

What should come after the Climate Strike? Some great education, that's what!

Youth inspire.

There is no better way to put it. I am inspired to write by two young woman from Rundle College, who wrote in the Calgary Herald on 20 Sept ['Why we strike: Young Alberta voices in the climate crisis').

For one thing, these inspiring youth understand the power of being for something, not against something: they support diversifying Alberta's economy, they support new jobs, and they believe that "Canadians should [support] renewable energy instead of attacking non-renewable industries." Hear, hear!

Our organization wakes up in the morning thinking about how to support such students in their learning – which of course, immediately and inevitably, brings us to the role of the teacher...

Pity the plight of the average Alberta teacher! They live in a time of astonishing changes, beset by new phrases like 'energy transition' and 'climate emergency' - and it is very, very difficult to keep up. I received a teaching certificate from the University of Calgary – and never once was anything of this sort mentioned in class. Even my colleagues in industry, full-time energy professionals in their own right, confess to being overwhelmed by the rate at which new technologies and new energy sources emerge.

But there is hope – much hope. I'm indebted to Gordon Lambert, a former leader with Suncor, who taught me that climate change has a solution space and a problem space – and that teachers should teach far more about the solutions than the problems. This means they're teaching about good news, not bad news; and instilling hope, not despair.

I believe that there is something each and every Alberta teacher can do on this file. Teaching kids who only come up to your knee? Get them outside, for goodness sake, and help them appreciate nature and fall in love with their planet - before asking them to protect it. Teaching science? Help students understand where their energy comes from, how to conserve it, the difference between renewable and non-renewable energy sources, and about myriad new technologies to help reduce our carbon footprint. Social studies? Help students practice their critical thinking as they unpack the rich and delicious issues surrounding the notion of getting Alberta oil to tidewater, or finding the balance between environmental stewardship and economic development.

In a world of fake news and increasingly polarized viewpoints, we owe it to Alberta's 700,000 K-12 students to help them understand the complexities of these immensely important topics that will shape their future. How else will we prepare them for jobs in the new economy? How else will we depolarize the conversation so that Albertans and Canadians can have better conversations about these issues?

Something is happening - and it's happening fast. In recent months both our country and the City of Edmonton have declared Climate Emergencies. Thinking about a spot of shopping at MEC? Don't do it this Friday – they're closing their doors to permit its employees to join in the climate strike. Less than a year ago Calgary Council approved a Climate Resilience Strategy for the city – and I'm proud that our organization is part of a new, visionary effort to connect Calgary teachers and students to this plan for the city in which they live, helping them do their small part to deliver on the plan.

Our organization is privileged to work with a community of committed educators and education agencies who believe that education is a strategic tool as society wrestles with how to deal with climate - without undermining our economy and our prosperity. We've worked with these colleagues to build a formidable toolkit for teachers, on our home page at <https://www.abcee.org/after-climate-strike-click-here-see-what-weve-got-teachers>, including an upcoming conference on energy and environmental education, a treasure trove of teacher-ready resources, and information on how to talk about climate and related issues in a way that supports student learning, critical thinking, and citizenship activities - just like the two young ladies from Rundle College.

I'll give the last word to two other of my heroes: Leah Buchanan, a recent Edmonton high school graduate, who said "When it comes to climate change, the antidote to despair is action." Or as David Orr likes to put it: 'Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up...'

Gareth Thomson is Executive Director of Alberta Council for Environmental Education; the educational resources he mentions above are on their home page at www.abcee.org.