

# A Message from the MIDDLE

Volume 11, Number 1, May 2020



## President's Message



Last year when I was writing for the spring newsletter, the sun was shining and I had just returned from our annual conference in Banff. This year is a completely different

story. At the time of writing this, we are in the middle of April, and this morning I hear of more snow tonight. We are also in the middle of spring break, and the pandemic is on everyone's mind.

Teaching middle school is tough already, but trying to reach the students online is very challenging. We are all trying to do our best during these uncertain times, and I have faith that teachers around our great province will do what we can for these adolescents. Keep up the great work that all of you do.

As I am locked up with two teenagers at home, I try to use humour as much as I can to help us get through these times. My father always taught me that laughter is the best medicine. Find the positives in your life and stay strong.

I was blessed this year to teach my daughter in my Grade 8 Science class before the pandemic hit. It was a very challenging and rewarding experience. Having taught middle school for over 25 years, teaching my

daughter brought a whole new dynamic to the job. I have really questioned what I am doing in the class because I come home to the biggest critic you can have—an adolescent!

We are continually looking for new ways to support middle years teachers and for feedback from you to help us out. We are committed to making sure that you, as members, receive as much as possible from your membership in the Middle Years Council. Please let me know if you have any ideas to make your years in the middle better by contacting me at [jeremy.spink@rdpsd.ab.ca](mailto:jeremy.spink@rdpsd.ab.ca). We hope that you love being part of our council and that you have a great year "in the middle." Hope to see you at our rescheduled annual conference in Banff in April 2021.

*Jeremy Spink*

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# Conference 2020

Unfortunately, we have to announce that #MYC2020 is officially postponed. A new conference date with Jody Carrington has been arranged for April 23–24, 2021, again at the Banff Park Lodge. We hope that most delegates will simply transfer their registration at no cost to next year's conference at the Banff Park Lodge.

In the meantime, if you have questions or concerns about a conference refund, please give us a few weeks to get this information in order. We are working with the Alberta Teachers' Association and will be in touch through e-mail with everyone so that option exists for each delegate.

Banff Park Lodge has cancelled the rooms and will notify all delegates directly by e-mail.

Thank you for your interest in mental health and the middle years. More news to come soon!

*Chris McCullough and Tom Stones  
Conference 2020/21 Cochairs*

# Tech Corner



In the last issue we touched on the subject of screencasting and using Screencastify to capture some of the movements on your computer that can be later used to catch students up who may have missed the lesson. Taking things even further is the free add-on, Soapbox. Soapbox can be found installed as a free extension in the Chrome Web Store. Soapbox allows you to record your screen and utilize your webcam at the same time, so you can display what you want the students to see as well as what you want them to hear. Record your screen, your face or both, then use the handy built-in transitions to switch between sharing a full-screen or split-screen view. With Soapbox, it's quick and easy to create your best-looking lessons. No need to export, process, download or upload. Once you've made your videos look squeaky clean, they're instantly ready to share. Marketed as a way to build your brand in the Instagram world, Soapbox has been adopted by educators to use as a tool in flipping their classroom. Find Soapbox in the extensions of Chrome or at <https://wistia.com>.

*Jeremy Clevette  
Webmaster*

# Citadel Theatre School Programs



For the past three years, I have been taking my students to the Citadel Theatre's school matinees of *A Christmas Carol*. For most students, this is their first live theatre experience. Students have told me that they

loved it, and they wanted to go again. They were amazed at how quickly the set was changed for each scene and how the costumes suited each character. They were impressed with the phenomenal acting and the props that made the ghosts come alive.

Research has shown that students who attend live theatre have enhanced tolerance and empathy toward others. They are also able to have emotional experiences that they may not or will not experience because it extends beyond their normal lives. Live performance is more than just watching a show, it is an experience.

If you would like to read more about the benefits of watching live theatre, check it out at Science Daily ([www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/10/141016165953.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/10/141016165953.htm)).

*Emma Holota*  
Publications Director

## THE MIDDLE YEARS COUNCIL WANTS YOU!!!

### EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS

We are always looking for volunteers from all over the province who would like to join the executive and promote middle years education. The executive meets five times a year; two meetings are via video conference and one is held at the annual conference in April. Please contact **Jeremy Spink** at [jeremy.spink@rdpsd.ab.ca](mailto:jeremy.spink@rdpsd.ab.ca) if you are interested in joining the executive.

### NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTORS

#### Request for Links, Games, Lessons or Cool Activities

Do you have any website links, games, lessons or cool activities that you would like to share with other middle school teachers? Send them to **Emma Holota** at [holota.emma@gmail.com](mailto:holota.emma@gmail.com). We will include them in upcoming issues of our newsletter.



The MYC website is  
[WWW.ATA-MYC.COM](http://WWW.ATA-MYC.COM).  
Add it to your favourites.

# Tips for Teaching in the Middle



Teaching middle years learners means connecting with middle years learners. For some that comes naturally, while others must work at it. This means building common ground and

developing a strong sense of trust and respect within the learning environment. In my experience, those components must be felt between not only the teacher and the students but everyone in the room. The environment in which we intend for students to learn must feel comfortable and safe. So how do we do that? Below are some ideas:

1. Develop common goals (educationally and personally).
  - a. Set learning goals together for the day, week, month and year, and display them for everyone to see and reflect on frequently. (Take the curriculum then have class discussions that result in educational goals written in student-friendly language.)
  - b. Prioritize the goals. (You can't display the entire curriculum, so prioritize it and involve the students in this process.)
  - c. Set and share personal goals on a regular basis. (Have morning meetings, take turns and share, write in journals and so on to ensure that students are invested in goals and achievements that they set for themselves.)
  - d. Find common personal goals. (For example, I am going to share my ideas in class. I am going to do one kind thing every day. I am going to volunteer once a week.)
2. Share and connect with past and current experiences.
  - a. Making connections is a big part of how we learn, so students require opportunities to share and make connections with what they are learning to their own lived experiences and prior knowledge.
  - b. Sometimes we need to just give students a scheduled connection break. (Think of team-building activities and how you can incorporate quick movement breaks into your daily learning that build better connectivity.)
  - c. Find something you have in common with every single student you teach—seriously.
3. Explicitly teach conflict resolution.
  - a. Conflict is a part of life, so modelling and explicitly teaching students how to work through this is super important.
  - b. Ultimately, we want students to see that by working through conflicts proactively and respectfully, we gain a better understanding of ourselves and those around us.
  - c. Teaching conflict resolution through characters or historical figures at first can help depersonalize it and make it a safer learning experience than using a real conflict that has emerged within your class. (Role playing and acting is another fun way to do this.)
4. Laugh, and then laugh some more.
  - a. Laughter releases endorphins, and we want students to have positive feelings about learning and their time in our class, so let's tap into their physiology and laugh.

- b. Learning is hard and being a teenager can be stressful, so we should remember as the adult in the room not to take things too seriously. Sometimes we must just laugh.

I hope these ideas and tips will help you to have an enjoyable and successful year with your students. Always remember, every child you teach is someone's everything.

Demonstrate love and compassion, and don't forget to laugh! This job is hard, so enjoy the great moments and the time you are fortunate enough to have with your students. They may not remember your amazing lesson plans, but they will remember how you made them feel.

*Abby Stilwell  
Northwest Alberta Regional Representative*

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## Book Review

### *Kids These Days: A Game Plan for Connecting with Those We Teach*

**Jody Carrington**

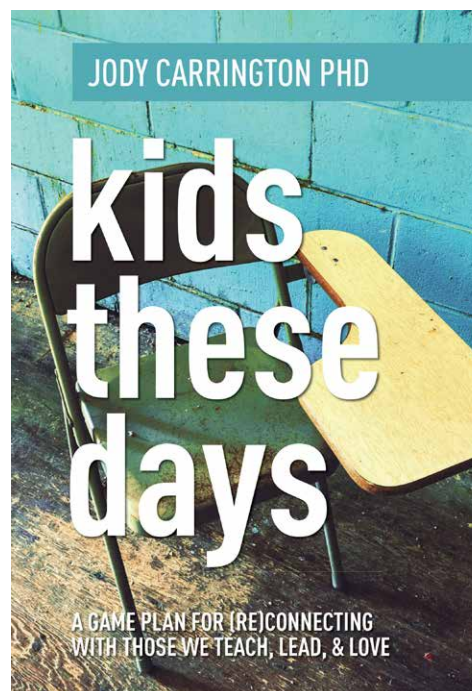
**Friesen Press, 2019**

*Reviewed by Rebecca Hilligas*

Most people who work in the field of education have heard of Jody Carrington. I've had the privilege of hearing her speak and knew that I had to read her book. I bought it as soon as I could, as well as the audio version. I've read and listened to her book, each time gaining new insight to my role as an educator. No, I'm not a teacher. I'm a librarian, and while I may not always see students flipping their lids or at their worst, I see the teachers, the educational assistants, the administrators and the counsellors, and I'm reminded that we are all part of the circle of security that Jody Carrington talks about—having hands on the circle for our kids and our staff. What struck me most is when she talked about being bottom hands only; that is, when you need to be kinder and wiser to the kids

flipping their lids and to the staff who are doing their best to model self-regulation and not flipping their lids. I also see the bottom hands on the circle as a reminder to lift people up. What we do is not easy, but as Jody Carrington says, "We're wired to do hard things."

*Rebecca Hilligas is the librarian/distance learning coordinator at École Plamondon School.*



# Tier 1: Elements of a Quality Learning Environment

## FILL A HOLE IN YOUR ELA CURRICULUM

“This I Believe” Essays  
Genius Hour  
ELA Makerspace  
Design Thinking Projects  
Free Choice Reading Unit  
Poetry Slam  
Ted Talks  
One-Act Festival  
Podcasting  
Student Blogging

As a teacher I use the following best practices:

### Instructional Strategies

- Give advance notice of tests and quizzes.
- Teach chunk lessons, directions or assignments in chunks.
- Give concrete examples.
- Do hands-on activities.
- Highlight directions/text.
- Give multi-modal instruction.
- Preteach significant vocabulary.
- Preread questions, focus on the big ideas.
- Provide additional examples.

- Provide clear step-by-step instructions.
- Provide specific and immediate feedback.
- Use colour-coded materials.
- Rephrase questions or directions.
- Provide outline or study guides.

### Assessment Strategies

- Provide study guides and allow time for review.
- Chunk the information on tests.
- Teach test-taking skills.
- Review directions before beginning test.
- Provide practice tests.
- Use hands-on performance testing.
- Employ hint system to provide objective assistance.
- Give tiered assessments based on difficulty.
- Use formative feedback loops for areas of struggle.

### Social-Emotional Strategies

- Have students check in at the start of each class.
- Give students leadership roles when possible.
- Help students set up self-monitoring strategies.
- Focus on positive feedback.
- Monitor tolerance/frustration and adjust to task.
- Anticipate behavioural warning signs.
- Teach anxiety coping strategies.

### Executive Functioning Strategies

- Prioritize “things to do” daily.
- Give advance notice of changes.
- Keep daily assignments posted.
- Notify students of change and check for understanding.

- Post daily routines and reminders.
- Preview and review class lessons.
- Establish specific places for all belongings and reinforce students for keeping things in place.
- Keep each student's work in one binder.
- Provide and organize course materials.
- Assist at the start of assignment or project.
- Use visual timelines for time management.
- Keep all assignments in a folder.
- Repeat, shorten and repeat (orally) directions.
- Give students a checklist to follow with due dates.
- Use advance organizers.
- Give extra time for transitions.

## Literacy

- Assist with book selection.
- Try literacy apps.
- Use partner reading.
- Suggest personal dictionaries.
- Preteach text and vocabulary.
- Suggest reading along with recording.
- Read familiar text to focus on strategy.
- Read songs they like.
- Read to younger students.
- Repeat high-frequency words.
- Do small-group reading.
- Use highlighters and sticky notes when reading.
- Use reading trackers.
- Use keyword lists.
- Focus on disciplinary literacy.
- Use visuals.
- Reduce visual clutter.
- Use high-interest, low-level books and reading material.
- Preteach significant vocabulary.
- Modify spelling, punctuation and paragraphing requirements.
- Allow outline or point-form notes.
- Use graphic organizers.

## Numeracy

- Use math songs.
- Use numeracy stations.
- Try problem-solving acronyms.
- Use concrete examples.
- Create connections between personal experiences and new mathematical concepts, using strategies such as think-pair-share and mind mapping.
- Learn to use manipulatives, such as base 10 blocks, mathematical balance and various counters, to represent numbers and problems in a variety of contexts.
- Use visual models and supports, such as open number lines, hundred chart, strings or place value mats.
- Revisit and review key concepts, using a variety of learning experiences connected to real-life experiences at home, at school and in the community.
- Begin to explore personal strategies, using strategies such as math journals.
- Have access to mathematics materials and visual prompts that are modified for ease of use.
- Sort and highlight key math vocabulary.
- Create and use charts and flashcards.
- Use real-world pictures and examples.

## Sensory and Environment Needs

- Provide alternate seating according to needs.
- Gain students' attention before speaking.
- Seat student near positive peer model.
- Vary output mode for assignments.
- Provide a safe and quiet retreat space within classroom.
- Help students focus on directions.
- Use multisensory instructional approach.
- Give adequate response time.
- Check-in/check-out system.
- Create an opportunity for communication.

*Dana Schafer*

# AMLE Update

## AMLE Affiliation

Members of the Middle Years Council have found value in having a membership in the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), which is the international organization for middle years educators. The AMLE website ([www.amle.org](http://www.amle.org)) has resources and information related to middle years education. The free membership will allow you to access some materials. However, with a professional membership, you will have full access to all resources, as well as receive discounts on books, resources and conference registration.

## AMLE at a Glance

The AMLE is committed to helping middle grades education

- reach every student,
- grow professionally and
- create great schools.

## Mission

The AMLE is dedicated to improving the educational experiences of all students ages 10–15 by providing vision, knowledge, and resources to educators and leaders.

## Vision

The AMLE is the leading international organization advancing the education of all students ages 10–15, helping them succeed as learners and make positive contributions to their communities and to the world.

## Core Values

- *Integrity.* The AMLE practises the ethical, inclusive and courageous behaviours that sustain an open and honest organizational culture.
- *Future thinking.* The AMLE is visionary and prepares for the future.
- *Respect.* The AMLE values human worth, dignity, diverse talents and varied perspectives.
- *Collaboration.* The AMLE seeks active partnerships and shared leadership opportunities at the state, national and international levels.

## AMLE Conference 2020

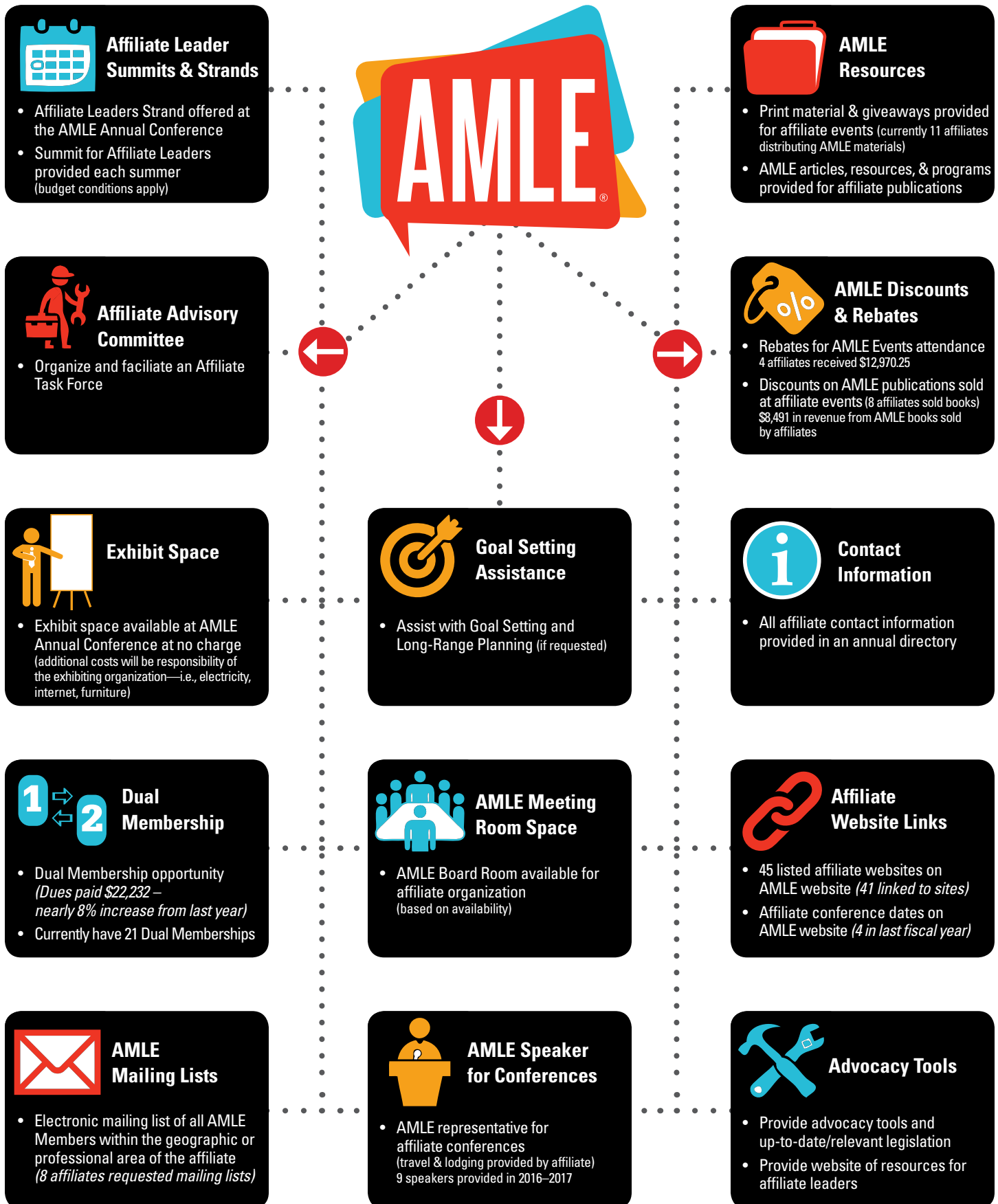
November 12–14

National Harbor, Maryland

[www.amle.org/ServicesEvents/AMLE20-AnnualConference/tabid/625/Default.aspx](http://www.amle.org/ServicesEvents/AMLE20-AnnualConference/tabid/625/Default.aspx)



# What does AMLE provide to affiliates?



# Publishing Under the *Personal Information Protection Act*

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) requires consent to publish personal information about an individual. Personal information is defined as anything that identifies an individual in the context of the collection: for example, a photograph and/or captions, an audio or video file, and artwork.

Some schools obtain blanket consent under FOIP, the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. However, the *Personal Information Protection Act* (PIPA) and FOIP are not interchangeable. They fulfill different legislative goals. PIPA is the private sector act that governs the Association's collection, use and disclosure of personal information.

If you can use the image or information to identify a person in context (for example, a specific school or a specific event), then it is personal information and you need consent to collect, use or disclose (publish) it.

Minors cannot provide consent and must have a parent or guardian sign a consent form. Consent forms must be provided to the Document Production editorial staff at Barnett House together with the personal information to be published.

Refer all questions regarding the ATA's collection, use and disclosure of personal information to the ATA privacy officer.

Notify the ATA privacy officer immediately of any incident that involves the loss of or unauthorized use or disclosure of personal information, by calling Barnett House at 780-447-9400 or 1-800-232-7208.

Maggie Shane, the ATA's privacy officer, is your resource for privacy compliance support.

780-447-9429 (direct)

780-699-9311 (cell, available any time)

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## Consent for Collection, Use and Disclosure of Personal Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

I am giving consent for myself.

I am giving consent for my child/children or ward(s), identified below:

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

By signing below, I am consenting to The Alberta Teachers' Association collecting, using and disclosing personal information identifying me or my child/children or ward(s) in print and/or online publications and on websites available to the public, including social media. By way of example, personal information may include, but is not limited to, name, photographs, audio/video recordings, artwork, writings or quotations.

I understand that copies of digital publications may come to be housed on servers outside Canada.

I understand that I may vary or withdraw this consent at any time. I understand that the Association's privacy officer is available to answer any questions I may have regarding the collection, use and disclosure of these records. The privacy officer can be reached at 780-447-9429 or 1-800-232-7208.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

For more information on the ATA's privacy policy, visit [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca).



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