

*“The name ‘Connecting Leaders’ is what it is all about. Whether it is with your District buddies, colleagues from another city, or educational professionals from around the world, it is about connecting educational leaders in different ways.”*

Read Jorgensen, Principal,  
Northridge Elementary, Victoria  
Connecting Leaders 2018

Our colleague Read Jorgensen made this observation when invited to offer his thoughts about being part of the planning team for Nanaimo’s 2018 Connecting Leaders Conference. For more than three years, teams of Principals and Vice-Principals have worked with BCPVPA staff to envision, plan and operationalize the BCPVPA Connecting Leaders Conference to take place in a different region of the province each year. Our flagship conference has not only been held up as a model of professional learning and development but, and as Rayleen Larmet, Co-Chair of the 2019 conference Penticton commented, “The opportunity to connect with colleagues from around our region is incredibly rewarding.”

Prior to COVID-19, the concept of ‘connecting’ had a simpler meaning – or perhaps it was just different.

With the onset of COVID-19, our interactions have changed drastically in order to respect individual and community needs. At first we bumped elbows, then we ensured two meters of distance, and now we mostly meet online. While we might think of this

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as communicating in a new way, communication has been an evolving concept for generations of civilizations. Cave drawing, smoke signaling, drumming, storytelling and eventually ‘libri manu script’, which translates to ‘book written by hand’, all provided the connection people craved. More recently, we continued to evolve from the telegraph, to the telephone and now we are reliant on our cell phone and wireless computer communication, all in service of forming connections with others.

Leaving aside the evolution of the modes of communication, the driving concept behind each is the need and importance of human connection and relationship, both in person and over a distance. Human connection is part of our fundamental character and is defined by Brené Brown as ‘...the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.’ (Gifts of Imperfections: Let Go of Who You Think You’re Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are, 2010)

With the necessity of closing schools and many businesses due to COVID-19, we found ourselves in a space and place that required us to lean more on ‘communication over distance’ and less on direct human connection as we strived to have others ‘feel seen, heard and valued’. While we engineered virtual ways to make that happen, we knew that there would be a time when we returned to meeting our students, staff and community face-to-face. June will be a complex but good time, as we partially open schools in the hope for days ahead when hallways can be full, classrooms buzzing and collaboration spontaneous.

In many creative ways, educators in BC have managed to provide for the continuation of learning largely through virtual means. But in so doing, we as

## CONNECTING LEADERS DURING CRISIS



**While the Definition of a  
Conference May Change,  
the Connection of  
Leaders Never Will**

educators recognize that a critical component to learning is still that direct human connection. In her well-known TED talk of 2013 – Every Kid Needs a Champion – Rita Pierson references George Washington Carver as saying that ‘all learning is understanding relationships’ and James Comer as saying that ‘no significant learning can occur without a significant relationship’. Being in close physical proximity enhances significant relationships by allowing us to pick up on the unspoken nuances of conversation that often do not transmit over a screen. We know this to be true of learning, and we know this to be true of leadership as well.

Hence the continued importance of the times that we gather as leaders, to learn together, share common experiences and feel seen, heard and valued, and to do so by sharing physical community as well as in a virtual capacity.

And, that brings us full circle to the 2020 Connecting Leaders Conference. Three years ago, we changed our delivery format for the conference. While still a provincial conference that welcomes Principals and Vice-Principals from all sixty Chapters to participate, the conference became mobile and each year is situated in one of four regions – Vancouver Island and the North Coast (2018, 2022), the Okanagan and Kootenays (2019, 2023), the Metro area (2021, 2025) and the Center and North (2020, 2024). The conceptualization of each conference belongs to the members in the region, and offers them an opportunity to showcase both their communities and their unique approaches to learning to their colleagues from across the province.

Past chairs and committee members have generously shared some thoughts on the experience:

*Allowing local level PVPs to plan the conference was a brilliant idea. From my point of view, what a*

*powerful experience it was to have agency; allowing us to act purposefully and constructively to direct our own professional growth and to contribute to the growth of our colleagues.*

**Sue Tonneson CL 2018**

*Sometimes those of us from smaller, more remote districts don't have as many opportunities to collaborate and connect with our peers. I felt that we had a voice throughout every stage of the process and that the 2019 CL conference really reflected our school leaders and what we were looking for in regards to professional development.*

**Kirsten Odian CL 2019**

*Being a part of the Connecting Leaders Conference was a great experience for me. I appreciate the ability to work with colleagues from all over the island and getting to plan and deliver the conference with them is an experience I will cherish for a long time. This has had the added benefit of finding familiar faces at subsequent events.*

**Kelly Amodio CL 2018**

*It was a great experience to work so closely with the team at the BCPVPA. They are a positive and encouraging group of individuals that supported and guided the work so that we could reflect the regional flavour in our activities and meet regional needs in the presentations. The local nature of the conference also allowed our local chapters to attend as teams and encouraged local districts to support these teams in attending.*

**Burt Bergmann CL 2019**

*Being part of the organizing committee has built relationships across districts. We all work so hard and that work is more rewarding when we do it together.*

**Andrea McComb CL 2021**

For the past two years, we have worked with our accomplished and enthusiastic 2020 committee led by Co-Chairs Brenda Anderson and Jacqueline Borosa, and have planned for a unique event in Prince George where attendees could experience

the flavour of the north and reignite the power of personal connection. The title 'The Changing Nature of Leadership' was established by the committee at the beginning of their tenure: who knew it would be so apropos!

Up until early April, we believed that we could plan with optimism for an October conference. We all wanted to believe that we would be safely on the other side of this pandemic, and could reconvene, renew relationships and recall how we once were.

Instead, shortly after issuing our hopeful registration announcement, we came together in agreement that this year is like no other and that we needed to do as leaders do and make a hard decision. We reviewed a variety of options for the conference but ultimately, in order to ensure that we can continue to offer content, collaboration and connection – without that less desirable 'c', cancellation – we have moved to an online conference. As we have heard in conversation with others about similar changes that they have made, our objective is to offer not a dressed-up webinar, but a full conference experience that respects the creativity and commitment – more 'c's – of our committee, attending members, keynote speakers, workshop presenters, sponsors and exhibitors.

In the face of the 'changing nature of leadership', leaders do what is needed and find ways to innovate and grow. While we don't ever want to let go of the joy of reuniting with a friend, meeting new colleagues over table-talk, or sharing the *aaaahhh* moment of new learning with others, we hope that our 2020 Connecting Leaders Conference will introduce new ideas and new experiences that will continue to inspire you.

#### VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

**2020 BCPVPA  
Connecting Leaders Conference  
The Changing Nature of Leadership  
October 22 - 23**

**Registration Opens In June  
[bcpvpa.bc.ca/connectingleaders-3](https://bcpvpa.bc.ca/connectingleaders-3)**



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**[bcpvpa.bc.ca/essentials](https://bcpvpa.bc.ca/essentials)**