

**Words at Work: Constructing a Labour Conflict**  
**Le pouvoir des mots : genèse d'un conflit de travail**  
**Las palabras en acción : la construcción de un conflicto de trabajo**

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Résumé de l'article

Dans cet article, nous nous penchons sur le conflit de travail, survenu en 2011-2012, entre la Fédération des enseignants-es de la Colombie-Britannique et le gouvernement de cette province, afin d'examiner de quelle manière la présidente de cette fédération, Susan Lambert, a utilisé le langage pour amener ses membres à réaliser l'ampleur du conflit et les mobiliser contre le gouvernement. À cette fin, nous avons passé en revue des articles de quotidiens et des documents d'archives couvrant la période s'étendant de la mi-2011 à juin 2012, dans le but de cerner comment Mme Lambert est parvenue à identifier les enjeux et les acteurs cruciaux, attribuer les rôles, établir les relations et les actions, et, surtout, comment elle a réussi à inspirer une volonté d'agir chez les membres et leurs partisans.

Pour explorer comment elle a « construit » le conflit, nous adoptons une théorie de la mobilisation développée par des universitaires qui ont étudié les mouvements sociaux organisés. Snow et Benford (1988 : 200-202) ont conceptualisé trois piliers-clés du conflit : 1-*élaboration du diagnostic*, soit identifier un problème, en attribuer le blâme ou la cause, et identifier les acteurs-clés; 2- *élaboration du pronostique*, soit offrir une solution et en identifier les stratégies, tactiques et cibles; et, enfin, 3- *élaboration de la motivation*, soit faire un appel aux armes ou offrir un argumentaire qui convaincra les membres et les partisans de l'urgence de passer à l'action. Pour analyser la manière dont la présidente a réussi cela, nous nous référons aux quatre stratégies de légitimation identifiées par Van Leeuwen (2008), et Van Leeuwen et Wodack (1999) : autorisation, rationalisation, moralisation et construction d'un mythe.

McAdam (1982 : 48) soutient qu'avant qu'une action collective ne débute, il faut que les personnes concernées considèrent leur situation comme étant injuste et devant être changée. Nous nous servons de ce cadre d'analyse pour explorer la manière dont la présidente a utilisé le langage pour « construire » cette vision. Grâce au langage utilisé, elle est parvenue à faire ressortir les enjeux du conflit et à « construire une réalité » où les membres ont pu s'identifier comme agents de changement et acteurs de la protestation.

# Words at Work: Constructing a Labour Conflict

Yonathan Reshef and Charles Keim\*

**Using newspaper articles and archival material from the 2011-12 conflict between the British Columbia Teachers' Federation and the British Columbia government, the authors investigate how the union president used language to construct the labour conflict as a phenomenon worthy of members' attention and action. We use a social movement organizations theory to conceptualize three discursive foundations of conflict—diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational (Snow and Benford, 1988). Through language, the abstract concept of conflict was concretized and brought to life by creating roles, assigning relationships, and transforming teachers into agents of action. Examining how conflict was engineered in this instance enlarges our understanding of conflict generally.**

**KEYWORDS:** discourse, framing, public sector, labour conflict, trade unions, mobilization.

## Introduction

Labour conflicts, mainly strikes, are extensively researched industrial relations phenomena. Understanding the patterns and determinants of strikes' duration, number, and volume has been a popular research topic (Stern, 1978; Kaufman, 1982). Comparative analysis of strike patterns across nations has provided researchers with another avenue for exploring labour conflict (Hibbs, 1976; Poole, 1984). Politically-oriented researchers have focused on the relationship between politics (e.g., the nature of the government party) and labour conflicts, thus adding a further dimension to the discussion (Shorter and Tilly, 1974; Korpi and Shalev, 1979; Seifert and Sibley, 2011). Others have explored the association between union organization and existing social structures and strike incidence at the national (Shalev, 1992; Piazza, 2005) and firm level (Blyton and Jenkins, 2013; Jansen, 2014).

These canonical research efforts have improved significantly our understanding of labour conflicts. Yet the more visible, measurable and perhaps academically

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attractive aspect of conflict, the point where labour is mobilized to act, has received the most attention. But this focus treats the existence of conflict as a given. Consequently, we know less about how a conflict comes into being and how the concept is concretized. We aim to address this lacuna in order to investigate how a disagreement is constructed as a conflict. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, conflict is the opposition of persons or forces that gives rise to a dramatic action. It is a serious disagreement where at least one of the quarrelling parties takes extraordinary action to redress its grievance. How does a disagreement become serious? How is conflict engineered? Whereas we recognize that there is more to conflict than language, we assume that language is fundamental to its constitution. Based on the social movement organizations theory outlined below, constructing a conflict requires a leader to: 1- establish the parameters of a disagreement by identifying core issues and actors; 2- prescribe actor roles, relationships and actions; and 3- if collective protest is included in the repertoire of “dramatic actions,” inspire a will to act in the movement’s members and supporters. According to this framework, for a disagreement to become a conflict it must be constructed as a world populated with people who have been set in motion.

Language plays a vital role before, during, and after conflicts. Billing (2003: xv) argues that “the words of war are central to the activity of war.” Not only does war require communication but, as Nelson (2003: 449) notes, “We generate, shape, understand, remember and forget violent behaviour between individuals, communities or states through specific discourse. It is discourse that prepares for sacrifice, justifies inhumanity, absolves from guilt, and demonizes the enemy.” Within the current labour relations context, before teachers take to the streets, words commit the first act of dissension. During conflicts, words differentiate between heroes and villains, Robin Hoods and bullies, noble and ignoble actions. Words can prevent, end and perpetuate labour conflict, sowing the seeds for further conflict or peace. Therefore, we should not underestimate, nor should we neglect to examine, the role of language in labour conflicts. Below, we explore how the BCTF president Susan Lambert mobilized language to construct a reality in which teachers could locate themselves as agents of protest.

## **Analytical Framework**

How does a union leader construct a social space where normally compliant workers choose to risk their livelihood and, occasionally, freedom to challenge a formidable opponent like government? How is a reality structured so that teachers willingly withdraw their services, leaving their protégés to fend for themselves? To discern and analyze the core components of a labour conflict we turn

to a mobilization theory developed by scholars of social movement organizations (SMO). Although we do not focus on labour mobilization per se, the following SMO model provides us with a framework suitable for analyzing how the union leader engineered the conflict.

Goffman (1974: 21) introduces the term “framing” to describe how a narrative enables its user “... to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms.” Snow, Benford, and their colleagues use Goffman’s term to denote a process whereby social movement leaders interpret relevant events and conditions in a way that inspires potential activists and creates support within the general population for the movement’s goals (Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford, 1986; Snow and Benford, 1988; Snow and Benford, 2000). Framing mediates between grievance, opportunity and action. As a strategic tool, it articulates a grievance that concerns the interests of potential adherents, while assuring the latter that collective action can right that wrong. Ultimately, framing should align the views of potential supporters with the views of the movement, “such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary” (Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford, 1996: 464). According to Snow and Benford (1988: 200-202), framing serves three core tasks: *Diagnostic framing* identifies a problem and attributes blame or causality; *prognostic framing* offers a solution and identifies strategies, tactics and targets; *motivational framing* provides a call to arms, or rationale for action.

McAdam (2013), a foremost SMO scholar, modified this framework to emphasize the cognitive transformation followers undergo to become agents of protest. For McAdam (1982: 48), “Before collective [action] can get under way, people must collectively define their situation as unjust and subject to change through group action.” This process he defines as “cognitive liberation” and, following Piven and Cloward (1977: 3-4), explains that it comprises three stages: first, individuals no longer perceive the system as just, fair, or legitimate; second, those who once saw the system as inevitable begin to assert their rights and demand change; third, those who consider themselves powerless come to believe that they can alter their lot in life (1982: 48-51).

We agree with Nepstad (1997: 472) that diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing efforts facilitate cognitive liberation. Diagnostic framing helps individuals realize that they are hard done by the system, inculcating a sense of injustice. Through prognostic framing, people discover their opponent(s), potential ally(ies), and how to conduct their protest. Motivational framing inspires individuals to act collectively in pursuit of a desired change. Together, these processes construct a reality in which followers can locate themselves as agents of social protest and change.

We use this framework to study how language constructs labour conflict. *Diagnostic framing* defines the contours of the conflict. At this stage, grievances are articulated, key actors identified, and the gravity of the situation established. *Prognostic framing* maps out the union's strategy and tactics, including members' identities, roles, and relationships so that stakeholders recognize what must be done. Union leaders should use *motivational framing* to inspire action among members and supporters. Thus, to transform a disagreement into a labour conflict, we expect union leaders to use language to establish the parameters of the conflict, devise a plan of action, and instill conviction and a will to act in members and supporters.

We focus on BCTF president, Susan Lambert. McAdam (1982) claims that studies should begin with the leader, "[f]or in the context of political opportunity and widespread discontent there still remains a need for the centralized direction and coordination of a recognized leadership" (*Ibid.*: 47). In his discussion of framing in politics, Entman (2003: 420) maintains that, "[i]deas that start at the top level ... possess the greatest strength," for those at the top "enjoy the most independent ability to decide which mental associations to activate and the highest probability of moving their own thoughts into general circulation." Closer to our context, Kelly (1998: 33) argues that union leaders are in a unique position to use "... language as a power resource to 'frame' a particular definition of interests amongst the workforce and to construct a broad alliance of class forces against the employer." Thus, we consider union leaders' critical actors by virtue of their position in the union organization, ability to deploy resources, and capacity to apply information. As socially recognizable figures they occupy a prominent position in society and enjoy greater media access.

## Data and Methodology

We selected the BCTF case for several reasons. First, the conflict is recent (2011-12) and has yet to receive much scholarly attention. Second, the conflict comprised a series of incidents that provided the protagonists with many opportunities to turn it into a "discursive event." In other words, the conflict generated a volume of information that enabled us to discern linguistic patterns. Third, collective protest did occur. The teachers went on a three-day strike, withdrew from extracurricular activities, participated in rallies, and did not issue report cards. Thus, a major element of a conflict, "dramatic action," occurred.

Newspapers, the Internet edition of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and union and government news releases are the sources of our data. The case begins in 2011, when the current contract was about to expire and a new one had to be negotiated subject to the government net-zero mandate. The policy meant that all public-sector unions whose collective agreements expired

on or after December 31, 2009, must sign two-year agreements at no additional cost. The case ends with the parties signing a new, mediated agreement in June 2012. We looked for news items that occurred between mid-2011 and June 2012. We also searched regularly the government and union web sites for news releases. We collected a total of 150 newspaper articles and 10 news releases (Table 1). Government utterances appeared in 67 articles; union utterances in 114. An utterance comprised all the information provided by a specific speaker (e.g., union president or a minister) in a given article. Throughout the conflict, each party featured a prominent speaker. President Lambert was quoted in 75 (65.8 percent) of the 114 articles featuring union utterances. The Education Minister, George Abbott, was quoted in 51 (76.2 percent) of the 67 government-quoting articles. On the government side, only three speakers were responsible for all of the utterances. The total number of union speakers, on the other hand, was 26, likely reflecting reporters' access to local union leaders and members. Generally, however, Lambert's utterances were longer and richer. She made all but three of the utterances we used in the data analysis. The other utterances were made by the President of the BC Federation of Labour and the President of the Cariboo-Chilcotin Teachers' Association.

TABLE 1

Data Sources (Total number of articles = 150; Total number of news releases = 10)

Government		Union	
Total Utterances	67	Total Utterances	114
News releases	5	News releases	5
Number of speakers	3	Number of speakers	26
Education Minister	51 (76.2%)	President	75 (65.8%)
Premier	9 (13.4%)	Union members and officers	33 (28.9%)
Finance Minister	7 (10.4%)	Greater Victoria Teachers' Association President	6 (5.2%)

We used NVivo to record the information. After eliminating utterances that appeared more than once in our database and information we deemed irrelevant (e.g., technicalities of the collective agreement, collective bargaining, and net-zero mandate), we were left with a total of 36 usable union utterances. We used diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing to discern the themes constituting the conflict. Next, each one of us sorted the 36 union utterances by theme. We achieved full convergence for diagnostic framing within a single iteration. Twelve utterances comprised this theme. We did not achieve full convergence for prognostic and motivational framing. In each case we disagreed on three utterances so these were excluded from our analysis. For prognostic framing we agreed on eight utterances and for motivational framing we agreed on ten.

We arranged the data in Tables 2-4. Each one included utterances comprising a specific framing task, or theme. Within each theme, utterances were divided along four topics—net-zero mandate; *Bill 22* (see next section); the mediation process; and the new, mediated agreement. These topics represented critical events that provided a fresh vantage point from which to construct a frame. For each topic, examples have been provided to illustrate the linguistic strategies. We also divided the utterances between union and government, since although our focus is on union framing efforts, we assumed that government and union conditioned each other's framing moves. At a minimum, Lambert responded to the government agenda, while the government justified it and pointed out the union's impropriety. Therefore, we provided a government utterance for each theme, with one exception. As shown in Table 3, the government reacted to two distinct issues subsumed under the net-zero mandate. The three framing tasks are not linear and Lambert often conflated them. Operationalizing these tasks enables us to examine the well-studied phenomenon of labour conflict through a different lens.

## Evolution of the BCTF-Government Conflict

The turbulent relationship between a string of BC governments and the BCTF has been described as “a conflict that has been, without question, the single most defining characteristic of public education in the province for the past four decades” (Fleming, 2011: 12). Prior to 1987, teachers could only negotiate their salary with school boards. In 1987, they attained the right to unionize and access full-scope collective bargaining. All 76 local teachers' associations elected to be represented by the BCTF for the purpose of collective bargaining. From 1987 to 1994, collective bargaining took place at the local level, between local school boards and the BCTF. In 1994, the new *Public Education Labour Relations Act* established a new labour relations regime that required negotiation of cost provisions at the provincial level, and that local matters be negotiated between each school board and the local union. The new law established the BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) as the bargaining agent for all the public school boards in the province. Since then, with the exception of 2006, the government has legislated every collective agreement into existence. The remainder of this section reviews developments directly related to the conflict.

On May 16, 2001, Gordon Campbell led his Liberal Party to a landslide victory. With 77 seats in a 79-seat legislature, the Liberals triumphantly ended the New Democratic Party's (NDP) 10-year rule as well as their own 49-year political drought. Campbell inherited a \$3.4 billion deficit, which was projected to grow to \$4.4 billion by 2003. Before his election, he promised to balance the budget

by 2004-05 using the then popular cocktail of budget cuts, layoffs, legislation, and restructuring. The BC teachers were one of the first groups of public-sector employees to feel the fallout of the 2001 political upheaval, since education was a prime target for restructuring. To keep the BC teachers in check, *Bill 18 (Skills Development and Labour Statutes Amendment Act)* was passed in August of 2001. It designated education generally, not just teaching, as an essential service. Consequently, the labour minister could request the LRB to designate school support staff, facilities, or services as essential.

Campbell also inherited deadlocked wage bargaining between the province's 45,000 teachers, represented by the BCTF, and the BCPSEA. When this bargaining round began in March 2001, the BCTF demanded a 34.0 percent wage increase over three years. The BCPSEA offered about one fifth of that figure, 7.5 percent over three years. A stalemate was unavoidable. In August 2001, as teachers contemplated their next move, they were hit by the aforementioned *Bill 18 (Skills Development and Labour Statutes Amendment Act)*. The BC teachers thus began the 2001-02 school year by withdrawing from extracurricular services and securing the Labour Relations Board's (LRB) permission to not issue report cards.

In January 2002, the government intervened in the dispute by passing two bills: *Bill 27, the Education Services Collective Agreement Act*, imposed the employers' first and only offer; *Bill 28, Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act*, which undercut the union's bargaining capacity by eliminating key bargaining provisions that teachers had negotiated over many years. Staffing levels, caseloads, and teaching loads were removed as permissible subjects of bargaining. The same thing for class size limits, which would now be dealt with in the School Act on an average system. The teachers reacted swiftly. On January 28, thousands of teachers staged a one-day walkout and held about 40 rallies across the province affecting some 600,000 students. The government, however, remained steady on course.

In May 2001, BCTF had filed a proceeding with the BC Supreme Court alleging that the two bills violated the teachers' freedom of association right, which was protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Since at that time several BC health-care unions filed a similar proceeding with the Supreme Court of Canada, the BC court decided to wait before taking its decision. In 2007, in a landmark decision, the Supreme Court of Canada declared that collective bargaining was protected by the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Therefore, governments could not tear up duly negotiated collective agreements at will (*Health Services and Support, 2007*). In April of 2011, in line with the 2007 decision, the BC Supreme Court found in the teachers' favour, and gave the province a year to fix the faulty 2001 legislation (*British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 2011*).



In early 2011, the Minister of Finance, Colin Hansen (2011: 3) forecast a deficit of \$1.265 billion for the fiscal year just ending. Among other deficit-elimination measures, the government perpetuated the aforementioned net-zero mandate in negotiations. Any salary increases would have to be offset by savings from concessions in other areas of the collective agreement. In early 2012, Education Minister George Abbott said that, “the only union that hasn’t signed on to a net-zero mandate is the BCTF” (Matas, 2012). It asked for a 15.0 percent wage increase over three years and, following the April 2011 court decision, a renewed negotiation over class size and composition. The government rejected these demands.

At the start of the new school year (September 2011), the teachers began job action. The LRB outlined non-essential activities the teachers did not have to perform, including issuing report cards. In late February 2012, after more than 70 fruitless negotiation sessions, the government introduced *Bill 22*, the *Education Improvement Act*. It implemented a new Learning Improvement Fund of \$165 million over three years to help school districts and teachers address classroom composition issues. The Bill imposed a six-month cooling-off period. During this period, any teacher participating in a strike could be fined \$475 a day, a union officer \$2,500, and the BCTF \$1.3 million.

In addition, *Bill 22* brought in a government-appointed mediator, Dr. Charles Jago, which the union opposed arguing that Jago had been involved in the construction of *Bill 22*, and in the writing of a government-commissioned 2006 report on the BC education system. The government reiterated that Jago was the right person for the job and was bound by the net-zero mandate. In addition, Jago was not allowed to consider class size and composition, items that should have been restored to the bargaining table following the *2011 BC Supreme Court decision*. According to *Bill 22*, these items would become negotiable in the next round of bargaining, in the summer of 2013. Following the mediation process, barring significant movement by either side, a contract would be legislated by the end of July 2012.

On the same day that the government introduced *Bill 22*, the BCTF received permission from the LRB to call a three-day strike. On March 5, some 41,000 teachers walked off the job forcing about 556,000 students to stay home. On March 15, *Bill 22* was passed. By that time, 138 bargaining units covering some 180,000 employees, more than half of the public sector unionized workforce, had signed net-zero agreements (Matas 2012). The union and teachers continued to fight by withdrawing from extracurricular activities, organizing anti-government rallies, refusing to prepare report cards, and confronting the government in the media. On June 29, under the threat of fines, the teachers voted to accept a new, mediated contract which froze wages for 2011-12 and 2012-13. Furthermore,

despite the BC Supreme Court ruling that *Bills 27* and *28* were unconstitutional and invalid, the government refused to redress its legislation, which stripped teachers' collective agreements, restricted their bargaining rights, and eliminated provisions for class size and composition, as well as staffing ratios for specialist teachers who served students with special needs. In Lambert's words the union had been "bullied into a deal" (Hutchinson, 2012).

## Constructing a Labour Conflict

We have identified the three core tasks of framing in our data. Recall that these tasks breathe life into the concept of conflict, creating a reality in which teachers willingly confront their government adversary. Diagnostic framing alerts individuals to the perceived injustice of the system. They learn that the hardship they are facing is not a providential act but the work of human hands. Diagnostic framing identifies the problem, explains why it is a problem and assigns blame for it. Prognostic framing outlines solutions and identifies strategies, tactics, and targets — "What is to be done is thereby specified" (Snow and Benford, 1988: 201). Motivational framing inspires individuals to pursue collectively a desired change—it puts the wheels into motion. It should be remembered that these tasks are neither linear nor restricted to certain times in the conflict. In what follows, we provide textual examples demonstrating how union leaders used language to accomplish these three tasks.

### Diagnostic Framing

Table 2 focuses on Lambert's attempt to set the parameters of the conflict by identifying the core issues, placing blame for the conflict on the government, exonerating the union from any wrongdoing, and assessing the gravity of the situation. U2.1 and U2.2 established that the parties were "poles apart." Therefore, without a substantial shift, a negotiated agreement was impossible. While the union was reasonable and open to compromise, the government "won't compromise by an inch." As G2.1 illustrates, the government had no intention of straying from its net-zero mandate to satisfy the demands of one union. According to G2.1, 138 bargaining units had signed net-zero agreements and the BCTF did not deserve special treatment. That should have challenged Lambert to justify her union's wage demands. But she never argued that teachers deserved better wages because of who they were; rather she couched her justification in broader terms—better working conditions were needed to guarantee better learning conditions. *Bill 22* provided further opportunity to shift the focus of her framing activities away from monetary issues while attributing additional blame to the government.

TABLE 2

## Diagnostic framing: The system is not fair and just

Topic	Union Utterances*	Government Utterances**
I. Net-Zero Mandate	<p><b>U2.1:</b> We are poles apart. I think [the union demands are] realistic and [are] very different from the government mandate. There is going to have to be a shift somewhere along the line (Hunter, Justine. 2011. "Abbott Goes Back to Class to Avert Teachers' Strike." <i>Globe and Mail</i>, March 18).</p> <p><b>U2.2:</b> Every single one of our objectives is negotiable. We are ready to compromise on every single one, including salary, including everything. And this government won't compromise by an inch ... (Steffenhagen, Janet and Jonathan Fowlie. 2012. "Education Minister Offers to Talk to Teachers Union Boss About Bill Concerns." <i>Vancouver Sun</i>, March 7).</p>	<p><b>G2.1:</b> It would be bad faith to say to the 138 unions and locals that have signed on to net-zero that net-zero was good enough for them but it's not good enough for the teachers' federation (Stueck, Wendy. 2012. "Returning B.C. Teachers Vow to Keep Up Pressure Against <i>Bill 22</i>." <i>Globe and Mail</i>, March 7).</p>
II. <i>Bill 22</i>	<p><b>U2.3:</b> This act [<i>Bill 22</i>] is the height of political cynicism. It's much more of a political act than it is an education. The punitive fines for contravention of the act are outrageous and a deliberate attempt to intimidate, bully and bludgeon. This act legislates the net-zero mandate for teachers and that will mean, just in terms of compensation alone, probably a cut of about \$1,400 per year per teacher—so on the backs of the profession of teaching is the balancing of this government's budget (<i>CBC News</i>, 2012. February 28).</p> <p><b>U2.4:</b> <i>Bill 22</i> is an attack on free collective bargaining. It's the right to negotiate a collective agreement and not have one shove in your face by the government full of concessions and zeroes (Jim Sinclair, President, B.C. Federation of Labour. 2012. <i>CBC News</i>, March 6).</p>	<p><b>G2.2:</b> I think that the class of 2011-2012 deserves that [the stability <i>Bill 22</i> is bound to provide]. They have had six months of modest disruption of their education year. I think they deserve an opportunity to get full teaching for the balance of the year (Bailey, Ian and Justine Hunter. 2012. "Extracurricular in Crosshairs as B.C. Passes Bill Banning Teacher Strikes." <i>Globe and Mail</i>, March 15).</p>
III. Mediation Process	<p><b>U2.5:</b> This mediation process, I call it a mock mediation process, is one that's skewed right from the get-go so I don't know what kind of a mediator would accept the task in the first place. It would have to be someone who has extensive mediation experience, but even then, their hands are tied by constraints in the legislation itself (Meissner, Dirk. 2012. "B.C. Legislature Passes Bill to End Teachers Strike." <i>Globe and Mail</i>, March 15).</p>	<p><b>G2.3:</b> Apparently there is some suggestion that Dr. Jago had a hand in the construction of <i>Bill 22</i>. That is absolutely incorrect and if the BCTF are operating on that premise, it is a faulty premise. I have full confidence in the qualifications of Dr. Jago. He is the right person for the job. ... I haven't seen the BCTF's application to the LRB [to disqualify Jago]—but I am sure the board will deal with it in due course (<i>CBC News</i>, "BCTF Asks Labour Relation Board to Dismiss Mediator." April 5, 2012).</p>

TABLE 2 (suite)

**Diagnostic framing: The system is not fair and just**

**Union Utterances\***

**U2.6:** I'm sure he's [Jago] a very accomplished person, but I am concerned about his ability to mediate this dispute and his ability to understand the issues that separate both parties. [I have] an apprehension of bias due to a 2006 report he wrote about the future of education in B.C.. Jago's comments questioning the scope of teachers' seniority are concerning, and could foreshadow a possible predetermined outcome (Bell, Jeff. 2012. "Mediator Appointed in B.C. Teachers' Dispute." *timescolonist.com*, March 28).

**IV.  
New  
Agreement**

**U2.7:** We've concluded this agreement in order to prevent government from imposing a contract that would further erode teachers' hard-won rights and do more harm to students' learning conditions. The agreement leaves important matters unresolved. The agreement provides for no improvements to class size and composition. Despite the BC Supreme Court ruling that *Bills 27* and *28* are unconstitutional and invalid, government refused to redress this legislation, which stripped teachers' collective agreements, restricted their bargaining rights, and eliminated provisions for class size and composition, as well as staffing ratios for specialist teachers who served students with special needs (*BCTF News Release*, 2012. June 26).

**U2.8:** ... going into school next year, this settlement does nothing to alleviate the working conditions and learning conditions in schools, it does nothing to decrease classroom sizes, it does nothing to increase the programs that support children with special needs. From that point of view, we realize that this government has refused to accept its responsibility to nurture a high-quality education system. That's very hard for teachers to hear (Nursall, Kim. 2012. "Majority of B.C. Teachers Vote in Favor of Contract Agreement." *The Canadian Press*, June 29).

**Government Utterances\*\***

**G2.4:** We are pleased that mediation has resulted in a tentative memorandum of settlement between the BCPSEA and the BCTF. Under Dr. Charles Jago's guidance, the parties worked extremely hard and made progress on many important issues (Ip, Stephanie. 2012. "B.C. Teachers Reach Tentative Deal with Province, Seek 'Fair Treatment' in Next Round." *The Province*, June 27).

\* All quotes were made by the union president, Susan Lambert, unless otherwise indicated. \*\* All quotes were made by Education Minister George Abbott, unless otherwise indicated.

The government described *Bill 22* as a mechanism for bringing stability so that the students could receive their teachers' full attention (G2.2). Lambert never accepted that notion, arguing that *Bill 22* was a punitive tactic taken by a government bully that had trampled on the union's democratic right to free collective bargaining. Thus an inflexible and unreasonable government was now taunted for riding roughshod over teachers - "on the backs of the profession of teaching is the balancing act of this government's budget," declared Lambert (U2.3).

For Lambert, *Bill 22* was government's way of beating the union into submission (U2.3). According to Section 6 (2) (b), a new mediated agreement must respect the net-zero mandate. In addition, Section 6 (2) (c) (i) and (iii) stipulated that the new agreement: 1- must promote improvement through effective evaluation of teachers; and 2- enable the employer/principal to consider teacher qualifications to teach a subject, not only seniority, when making appointments. These stipulations prompted Lambert to vigorously oppose the mediation process; it was a "mock mediation process" that was "skewed right from the get go" (U2.5). In addition, she opposed the government-appointed mediator, Charles Jago. Upon hearing of Jago's appointment, Lambert quickly questioned his impartiality (U2.6). Although the Minister of Education expressed his full confidence in Jago (G2.3), she interpreted his appointment as one more sign of a tainted and biased process.

Jago met the government deadline for delivering a signed agreement. The government was pleased with the outcome and praised the parties (G2.4). But as mentioned above, Lambert held that the union had signed the agreement only to avoid a legislated one. Major issues remained unresolved, which proved that "this government has refused to accept its responsibility to nurture a high-quality education system" (U2.8). In addition, the exclusion of class size and composition from the mediation demonstrated the government's disregard for the *2011 BC Supreme Court Decision*, which had ordered it to renew negotiation over these issues (U2.7). Thus the early depiction of government as stubborn and inflexible evolved over time into one that was an anti-democratic bully, disrespectful of teachers, labour rights, and the legal system. Taming such a beast would require "dramatic action."

Conflict begins when groups "fail to negotiate interests, norms or identities" states Dedaić (2003: 1), and therefore "every dispute starts with 'othering.'" "Othering" requires distinguishing between "us" (in-group) and "them" (out-group). Without othering, or polarization, conflict is not possible. Only after groups have been formed can they be set in motion against each other. The construction of conflict thus requires that competing groups and incompatible interests be clearly demarcated.

Diagnostic framing operationalized a discourse of polarization: government was vilified, the union valorized. Lambert used this dichotomy to distinguish between an ignoble government and a noble union. It was the government, with its refusal to heed the *BC Supreme Court decision* and its net-zero mandate, which was “a wall that provides for no ability to compromise,” which bore responsibility (Hughes, 2012: 6). Teachers were victims; government their victimizer. Students and their parents were also included in this “in-group” by virtue of their being under siege by the same bullying government that hoped to balance its budget on their backs.

The discourse of polarization used uncompromising language to assign core identities and establish the gravity of the conflict. It drove a wedge between the union and the government while raising the stakes. The government was more than ill-mannered: it was a bully openly defying the courts to get what it wanted. Dealing with people who disagree with “us” is one thing, counteracting an oppressor with no respect for education, labour rights, and the law of the land quite another. By identifying a clear villain assaulting the vested interests of teachers and society, Lambert liberated, or at least loosened, teachers from a belief in the fairness of the political system and inculcated a sense of injustice. But how to stop such a powerful oppressor?

### **Prognostic Framing**

While the “in-group” must do something about the “out-group,” what to do and how to do it is the domain of prognostic framing. The net-zero mandate rubric included two arguments. First, the union sought contract improvements. These improvements were not about satisfying the demands of self-centered, greedy teachers; rather, the union sought to guarantee the integrity of the education system. The union was selfless not selfish. The government did not buy the union’s altruism. In 2012, on budget day, Premier Clark declared that she was ready to invest in students and classrooms, and reiterated that the government would not meet the union’s wage demand (G3.1). Thus, she distinguished between wage demands and investment in education, elements that Lambert sought to fuse.

Second, in 2011, as a part of the campaign against the net-zero mandate, the union secured LRB permission to not issue report cards in the 2011-12 academic year. Report cards were “hugely important” to the Minister of Education, who resented the fact that students and parents were caught in the conflict’s crossfire (G3.2). Lambert had to convince teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders that the teachers could confront their adversary without abdicating a major pedagogic responsibility. Reiterating the union position, Joan Erb, president of Cariboo-Chilcotin Teachers’ Association, reassured parents that teachers would

TABLE 3

## Prognostic framing: What is to be done?

Topic	Union Utterances*	Government Utterances**
I. Net-Zero Mandate	<p><b>U3.1:</b> Contract improvements are needed if BC hopes to attract and retain the best teachers. The union wants parity with teachers in Alberta and Ontario (Steffenhagen, Janet. 2011. "Freeze, What Freeze? BC Teachers Want Pay Hike." <i>Vancouver Sun</i>, January 18).</p> <p><b>U3.2:</b> Teachers are stepping up to the plate and keeping that communication line [with parents] going. Even though you [parents] may not be getting a report card, you have a good idea of ... how your child is doing. ... We need you to know we are still watching out after your kids and providing them with a first-rate education (Joan Erb, President of Cariboo-Chilcotin Teachers' Association at a meeting with parents. Rooney, Carole. 2011. <i>100 Mile House Free Press</i>, November 2).</p>	<p><b>G3.1:</b> On education, our priority is to focus the resources that we have on students in classrooms; not on the 15 percent wage hike the teachers' union is asking for (Premier Christy Clark's addressing the province on budget day. 2012. <i>CKNW</i>, Bill Good. February 13).</p> <p><b>G3.2:</b> Report cards and reporting generally are hugely important to us. It is not acceptable to me, nor to the Ministry of Education, to have children and parents in British Columbia not understanding how they are progressing (Kidd, Steve. 2011. "Teachers and Ministry at Odds Over Report Cards." <i>Penticton Western News</i>, November 1).</p>
II. Bill 22	<p><b>U3.3:</b> While they do push this legislation through, they need to know that we have just begun. The teachers of B.C. will defend public education with all our wits and all our strength (Stueck, Wendy. 2012. "Returning B.C. Teachers Vow to Keep Up Pressure Against Bill 22." <i>Globe and Mail</i>, March 7).</p> <p><b>U3.4:</b> It's the teachers who will tell me what to do. If the 41,000 members of the BCTF decide to take the action that will incur fines [by striking illegally], then I will be incurring fines, I suppose (Austin, Ian and Frank Luba. 2012. "B.C. Teachers May Vote on Strike Tuesday as Abbott, Lambert Square off." <i>The Province</i>, March 19).</p>	<p><b>G3.3:</b> Now that Bill 22, the Education Improvement Act has been passed by the legislature and a mediator will soon be appointed, it's time for everyone involved to pause and reflect on how we can work together to continue to improve our education system. I know that this has been a challenging year for all involved and I am hopeful that through the mediation process, both parties will have the opportunity to work together in a constructive way to resolve issues and reach a negotiated collective agreement (Ministry of Education. 2012. <i>News Release</i>, March 15).</p>
III. Mediation Process	<p><b>U3.5:</b> We will be taking a lot of aspects of Bill 22 to court. Bill 22 is very poorly written legislation. It violates teachers' constitutional rights to free and full collective bargaining (Luba, Frank. 2012. "B.C. Teacher on Brink of Vote to Withdraw Voluntary Extracurricular Teaching." <i>The Province</i>, April 17).</p>	<p><b>G3.4:</b> He [Dr. Jago] is the right person for the job. Unfortunately, while they initially asked for a mediator to be appointed, the BCTF now seems intent on sidelining the mediation process by asking the Labour Relations Board to have Dr. Jago's appointed rescinded (Stueck, Wendy. 2012. "B.C. Teachers' Union Calls For Mediator to be Sent Packing." <i>Globe and Mail</i>, April 5).</p>

TABLE 3 (suite)

**Prognostic framing: What is to be done?**

**Union Utterances\***

**U3.6:** The [mediated] agreement changes nothing in schools. Yes we are asking for more money for public education. We're asking for smaller class sizes. I'm asking for a full-time library in every school. This civil claim is aimed at getting our rights back and the public education system should get \$3.3-billion back cumulatively over the past 10 years. Parents are very clear that they want classroom conditions that allow their children to learn. So they want class sizes and those programs that are constructed to help children that are struggling in schools. Parents are very, very clear and strong in their advocacy for public education (Burritt, Dan. 2012. "BC Teachers Head Back to Court over *Bill 22*." *News 1130*, June 27).

**Government Utterances\*\***

**G3.5:** The term of the agreement runs until June 30, 2013, sets out improved language to manage leave provisions, and is consistent with government's net zero mandate. In addition, the parties agreed to further discuss and seek mutually agreeable improvements on key policy issues to provide students with the best education possible (Stueck, Wendy. 2012. "B.C. Government and Teachers' Union Agree on Tentative Deal." *Globe and Mail*, June 27).

**IV.  
New  
Agreement**

**U3.7:** We are required to open negotiations again in just eight months, and we will once again be looking for fair treatment at the bargaining table and long-awaited improvements for our members and our students (Ip, Stephanie. 2012.. "B.C. Teachers Reach Tentative Deal with Province, Seek 'Fair Treatment' in Next Round." *The Province*, June 27).

\* All quotes were made by the union president, Susan Lambert, unless otherwise indicated.    \*\* All quotes were made by Education Minister George Abbott, unless otherwise indicated.



maintain communication with them and upon request provide information on their children's progress (U3.2). Despite the ongoing conflict and the suspension of report cards, an unwavering commitment to high-quality education and open communication with parents was pledged. Likely, the implicit message to the parents was that they, and their children, were not pawns the union was using to pressure the government. To teachers, the message might have been that there was a way to suspend a core responsibility without damaging their relationship with students and parents, and violating their own professional standards.

The government introduced *Bill 22* to end the conflict (G3.3). Lambert repeated her opposition to the Bill (U3.3). Practically, the union launched a three-day strike when the Bill was introduced and challenged an aspect of the Bill at the LRB. Generally, *Bill 22* gave Lambert renewed opportunity to rally her members. She emphasized that any thoughts that *Bill 22* had paved the way for a settlement were premature. Teachers were not lemmings, and would not be pushed around. They had a voice and she would heed it, even if it meant breaking the law and incurring heavy fines (U3.4). Apparently, just as the government did not comply with the *BC Supreme Court decision*, the union was prepared to defy the law to protect its interests.

Lambert characterized the union as a belligerent, self-assured organization willing to confront the government to defend public education and the teaching profession. In addition, she sent a strong message that teachers would not carry out their fight at the expense of students and their parents. The message was addressed to the government, students, parents and, perhaps especially, teachers. Through it, the government learned that *Bill 22* was not a silver bullet, students and parents were informed that the teachers would not abandon them, and teachers were inspired to join the discussion about how best to counteract the government.

A group of radical members challenged this message and published a manifesto (*Walk Out 2012*) calling for a militant response. They declared that “[r]estricting ourselves only to ‘legal’ activities is both, 1- an expression of our acceptance of unjust laws, and 2- a certain defeat for us and our profession. ... If we let the government ... order us around, belittle and humiliate us, then we would look unprofessional. We must stand up to *Bill 22* and take action to assert our professionalism.” Perhaps Lambert catered to this radical voice by saying that she was open to considering every member's idea, and that the union must resist *Bill 22* at any cost. Containing this rogue element required Lambert to be both highly inclusive and unwavering.

Practically, the union planned to challenge the legality of *Bill 22* (U3.5). In early April 2012, it applied to the LRB to have the Board declare the mediator's appointment be quashed. BCTF also sought an interim order that the mediation not

proceed until the Board had provided its decision regarding the union application. The Board rejected the union application for interim relief and, in May, dismissed its request to terminate the mediator's appointment. The underlying message of this step might have been that the union was determined to leave no stone unturned in its effort to protect the "teachers' constitutional rights to free and full collective bargaining" (U3.5).

The mediation process went ahead and produced an agreement upon which the union frowned. Consequently, the campaign for better learning and working conditions was not over (U3.6 and U3.7). In the next bargaining round, the union would ask for "fair treatment" and "long-awaited improvements for members and students" (U3.7). The solution was to keep fighting the good fight. Hence teachers, students, parents, and government should brace themselves for another battle. The mediated agreement had but suspended the conflict; the union wrath was still smoldering.

Lambert made it clear that the teachers must, and would, stand up to the government by resorting to the legal system and their own collective strength. She warned the government that "we have just begun" and that teachers would "defend public education with all [their] wits and all [their] strength" (U3.3). No longer were teachers cast as victims, rather they were potent guardians of public education who could, and should, resist the government. To that purpose, she issued a list of actions the union and teachers had at their disposal (e.g., not delivering report cards, taking legal as well as illegal action, teaming up with parents).

Lambert was defiant, but along with the roles she assigned (Fairclough, 1989: 38; Hardy and Phillips, 1999: 4), she added a discourse of social responsibility. Being socially responsible, teachers were attentive to the needs of parents and students and mindful of the union's deep commitment to the teaching profession and education system. Being defiant, she took her marching orders from her members alone, and she would pay the price for her audacity. Using these two discourses, Lambert allocated roles to government (the villain), teachers (heroes), parents (supporting cast), students (vulnerable victims), and herself (a fearless participatory leader). Meaningful involvement was possible only by occupying one of these roles. Occupying a subject position in a discourse gave some individuals the right to speak louder than others.

### **Motivational Framing**

People may agree about the causes and solutions to a particular problem and yet not yield to mobilization efforts (Snow and Benford, 1988: 201). Participation in collective action is contingent "upon the development of motivational frames that function as prods to action" (*Ibid.*). Table 4 presents motivational framing

texts. The government introduced *Bill 22* in late February 2012, believing that it had paved the way to end the conflict (G4.2). The union considered it bullying, an “appalling disrespect” for teachers and students, and entertained a few retaliatory collective actions. The teachers responded by calling a three-day strike, in addition to their withdrawal from extracurricular activities. In other words, teachers were set in motion; action was taken.

But how do speakers inspire conviction and enhance the prospects for action? SMO scholars recognize that speakers must legitimate their messages (Snow and Benford, 1988: 202; Chiapello and Fairclough, 2010: 273). Van Leeuwen (2008: 105-123) and Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) outline four archetypal legitimation strategies for collective action: authorization, rationalization, moralization and mythopoesis. In inspiring action, a speaker may appeal to some or all of these strategies. We use this framework to structure our analysis of how Lambert went about setting union members in motion.

*Authorization* is legitimation by reference to authority. It answers questions such as, why should we trust your words? Why should we follow you? The answer is “because I say so,” or, in this case, “because I am the union president.” Put another way, the speaker is someone in whom institutional authority is vested. Lambert’s words carried the power to set others in motion because she was the union president.

An interesting use of authorization was offered by Lambert in U4.5. Here teachers were told that they should participate in collective action because of who they were: “It’s our professional obligation to stand up on behalf of the kids.” In this instance teachers were told to mobilize because it was their “professional obligation.” To be a teacher means that “we cannot be compliant.” We should also note how the inclusion of those for whom they stood, “kids,” added a moral dimension and assigned teachers the role of protector. In this instance, authorization was legitimated by reference to the profession of teaching. Teachers stand up for kids because that is what teachers do.

*Rationalization* is legitimation by reference to the utility of specific actions (“instrumental rationalization”), or to the “facts of life” (“theoretical rationalization”). People applying the instrumental form justify actions by reference to the purposes or functions that the actions serve. Here, collective action was necessary since it was impossible to get a negotiated agreement and things could not go on like this. Moreover, acquiescing to *Bill 22* would set the union on the slippery slope to further concessions. Theoretical rationalization defends the activity to be legitimated by arguing that it is part of a natural course of events; it is appropriate “because this is the way things are” (or “this is life”). According to Lambert, “you have to stand up to a bully”; this is what people should do when they are harassed, even if they are scared.

TABLE 4

Motivational framing: Call to arms

Topic	Union Utterances*	Government Utterances**
<p>I. Net-Zero Mandate</p>	<p><b>U4.1:</b> We're not going to do formal report cards but we will maintain close communication with parents (2011. "Strike Vote Gets Massive Support from B.C. Teachers." <i>Daily Bulletin</i>, June 30).</p> <p><b>U4.2:</b> Teachers all over B.C. are eager to reach a negotiated settlement to the current labour dispute, but facing such disrespectful demands it's practically impossible to move forward at the bargaining table (Joan Erb, President of Cariboo-Chilcotin Teachers' Association. Rooney, Carole. 2011. <i>100 Mile House Free Press</i>, "Teachers Label Latest Contract Offer Draconian." November 30).</p>	<p><b>G4.1:</b> There is no question in my mind and certainly no question in government's mind that the net-zero mandate that has now been applied to about three-quarters of public servants in British Columbia will soon be applied to teachers. From a budgetary perspective it's going to be a zero-percent increase year-over-year. It's not like government is being mean-spirited here. We don't have a choice, we don't have the dollars to deal with a wage increase for the teachers or for anyone else at this point (Cooper, Alex. 2011. "B.C. Education Minister Pessimistic about Deal with Teachers Any Time Soon." <i>Revelstoke Times Review</i>, August 30).</p>
<p>II. Bill 22</p>	<p><b>U4.3:</b> The bill tabled on Tuesday was a sign of the appalling disrespect for the profession of teaching, for students, and for public education in BC. Sometimes—even though you're afraid, even though the threats seem overwhelming—you have to stand up to a bully (<i>BCTF News Release</i>, March 1, 2012).</p> <p><b>U4.4:</b> That's the moral choice that's facing teachers across the province—either you stand up to an unjust law, and knowingly take the risk, or you find other ways of resisting. There are consequences for teachers, there are consequences for teaching and there are consequences for public education. We understand the gravity. When you are united, when you act in solidarity, when you act on principal [sic] and with integrity and courage and you build public support for that position ... then you can sometimes reverse government decisions. ("Legal Strike Urged by Some B.C. Teacher." <i>The Canadian Press</i>, March 19, 2012).</p> <p><b>U4.5:</b> We cannot be compliant. It's our professional obligation to stand up on behalf of the kids. That's who we stand for (Hutchinson, Brian. 2012. "B.C. Teachers Ceasefire Unravels." <i>National Post</i>, March 23).</p> <p><b>U4.6:</b> It's like a Hansel and Gretel story. We're being led down a path to a very fine, candy-coated house, but inside there's a risk for us. And that major risk, it seems to me, is a net-zero mandate and further concessions to our collective agreement (Stueck, Wendy. 2012. "Mediator in B.C. Teachers' Dispute Questioned Over Pay, Independence." <i>Globe and Mail</i>, March, 28).</p>	<p><b>G4.2:</b> The conclusion of this [i.e., <i>Bill 22</i>] is inevitable. Everyone has seen the legislation that brings in a mediator and requires a cooling-off period for all this job action. So I'm not sure what their purpose is in closing down schools when it isn't going to do anything to change the outcome (Premier Clark. Steffenhagen, Janet and Jonathan Fowlie. 2012. "Education Minister Offers to Talk to Teachers Union Boss About Bill Concerns." <i>Vancouver Sun</i>, March 7).</p>

\* All quotes were made by the union president, Susan Lambert, unless otherwise indicated.

\*\* All quotes were made by Education Minister George Abbott, unless otherwise indicated.

U4.1 and U4.2 are related to phase 1 of the teachers' protest against the net-zero mandate, namely withdrawal from extracurricular activities. U4.1 sought several goals. First, like U3.2, announcing that teachers would not prepare report cards was likely a pressure tactic. As such, it was a part of prognostic framing. Second, it was a way to prod teachers to action, or inaction in this case. Those who might have felt uncomfortable with not issuing or receiving report cards were reassured that the flow of information from teachers to parents would continue in the absence of report cards. Hence teachers should not be reluctant and parents should not worry. Instrumental rationalization justified the withholding of report cards by arguing that it was "practically impossible to move forward at the bargaining table." Action must be taken.

*Moralization* is legitimation by reference to specific value systems that provide the moral basis for legitimation. Lambert used a discourse of social responsibility to moralize her call to arms. First, she moralized the context: "That's the moral choice that's facing teachers across the province" (U4.4). As well, by juxtaposing such terms as "unjust law," "integrity," "courage," and "act on principle," Lambert established the teachers' moral superiority. They should fight with courage and integrity on behalf of the community against an unjust law passed by a government disrespectful of the democratic process and the rights of others. This discourse endowed teachers with the virtue of moral supremacy reserved for selfless heroes. Moreover, the teachers' actions were described as defensive not offensive; they were reacting to government' provocation. It was the teachers' professional and civic duty to protect their students, teaching profession, public education system, and democracy itself.

U4.2 provided another basis for the teachers' action. The union wanted to solve the problem. It was "eager to reach a negotiated settlement" but the government was not. The teachers cared deeply for their profession and for their students. They were good people who cared about children and their parents, but they were up against a government that showed "appalling disrespect." Government did not care and would run roughshod over the province's children. The teachers, however, had the power to stand up against this powerful adversary. Hence members were told that they faced "a moral choice" (U4.4); they were standing up "on behalf of the kids" (U4.5). Lambert thus developed a moral frame that would hopefully function as a "prod to action" (Snow and Benford, 1988: 201). Teachers should take collective action because it was the right thing to do.

The last type of legitimation strategy is *mythopoesis*, or mythmaking. It refers to legitimation that is achieved through the telling of stories that contextualize the past and the future in relation to the present issue. This strategy rests on texts used in all the framing stages. As such, Lambert did not relate the union story in a single utterance. We did find, however, that the particular pieces of the relevant

data occupied a specific part of the larger arc which, when taken in their totality, presented a cohesive and meaningful whole. Like shards of pottery, each of the various discursive pieces possessed a certain shape, and when glimpsed in their totality formed a distinctive pattern. That pattern cast the complex and complicated nature of the conflict as coherent and straightforward.

According to Lambert, several years ago the government passed *Bill 27* and *28* that worsened learning and working conditions and undercut the union bargaining power. Though the BC Supreme Court declared these bills unconstitutional, the government refused to redress the effects of its legislation, so the union could not address such issues as class size and composition. More recently, the union capacity to negotiate wage increases was undermined by the government's net-zero policy. But the union refused to roll over; it would confront the villainous government on behalf of others. Yet the union was bullied into signing a new agreement by a tainted mediation process. The struggle, however, was merely paused. It would be rekindled at the upcoming bargaining round.

This narrative simplified the complexities of the conflict, providing a clear story in which a union hero was confronting a government villain. As such, Lambert never discussed the province's fiscal situation, the compliance of most other unions with the net-zero mandate, the long history of acrimony between the union and previous BC governments, or the effects of this history on the education system. The narrative that she crafted concerned a noble union protecting a key collective good by standing up to an irresponsible and unfair government. It was straightforward, easy to digest, and likely to resonate with the in-group, and hopefully the public.

The above legitimization efforts provided a rationale for fighting the government. Lambert, however, used one more strategy. Using a discourse of collective efficacy, she urged unity, because "when you are united, when you act in solidarity ... then you can sometimes reverse government decisions" (U4.4). There was might in togetherness and strength in numbers. Thus the teachers' fight was not only just; it was also winnable. But success was contingent upon the ability of teachers to pull together and confront the government *en masse*. She encouraged teachers to remain united because when people act in unison they may reverse the government's decisions. Thus the success of a collective protest, while not guaranteed, was within reach.

## Conclusion

We have used the 2011-12 conflict between the BCTF and the BC government to explore how the union president, Susan Lambert, used language to construct a labour conflict. We have applied a social movement organizations theory to con-

ceptualize three pillars of conflict—establishing its parameters (diagnosis); outlining what is to be done (prognosis); instilling a will to act in union members (mobilization). Overall, using discursive strategies, or interpretative practices, such as polarization, altruism, defiance, legitimation, and collective efficacy, Lambert animated the concept of conflict; carved roles and assigned relationships to various actors; and infused teachers with a will to act. Future research can examine the typicality of the president's language: were there differences between what was said directly to members and to the general public? Were certain frames used more often and were they dependent upon the audience? Did the type of government workers (teacher, nurse, office worker, etc.) influence the type of language, discursive strategies, and frames used to construct the conflict and its importance?

As with other discourse analyses, distinctive text constitutes our dataset. Therefore, it may not be replicable. In addition, others may interpret the same data differently; hence a natural question about our findings' generalizability. Yet, as Talja (1999: 472; emphases in the original) suggests, "*Social practices that are possible*, that is, *possibilities of language use*, are the central objects of [discourse] analysis." Therefore, "research results are not generalizable as descriptions of how things are, but as how a phenomenon can be seen, [analyzed], or interpreted." Framing is important whenever a speaker seeks to persuade others to think and act in a certain way. Events must be interpreted to appeal to the audience, enabling them to identify with the speaker's premises and theses. Consequently, we suggest that Lambert's interpretive practices, as we describe them, can be considered generalizable even though we cannot demonstrate the applicability of our view across different settings. This is in line with Phillips and Hardy (2002: 6) who argue that the most important contribution of discourse analysis is that it "examines how language constructs phenomena ... ." In other words, following Cheek (2004: 357), our approach does not "necessarily aim to seek closure in terms of producing the only possible reading," but rather to demonstrate the value and logic of our reading of the data. However, we would like to add that the concepts and themes used in such examinations might be applied in other, similar studies.

Competing analyses and interpretations thus are not unacceptable; they are welcomed since they, first, offer a valid representation of the multi-dimensionality of life and, second, enrich our understanding of such complex social phenomena as labour conflict. Therefore, they should not detract from the importance of discourse analysis. In Phillips and Hardy's (2002: 6) words "without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand our reality, our experience, or ourselves." Our study has charted a way in which a speaker ushered the reality of labour conflict into being. We invite others to provide their own take on the construction of this and other labour conflicts.

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## SUMMARY

### Words at Work: Constructing a Labour Conflict

We use the 2011-12 conflict between the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) and the British Columbia (BC) government to explore how the union president, Susan Lambert, used language to bring the conflict into being and mobilize union members in opposition to the government. We use newspaper articles and archival material from mid-2011 to June 2012 to explore how Lambert identified the core issues and actors, prescribed roles, relationships and actions, and, importantly, inspired a will to act in union members and supporters.

To explore how she constructed the conflict, we adopt a mobilization theory developed by scholars of social movement organizations (SMO). Snow and Benford (1988: 200-202) conceptualize three core pillars of conflict: 1- *diagnostic framing* identifies a problem, attributes blame or causality, and identifies the key actors; 2- *prognostic framing* offers a solution and identifies strategies, tactics and targets; 3- *motivational framing* provides a call to arms, or rationale for action while inspiring an urge to act among members and supporters. In exploring how she urged action among members, we use the four archetypal legitimation strategies identified by Van Leeuwen (2008) and Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999): authorization, rationalization, moralization and mythopoesis.

McAdam (1982: 48) argues that before collective action can begin people must come to view their situation as unjust and subject to change. We use the above framework to structure our exploration of how the union president used language to frame members' understanding of the conflict. Through language she ushered the reality of labour conflict into being and constructed a reality in which union members could identify themselves as agents of protest and change.

KEYWORDS: discourse, framing, public sector, teachers, labour conflict, trade unions, British Columbia, mobilization.

## RÉSUMÉ

### Le pouvoir des mots : genèse d'un conflit de travail

Dans cet article, nous nous penchons sur le conflit de travail, survenu en 2011-2012, entre la Fédération des enseignants-es de la Colombie-Britannique et le gouvernement de cette province, afin d'examiner de quelle manière la présidente de cette fédération, Susan Lambert, a utilisé le langage pour amener ses membres à réaliser l'ampleur du conflit et les mobiliser contre le gouvernement. À cette fin, nous avons passé en revue des articles de quotidiens et des documents d'archives couvrant la période s'étendant de la mi-2011 à juin 2012, dans le but de cerner comment Mme Lambert est parvenue à identifier les enjeux et les acteurs cruciaux, attribuer les rôles, établir les relations et les actions, et, surtout, comment elle a réussi à inspirer une volonté d'agir chez les membres et leurs partisans.

Pour explorer comment elle a « construit » le conflit, nous adoptons une théorie de la mobilisation développée par des universitaires qui ont étudié les mouvements sociaux organisés. Snow et Benford (1988 : 200-202) ont conceptualisé trois piliers-clés du conflit : 1- *élaboration du diagnostic*, soit identifier un problème, en attribuer le blâme ou la cause, et identifier les acteurs-clés; 2- *élaboration du pronostique*, soit offrir une solution et en identifier les stratégies, tactiques et cibles; et, enfin, 3- *élaboration de la motivation*, soit faire un appel aux armes ou offrir un argumentaire qui convaincra les membres et les partisans de l'urgence de passer à l'action. Pour analyser la manière dont la présidente a réussi cela, nous nous référons aux quatre stratégies de légitimation identifiées par Van Leeuwen (2008), et Van Leeuwen et Wodack (1999) : autorisation, rationalisation, moralisation et construction d'un mythe.

McAdam (1982 : 48) soutient qu'avant qu'une action collective ne débute, il faut que les personnes concernées considèrent leur situation comme étant injuste et devant être changée. Nous nous servons de ce cadre d'analyse pour explorer la manière dont la présidente a utilisé le langage pour « construire » cette vision. Grâce au langage utilisé, elle est parvenue à faire ressortir les enjeux du conflit et à « construire une réalité » où les membres ont pu s'identifier comme agents de changement et acteurs de la protestation.

MOTS-CLÉS : discours, construction de la réalité, secteur public, enseignants, syndicats, mobilisation, Colombie-Britannique.

## RESUMEN

### Las palabras en acción: la construcción de un conflicto de trabajo

Se estudia el conflicto ocurrido en 2011-2012 entre la Federación de profesores de Colombia Británica (FPCB) y el gobierno de Colombia Británica (CB) para explorar el uso del lenguaje - en este caso, por la presidenta sindical Susan Lambert - para hacer brotar un conflicto y para movilizar los miembros del sindicato en oposición al gobierno. Utilizamos artículos de periódicos y material de archivo aparecidos desde mediados de 2011 a junio 2012 para analizar cómo Lambert identificó los temas centrales y los actores, los roles prescritos, las relaciones y las acciones, y, más importante aún, la manera cómo inspiró los miembros sindicales y simpatizantes a pasar a la acción.

El análisis de la gestación del conflicto se basa en la teoría de la movilización desarrollada por los académicos de las organizaciones de movimiento social (OMS). Snow y Benford (1988 : 200-202) conceptualizan tres pilares centrales del conflicto: 1- *estrategema de diagnóstico* para identificar un problema, atribuir la responsabilidad o la culpa e identificar los actores claves; 2- *estrategema de pronóstico* que ofrece una solución e identifica las estrategias, tácticas y metas; 3- *estrategema motivacional* que procura a los miembros y simpatizantes una justificación para la acción o un « grito de combate », inspirando, al mismo tiempo, la urgencia de pasar a la acción. Para analizar la manera cómo Lambert motivó los sindicalistas a pasar a la acción, se utilizan los cuatro arquetipos de estrategias de legitimación identificados por Van Leeuwen (2008) y Van Leeuwen y Wodack (1999): autorización, racionalización, moralización y creación de un mito (mythopoesis).

McAdam (1982: 48) sostiene que antes que una acción colectiva comience, es necesario que las personas concernidas consideren su situación como injusta y sujeta al cambio. Nos basamos en este enfoque para analizar la manera cómo el lenguaje fue utilizado para modelar la comprensión de los miembros sindicales respecto al conflicto. Gracias al lenguaje utilizado, la presidenta sindical condujo la realidad del conflicto laboral hacia su esencia y construyó una realidad en la cual los miembros sindicales podían identificarse como agentes de protesta y cambio.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** discurso, *estrategema*, sector público, profesores, conflicto laboral, sindicatos, Colombia Británica, movilización.