Commercial
- **I** or **M** – Industrial

There are also zoning districts for agricultural land, and institutional land where schools, hospitals, and libraries are permitted.

Zoning also sets limits on the location and height of a building on a lot, the amount of space the building has to be setback from the edges of the lot, and the maximum floor area of the building that is allowed. Zoning regulations get very specific!

REZONING, VARIANCE, or AMENDMENT all refer to changes in the use of land that is set out in the bylaw, plan, or zoning. Permission is always required for these kinds of changes. Rezoning requires a public hearing.

DENSITY is measured by calculating the **FLOOR SPACE RATIO [FSR]** or **FLOOR AREA RATIO [FAR]** of a building. You can calculate FSR by dividing the size (floor area) of a building by the size (square footage) of the lot on which it is built.

DENSITY-BONUSING is the practice used by some larger municipalities to allow developers extra height (or extra FSR) in the buildings they are constructing. In exchange, the developer must provide a space that has a public use like a library, park, childcare centre, or arts centre. These are sometimes called **COMMUNITY AMENITY CONTRIBUTIONS [CACs]**. Density-bonusing is also a tool used by planners to create more social housing or preserve heritage buildings.

DEVELOPMENT COST CHARGES [DCC] or **DEVELOPMENT COST LEVIES [DCLS]** are the amounts charged by municipalities on new developments that help to pay for things like parks, transportation, or childcare that are needed as a result of the growth of the city. DCC's are generally charged per square foot. ■

Delayed report shows B.C. welfare-to-work programs ineffective, expensive

In August, the government released an 11-month-old evaluation of its Job Placement and Training for Jobs programs. The report shows a lack of effectiveness, misapplication of efforts, and hefty price tag for the government's work-focused welfare experiment, writes **Matthew Beall**.

ON AUGUST 3, 2005, the B.C. government released the summary of a September 2004 assessment of its welfare-to-work programs. A couple weeks later, the full report and a follow-up report that updates the original through July 2005 were also posted Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance website. The reports are the first independent evaluation the public has seen of any aspect of the government's work-focused welfare experiment. The assessment shows that the Job Placement and Training for Jobs programs have, to date, been ineffective and expensive. This comes as no surprise to many critics of the system, who have been critical of the government's lack of transparency and accountability and who have cited failures of similar programs in Ontario and the U.S.

Regardless of the policy's successes or fail-

ures, it is not fair to the citizens of British Columbia that they receive little or no information on the cost or efficacy of welfare-to-work programs apart from the government's unsubstantiated (and repeated) claims of success. That a report like the one released in August was delayed eleven months (and one election) before being released—and the public was left unaware of its existence for so long—is a clear demonstration that the government has little interest in transparency or accountability. Supporters and critics of work-focused welfare alike deserve to know whether the system is working as proposed and how, when, and if it will be improved and evaluated over time.

The first report card: failing grades

The reports indicate that neither of the government's extended employment-oriented pro-

“All government programs, especially those like work-focused welfare, where the well-being of our least privileged citizens is at stake, should be open to a maximum of public scrutiny.”

grams have met with success.

The Job Placement program, ostensibly designed to place eligible individuals in jobs so that they become, and remain, independent of welfare, does not appear to be of significant help to those admitted, nor does it seem to be helping those who need it most. The difference in the amount of ‘independence’ from income assistance payments gained by individuals accepted into the Job Placement program versus those who were referred but not accepted is minimal: 19.7 months versus 18.3 months (over 34 months). In addition, the authors of the report noted that of those referred to the Job Placement program but not accepted, many were not accepted because the contractors perceived them as less employable by the contractors, and therefore less profitable under the performance-based contracts. Even so, this referred-but-not-accepted (and less employable) group had only 1.4 months less ‘independence’ over the almost three years of the Job Placement program. What this indicates, essentially, is that the vast majority of people on welfare are without significant barriers to employment can and will find work whether admitted to a job referral program or not. The preference given to the most employable welfare recipients means that little time and effort is directed toward helping the minority of ‘expected to work’ individuals who actually need significant help finding and retaining work. It is this group that faces the greatest potential hardship under the time limits set by

the government.

The story is not dramatically different for the Training for Jobs program, which aims to provide short-term, job-relevant training to individ-

“That a report like the one released in August was delayed eleven months (and one election) before being released—and the public was left unaware of its existence for so long—is a clear demonstration that the government has little interest in transparency or accountability.”

uals and then place them in jobs. Only half of the individuals accepted into the program have been placed in a job to date. Just one-in-three has achieved at least one month of independence, and only one-in-four has attained six or more months of independence. Again, as with the Job Placement program, the telling statistic is the incremental improvement in independence for individuals accepted into the program is minimal as compared to those referred-but-not-accepted: only two weeks more independence over 28 months. What this may indicate is that those referred to the Training for Jobs program do not in fact so much need short-term job or skills training, but broad-based, individually oriented social supports, guidance, and programs.

On top of the less-than-spectacular successes of the welfare-to-work programs and apparent misapplication of efforts, the programs have been expensive. To date, the authors of the report

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estimate that contractors have received \$53 million to earn a net welfare savings of \$19.5 million. While a \$33 million outlay over three years may not be unreasonable for helping employment-challenged individuals prepare for, find, and retain sustainable employment, the record so far points to programs that are ineffective and which misdirect funds and efforts to the detriment of those who need them the most.

Moving forward

The government has already announced that it intends to revise the current programs. With a new round of contracts worth \$120 million being handed out this Fall and \$300 million dedicated to continuing its work-focused welfare policies over the next three years, you can be sure that the government is keenly interested in showing that its reforms are successful.

While the reports released by the government are a good first step in assessing the efficacy of its welfare-to-work programs, more transparency and accountability is required. All government programs, especially those like work-focused welfare, where the well-being of our least privileged citizens is at stake, should be open to a maximum of public scrutiny. While governments risk public criticism where programs do not perform well, they stand to benefit from external input and in those cases where the successes of such programs are clear.

Further, many questions remain about the work-focused welfare initiative, and the public deserves answers. Are individuals who achieve independence from the welfare rolls actually get-

ting out of poverty? What happens to those individuals who have their benefits reduced or revoked? How many people who were on welfare or who were denied benefits are now homeless?

Just as it is revising the Job Placement and Training for Jobs programs, the B.C. government needs to reexamine its reporting and evaluation procedures. The public requires a minimum standard of transparency and accountability far greater than the one shown to date, and further, we need to know that the government is committed to tracking the effects of its policy changes. ■

On the Web

The data cited in this article is available in the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance's posted evaluations of the Job Placement and Training for Jobs programs available at:

www.mhr.gov.bc.ca/research/reports/eval_JP_TJ.htm

COMING SOON

SPARC BC Policy Spotlight on WORK-FOCUSED WELFARE

SPARC BC has developed a new publication series we call *Policy Spotlights*. We plan to produce these short on a regular basis—probably around four times per year—to feature an emerging or existing local, provincial, or national policy issue from the standpoint of its contribution or threat to building a just and healthy society for all.

Our first *SPARC BC Policy Spotlight* is on B.C.'s new work-focused welfare policies. It will be published this fall on our website, with hard copies available to those that request them.

www.sparc.bc.ca • info@sparc.bc.ca

Diversity, action, reflection, collaboration:

Lessons learned from community development education in B.C.

This article draws from the research **Danyta Welch**'s Masters thesis, *Lesson Learned in Capacity Building: A Review of the Community Development Education Projects of the Social Planning and Research Council of BC* prepared for the School of Community and Regional Planning at the University of British Columbia.

IN SMALL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES across British Columbia capacity building has become a catchphrase for promoting economic growth, social vibrancy, quality of life, and local development. The reasons for this are multiple and complex, but in many cases the push for community capacity building has grown out of the realization that individual communities can no longer rely on local, provincial, or federal levels of government to provide social, economic, and ecological well-being.

But how do communities build their capacity? How do you nurture the skills required to maintain or re-establish the economic, social, and ecological integrity of communities? And—perhaps more importantly—how do communities know which capacities they need to develop, who is the appropriate teacher, and what does this kind of education look like? One answer can be found in the provision of community development education projects by regional organizations such as SPARC BC. This article briefly examines the lessons that can be learned from SPARC BC's experience in community development education and which can help other regional organizations

to positively impact capacity building in small towns and rural communities in B.C., or in similar regions.

Diverse participation needs to be actively encouraged

A consistent element in the capacity building literature is partnerships. The need for “effective partnerships at the local level with governments, Aboriginal organizations, business, labour and informal groups of active citizens” has been identified as a key approach to community development (Skills Development Canada 2004). As well, in its evaluation of numerous rural community development projects, the Canadian Rural Partnership identified the trend of getting “the cooperation and support” of local groups as a problematic and recurring necessity in their projects (Canadian Rural Partnership 2002).

The question of how regional capacity building organizations can best broker cross-sectoral participation looms large. For example, is one large community process more useful than separate processes for each sectoral audience? In

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the experience of SPARC BC, however, community members are not only identifying missing community sectors, but are also aware that these are the representatives they need to work in partnership with for long-term community development. This suggests that capacity building organizations may have a greater role to play prior to the delivery of workshops in actively encouraging diverse sectors to attend and assisting local organizations in networking to ensure relationships are formed before a learning event or community process begins.

The “value of diversity and the importance of inclusion of women, youth, disability and ethno-cultural learning needs” has also been identified as a cornerstone of best practices in community development work (Skills Development Canada 2004). SPARC BC’s experience in community development education highlights the need to be aware of, and sensitive to, the sometimes differing needs of community groups. For example, respondents from the Community Development Education Pilot and Creating Collaborative

Communities projects identified, to varying degrees, how the workshop impacted women, youth, seniors, people with disabilities, and First Nation people and communities.

Action needs to balance reflection

Just as community development involves “action, reflection, action, and so on” (SPARC BC, 1995: i) regional capacity building organizations need to incorporate checks and balances to ensure that adequate reflection is inserted into their work. Such reflection can be accomplished in many ways, including through the use of evaluations and guiding principles.

Evaluation of community development education approaches is a critical component in capacity building that needs to include a defined approach to measuring the impact of community capacity in order to build knowledge concerning how to impact outcomes and how to define the synergistic elements that support capacity building. And yet, evaluation is not being done in a comprehensive manner in B.C. For exam-

What Community Development Educators Can Do to Increase Participation:

- Model collaborative approaches by increasing scope of partnerships and collaborations between regional organization
- Encourage participation from diverse cultural and interest groups. A single community group is not representative of the community
- Encourage networking and community participation as an element of a life-long learning that is central to community development.

What Community Development Educators can do to Increase Reflective Practice:

- Incorporate a mutual learning perspective—the key is to “work hard to both educate and learn from citizens” (Burby, 2003:44).
- Use comprehensive, long-term evaluations to understand the link between programs and community development and relate these impacts to funders
- Take the front-end time to develop values and principles in order to deliver programs that are consistent with the organization mission or purpose and which address community need.

ple, of the nine leadership organizations identified in the CED Leadership Report, including SPARC BC, “several use databases to track course evaluations and results but only [two organizations] are doing longer term community impact assessments with participants” and only one group uses an external evaluation scheme on a yearly basis (Colussi, 2005: 8).

Guiding principles

While reflection and adaptation are good things, the use of guiding principles and values also appear to be a critical element in balancing action and reflection. Indeed, it has been stated that “to revitalize a community from the inside, we must ensure that there exists certain values and principles—of inclusion, mutual respect and equitable access to community resources” (Ronaghan 2003). Guiding principles allow flexibility to be mixed with consistent and intentional values, and assists in the delivery of locally appropriate workshops without reinventing the curriculum for each location.

What Community Development Educators Can do to Increase Collaboration:

- Be aware of the vast community development education expertise available in BC to address the capacity building needs of local communities.
- Recognize the tremendous value of modeling and facilitating partnership and collaboration development
- Create better linkages between local and regional organizations
- Develop networking mechanisms for regional organizations to come together
- Build partnerships with government agencies, at policy and programming level

Organizations benefit from collaboration

The Government of Canada’s Rural Secretariat has stated that “innovative community development approaches should be identified and shared” (Rural Secretariat 2004 3-4). Recognizing this and the fact that “regional partnerships and alliances create more opportunities and resources” (Colussi, 2005b: 24), collaboration within the capacity-building sector is a goal worthy of consideration. Yet, like evaluation, this does not appear to be happening on a significant scale in B.C.

The experience of SPARC BC suggests that encouraging and modeling collaboration is valuable, and is welcomed by most agencies in B.C. involved with capacity building projects.

The lessons described above are the accumulation of years of learning, and form a strong model for capacity building that should guide community development for years to come.

If you are interested in learning more about this topic, the complete thesis is available from SPARC BC.

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Community accessibility contacts project moves forward in year three

SPARC BC remains committed to building communication and collaboration between committees and organizations involved in accessibility work in B.C. Our accessibility contacts initiative has exciting plans for its third year, explains project coordinator **Nick Istvanffy**.

THE COMMUNITY ACCESSIBILITY CONTACTS INITIATIVE (CACI) has been a SPARC BC project since 2003. The goal is to create and build connections and networks between municipal staff and committees that work to improve accessibility for people with disabilities in B.C. In the first year of the project, a survey of municipalities in B.C. resulted in *Access Links 2003/04*, a booklet that provided information about the accessibility improvements and activities of over sixty B.C. municipalities. *Access Links 2003/04* also explored some of the common concerns that B.C. communities and municipal committees had about accessibility as a way to build awareness of accessibility issues and prompt policy makers to consider how to address them.

The third year of the CACI initiative is an exciting one for us. Not only are we set to print an updated version of the *Access Links* guide, but launch an online accessibility network and host a series of regional accessibility meetings.

Access Links 2005/06

To update the *Access Links 2003/04* contact information, distribute the results of the CACI survey

completed earlier this year, and share information on key accessibility issues faced by B.C. communities, SPARC BC has produced a new version of our information booklet, *Access Links 2005/06*. Participation in the network has increased, with many new municipalities. Included in the booklet are discussions of building bylaw and development options that some communities have tried as ways of promoting accessibility, as well as a discussion of approaches to provide and ensure parking spaces are available for people with disabilities.

Access Links 2005/06 also has a discussion of highlights innovative approaches that B.C. communities have taken to improving accessibility. Port Moody has implemented several interesting accessibility initiatives, including the 'Accessibility Awards' program and adaptable design guidelines for developers. Similarly, Powell River has undertaken to be a 'Model Community' for people with disabilities, and is working to ensure access to recreation and other services. The community of Hudson's Hope clears snow from the driveways of seniors for no charge in the winter. In Prince George, the

Special Needs Advisory Committee presents the 'Access Award of Merit' each year as a way of encouraging accessibility in the community.

The primary purpose of *Access Links 2005/06* is to update and expand the contact information for municipal committees and staff members who work to improve accessibility in their communities. To that end, the booklet has a section that identifies the appropriate contact persons for every municipality in the province. All of the municipalities who responded to the survey provided some information about their activities and successes in promoting community accessibility. This information will serve as a reference for local governments and committees seeking to improve accessibility in their own communities.

BC CAN

Another exciting part of this year's CACI project is the founding of the British Columbia Community Accessibility Network (BC CAN), a set of electronic communications tools hosted by SPARC BC to enable network members from across the province to collaborate, share information, and generally strengthen accessibility work in B.C. The BC CAN network will be configured with a variety of tools, including:

- An online version of the accessibility contacts directory.

"The third year of the CACI initiative is an exciting one for us. Not only are we set to print an updated version of the *Access Links* guide, but launch an online accessibility network and host a series of regional accessibility meetings."

- A discussion forum where members can contact one another, share ideas and opportunities, and have ongoing discussions on accessibility issues.
- Facilities for members to update their organization's contact and project information.
- An email newsletter to keep members informed.
- A document and resource library where members can share information and documents related to accessibility in B.C.

The network is set to launch this Fall. Watch for updates in the BC CAN section of SPARC BC's website: <www.sparc.bc.ca/bc_can>.

Regional Meetings

The respondents to the survey indicated that many would be interested in attending regional meetings to build networks and learn about the activities of other communities. In response to this interest, SPARC BC is planning to organize two regional meetings in different parts of the province. These meetings will take place over the fall and winter, and will help to build stronger links and relationships between the many people in B.C. who are working to improve community accessibility for all. ■

Deryck Thomson Award honours Michael Clague

Michael Clague's contribution to community social planning in B.C. is immense. His vision and dedication has made him one of the most respected voices in social planning in this province.



Special Congratulations.

Michael Clague receives a special commendation from his granddaughter at the Deryck Thomson Award ceremony on June 28, 2005..

THE DERYCK THOMSON AWARD, presented annually to an organization or individual, recognizes an exceptional contribution to community social planning and the well-being of B.C.'s citizens and communities. Deryck Thomson was a founder of SPARC BC and the award was established in 1991 by the SPARC BC Board of Directors to honour Deryck's contributions to the social well-being of our communities, but especially to families and children in B.C.

On Tuesday, June 28, 2005, SPARC BC presented the 2005 Deryck Thomson Award for Community Social Planning to Michael Clague, a long-time community worker and advocate and former director of SPARC BC. The reception, held at the Moberly Arts & Cultural Centre, was attended by over fifty friends, family, and

colleagues from Michael's many years of community work in B.C.

SPARC BC selected Michael for this award because throughout his career, he has helped shape community social planning in B.C. He has worked for all three levels of government and has been Executive Director of three voluntary agencies: the Britannia Community Services Centre (Vancouver), the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria, and the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC). He recently retired as Executive Director of a City of Vancouver facility, the Carnegie Community Centre, and now works in Vancouver as a private consultant.

Under Michael's leadership from 1985 to 1991, he reinvigorated SPARC BC by expanding

and refocusing the organization's research, social policy, and community development roles. During this period, SPARC BC did pioneering work on community economic development education throughout the province. The Community Development Institute was created and SPARC BC established advisory committees on Disabled Persons issues, Prevention of Elder Abuse and Neglect, Health, and Income Assistance. Under Michael's leadership, SPARC BC also published the first of its periodic reviews of welfare rates—an important project SPARC BC continues to this day. (Watch for *Left Behind: A Comparison of Living Costs and Income Assistance Rates in British Columbia* coming this Fall.)

In 1983, Michael wrote *A Citizen's Guide to Community Social Planning*, an incive work that remains relevant to this day. Each time a new staff person working on community development starts work at SPARC BC, they receive a copy to read on their first day.

Michael has recently retired from his position as Executive Director of the Carnegie Centre in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Michael helped to facilitate the use of community-

based arts and culture to support community development and bring diverse groups together in the area—to heal relationships, create new meaning, and create spaces of inclusion rather than exclusion. The Downtown Eastside Arts and Humanities Trust was created on the

“Throughout his career, Michael has helped shape community social planning in British Columbia.”

Carnegie Centre's 100th anniversary celebration and will community art in the neighbourhood. Michael has said of his experience at Carnegie that it was the most personally challenging and rewarding experience of his career, for all he learned about community, and about the miracles that people with very little means can accomplish for themselves individually and collectively.

During the award ceremony, Michael's colleagues celebrated his accomplishments, influence, and leadership. Doug Soo, Director of Continuing Studies at Langara College, had this to say of Michael: “Michael Clague is the person I want to be when I grow up.” ■



The power of language:

How we talk about welfare policy

The language we use to interpret issues shapes the construction and direction of policy. The change in the language of welfare in B.C. is an alarming example, writes **Kari Wolanski**.

POWER IS OFTEN UNDERSTOOD AS something that people possess. Some people have more power, represented by wealth, status, and their ability to exert influence ‘over’ other people. Others have less power, resulting in a reduced range of life choices.

Political philosopher Foucault suggests a completely different understanding of power, dismissing what he calls the “commodity metaphor” for power. Instead, he argues that power works through language and knowledge to shape our reality.¹ By this logic, which political party governs is less important than the received wisdom and laws regulating how they govern.

Policy is a particularly important intersection between language and power. Welfare policy, for example, exercises power over the lives of people living on social assistance by determining conditions and eligibility.

The language we use to understand the problem of poverty influences the type of solutions we consider. In 2002, B.C. overhauled its welfare policies, with *personal responsibility* as a guiding principle.² The language of personal responsibility leads to policies based on what individuals should do to prevent their own poverty.

Throughout the process of welfare reform, the B.C. government has suggested that people are choosing welfare as “a lifestyle.”³ Economist Stiglitz pokes fun at the assumption that unemployment is caused simply people choosing not to work. “In this interpretation, unemployment in the Great Depression, when one out of four people was out of work, would be the result of a sudden increase in the desire for more leisure.”

The language we use to describe consequences also influences the types of policies we accept. Until recently, the policies in which people are ineligible for welfare even if they have no other source of income would not have been legal. Up until 1995, provinces were legally bound to provide welfare for persons “in need.”

Based on the assumption that people are

1 Foucault, Michel. 2003. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975-1976*. Edited by Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana. Translated by David Macey. New York: Picador. pp. 13, 14.

2 Ministry of Human Resources. *Service Plan Summary 2002/03 – 2004/05*. p. 2.
<http://www.mhr.gov.bc.ca/sp/2002-03_summary.pdf>

3 Coell, Murray. March 5, 2003. *Income Assistance Changes Support People in Need*. <www.mhr.gov.bc.ca>

choosing not to work, the new policies also assume that the only possible outcome of denying people access to welfare is that they will find work. Yet when the caseload decreased by 26% in the first year after the changes, only 67% of the adults who left social assistance left for employment. Also, more than a third of the 'decreased caseload' were children.⁴

Other consequences of ineligibility for welfare include early pregnancy, return to abusive relationships, homelessness, addiction, prostitution, and criminal activity.

Indeed, since the new welfare policies came into effect, the number of visible homeless people in Vancouver has doubled. Alarming, while only 15% of these B.C. residents were not receiving welfare in 2001, by 2004 this proportion had risen to 75%.⁵

It is a very short step from personal responsibility to blame. The language of personal responsibility makes poverty an individual issue to be solved through 'incentives' to work and short term re-training. The result is to depoliticize poverty, blaming it on individuals who choose not to work rather than changing economic conditions due to trade liberalization combined with a withdrawal by the state from programs that sought to enhance equality.

By contrast, the language of 'social responsibility' allows for policy-making that considers the context from which poverty arises. In this

language, citizens are interconnected and have a stake in a larger society. It is based on a sense of shared destiny. Increasing poverty in B.C. has an impact not just on those individuals living in poverty, but also on our collective health, safety,

"Policy is a particularly important intersection between language and power. Welfare policy, for example, exercises power over the lives of people living on social assistance by determining conditions and eligibility, and the language we use to understand the problem influences the type of solutions we consider."

and well-being. As a result, we have a mutual investment in enhancing equality.

The language of social responsibility opens up a different range of policy options. Increasing poverty and the polarization of wealth are understood as consequences of changing economic structures and policy decisions, not increasing laziness. This leads to questions about the role we, as citizens, want our government to play in supporting equality through international trade negotiations, healthy labour standards, social programs, taxation policy, and income transfers.

4 Stiglitz, Joseph E.. 2003. *Globalization and Its Discontents*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. p. 35.

5 Ministry of Human Resources. "Year-at-a-Glance Highlights." In *2002/03 Annual Service Plan Report*. <http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/annualreports/ar2003/hr/hr_highlights.htm>

6 City of Vancouver. June 2005. *Homeless Action Plan*. p. 6.

Keep it simple:

Plain language for accessible community-based research

Dense or complex writing can prevent community-based research from being as useful as it could be. **Katie Hume** discusses the use of plain language in helping research make a difference.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU thought about literacy? For many of us doing community-related work, we often forget that almost half of all Canadian adults have problems using words and numbers. In fact, 10 million Canadians have literacy skills below what is needed for “successful participation in society.”¹ While these numbers may be surprising, they have important meaning for our work in communities.

In community-based research, our goal is to strengthen communities by including them in the research process. A key part of this is communicating research results back to the community. However, in many cases, handing a copy of your final report to community members is not enough, for academic language may not be understood by members of the community with lower literacy skills.

Lower literacy may be a result of things like family environment, learning disabilities, or speaking a different first-language. Low literacy has also been linked to poor health, isolation, and poverty.² In some circumstances, by not meeting the needs of those with different literacy skills, we may exclude the part of our audience we most want to reach.

Plain language

Plain language is defined by Plain Language Association International (PLAIN) as, “language that everyone in your audience can easily understand.” However, writing in plain language several more than just using small words. It has many steps and often requires training to be done well. In her article, “An Introduction to Plain Language,” Cheryl Stephens gives some basic rules to begin make your research results more accessible to all literacy levels.³

Step 1: Plan

Using plain language begins with knowing your audience. Consult with your readers. What do they want and need to know? What are some of the challenges they face in understanding your message? Are there cultural differences? Is there a generation gap?

¹ Movement for Canadian Literacy. *Literacy is for Life! Factsheet #1 Literacy in Canada*. <www.literacy.ca/litand/1.htm>

² Ibid.

³ Plain Language Association International. *An Introduction to Plain Language*. <www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/stephens/intro.html>

Step 2: Write

Once the document has been planned, write and re-write what you want to say. Here are some of Cheryl Stephens' tips to make your work easier to read.

Choose your words wisely:

- Avoid multi-syllabic words.
- Avoid abbreviations.
- Avoid acronyms.
- Avoid jargon if possible, but explain it if you use it.
- Avoid undue formality.
- Use personal pronouns such as “you,” “we” and “I.”

Use short, simple sentences:

- Use shorter sentences (no more than 35 words).
- Use positive sentence structure.
- Put the subject and the verb close together at the beginning of the sentence.
- Describe no more than one idea per sentence.

Organize to make your message clear:

- Place the most important information at the beginning of the document.
- Keep paragraphs short.
- Use bold titles and subtitles that summarize key messages.
- Use bullet points.
- Use pictures and other graphics to highlight main points.

Step 3: Test

Consult your audience again. Give copies to people who belong to your intended audience. Where do they struggle? Does it look interesting? Is your intended message clear?

Another basic way to test readability is to use the Flesch Kincaid scale. The scale counts the average number of syllables per word and average number of words per sentence. The score tells you what grade level a reader needs in order to understand a piece of writing. (Here's a useful tip: Many major word processors have will report your document's Flesch Kincaid score).

This article was written to have a score of 8, meaning that a typical grade 8 student could read and understand it completely. Despite my good intentions, however, plain language experts say that writing for the general public should be at a grade 4 to 6 level.⁴

Create understanding, create change

Using plain language is challenging. Old habits die hard. But by making the effort, we have a chance to help all members of the community understand. The more people understand, the more their voices will be heard in creating change. Isn't that what community-based research is really all about? ■

For more information

Government of Canada. Successful Communication Toolkit – Literacy and you.

<www.communication.gc.ca/services/alpha_lit/2003/scr2003_toc.html>

Plain Language Association International (PLAIN)

<www.plainlanguagenetwork.org>

⁴ Ibid.

Strengthening the network:

Participants from across B.C. attend community social planning conference

The Community Social Planning Network of BC continues to support social planning across the province. **Jim Sands** reports back from the network's conference in June.

OVER 75 PEOPLE FROM ACROSS B.C. gathered in Richmond in June to celebrate the successes and address the challenges of community social planning in British Columbia. Strengthening the Network: Building Local Capacity to Promote Social Planning Across B.C. was a two-day conference intended to promote information sharing, the development of strategies to raise the profile of community social planning in the 2005 municipal elections, and to build ongoing strategies to enhance the development of community social planning in B.C. communities.

After a vigorous round of "Social Planner Bingo" (an icebreaker exercise designed to help people from across the province meet each other) participants were welcomed by Richmond mayor Malcolm Brodie, Vancouver City Councilor Jim Green (chair of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Social Development Committee), as well as representatives from the Community Social Planning Network of BC Steering Committee and SPARC BC Board of Directors.

During an evening session, participants

learned about exciting developments in community social planning across B.C., including a Quality of Life Indicators project in the Comox Valley, the formation of a social planning council in the Cowichan Valley, and how a municipal government has supported strategic planning by the Social Planning Council for Williams Lake and Area. The group also heard about the North Coast Community Asset Development Initiative (NCCADI), a multi-year process supported by the City of Prince Rupert and a range of federal and provincial funders to support coordinated activities including community asset mapping and youth development.

Cara-Lee Malange, the healthy communities coordinator for East Richmond, spoke about how a healthy communities strategy based on a social determinants of health approach is being developed to address the unique challenges faced by East Richmond residents.

During a full-day session held on Saturday at the Richmond Cultural Centre, participants heard about the challenges and successes involved in building local government support



A Plethora of Planners. Attendees of June's conference participate in a workshop.

and recognition for community social planning. Panelists representing a variety of perspectives, communities, and social planning models discussed a variety of approaches to social planning utilized by municipal governments.

In Prince George, the municipal government provides a yearly grant to the Community Planning Council that has served to leverage funding from other sources. The arms-length relationship works in this instance because the Community Planning Council has established itself as a credible organization that can develop action plans to address contentious issues. In Kamloops, the Social Planning Committee is a city council committee that makes recommendations and can respond to council requests for information, but is mostly self-directed in its work.

Social planning models and relationships are evolving in Dawson Creek and Quesnel with council recognition of social planning issues as important part of the development process.

Participants also took part in workshops addressing a variety of topics such as developing

partnerships at the local and provincial level, the *Community Charter* and social planning, and raising the profile of accessibility issues. One workshop introduced the upgraded SPARC BC website as a network building tool to share information on local issues on province-wide basis. Another introduced the publication *Municipalities Votes* as one tool for raising the profile of community social planning in the fall municipal elections.

During a closing plenary, participants expressed the hope that events of this type could continue to occur. Many people noted that those involved in community social planning work in isolation and can benefit by sharing information, strategies, and support. ■

For more info

A summary report and conference proceedings will be available soon on the SPARC BC website <www.sparc.bc.ca/cspn_bc/>. For more information on the Community Social Planning Network of BC contact Jim Sands at (604) 718-7742 or jsands@sparc.bc.ca.

Organizing an all-candidates meeting

THE B.C. MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ARE COMING in November and many community groups want voters and candidates to consider social and community issues. As such, an all-candidates meeting is a great way to bring candidates and community members together to engage on issues before an election. By organizing and hosting these meetings, community groups can be catalysts for positive change.

An all-candidates meetings, when organized around a particular issue, can raise awareness of an issue or policy among voters, foster informed debate, prompt candidates to develop a standpoint on an issue, garner some positive media attention for your organization, and perhaps even get an issue on candidates' agendas.

As this edition's piece in our ongoing *Tools for Community Social Planning* series, we have compiled a list of tips for organizing and executing an all-candidates meeting in your community.

Before

Consider partnering with other community organizations. Cooperating to host an all-candidates meeting allows you to share costs, access a broader group of voters, build partnerships, and increase the profile of your organization.

Secure the candidates. Present the meeting to candidates as an opportunity to speak with voters and get press coverage. Give the candidates a range of dates so that you can schedule for a day that works for everyone.

Choose an appropriate format. At most meet-

ings, candidates get the opportunity for a short speech followed by time for questions. A reception before or after the formal event is also a good idea because it gives voters, candidates, and organizers another chance to connect.

Select a suitable venue. Consider parking, proximity to public transit, access for people with mobility restrictions, and room for the media and their equipment (if you plan to invite them). Have a sound system set up if necessary.

Publicize. Advertise the meeting as widely as you can. Use local media, email lists, websites, networks, partners. Send out the information more than once. Remind the media directly.

During

Manage the proceedings. Seed some questions in the audience if needed. Have a moderator conduct the event if required.

Have other information available. An all-candidates meeting is an excellent opportunity to distribute reports and materials. Have tables set up for you and your partners.

Record the meeting if you can.

After

Prepare a follow-up media release. Include quotations and a media contact.

Send thank-you letters to candidates, organizers, partners, and any other contributors.

The tips are drawn largely from the Assembly of British Columbia Arts Councils' article *Tips on Hosting an All Candidates Meeting*. <www.assemblybcartscouncils.ca>

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