

LEADING FOR CHANGE

The Transformative Educational Leadership Program Gets Reviewed

by
Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser

THE ORIGINS OF TELP

We have enjoyed every aspect of our careers so far, and we both especially loved being school Principals. We feel very fortunate to have been involved in a number of leadership development programs including helping to design the provincial BCELC (British Columbia Education Leadership Council) program for new Vice-Principals and Principals. We also enjoyed the opportunity to create a graduate certificate program at two universities: the University of Victoria and Vancouver Island University. Both of these programs had a strong emphasis on equity and quality, curiosity, Indigenous understandings, and innovative learning environments. We have learned a great deal from each of our graduate students, and we are grateful that we get to observe their ongoing contributions to their schools and districts.

In 2015, we were asked by Dean Blye Frank at the University of British Columbia to create a new program at UBC for post-Masters students. We accepted his invitation and are now working with our seventh cohort in the Transformative Educational Leadership Program (TELP)¹. Right from the start, we were excited about the chance to create a program that allowed participants from all the levels of our system to learn together. There is a strong benefit to system change when teachers, Principals, Vice-Principals, district staff, and deputy ministers can learn as part of the same community.

The pandemic shifted the program to an online environment, which has made it easier for our participants from distant rural and urban communities to engage with the ideas. We have found that the certificate program is an excellent 'warm up' for those interested in tackling a doctoral program. It is also very useful for those who value working with others from a wide array of roles and places – the networking aspect of the cohort approach is very important.

In 2021, with seven years of experience with the program, Dean Frank decided it was time for an external review to examine what had been accomplished and what needed to be enhanced. Professor Louise

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Stoll, a highly respected international researcher, agreed to conduct the evaluation. In the process, she surveyed TELP graduates as well as educators who had observed the impact of TELP graduates. She also conducted in-depth interviews with forty TELP graduates. Her findings are in an extensive report that we hope some of you will find the time to read.²

We found the graduate comments about transformation especially interesting as they reported that they were:

- Pushed to probe, inquire, and reflect deeply
- Provoked to challenge their own assumptions
- Moved towards paradigm shifts
- Forced to act
- Led to much broader perspectives
- Helped to find new opportunities
- Learned demanding ideas and gained courage
- Built confidence
- Stimulated greater interest in the potential of leadership
- Stimulated an even greater passion for learning
- Prepared them for further study and post-secondary teaching appointments

WHAT PRINCIPALS AND VICE-PRINCIPALS HAVE TO SAY

In preparation for this article, we decided to follow up ourselves with a few Principals and Vice-Principals, to further reflect on what resonated with them from the TELP experience. Here's what we heard:

Elementary Principal

"While participating in TELP felt like an exciting opportunity for me, it was when I moved to my new school that I felt like I was able to really be part of school transformation. In my scanning and asking questions, I could see, hear, and feel that the community was in a state of stress. I thought back to my learning from Teresa Downs, Superintendent of Schools, Gold Trail SD 74, and how she always thought of the most vulnerable student in the district, and thought of that student with each decision that she made. While I was using an inquiring mindset while asking questions, it wasn't until we asked our students and families the four key questions – and looked at the answers together – that we were able to begin our journey as a staff to see if what we were doing was making a difference.

The most powerful shift that came from surveying the students was the creation of a committee that was led and facilitated by a core group of teachers on staff. What was once perceived as a task that needed to be completed by the Principal at the school has now become central to all of the decisions that we make together. Is what we are doing ensuring that everyone feels welcome and safe? We know the Spirals of Inquiry process is cyclical and ongoing. Being a part of school transformation is the most excited and fulfilled I have ever felt as a school leader."

Secondary Vice-Principal

"TELP came at the right time and right place for me. So much was constantly changing as we navigated through the pandemic, but TELP helped to frame

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my thinking as we explored new and innovative ways to support learners post-pandemic. The relevant and diverse texts with Indigenous themes woven throughout grounded my experiences by confirming my values and beliefs and challenging my assumptions.

Since participating in TELP last year, I feel that I am better equipped to navigate change, as I've been able to weave in many of the ideas and themes of TELP to future planning. In the current context, our leadership team has redesigned Educational Facilitator meetings to be centered around the Spirals of Inquiry. *The Spirals Playbook* and *Rethinking Letter Grades* will be the anchor texts for the year, and we are taking an inquiry stance that will allow staff leaders to make their curiosities visible.

In addition, our goal is to use the Spirals of Inquiry process with a group of student leaders. We want to know what is important to students, and to model curiosity around issues that are relevant, meaningful, and engaging. Our hope is that by aligning inquiry at the student, teacher, and formal leader levels, we can build more momentum towards being vulnerable and curious together to support all of our learners.”

Elementary Principal

“I have always believed that we have the collective wisdom to explore, connect, and align with our most valuable informants – our learners. With unfailing optimism and heart, I pursue how we can shift from information to innovation, and from intended learning to emergent learning. I rely on my ability to build deliberate acts of cohesion, maintain momentum, and use the Spirals to engage in focused and deep collaborative inquiry that leads to aligned action.

During TELP, I developed my capacity to transform my leadership (and my community) by exploring and engaging in dialogue, and debating about major challenges and opportunities facing schools and districts. TELP helped frame my optimism. I confidently focus on stories of hope, aspiration, and possibility. I frame concerns and expected resistance into opportunities for renewed perspectives and deep, experiential learning. I offer multiple entry

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points and I know that when I focus on deepening knowledge and meeting people where they are at, we build trust. I see that transformation takes place when we understand and respect our learners, maintain our interconnectedness, and have a common, unified purpose that is aligned with a focus that has the biggest impact for our learners.

This is not easy. It is complex. *And so it should be.* I expect nothing less. The TELP program was a place for me grapple with the complexities and try to make sense of it all in the context of current research, with likeminded colleagues and experts from around the world. In studying leaders as case studies, I learned that I need to bear witness to – and understand – the stories of each individual, each group, and each network. Only then can I reflect and focus on the co-creation of next steps for meaningful learning and action, alongside one another. Our work can then be a beautiful, bold walk towards belonging and becoming. I know that when a community can see how their voice is heard and valued, and that when they can see how everything fits together, there is greater clarity and more energy for change.

The TELP program helped me learn that with cohesion, all layers of a school or organizational context can learn together, and thus enhance the likelihood of deep, sustainable change. I have been at the helm of this in my leadership and it is humbling to witness seemingly small imaginative thoughts develop amongst my staff, grow in momentum, live, and then transform a community of learners. I find joy in this work of creating commitment and taking action!”

Elementary Principal

The big impact from being a part of TELP was the realization that there is a whole community of educators and leaders who are interested in making

positive changes in schools, beyond what is already known and familiar to me. Having my perspective stretched through opportunities to hear and learn from so many different amazing minds shifted my own metrics for the work I do in schools. It also gave me a framework and grew my knowledge base around best practices for system and school leadership, from which I can make decisions and move my school community forward with more intentionality and a clearer purpose. Sometimes it’s hard to know where to grow as a leader – TELP asks us to think and act at a higher level, which is what makes it really engaging and actionable learning.

STAYING CONNECTED, MOVING FORWARD

Professor Stephan Huber leads the Institute for Management and Economics of Education at the University of Teacher Education in Zug, Switzerland. We had a chance to meet Stephan many years ago at a conference in Australia, and since then we have followed his work closely. His international research on effective Principal development programs had a significant influence on the design of each of the programs with which we have been associated, and his ongoing work continues to impact our thinking. One of the key findings from his original research of programs in fifteen countries was the importance of creating an ongoing opportunity for participants to stay connected, and to continue learning together after the program formally concluded. We have tried to create this in a variety of ways here in BC.

This year, for the first time, we have welcomed international participants from Australia and China into TELP. We are pleased about the potential for extending the impact of TELP. Right now, there is a quite lot of global interest in understanding why BC is such a strong system. We think that much of the success in BC is because of the quality of leadership in our schools. Being part of the TELP program, and getting to work alongside BC Principals and Vice-Principals in this program, is a career highlight for us both. We are deeply grateful to all the educators who have entrusted us with their learning.