

A Friend on

How A Professional Partnership



the Journey

Can Enhance & Enrich Your Practice



Like many close friends, they frequently finish each other's sentences and the narrative passes back and forth seamlessly. They laugh – often – and have the ease of colleagues who have a lot of history, and a great deal of mutual respect.

This year, both **Jessica Antosz** – BCPVPA Director, Professional Learning and Development – and **Don Boyd** – BCPVPA Director, Member Support Services – will wrap their final 'school year' after long and vibrant careers as supportive educators.

The bond of trust between colleagues can take years to develop, and is something to be treasured. We asked Jessica and Don about where it all began, and the ways that a professional partnership can guide an educator's practice.

Jessica: "It was 1992, and Don transferred in as the new Principal. I was a teacher at that time, and student services coordinator for grades six and seven. We worked closely with admin and the school-based team – it was a different relationship than being a teacher with only classroom duties."

Don: "We relied heavily upon the student services team because both my Vice-Principal and I were new to that school of 517 bubbling grade 6, 7 and 8 students. Having Jess there was like having another administrator. The year after Jess came back from maternity leave, Steve was appointed Acting Principal at another school. They asked me who I'd like to have as a Vice-Principal, and I chose Jessica."

Jessica: "The Vice-Principal came back the next year, but we were faced with another challenge for our school. Accreditation was introduced, and that set our school on a year-long process where we worked collaboratively with the staff to review all school programs and to create a 3-year plan. Don asked me to be the Co-Chair of the Accreditation process. An external team came in at the end of the year and did a successful review of all the school's committee work, it was quite a process.

It was wonderful, in a sense, because that's where we really started building the school culture together. We established sub-committees within our staff, that

guided us through the accreditation process and built leadership capacity of our staff."

Don: "Every school has potential leaders: they just need the opportunity to lead. Wherever possible, we offered people an opportunity to have leadership, not just in the classroom but for the whole school. Our staff didn't turn over: they wanted to be there, and they were committed to the team. Out of our staff, I believe that at least 7 of 27 went on to be Principals, Vice-Principals or senior staff members."

Jessica: "At the time, we were not aware of any models for staff development and professional learning. I went to the library and found an article from the National Staff Development Council (now Learning Forward) which had a Staff Development learning academy in the U.S. for educators; there was no equivalent training program in B.C. at the time. Don and I were accepted and took the 2 ½ year program, we were part of study groups, did research on the foundational elements of staff development and acquired new skills. We started to change what our staff meetings looked like. And it just grew from there."

Don: "We had the support of our superintendent, Tom Watson and the Qualicum School District, our staff was ready to go and we had the opportunity to be with leading educators. The idea was to have the staff work collaboratively, to improve their instructional practices which would ultimately improve student achievement. We tracked this in different goal areas, and we had the progress posted in the staffroom.

LEADERSHIP ADVICE NEW LEADERS

Read, read, read, and share your learning
– your articles, your books and your videos
– with your staff, students, parents, and
everyone you work with.

LEADERSHIP ADVICE WORKING IN TEAMS

And we released the staff. We created a timetable so teachers had common prep, but we'd also go into their classrooms and teach their classes so that they had that additional time to collaborate. They loved it."

Jessica: "We went to the two unions and to the district so that we could get permission to do this – at the time, it was ground-breaking."

Don: "We established a sense of team. Some teachers went to do their masters, and talked there about what we were doing in our school, and people were surprised. We took a group of our staff members, and we went to other places to present about the study groups, and how we found the time. This was 2002-2007, way ahead of its time."

Jessica: "One of the main things that we did was we listened. We changed staff meetings from people just coming in and attending the meeting: to being actively engaged in new learning and having staff members present to one another. We structured the meetings and tables to have staff move outside of their comfort zone and to work with other staff members who they usually didn't work or collaborate with. It was interesting to see the interest grow and people looking to see who they would be working with at the meeting."

Don always talked about the importance of consensus and starting off small. You can start to work with a group, and another group will ask why you aren't working with them, too – you can say, 'I didn't know if you were interested', and then you start the process with them. It's that process of scaffolding."

Don: "You look at people's strengths and say, 'How can I maximize that to benefit the rest of the group?' All of the staff were in study groups and we also had our parents in a study group. It was a whole sense of school."

Jessica: "And community. Don and I were also co-chairs of the district PLD committee, and we'd have a professional learning component at our Chapter meetings and share the learning at the district level."

Don: "We had 26 administrators in our district and 13 of them were on the Pro-D committee. We brought

We were involved in the writing of all three BCPVPA Leadership Standards documents, and we learned that one of the major things with working in groups is that if we are to effectively move forward, we need to listen carefully to one another, and ask deep questions to gain clarity, to embrace curiosity and reflection, and to recognize that there is more than one way to do something. Listen, listen, listen first — then creativity and innovation will come.

Clarify what values are important to any group you work with, and make sure your actions demonstrate your values. Make sure that the values that you agree upon by the group are upheld. Responsibility, respect, courage, communication, empathy, gratitude, service, tolerance, trust, loyalty: these values are so important in schools, and will truly lay the foundation for creating collaborative teams, whether it's staff, students, parents, or the community.

in guest speakers from the B.C. and the U.S., many experts. In the past it had been 'administrivia', and it instead became prime time for joint learning in our Association meetings."

Our school was highly successful: teachers weren't leaving, EAs weren't leaving, parents wanted their kids to transfer in. Then, Jessica was transferred to another school. We relied upon the staff, and things

LEADERSHIP ADVICE

CREATE YOUR NETWORK

If you are a single administrator, it's important to have a coach, or a mentor or a network that you can go to. If you are a single administrator, you're there as part of the team, but you are also everything at that school, and you need to develop a way to share and discuss your ideas.

continued the next year. And then I was transferred out, to be Principal of a different school. The team that came into the school had a different vision.

Each time you go to a school, you bring your passion – when we went to our new schools they said 'Oh: you're about staff development. What are you going to bring to us?' And we each said, 'What is it that you need?' How can we help you?' That took away a lot of the angst."

Jessica: "It's important to understand your new staff. I observed the way things were done throughout the first year in the new school as I got to know the staff, built social capital and supported them. We realized that we wanted to improve and enhance our literacy program, so we created a literacy committee that focused on implementing new strategies to improve student learning. The staff started to understand that I was someone coming in to support, and to give them opportunities. It wasn't the same study group model; it was a hybrid of the model. You have to figure out where people are, and seek to understand. I think for both of us the highlight was experiencing the excitement, and seeing people embracing their various roles and being successful. Everyone has a talent and an important role in the school."

As Jessica and Don begin to eye the change ahead,

they are reflective about what they have learned, and what they have been able to share with their staffs and with BCPVPA members.

Jessica: "We think one of the important things about the work we do in PLD is that Liz (Bell) and I can't do the job just ourselves, we have to give opportunities for other people to build their skills, because we're not going to be here forever. You really realize the value of a team, and that the importance of leadership is leading others and supporting others. I love asking people if they can present at a course, or be a facilitator. They may say that they don't feel they can, but we can assure them that we will train and support them. When we develop programs, it's about giving those other people opportunities. It could be running for the Board, participating in training, or writing an article. You open up doors for people to share their gifts."

Don: "I was involved with contracts in our district for 20 years, and with the CAC (BCPVPA Contract Advisory Committee). I was often called upon by colleagues to do mediations between people in our district. When this position was posted, I didn't apply at first, but Jess encouraged me. And similarly for

LEADERSHIP ADVICE

ALLOW OTHERS TO DEVELOP CAPACITY

Allow others to build their leadership capacity. It's important to learn to step aside and let others have the opportunity to take on key roles. Be a guide in collaborative groups. Allow risks and new ways of doing things, even though you may not agree. Learn to let go of your thoughts and work for the good of the group.

LEADERSHIP ADVICE

FOSTER UNDERSTANDING

People need to know how to work with one another. You can be faced with an environment where certain people can't work with certain other people. We brought in a presenter on 'true colors', and people really learned from it: they said, "You're random abstract, and I'm concrete sequential, no wonder you drive me crazy!"

So that's a learning piece for staff, when you're together for a long time, you can do these types of things. Set the norms, so you know how to interact with one another.

Jess, when she applied for her role: you always have that self-doubt – and then all of a sudden people realize that she's applied, and they're saying that's who we want. That's who we need.

It's about creating a sense of team, and trust. It's about recognizing strengths in people, and getting them into positions where they can have the most impact assisting others.

I've got 35 years in a school, and eight with the BCPVPA, and Jessica has 40 years. It's a long time. And we could still do the jobs, but we're looking for another change."

Jessica: "It is time for somebody else to come in and to bring another lens to the position. In looking back on my career, I have been very fortunate to have worked in numerous school districts, with wonderful admin partners, staff, students, parents, communities, colleagues, educators and of course the incredible BCPVPA Board, staff, and members. And not to forget my amazing and creative PLD team partners over the years — Elizabeth Bell and Amorie Kruger. Liz and I each brought different skill sets to



"One of the main things that we did was we listened. We changed staff meetings from people just coming in and attending the meeting: to being actively engaged in new learning and having staff members present to one another."



DON ON JESSICA

"Jess is an 11 on the relational scale, she builds relationships, and people feel comfortable talking to her because she validates them when she asks them to do things, and pays it forward. She was involved with the BCPVPA, she was involved in Pro-D, and was active throughout the province. One of the leaders in our district, when Jessica was leaving to go to the BCPVPA role, said that Jessica needed a bigger playground for her skills. She had done her thing in the district and in schools, but she was bigger than that."

LEADERSHIP ADVICE

LEARN BEYOND THE SCHOOL

We gave teachers and all staff the opportunity to learn outside the school, and to bring new ideas back to the school in order to drive new learning forward. This is the same as at the district level for Principals and Vice-Principals: in order for districts to grow, leaders need to seek new learning experiences outside their district.

the department, we worked together in such harmony and balance to create a new vision and programming for the department with Liz focusing on the high level vision and me focusing on the details. Liz has been a dynamic leader and partner, and working together has been a fun, memorable and incredible leadership learning experience. I can honestly say that the hardest part of my career will be leaving all the people I have met and worked alongside."

Don: "I value that members reach out and ask for support. I value the opportunity to be able to work with them, and provide them some guidance based on my experience at the school level, and in this role."

Whether it's a parent, whether it's a teacher, a student or whomever, the key thing is that people want to be heard and that you understand them. They also want to know that you have a process for making decisions."

Jessica: "I hope I've been able to support people in the work that they do, and I hope that I've been there for them. It's been a fabulous learning experience. It's not like I'm coming to work, it's coming to a role that I've been gifted with."

Don: "Speaking for both of us, if I can, the opportunities that we have been provided to work at the BCPVPA, to support guide and work alongside all the other Principals, Vice-Principals and teachers in the province has been for the both of us, the pinnacle of our careers.

Jessica and I have always acknowledged our great staff teams. The buck stops with us, and we will always support our staff to take risks to push their learning, and to improve instructional practices so students can learn and be engaged at high levels."

Jessica: "It will be sad to leave but the memories I take with me are incredible. I have been lucky to work with dedicated and passionate teams at all levels of education — the importance of being a team player was instilled by my parents. Above all I want to thank all my family members — my husband, daughter, sisters, brothers, in-laws, our mentor Karl Clauset, and friends who have supported me in living out the dream of finishing my career in PLD at the BCPVPA. New adventures await and the time has come to spend more time with family, friends, a new dog, travel and, of course, the beach (laughs). Together is a wonderful place to be."

Don: "I would like to thank my family, friends and colleagues who have supported my journey over the years, for without their support and guidance I would not have been able to do this.

And now (laughs), it's time for fishing."

LEADERSHIP ADVICE MODEL THE WAY

With the Study Groups we established, we asked everyone to be part of one. And that meant that we also needed to be part of one. Model the way for others, and work alongside your staff: there is nothing more valuable.



JESSICA ON DON

"Don has a relational attitude, and an openness to listen really carefully to people: when you go to Don, it's not about Don, it's about how he can support you. He's got a really great critical eye, and there's a safety with him. Don keeps his word, what Don says he'll do, he will do as a leader, and his actions tell you that what you see is what you get. His opening line is 'How can I help you?' and he will go to the end. He's a true servant leader. And that's why he's got more gray hairs than anybody I know!"