

TURNS OUT ... I'M A COUNTRY MOUSE.

In my transition of identity and geography, I took some time to reacquaint myself with Aesop's fable of the two creatures.

The metaphor holds true for me personally, as I come out of my relatively protected home community to engage 'the city'. I've always thought of myself as a creature of the city, even though I left Vancouver many years ago to start my career in BC's interior.

Like City Mouse, I love the vibrancy and the bustle of activity, the endless distractions on offer and the stunning natural beauty. Vancouver is amazing, with such splendour and scope. But, as I said, it turns out I'm more country.

In the fable, Country Mouse returns to the simple yet secure life, leaving the city with its anxieties and hazards behind.

I can connect with the greater sense of security that blankets smaller centres. I hail from a community whose entire population will fit inside the large secondary schools of our urban centres, so it is easy to view the populated cities with anxiety and trepidation ... and it becomes easier to empathize with families and staff who express concern for a return to classroom learning in full force.

In fact, I believe in our present circumstances that many school leaders are feeling the draw of a simpler existence, or at least one that we recognize.

by
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Remember when you knew the score? Remember when September was a familiar script, all the design, routine and ritual was like muscle memory. Every Fall was a new game with new players, but it was one we had trained for, reflected upon and practiced. And now the year ahead is one with only one certainty: our schools will need the leadership of BC's Principals and Vice-Principals like never before.

"The principalship is a demanding job right now ... nearly an impossible one. And yet knowing that, there are thousands of principals who not only show up to school every day, they put everyone else before themselves."

(Peter DeWitt, 2020)

Of course we do.

The year ahead is difficult to imagine, much less see. The BC Restart Plan continues to be a work in progress, with challenges for the application of learning groups and the considerations for timetable platforms and divisions. Secondary timetables that were so carefully developed in the Spring are being significantly reconfigured, impacting elective course design and offerings.

An objective of the BC Restart Plan is clear and consistent: the return to school for as many students as possible for as much time as possible, the default being 100% of students 100% of the time.

It is an understatement to say that both meeting this challenge and remaining true to the objective is hard. Principals and Vice-Principals, with their district teams, are digging deep and building creative alternatives and structures in order to address the challenges of our restart.

October is completely obscured at this point, invisible behind the substantial work immediately before our members. But that does not mean that we are without vision.

For most of the Principals and Vice-Principals in BC, Friday the 13th is a more infamous day in the calendar than it was before COVID-19. In all the days that followed, throughout

the Spring and into June, our school leaders were called upon to forge pathways, foster innovation, support connections, and preserve security. BC Principals and Vice-Principals envisioned a new design for education in the province and pulled their teams together to build it. Now again, and in the months ahead, our vision and our perspective will be key to a successful restart.

This episode in our history began with calls for kindness and tolerance and care: let us not lose these qualities as we move forward. As Simon Breakspear has urged, let us capture, cleanse and weave in order to adopt the best parts of the new normal, and to adapt our practice for the benefit of all. And let us not lose sight of our own needs, for in times such as these our school leaders place self-care well down the priority list.

"Leaders are the ones who are willing to give up something of their own for us."

"Their time, their energy, their money, maybe even the food off their plate. When it matters, leaders choose to eat last."

(Sinek, 2014)

Insist on nourishment for yourself and look to your networks for support and assistance. Our team in Member Support Services is ready with connections and resources to assist our members in the weeks and months ahead. And don't hesitate to connect with me directly at ddanyluk@bcpvpa.bc.ca.

I am a Country Mouse who now has chosen to live in the city with all it brings. Whether rural or urban, we are connected in this global event. And we are connected in our need of each other, and the compassionate reassurance that this pandemic is not forever ... but it is for now. A young woman I met recently offered an excellent summation, which is appropriate as I close:

"I'm looking forward to 'precedented' times..."

Yes. We all are.