

Principl(ed)

VOL. 4 - ISSUE 2 - March 2023

Collaborative
Culture

Understanding
Governance

Embracing
Empathy

A Day in the Life

of a New
Secondary
Vice-Principal

Lori Burger on representation,
discovering your 'why', and
the learning, support,
and shared vision
to be found in teams



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The Journal of the BC Principals'
& Vice-Principals' Association



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Designed and edited

by Sandra Murphy

Proofreader

David A. Serpa

The BCPVPA welcomes
editorial contributions

Sandra Murphy

Director, Communications

sandra@bcvpva.bc.ca

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representing school leaders
employed as Principals
and Vice-Principals in BC's
public education system.

The BCPVPA provides
its members with the
professional services and
supports they need to provide
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CORRECTION

"Diverse Women in Leadership: Five BC Educators Share Their Stories"

On page 62, an incorrect year was cited. Ranjit Bains became the first female South Asian secondary school Principal in Vancouver in 2017. The correction is reflected in the digital copy of this issue, available from bcvpva.org

bcvpva.org



by

Brian Leonard

President, BCPVPA

As school leaders, our key responsibilities can include the introduction of new curriculum, the implementation of revised reporting standards or updated assessment practices, the articulation of updated policies, or the enactment of Ministerial Orders at the school level. In this work, we may recognize the impetus of a 'new' initiative which seems to become an accelerated priority. While updates can appear to be 'new' initiatives, many have been nurtured and developed for some time, and started as an idea far, far away from the classroom. One such example is the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Declaration Act), passed into law by the province of British Columbia in November 2019. The Declaration Act establishes the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as the province's framework for reconciliation, as called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. Here is how UNDRIP is having a profound and important impact on BC's schools and classrooms.

Part One: UNDRIP - A Brief History

The Declaration was more than 25 years in the making. The idea originated in 1982 at a United Nations working group to address problems of discrimination

WHAT IS UNDRIP?

What Do I Need to Know, and How Does it Impact My Work?

faced by Indigenous peoples. After many years of hard work and consultation, the United Nations General Assembly passed the landmark resolution – the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) – on September 13, 2007. The Declaration "emphasizes the rights of Indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions, and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations." It "prohibits discrimination against Indigenous peoples," and it "promotes their full and effective participation in all matters that concern them and their right to remain distinct and to pursue their own visions of economic and social development."

Canada was one of four nations to initially vote against the resolution at the UN, alongside Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. However, all four countries reversed their original position and went on to support the UN Declaration.

In December 2015, the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission¹ confirmed the ratification of UNDRIP as one of its national Calls to Action in its final report.

The government of Canada pledged on June 21, 2017, to rename National Aboriginal Day² to be consistent with the terminology used by the Declaration.

1
2

www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525

www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100013718/1534874583157

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On November 26, 2019, with the unanimous passage of the Declaration in the BC Legislature, BC was the first Canadian province to start bringing its legislation in alignment with UNDRIP by implementing the BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. The ongoing implementation process is intended to propel reconciliation forward in BC. The provincial government has been working with the Assembly of First Nations³, First Nations Summit⁴, and Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs⁵, to employ and integrate UNDRIP principles.

On December 3, 2020, Bill C-15, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act⁶, was introduced to the House of Commons and

3 www.afn.ca/Home

4 fns.bc.ca/

5 www.ubcic.bc.ca

6 www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/u-2.2/page-1.html

received royal assent on June 21, 2021, to become law. In doing so, Canada became the first of the four countries that originally voted against the resolution to now adopt UNDRIP.

On March 30, 2022, the Province of British Columbia released the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) Action Plan⁷, developed in consultation with Indigenous peoples, including the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC)⁸, outlining 89 actions across all government ministries that will be undertaken over the next five years (2022-2027). The Action Plan has a number of actions specific to education that will directly impact the future of the BC education system.

7 www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/ministries-organizations/ministries/indigenous-relations-reconciliation/declaration_act_action_plan.pdf

8 www.fnesc.ca

Part Two: K-12 Specific Items

BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan: Summary of Education-Specific Actions⁹

Theme 1: Self-Determination and Inherent Right of Self-Government

1.6 Co-develop an approach to deliver on the BC Tripartite Education Agreement commitment, in which the Ministry of Education and Child Care and the First Nations Education Steering Committee will codevelop legislation that requires local education agreements (LEAs) with First Nations where a First Nation wants one, and that requires the application of the provincial LEA at the request of a First Nation. (*Ministry of Education and Child Care*)

1.7 Update the Bilateral Protocol agreement between the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care and the First Nation Education Steering Committee for relevancy, effectiveness, and consistency with the UN Declaration to support First Nation students in the K-12 education system. (*Ministry of Education and Child Care*)

Theme 3: Ending Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination

3.3 Conduct an external review of Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination in the provincial public education system, and create a strategy, including resources and supports, to address findings. (*Ministry of Education and Child Care*)

3.4 Implement a mandatory course or bundle of credits related to First Peoples as part of graduation requirements in B.C. and co-create culturally relevant provincial resources with Indigenous people for use by all educators across the K-12 education system. (*Ministry of Education and Child Care*)

9 These education-specific items are excerpted from the BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Act Action Plan, March 30, 2022. The full document is available at <https://declaration.gov.bc.ca>

Theme 4: Social, Cultural, and Economic Well-being

4.1 Identify and undertake concrete measures to increase the literacy and numeracy achievement levels of Indigenous students at all levels of the K-12 education system, including the early years. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care)*

4.2 Develop and implement an effective recruitment and retention strategy to increase the number of Indigenous teachers in the K-12 public education system. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care, Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training)*

4.3 Co-develop and implement a framework for the involvement of Indigenous Education Councils in school district financial planning and reporting. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care)*

4.4 Identify, develop and implement mechanisms and approaches to enable boards of education to better support Indigenous students, including increasing and ensuring equitable access to education and safe environments. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care)*

4.29 Establish an Indigenous-led working group to develop a strategy for the revitalization of Indigenous languages in B.C., including potential legislative supports. *(Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Ministry of Education and Child Care, Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training)*

4.30 Support Indigenous language revitalization through sustainable funding. *(Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training)*

4.31 Develop full-course offerings in First Nation languages and implement the educational Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the K-12 education system. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care)*

4.32 Co-develop a K-12 First Nations Language Policy and associated implementation plan for the public education system with the First Nations Education Steering Committee, including ensuring that the language and culture of the local First Nation(s) on whose territory(ies) a board of education operates schools are the ones primarily reflected in any First Nations language and culture programs and services of the board. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care)*

The Declaration “emphasizes the rights of Indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions, and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations.” It “prohibits discrimination against Indigenous peoples,” and it “promotes their full and effective participation in all matters that concern them and their right to remain

Part Three: Current Priorities

In surveying the K-12 specific items, the reader can understand the current priorities for the Ministry of Education and Child Care and, by extension, for BC schools. Four main areas of focus emerge:

- 3.3 – an external review of Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination in the public education system
- 3.4 – implementation of a mandatory Indigenous-focused graduation requirement
- 4.1 – concrete measures to increase literacy and numeracy achievement levels of Indigenous students
- 4.2 – an effective recruitment and retention strategy to increase the number of Indigenous teachers in the K-12 system

While the education-specific action items present an ambitious agenda, we can recognize that for Indigenous communities, these are long-neglected priorities. From an idea that germinated 40 years ago at the United Nations, UNDRIP has blossomed into a reality for education in BC's schools. Beginning with the 2023-2024 school year, all students working towards a BC Dogwood Diploma will be required to complete four credits of Indigenous coursework to graduate¹⁰. (Find out more about the Indigenous-focused Graduation Requirement in this issue of *Principl(ed)*: "Advancing Reconciliation Through Education" by Melanie Stewart and Connor Morris.)

The K-12 specific agenda items will lead to transformative change for everyone in the BC education system. These are important steps toward lasting and meaningful reconciliation, and success for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

¹⁰ www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/support/indigenous-focused-graduation-requirements

Brian Leonard
is the 2022-2024
President of the BCPVPA



@bcvpapresident

The work and responsibilities of school leaders can vary greatly from elementary to middle to secondary, from region to region, and from school to school.

A Day in the Life offers a snapshot of BCPVPA members in their roles, and shares their thoughts on their path, their practice, and why they love what they do.

In our eleventh installment of the series, we meet Lori Burger, Vice-Principal Truth and Reconciliation of Charles Hays Secondary in School District No. 52 (Prince Rupert)

Lori Burger has been in education for more than 20 years, but her journey as an educator unfolded in an unusual way. “I was going to volunteer in my stepson’s classroom to read to the students, because they had sent home a communication to parents inviting them to come in,” says Lori. “And, instead, they thought I was applying for a job. That put into motion a series of events that brought me here today.” Lori has been in many different roles during that time, from First Nations Role Model, to Reading Assistant, First Nations Support Worker, Aboriginal Education Worker, Classroom Teacher, Curriculum Specialist Teacher, and Truth and Reconciliation Administrator. This year, Lori is a high school Vice-Principal, and still holds the District Truth and Reconciliation role. “I feel a lot of gratitude for having experience that spans all these different roles, because I can see the ways that the roles support each other, and work together. Overall, what’s important is being a part of a team, and being in many different roles, I’ve been able to see how all these teams come together toward supporting common goals in education.”

Lori is from the Nisga’a Nation, from the community of Gitlaxt’aamiks and Cree from Treaty 6 Territory in Saskatchewan on her mother’s side, alongside Swedish and Norwegian on her father’s side. “I’m Nisga’a Cree and settler heritages, and I work in the beautiful Ts’msyen territory in Prince Rupert. I have three boys, a bonus child who is 29, our oldest son who is 23, and our younger son who is 14. He is a student in Grade 9 at this high school. My husband is Tahltan and German, from Telegraph

A Day in the Life

of a New Secondary Vice-Principal



Photo courtesy Lori Burger

Creek. He has a lot of knowledge around traditional living off the land and Tāltān language which he brings to our boys”.

When Lori was growing up, her focus was not entirely on being an educator. “I didn’t know of any Indigenous educators. I had never seen or heard of Indigenous teachers, or leaders, until I was an adult. Language and culture were not present in my experiences in education. Becoming an educator was something that I wanted to do – I would play school with my sister – unfortunately for her, I would be the teacher all the time. In that way, I definitely had that passion, but it didn’t seem like an attainable goal, because I hadn’t seen anyone represented in the education system that was like me.”

In School District No. 52 (Prince Rupert), Lori has appreciated the opportunity to be able to work with the Indigenous Education Department. “I have felt really coached, guided, and mentored by the team at Wap Sigatgyet and by Roberta Edzerza, the District Principal of Indigenous Education. They have taught me about what it means to be a guest, teaching and learning in Ts’mSYen territory. This experience helped me consider leadership, where I probably wouldn’t have before, because where I didn’t see *teachers* represented as an Indigenous person, I also saw very few *leaders and administrators* represented as an Indigenous person, even as an adult. That was something that changed for me being involved in this department.

“I feel that leadership is so different from what I thought it was. Maybe it’s my own experiences in education as a student – I wasn’t a kid that got in a lot of trouble – but most of the time if I saw a Principal with a student, I would think, okay, that kid did something wrong, or the Principal is in

Aja Lihou, Lori Burger, and Carla Rourke
— Charles Hays Secondary School

their office with the door closed, and they're doing paperwork. I didn't actually see the way that their leadership was rippling out into the school. I've now had the opportunity to be part of a school leadership team with my colleagues, (Principal) Carla Rourke and (Vice-Principal) Aja Lihou. They have also been amazing coaches and mentors in this process – I can see that what we're doing is much more along the lines of advocacy for students, and advocacy for student success. It's asking the questions: "What is it that you actually need? What's missing for you? What brings you here? What keeps you here?" That's actually the work that we're doing, and that's what I'm interested in. When there are concerns, we come together; we're not coming together to choose who is to blame. We're coming together to say, how can we solve this problem together? What did we need to do, is there restitution involved? Is there advocacy that you need? Are there supports that are missing? Those are the kinds of pieces that we're looking at, and looking at the whole student."

All of the Vice-Principals in School District No. 52 have a teaching role, and Lori's is somewhat different because of her prior experience as a Truth and Reconciliation administrator. "When that role came about, it was through a grant with Ridley Terminals. That role was for two years, at the administrative level, working with all the teacher librarians, working with the Indigenous Education Department, working with teachers across the district; it had a lot of facets, and a lot to do with authentic resources. Now the role is different, in that I am connected to a school. The teaching component is connected to the district Truth and Reconciliation piece. I continue to work with the team at the Indigenous Education Department, which I love, but which is also a necessary part of protocol in teaching and learning about Truth and Reconciliation as a guest. The Indigenous Education department is always doing Truth and Reconciliation, it always has been since far before I came into the picture. Adaawx (true tellings) are an integral part of truth and reconciliation in a Ts'msyen context. Truth and Reconciliation is not something that is done to Indigenous peoples. We are diverse peoples and

"When I was growing up, I didn't know of any Indigenous educators. I had never seen or heard of Indigenous teachers, or leaders, until I was an adult."

enacting this work will be different for each person in their contexts. Our role as guests of a territory is to help facilitate rather than lead. The priorities of each person or group will be different, and must be guided by the peoples of the territory.

Part of the role is to be a part of district groups and tables around subjects like equity, and in co-facilitating learning sessions and professional development. "There are two sessions in our district that each person attends: one session is very specific to our local context, and is led by Indigenous Education. It is very specific to the truth in a Ts'msyen context, from time immemorial. The other session is a wider look at some guiding policies and documents: talking about the calls to action, UNDRIP (the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), authenticity and resources, the picture in regard to the responsibility toward systems change. So, it's not so much teaching the *students* in the classroom now, it's more working with adults on various teams. But, that said, I also co-facilitate a Student Voice Advisory group at our school with Carla, and we bring students together to talk about what's working in our school, and what's missing. What can we do to make our school better? How can we make Charles Hays a welcoming place for all students? How can we make sure that we're instilling a sense of belonging for everyone that comes here? We still get to be really connected with students, which is important. We have also ensured that we are prioritizing student voice that represents the demographic of our district, which is 65% Indigenous."

Lori works with adults and facilitates learning sessions with the team at Indigenous Education, and is also part of planning as a team with a larger vision



*Carla Rourke and Lori Burger with members of the Indigenous Education Department at the 2022 FNESC Education Conference
(left to right) Tina Demings, Lauren Neiser, Roberta Edzerza, Carla Rourke, Lori Burger, Lucy Trimble*

and larger Indigenous education goals for the whole district. That can be coordinating district-wide events or professional learning, and it can also be something more specific to what a school or teacher is requesting. “A teacher might say that they are looking at the calls to action with students at a grade four or five level, and they would like some help. We would talk about whether this could be an inquiry, we would look at the calls to action, and put together a document that’s going to be approachable for elementary learners, coming up with a scope and sequence of lessons that we could guide and co-facilitate together with the

Indigenous Education department.”

Lori recognizes that when she began to get more teacher lead opportunities through Indigenous Education, it started to make her think differently about leadership – what it could actually look like, and the real lack of representation for Indigenous and First Nations leaders. That recognition guided her next steps towards a Master’s program. “I didn’t always consider myself somebody that would be good at leadership, because I had those misinformed views of what leadership actually was. That’s why



"My aunties made regalia and gifted it to me for a surprise graduation celebration, it was all amazing – the room looked like someone was having a wedding! My regalia is a shawl, on the front of it there are killer whale crests that represent my boys. There is a crow feather with a heart inside of it, which represents my husband who is Crow from the Tahltan Nation, and then the flame of knowledge. I was honored to wear it at our family's stone moving feast recently where I received my name, *Gyuwil Akhlkw* which means: "to persevere and continue to strive to achieve". It was such a powerful experience, many people in my family received names and we could feel our family regaining our cultural strength. It was the first time I saw my mother wear regalia, due to fractures from the Indian residential school system and impacts on our family. That experience, and coming together in our home territory to participate in our true systems of governance, that is true decolonizing."

I pursued the Master of Education in Educational Leadership specifically, instead of Counseling or Curriculum, because I feel I had a lot of learning to do about what leadership actually means. I'm so glad that I focused on that, because it really challenged those misconceptions that I had, and made me realize that leadership is very different than what I had in my mind.

"One really important thing for me in that leadership learning is the huge leap that I found between the Bachelor's program and the Master's program. The Bachelor's program is learning about the context of education and a bit of the 'doing'. But the Master's program is really learning about yourself in a really deep way, looking at biases, and what's informing your decision-making. You look at discovering your 'why', and the kinds of things that are driving you. I think those are really necessary questions to be asking of a leader, especially from an equity standpoint: what's informing my decision-making?"

Lori received recognition as the valedictorian of her Master of Education program, and was also selected to represent the class of 2022 as class speaker at BCPVPA's Foundations for New School Leaders. Those honours have been very significant for Lori, when she looks back on her path to the educator she is today. "When I was in school, I felt like I was invisible. I was very shy, I didn't really talk to anybody, I'd try to avoid speaking in front of the group if there was a presentation. So, the thought of speaking to hundreds of people – and especially hundreds of colleagues that you really respect, that all have this emphasis on leadership and on education – that was really daunting for me. But what ends up driving me in these situations is my passion for First Nations representation, in a way that has been missing in education. So even though I'm terrified, and worried, I want to do it because I want that representation for Indigenous learners, and for my own children. I've had some practice over time that's helped me to grow more accustomed to it, but I don't know if I'll ever be 100% at ease. Words really carry a lot of weight. They are powerful and they are important."

"... the Master's program is really learning about yourself in a really deep way, looking at biases, and what's informing your decision-making, and discovering your 'why', and the kinds of things that are driving you. I think those are really necessary questions to be asking of a leader: what's informing my decision-making?"

A consistent theme that is woven into Lori's reflections on her work is that of the importance of teams. From the Indigenous Education Department in SD52, school teams such as the Truth and Reconciliation Planning Committee, to the leadership team at her school, and in the district. "I know that all of the learning that I've been a part of so far has been due to the support found in teams.

"We have a new group that's come together this year – it doesn't have a nice flashy name, but it's the Truth and Reconciliation Planning Committee. Our school has goals around Truth and Reconciliation, and what it will specifically look like in our school community. A group of educators has come together with myself, Carla, and Aja, and we're developing focus, intention, and shared vision as to what it can look like when we are all a part of it. Previously, this emphasis might be happening in specific classrooms. However, this is setting the stage for more collaboration and more school-wide involvement around what we're doing in the short term and in the long term. We're able to find a lot of learning around Truth and Reconciliation Week, National Indigenous Veterans Day, and other dates of significance. We were able to see the learning that was happening before, during, after, and beyond specific days of acknowledgement. The opportunity to see that ripple out is amazing. Working together as a team is helping us develop a vision of what it looks like when we all come together as a school.

"Representation is really important to me, and it's been a real driver for the ways that I make decisions on the things that I want to do next: it's representation paired with agency, and the importance of those two things coming together. I read Jesse Wente's book, *Unreconciled*, and he is somebody who's also a passionate advocate of representation. He talks a lot about how representation without agency is tokenism. I think that's so important to be aware of, that representation needs to be real, and it needs to be driven through First Nations Indigenous Education departments, as real collaborators and consultants in the kinds of decisions that are being made. The further Indigenous focused and Truth and Reconciliation based roles are disconnected from the Indigenous Education Department and Indigenous Education Councils, the more they are in danger of becoming inauthentic and tokenistic. We can avoid those dangers through following local protocols and asking questions, and knowing that making mistakes will be a part of this process of working together.

I really feel strongly that there should continue to be increasing representation in leadership and the development of First Nations focused roles in leadership. To have impact, it is important for these roles to exist in a leadership capacity with decision making agency, and in significant collaboration with Indigenous Education Departments. I know that is happening in districts across the province, and I am really happy with the direction that the Ministry of Education and Child Care and the province are going in recognizing the need for Indigenous focused leadership and district roles. I am hoping that our Association can continue to advocate for these types of roles which are necessary in moving forward authentic Indigenous representation and addressing our province's commitment to the DRIPA Action Plan. It's a change that I'm really happy to see and to celebrate, as someone who has felt that to be missing in my life experiences as a student in the K to 12 education system. To see that coming forward is just amazing, and I would love to see it continue."



Recognizing dates of significance was a starting point for us, a goal that was brought out of the student voice advisory group last year.

“Another amazing team I am a part of is NOIE, the Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education led by Linda Kaser and Judy Halbert. I’ve been very fortunate to partner with Jana Fox, an amazing Indigenous educator and leader in School District No. 54. We both co-coordinate the Indigenous Transitions Inquiry Project that’s happening with 25 schools across the province. They are doing exactly those ‘team things’ that we know have impacts: coming together, focusing their efforts, acting with intention, and working on improving outcomes and removing barriers for Indigenous learners in our system. That’s another piece of learning and working together where I feel gratitude and see the impacts that are being made.

“Being a member of the BCPVPA is another team that is important with shared vision and shared goals. I learned from an important mentor it’s really difficult to gain momentum or to be forward-moving if you don’t have that. A group of people coming together with shared goals and vision and a mission is necessary for moving forward in Indigenous Education now, and for focusing our attention and our efforts in an impactful way.”

Another important team that excites Lori and gives her energy is the Student Voice Advisory Group, which is a way to make a different kind of connection with students. “I’m always striving to be connected with students, making sure that I’m the face seen in the hallway, saying good morning, and seeing how kids are doing. If there’s a student that needs a little bit more support or who is struggling with something, I make sure to seek them out to see what they need. But with this student voice advisory group coming together, I’m amazed to see the kids and their comfort in sharing feedback about their own school, which is something I never would have done as a student. I really respect their empowerment and agency, and that I get to be a listening ear for it. I think overall, I just want students to come away knowing for themselves

that ‘I belong here’, ‘I matter – I’m important’. Also that they have a support network here that believes in them, and that believes that they can succeed.

“One of the best things about this role – besides getting to witness student empowerment – is having a bit of a systems or big picture view, where I can see progress being made in thinking about Truth and Reconciliation, and Indigenous education learning, in contrast with my own experiences as a student. In my student experiences, that learning was invisible, oftentimes inaccurate, and harmful. To come from that, and to be part of this school community where I can see so much gained momentum, people asking hard questions of themselves, and challenging themselves about how they can do it better, that is really energizing to me. I know that what we’re doing is important, and I know that we’re making progress. We’re doing the best that we can, but we’re asking for help, we’re being vulnerable, we’re connecting with people. I’m not the expert: even though ‘TRC’ is connected to my role, and connected to my job title, it certainly doesn’t mean that I have any of the answers. I’m learning alongside everyone else. I have an appreciation for that learning, and for seeing the progress. That makes me excited for where things can go.”

One of the more difficult parts of the role is one which is experienced by many school leaders. “I feel compelled to be in several places at once, and that is definitely a challenge. Having this conversation about my role has helped me to refocus my priorities a bit. We are always considering the students as whole people, and what they need to be successful, mentally, emotionally, and physically in their minds and hearts. And this has made me think that I had better start asking those questions about myself. The idea of balance has been a real challenge in a district role and in a school-focused role. There are a lot of times when I wish I could be in two places – or more! – at once. But it also has caused me to practice and learn how to make those prioritizing decisions, which I think are challenging for everybody.

“This is definitely a complex role because it’s mostly

school-based, but there is that piece that is connected to district learning. Every day is totally different. I might be co-facilitating a session with a group – and it's not always educators, everybody in our whole district is involved in cohort session learning: EAs, support staff, educators, and Principals in the morning, and then coming back and bringing everybody to a performance at the Lester Centre of the Arts in the afternoon, and returning later that day to check in with students. As a team, we want to make sure that we're prioritizing addressing student barriers all the time, keeping students at top of our minds, and making sure that students are feeling seen."

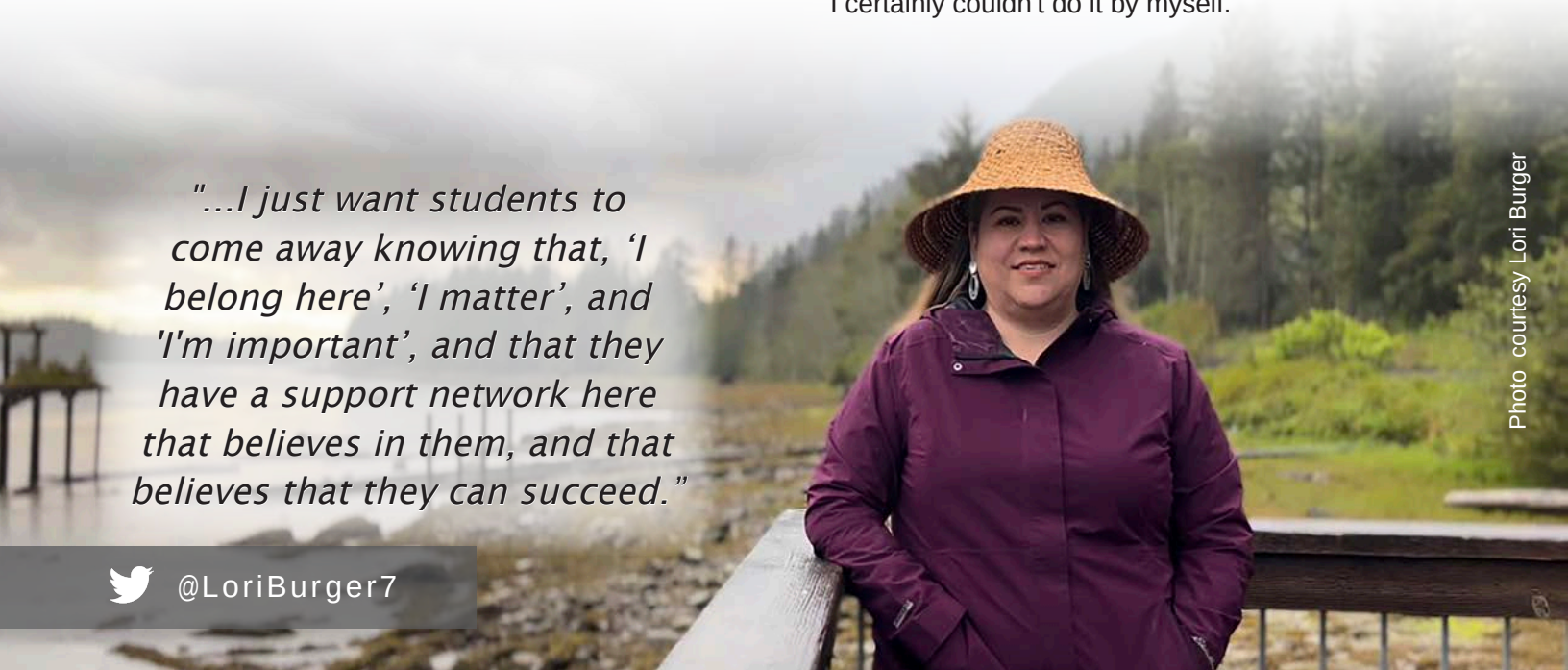
Lori can look back on her earlier impressions of leadership, and understand it from the lens of herself as a student and as an educator. "In that way, leadership looks very different to me now. What I thought Principals did when I was a student in school, or as a teacher, is completely different. I think I have a more accurate picture because of the coaching and mentorship that I received in this district and from our leadership team. I can see the passion and care that every single administrator in this district brings to their roles, and the way that they see the strengths of the students: that's definitely a team I want to be a part of. Once I was here and could see what leaders do, it made a lot of sense to me. It wasn't surprising in that way, because I had slowly been changing my views on leadership over time and when completing my Master's. But at the very beginning – had I not completed the Master's, and if somebody had asked

if I wanted to be a Principal – I would have said no thanks. I would have said that I'm pretty sure they do all the stuff that no one else wants to do. But that was definitely having the view of a former student, and educator, not as a leader.

"For me, what has made all the difference in this role is pursuing continual learning, and team collaboration. Those are the pieces that I feel energize and invigorate the process, help you to find ways to move forward with your goals in a really intentional and purposeful way. I think to pursue school leadership – and to think about doing it all by yourself – is where people get worried. But we as school leaders know that everything we get to be a part of happens with these teams and networks of people and we do our best to support each other. This makes it really important to pay attention with gratitude and appreciation for the people around you because the work we are doing together to make incremental change has the capacity to result in big change.

"There are a lot of other people that help us in these roles too, our families. I'm sure every partner or family of an administrator knows that they've had to make some sacrifices, especially regarding time. Truth and Reconciliation is also so connected to my family's history and to residential school legacy. If I didn't have that continued support of family, and those discussions and stories with my aunties in the Nass valley guiding me along and lifting me up when I need it, I don't think that this is something I could do. I certainly couldn't do it by myself."

"...I just want students to come away knowing that, 'I belong here', 'I matter', and 'I'm important', and that they have a support network here that believes in them, and that believes that they can succeed."



"On a personal level, this interview has been a really great way for me to step out of the role for a moment, and to appreciate all of the opportunities and learning in the role – I love it. Learning is my true lifelong endeavour. For our conversation, when I needed to think in advance about the kinds of things that I do in my workday, and the kinds of things I enjoy away from work, I realized that I might need to revisit that! What are the things that I enjoy, and how am I prioritizing time for those things? Those are the pieces that ground me and make me a better leader.

After I finished my Master's, I think I just craved learning so much – I thought, what else can I learn to do? So, I picked up a mandolin, and I started to learn to play and sing. I also started to do a little bit of poetry, to help me process the truth telling I had been learning in my Master's paper *Truth and Reconciliation in Education*. This is a sample of the poetry that I have been working through in my journey of learning about residential school legacy. It is written about my Uncle Jerry who was very special to me, and helped me work through learning about our family's history. He passed away while I was working through my Master's, so unfortunately he wasn't there to see me graduate. but I wanted a way to honour all that he taught me and the fact that, as a residential school survivor, sharing learning comes with great personal expense.

With love and gratitude to my uncle Jerry, residential school survivor and my honoured teacher:

*Uncle Jerry
he told me parts of his story
like picking up shards of broken glass
bloodletting in every word
he asked me to write it down
how they drilled into his perfect teeth
how they tried to break him.
but he was strong for himself and for us
millwright, fisherman, father, grandfather, husband, friend
best days of his life in NP cannery
home with his family at last
making memories to fill his heart and mind
before boarding the train again in fall
across the prairies.
But this is not the end of the story.
Though he is gone, his laughter still rings true
his loving teachings and gentle manner
breaking cycles of hurt and trauma
the path he forged so that we could empower others with the truth.*

Now I'm working on a children's book with a colleague of mine who's also from the Nisga'a Nation in Gingolx from the Nass Valley. She is an acclaimed artist, and her name is Lucy Trimble (Hlgu Maksguum ganaaw). She is amazing, with a beautiful voice in her work! Our book is about decolonizing through returning to our traditional foods and practices, and it is a project that we hope can help to share appreciation for our culture and community."

A Day in the Life of a New Secondary Vice-Principal

6:00 am	Yoga stretching for 20 minutes (aim for 2-3x a week), or 3 minute mindfulness practice and gratitude (aim for 3x a week)
7:00 am	Get ready for the day and do a quick email scan for emergencies
7:30 am	Drive from Port Edward to Prince Rupert, with my teenage son, playing loud music and enjoying the ocean view
7:45 am	Breakfast Club shopping for the week (enlisting the help of my son!)
8:15 am	Another quick email scan and check in with students in the café
8:45 am	Greet students coming into the school, usually in foyer, café and office. Chat with students or connect with them about current projects
9:15 am	Connect with school Principal and have a check-in to set the focus for the week, and to ensure we have priority students in mind. Overarching plans for team meetings and presentations
10:00 am	Morning announcements/ break: go out into the halls and connect with staff and students
10:30 am	Email scan, connect with staff and students in classrooms about upcoming events,

Typically, I leave the house at about 7:30 am. I live in Port Edward, just outside of Prince Rupert, and have about a 15 minute drive right by the ocean. I've learned to have a lot of gratitude for that 15 minutes, because it helps me to focus myself for the day, and on the way home it helps me to focus myself for the next phase of the day. My son comes with me in the morning, and he might help me shop for Breakfast Club, and then we come to the school and I open up the cafe. We have a beautiful little cafe space next to our Library Learning Commons, it reminds me of a little hotel lobby with tables and a kitchen space. The Indigenous coach mentor comes in and makes breakfast for the kids in the morning. All the Port Edward kids from our community who arrive early will go in there and hang out.

When I get here, I will do a quick email scan around absences and check in as to what we need to do for coverage with the Principal, Carla Rourke, and Vice-Principal, Aja Lihou. Kids will start arriving, so I'll go out and say good morning to people, see how they're doing, and do a few loops around the school. I'll check in with staff, and have those face-to-face conversations that we really want to have, but don't always get to do. When school gets underway, there may be some kids that are coming in late. I make sure to greet them too, with "good morning" and "how is it going?" Not a reminder that they are late, because they are probably stressed out; they're coming in knowing they are late for school. So we let them know with a smile that we are happy to see them.

I connect as regularly as I can during my day with Carla. She has been a leader at the school for a while, and she knows all the ins and outs of keeping everything running, all of the things that are beyond my comprehension as a new leader. She does a terrific job of coaching and mentoring me by giving me manageable pieces until I can put them all together, which is key to not being overwhelmed. You have to be a skilled coach-mentor to do that for somebody.

Once classes are underway, if we are lucky, our CHSS admin team have a chance to do a quick check-in and a bit of a collaboration piece together. Sometimes we might be going into different classrooms, checking in with teachers and students and celebrating learning. We want to let the kids know that we celebrate what they are working on right now, and give them opportunities to be proud of what it is that they're doing. I usually try to be out and in the

hallways and common areas when we have breaks. We don't have any bells, we have two blocks a day and the teachers decide on the appropriate break time; they set an organic natural time that works for their students, and it's usually about halfway through the block. Once I hear kids having hallway conversations, then I'll go out and start walking around the school to see how everybody's doing, and the same thing in the afternoon. There are things that take me away from that, of course, but I really try to be out there with the kids.

One of those unanticipated things we encounter in school leadership can be helping kids to problem solve conflict. That is definitely helping me learn a lot about conflict resolution: it's trying to make everybody feel heard, but at the same time coming up with a resolution-focused approach so that we can move forward. That takes time, and all the projects that you're working on need to unfortunately be put on hold. But, at the same time, that's where relationships get developed; it's when you're helping students when they're in a situation that they can't navigate on their own. I feel like even though the connection is born out of conflict, it can really develop student and community relationships. We can't all navigate every situation. We need help sometimes, and that's the piece that takes time. If there's a situation that involves seven kids, we're going to talk to those seven kids, and we're going to take the time to work on a resolution together.

We also have a team that meets every Thursday, with our Counsellors, Indigenous Coach Mentor, Indigenous Equity Mentor, Indigenous Family Resource Workers, Learning Support Teachers, myself, Carla, and Aja. We are looking at removing barriers – whatever they might be – for each student as an individual. We give each other updates on different students, things they might be going through, things they might need support with, so that we can make sure that each of those students is advocated for. Names get brought forward that people may have wonders or questions about, and we're focusing our attention in a way that removes barriers and offers supports for them in an individualized approach.

At the end of the day, my son is not usually with me so I just blast music and sing at the top of my lungs until I get home – which he probably is fortunate to miss, as I don't think anyone loves Bruce Springsteen as much as I do!

A Day in the Life of a New Secondary Vice-Principal

	projects or groups like the student voice focus group
11:27 am	Lunch: Emails and discussions with staff, work orders, connecting with student groups, connecting with district staff
12:07 pm	Afternoon class starts; usually try to eat lunch and have a cup of tea, work on emails, calls, and check-ins with District staff, set up meetings with teachers
1:30 pm	Break: Go out into the halls and connect with staff and students
1:50 pm	Check in with the school Principal; problem solving issues, planning, additional focal points for before the end of the day
2:53 pm	End of the school day: connect with students as they leave, go and connect with teachers in their classrooms
3:30 pm	Meetings in person or over Zoom re: District Truth and Reconciliation role or involvement in provincial projects
5:00 pm	Check in with Principal; planning tasks for the next day, debriefing the day's events
6:00 pm	Drive home from Prince Rupert to Port Edward: playing loud music and usually singing at the top of my lungs and reflecting on the day

MEET CHRISTINA ZACHARUK

DEPUTY MINISTER OF
EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE

Christina Zacharuk was appointed the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Education and Child Care in January 2022. Now that she's had several months to settle into the role, we invited Christina to answer a few questions about herself and share her thoughts on upcoming priorities for K-12 education in BC.

TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOURSELF

I was born on the traditional territory of the Katzie, Semiahmoo, and Kwantlen Nations before moving to the traditional territory of Secwépemc people, where I was raised and graduated from Kamloops Senior Secondary. My transition into public service was in 2004 after completing a Masters in Public Administration, including co-op placements with both the federal and provincial governments. I spent my first couple of years working in the area of Crown agency governance and accountability before I joined the Public Sector Employers' Council Secretariat (PSEC), where I was involved with the coordination of all public sector labour relations. These early years provided me an opportunity to work with the K-12 sector before joining the Ministry of Education in 2011 to lead the transition of the Teacher Regulation Branch into government. I was then recruited back to PSEC in 2012, becoming the CEO in 2015, where I remained until 2020 when I joined the Premier's Office. That experience provided me with insight and in-depth experience of the decision-making process of government and the vast and varied issues it needs to contend with on a day-to-day basis. I was then offered the opportunity to join the Ministry of Education and Child Care as Deputy Minister last January.



WHAT HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE AS DEPUTY MINISTER BEEN LIKE SO FAR?

From Day 1 it has been amazing – and what a time to start! Re-joining the Ministry at the height of the Omicron variant in January 2022, I was immediately impressed with the sector's experience, resilience, and compassion in supporting students and their families and in keeping our schools running as normally as possible. Having very few functional-related closures last year is a testament, in large part, to the excellent leadership and steady presence provided by our province's Principals and Vice-Principals. Thank you!

Every day I learn something new and feel like I have a better understanding of how this big and very complex K-12 education system of ours works. I still have lots to learn and am thankful for having such a strong team to help me. The relationships I'm building with partner groups, such as the BCPVPA, is also critical. I look to you and your members to keep me informed on the issues that are important to you. You are the front line, leading schools, connecting with parents, and supporting teachers and learners. That experience and perspective is vital to bring to our provincial tables.

WHAT ISSUES ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU IN THE YEAR OR YEARS AHEAD?

After two-plus years of pandemic disruptions, the time has come for us to put our efforts first and foremost back into the learning agenda. Our focus – once again – needs to be squarely on the needs of our students to ensure they are provided with the optimal conditions for learning and are on the path to a successful future.

There is a lot of work underway to make sure that happens. This includes the completion and implementation of the new K-12 Student Reporting Policy. The policy update is the result of extensive consultation and engagement with the education sector, including the BCPVPA. The redesigned provincial curriculum, introduced in 2016, requires a corresponding change to student reporting policies and practices. The framework (released in May 2022) provides an overview of the upcoming changes to the Student Reporting Policy, set to be implemented

in the 2023/24 school year. During the 2022/23 school year, a development team of teachers and school and district administrators will develop supporting documents and resources to help school administrators, teachers, parents, and caregivers, as well as students, understand the changes to student reporting and guide implementation processes. Policy implementation supports will be released to the sector in December 2022.

The Minister has also reconvened the Advisory Group on Provincial Assessment, comprised of rightsholders and sector partners, to provide advice as to how to continue to improve our provincial assessment system. This work will also ensure that our provincial assessments are well-aligned with the redesigned curriculum, advance equity, and meet the needs of all students, educators, parents, and administrators throughout the province.

"AFTER TWO-PLUS YEARS OF PANDEMIC DISRUPTIONS, THE TIME HAS COME FOR US TO PUT OUR EFFORTS FIRST AND FOREMOST BACK INTO THE LEARNING AGENDA."

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE HAS BEEN WORKING CLOSELY WITH PARTNERS AND RIGHTSHOLDERS TO FULFILL ITS COMMITMENTS IN THE *DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ACT ACTION PLAN*. CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THIS?

The *Declaration Act Action Plan* identifies a number of important actions we need to take to advance meaningful reconciliation with our province's Indigenous Peoples. We take this work very seriously and are working closely with our partners and rightsholders to fulfill these commitments. This includes collaborating with the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) to develop an Indigenous-focused graduation requirement for all BC students. Set to come into effect next school year, this new requirement will deepen students' understanding of the cultures, histories, and worldviews of Indigenous peoples.

We are also working closely with FNESC to develop and implement a strategy and related policies to

support the negotiation and implementation of Local Education Agreements between First Nations and their local school districts. This is an important mechanism to increase accountability and to promote and achieve effective working relationships in support of First Nation students. We are also especially proud of recent legislation that gave four First Nations law-making authority over K-12 education in their jurisdictions. This includes responsibility for things like teacher certification, school certification, graduation requirements, curriculum, and course approvals. We look forward to more agreements like this in the future where First Nations who wish it can attain greater self-governance over the education of their students. This is just the tip of the iceberg of what we're working on with rightsholders and partners in this important area.

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION RECENTLY EXPANDED TO INCLUDE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILD CARE. WHAT IMPLICATIONS DOES THIS HAVE FOR THE K-12 SECTOR?

This transition formally acknowledges that child care is an essential part of a child's learning journey, delivering important learning opportunities and supporting future educational success. It signifies our goal of ensuring BC's youth have a seamless transition into the K-12 system.

As the Ministry of Education and Child Care, we are committed to working with you to determine how we can improve access to child care for families, and to make the transition into schools easier for BC's kids. Though schools and school districts are not required to provide before and after school care under the School Act, we know that many have already embraced opportunities to provide this much-

needed service for families. We encourage schools and school districts to work with the providers in their communities, as well as with their municipalities and First Nations to uncover opportunities where they can work together to expand access to before and after school care on school grounds. We are here to support you in that important endeavour.

Each district will receive funding in 2022/23 to complete an environmental scan of existing Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) on school grounds and to engage across the district and with partners in search of opportunities for expanding ELCC on school grounds. We thank you for your leadership and important role in helping facilitate this work.

"THIS TRANSITION FORMALLY ACKNOWLEDGES THAT CHILD CARE IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF A CHILD'S LEARNING JOURNEY ..."

WHAT ELSE IS ON YOUR RADAR AS WE MOVE AHEAD?

One thing that is top of mind for me – and I know for all of you as school leaders – is how we respond to an extremely challenging labour market. Stats show that in any given month there are more job vacancies in Canada than there are people willing to fill them. And the BC education and child care sectors are certainly not immune to this problem: we are working with sector partners to better understand the context, and government is working to develop strategies to address key workforce challenges and labour market demands. Look for more information on that in the months ahead.

Another major challenge we're facing is a struggling global economy. Families are really feeling the pinch right now, and our government is doing what it can to help. The recent Student and Family Affordability Fund is a great example of that, with \$60 million being allocated to school districts to use at their discretion to support students and families in overcoming some of the economic hardships they face so students' learning is not adversely impacted. Thank you to the BCPVPA and its members for helping determine how to best utilize this funding in your schools.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE WITH US?

Just a thank you for all you do in support of our province's students and their families. Your leadership in our schools is a critical element in kids' success and we greatly appreciate everything you do. Please continue to let us know what we can do to support you in your critical role as school leaders – we're here to help.



VISIT THE
BC MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND CHILD CARE
FOR THE
LATEST NEWS &
FEATURED TOPICS

bcpvpa

TELL A FRIEND!

BCPVPA Members: do you have a colleague who has not yet joined our Association? Help them to be part of our community of leaders, and to get access to employment relationship support, professional learning and development, committee opportunities, and much more.

bcpvpa.org/membership/application



Stay on top of your professional health



The BCPVPA is pleased to offer its members the Early Intervention Program (EIP) by humanworks

Here to help you gain greater clarity and control of your professional health

BCPVPA EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAM

The EIP offers an excellent opportunity to be proactive in managing your health and well-being. It is designed to provide you with quick and easily accessible resources and counsel on how to best navigate your health-related concerns so that you can remain at work.

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www.humanworks.ca

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BCPSEA's New Strategic Direction

**A Focus on Service to
School Districts, EDI,
and Reconciliation**

by
Deneka Michaud
Chief Communications Officer
BCPSEA

The BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) is pleased to share with Principals and Vice-Principals its new strategic plan.

"We are delighted with the results of our strategic planning process. We spent many months consulting so that we could find out what the K-12 public education sector needs and wants from us. We believe our final new Strategic Plan 2023-2025 reflects these needs," said Bruce L Anderson, CEO, BCPSEA.

In Spring 2022, BCPSEA engaged with school districts, boards of education, and sector management associations – including the BCPVPA – to gather feedback to create a new strategic plan. Surveys were sent out, with excellent response rates. There were 102 responses from school districts, 63 responses from boards of education, and responses from BCPVPA, BC School Trustees Association, BC School Superintendents Association, and BC Association of School Business Officials. Surveys and meetings also happened with the BCPSEA Board of Directors and BCPSEA staff.

The end result is a strategic plan that is client-centric, putting the needs of school districts and boards at its core, while also recognizing broader sectoral requirements and challenges – including a commitment to Reconciliation and equity, diversity, and inclusion.

"Every element of the public education sector needs to be deeply committed to Reconciliation and equity, diversity, and inclusion. We heard this loud and clear in the feedback we received. BCPSEA is creating targeted objectives towards these critical components of our new strategic plan," said Anderson.

On September 23, 2022, the BCPSEA Board of Directors approved the new 2023-2025 Strategic Plan.

Here are the highlights:

Vision:

An inclusive and thriving BC public education sector with a workforce that fosters student success.

Mission:

BCPSEA provides trusted sectoral leadership in labour relations and human resources by working together with school districts, partners, and stakeholders to ensure the success of the public education system.

Core Values:

Accountability
Service Excellence
Collaborative Leadership
Trusted Expertise
Adaptability

Goals:

Goal 1

Sectoral Leadership and Service Excellence

Goal 2

Stakeholder and Partner Relations

Goal 3

Effective Resource Management and Sustainable Operations

Goal 4

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Goal 5

Reconciliation

The full strategic plan,
which includes objectives to support each goal,
is available on the BCPSEA website:



Learning

Developing Your Leadership Fitness



Leadership is a choice not a position

Leadership is a skill that can be learned

Leadership requires making change and progress

Leadership is about influence - achieving results through others

The 4 Essential Roles of Leadership - FranklinCovey

by

Peter Johnston

Director of Professional Learning & Development

BCPVPA

I listened recently to two of our Principal colleagues as they discussed their passion. One colleague mentioned how it took years to prepare for the Penticton Ironman: 16+ hours of swimming, cycling, and a marathon to finish. Another colleague spoke about the amount of practice it took to become an acclaimed pianist and organist. Their passion for strategic and intentional 'preparation and practice' translated to accomplishing their goals.

The BCPVPA Professional Learning and Development (PLD) team believes that leadership is a *skill* that can be developed and maintained with consistent, ongoing learning.

No one is born with the ability to play a sport such as football, soccer, or basketball. Playing a sport requires skills that must be learned and enhanced through training. Similarly, no one can pick up a musical instrument such as the guitar, or sit down at a piano, and play those instruments well without years of training and preparation.

Some people are born with physical attributes that might give them an advantage in a particular sport, such as size, strength, or speed. Others have innate mental and physical qualities that facilitate an aptitude for a specific musical instrument. Nonetheless, playing a sport or a musical instrument is a skill.

Leadership Must be Taught

No one is born with great leadership ability. Leadership is a skill that must be taught, learned, and developed over time through training, practice, and repetition. Some people are born with attributes that enable them to grow faster and to outperform others as they develop their leadership *abilities*. But without learning the necessary leadership *skills*, these people will not ultimately succeed. The pathway to becoming a good leader lies in learning and developing leadership skills through training, education, and continuous, dedicated effort.

Leadership is Not an Inoculation

You can't complete a single workout at the gym and expect to be in the best shape of your life. You can't attend a weekend seminar or read a book about health and nutrition and automatically perform at the highest levels of strength and cardiovascular endurance. To develop your physical athletic abilities to their peak requires a disciplined training schedule, multiple times a week, for weeks, months, and years.

The same goes for developing your leadership skills. You can't read a book, sit through a keynote speech, seminar, or workshop, or take a single online course and expect to be at peak leadership performance. Like physical training, leadership is something you must work to develop continuously, multiple times a week, for months and years on end. There is always something new to learn, some areas to improve, and some new leadership challenge to be faced.

No one is born with
great leadership ability

Leadership Development Requires a Disciplined Training Continuum

In the same way that leadership is not something some people are just born with, it is also not something you can stumble upon through experience. When you recognize that leadership is a skill, you can put together a disciplined plan to train and educate yourself with frequency, and focus on your continuous leadership development. You can then prioritize the effort to develop the leadership skills of the people on your staff to ensure they are constantly learning, growing, and improving to become more effective leaders. That disciplined effort over time is the pathway to effective school leadership, enabling you and your school community to develop a sustainable learning culture.

On Your Staff

"I'm really good at the technical stuff," said the Tech Education Department Head. "But I find leading other people to be really hard. It just isn't my thing."

"Leading people is the most challenging of human endeavours," I said. "But the good news is, it isn't something that any of us are born with. Leadership is a skill that must be learned."

"Do you think leadership is actually something that can be taught?" asked the Department Head doubtfully.

"It absolutely can be taught," I said. "When I ran leadership training for educators across North America, I saw many school leaders struggle at first. Some were introverts and super nervous about speaking at a staff meeting. Some were easily overwhelmed under pressure, and couldn't detach and make decisions. Some were too aggressive in decision-making without properly considering ways to mitigate risk. They had to be taught how to lead. With specific growth plan goals, they grew to become good leaders."

"Interesting," the department head responded. "Were there any school leaders you encountered who couldn't be taught?"

"Yes," I replied. "But the only school leaders that couldn't be taught were the ones who weren't humble enough to realize they needed to improve. If they couldn't check their ego, they wouldn't listen to any guidance or constructive feedback, and they would never improve. Many new Principals that initially struggled showed marked improvement through the course as long as they were willing to listen, learn, and apply the leadership skills they were taught, and most went on to have successful careers."

Take Action

This week, focus on how well you are prioritizing leadership training for you and your school leadership team. Examine how often you are making time for continuous leadership growth and development. How much time are you prioritizing in your schedule to develop the leadership skills of the people on your school team to ensure they are constantly learning, growing, and improving their leadership skills to become more effective leaders? That disciplined effort over time is the pathway to becoming an even better leader than you are now, and for your school to develop a deep learning culture.

Professional Learning & Development: *My BCPVPA*

Most of you have school districts that provide professional learning opportunities. Much of your school district's professional learning offerings focus on the appropriate management of your school, specific to the policies and regulations of your school district.

Leadership development should be done in a safe place where you get to share your frustrations, challenges, and reflections.

Regardless of where you are in your school leadership career, or where you live in British Columbia, you can access a BCPVPA leadership program that will be engaging and thought-provoking. Log in to My BCPVPA at bcpvpa.org and check out our PLD tile. There you will find our leadership development offerings and, if you are looking for more, then we invite you to request a custom leadership development program for you and your colleagues in your district.



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"In organizations, real power and energy is generated through relationships. The patterns of relationships and the capacities to form them are more important than tasks, functions, roles, and positions."

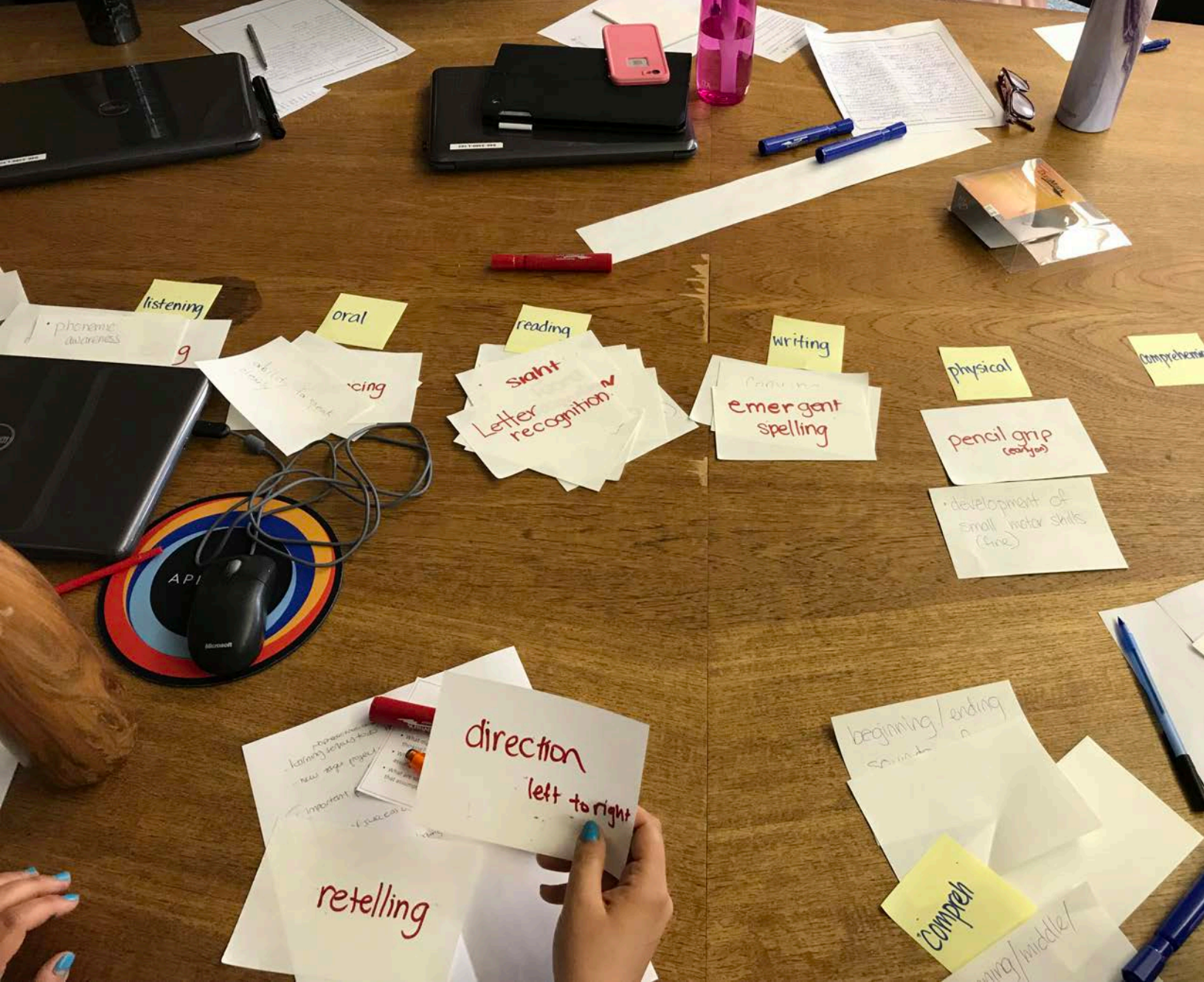
-Margaret Wheatley



Building

A Collaborative Culture

by
Andrea McComb
Director of Professional Learning & Development
BCPVPA
&
Lucinda Wolters
SD71 (Comox Valley)



As school leaders in this complex, fast-paced world, how do we craft the containers for engagement? According to Randy Cronley, there are four basic human needs for engagement: the need for trust, the need to feel a sense of worth, the need to foster hope, and the need for competence. Principals, Vice-Principals, school staffs, and parents have a collective responsibility to be engaged in student learning and development. As leaders in the system, the 'what, why, and how' of what we do matters.

Every school leader will say that our work begins with relationships. We want to create collaborative cultures

of care: cultures where each person feels valued and respected, and cultures that presume competence, so that each person will grow and develop because of our time together. To do that as leaders, we need to be both collaborators and inquirers.

When exploring how we foster collaboration and inquiry, we need processes, strategies, tactics, and skills. The Adaptive Schools© Seminars explore effective teams, and how to develop the facilitation skills to lead and develop collaborative groups. The training is the 'how' of being a leader of learning.

The Adaptive Schools© Seminar is a four-day, in-person program with the goal of developing the collective identity and capacity of organization members as collaborators, inquirers, and leaders.

Participants grow an increased capacity to develop and sustain high functioning collaborative teams by establishing meeting norms and decision-making structures, and knowing when and how to engage in dialogue or discussion. Gaining the skills to move groups beyond consensus to a common focus creates collective action. Learning to engage in cognitive conflict allows teams to value the diversity of perspectives and ideas. The strategies for planning and facilitating meetings help keep groups resourceful, on track, and on topic.

Here are the accounts of five school leaders who have participated in the training and subsequently applied the mindsets, strategies, tactics, and skills to their leadership.

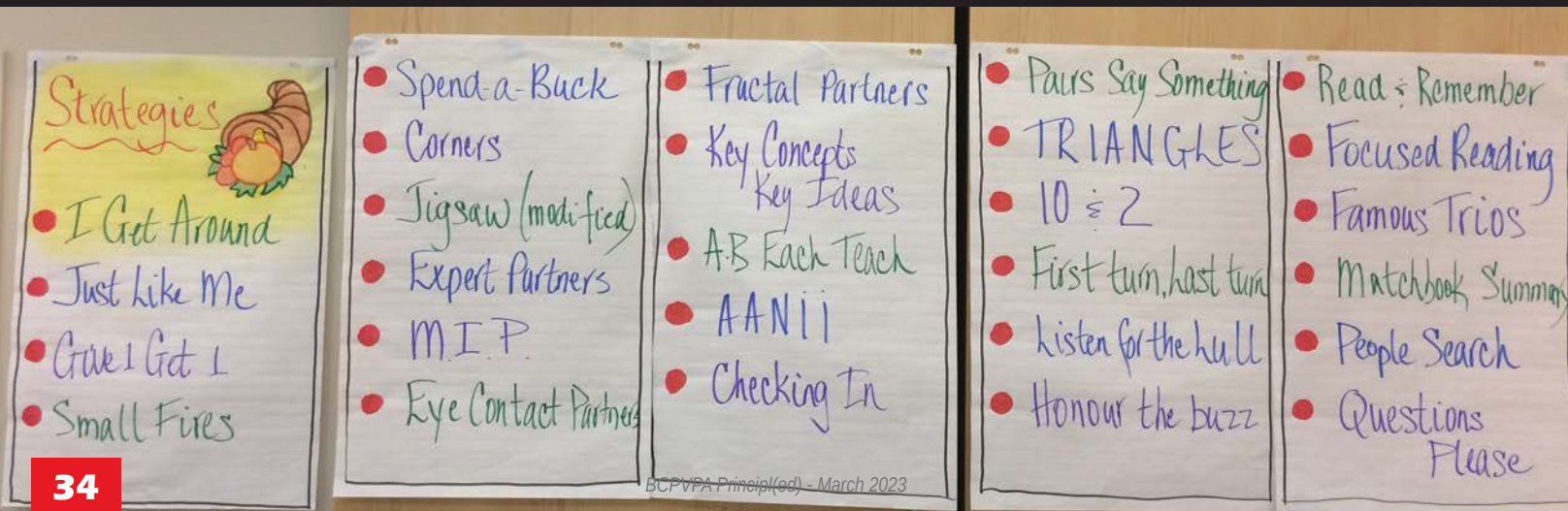
Ross Jacobsen is the Principal of Smiling Creek Elementary in Coquitlam.

Ross attended the seminar, and then very quickly made the decision to support his department heads in getting the training. He wanted to grow the capacity of his school so that they had a shared language and toolkit to plan collaborative work. The key learning for him was establishing working agreements on his staff, and more particularly with his student services team. He found his staff meetings became more productive, and they had more fun together. Collaborative work grew on his staff, and the time spent in meetings was more productive. They became good at making meaning out of data to identify grade level needs and school needs, so that resources and interventions were targeted and supported. From those teacher leaders that Ross supported in their training grew a next generation of leaders. Two of those leaders – Jennifer Nichols and Erin Reid – contributed to this article.

Jennifer Nichols is a Vice-Principal at Maillard Middle in Coquitlam.

Jennifer combines her learning from the Adaptive Schools© Seminars and Cognitive Coaching© towards creating and developing a thoughtful and purposeful professional learning community. She says that nurturing a culture of care is created by taking time to set up common values, establishing group norms, and using decision-making models.

Jennifer has seen an impact in staff commitment, with the biggest impact in the team of teaching assistants. She says, “We had a lot of cognitive capital in the building already, we just needed to find a way to listen, share, and support each other. Spending time building trust – getting to know each other through the AS strategies – has made a substantial difference in how we interact and listen. It is not perfect, but we all agree on our values and our purpose.”





Erin Reid is a District Literacy Mentor in Coquitlam.

Erin has used the AS toolkit in district meetings, work with schools, and planning for professional learning. Erin reflects that this learning has, “changed her entire way of understanding group dynamics and navigating challenging group situations. The tools really support action and allow for all voices to be heard. Groups move forward in action rather than getting stuck in an unproductive place. When groups come together cohesively, even when opinions differ, school culture and outcomes for students are positively impacted.”

Sean Della Vedova is the Principal of Central Elementary in Coquitlam.

Sean shares, “It is amazing how putting a little effort into thinking about how participants will interact can result in deeper, more productive conversations. Having a plan before we dive into potentially divisive topics helps me to be a better listener and leader. We have transformed our collaboration blocks with students and staff to being more interactive and engaging. With the increased use of technology, it has supported the documentation of work in a more streamlined manner. Process helps us, as colleagues engage in such important work.”

Lucinda Wolters is the Principal
of Arden Elementary
in the Comox Valley.

Lucinda quickly recognized the relevance and applicability of the Adaptive Schools® Seminar to school leadership, and the work of building collaborative, intentional cultures that do indeed influence student learning. Teachers responded positively to her facilitation, and their level of engagement in building shared understanding and collective ownership for student learning increased significantly. Lucinda says, “I noticed when I began using the AS concepts, strategies, and skills that this was a very different approach to unifying teachers in what was needed for our students. We quickly were on the same page by investing the time in processes, to honour all voices and collective thinking on key topics.”

Lucinda noticed the most influential application of the AS work has been with staff meetings. Building shared understanding through dialogue has been critical to influencing their decision-making. An increase in collective commitment to collaborative work was noted, and this became embedded in the school culture.

Utilizing the tools as well as the foundational concepts introduced in the seminar has influenced a significant shift in the culture of the school from isolated pockets of innovative practice, to leveraging the AS work to whole school decision-making. This was a result of using the AS work in their staff meetings, to go beyond teams or departments. Lucinda noticed that she, alongside the teachers, has been able to implement new approaches school-wide. “Our collective work is more intentional.”

“I would add that I have much more clarity about my leadership identity and how to enact that as a *leader of learning*. Going beyond leadership theories, I can more confidently live what I believe, to engage others in what’s important for kids through thoughtful facilitation. Besides, it matches what we want to see in classrooms, too.”

Conclusion

The patterns of relationships and the capacities to develop and sustain collaborative cultures are supported by how we engage in our shared work. Learning how to develop the capacity to build trust, rapport, and to honour the contributions of staff supports engagement. Through thoughtful approaches to developing a shared language, values, and norms, leaders are able to create collaborative cultures of care that influence student learning.

Interested in Adaptive Schools® Seminars for you and your school team?

Participants will develop:

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- An expanded repertoire of practical facilitation tools
- Understandings of when and how to engage groups in dialogue and discussion, the limitations, forms, and values of each
- Skills to move groups beyond consensus to common focus
- Ways to value and use dissension, argument, and conflict
- Strategies for keeping group members on track, on topic, energized, and resourceful

pldinfo@bcpvpa.bc.ca

Collaborative Conversations are:

♥ We are all learners,
☀ respectful
☀ supportive

♥ there is trust

♥ we are listeners

♥ relatability

♥ open to learning & growing

♥ we are all on a continuum

♥ coming from different
journeys

♥ genuinely interested in each
other

♥ a sense of humility



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We really must look at EMAIL

by
Read Jorgensen
*Retired Principal
SD 61 (Victoria)*



I took some undergraduate courses in Business Administration many years ago – in the Dark Ages, before email, when office memos ruled the world. To hone our skills in memo writing, one of my professors insisted that all assignments were to be submitted using a strict memo format. In her business, she explained, the memo format was not about spacing and commas, it was all about the discipline of crafting effective business communication that was worthy of the recipients' time and effort. The time has come to rethink our approach about email. Let me explain by providing an example, in the format that I learned.

To: BCPVPA Membership

From: Read.jorgensen@gmail.com

Re: Making email communication more effective

Purpose:

The following email provides specific recommendations to standardize communication through email, saving time and effort by using a prescribed format to promote clear, direct communication.

Action:

Begin all emails with specific Purpose, Action, and Background sections. Set a date to begin using this format, say the Monday after you read this article.

1. All emails will have three parts: Purpose, Action, and Background.
2. The Purpose clearly states the reason for the email and the intended result.
3. The Action clearly states what action is expected from the reader.
4. The Background is the contextual information needed to support the Purpose and Action.

Background:

Email is overwhelmingly the tool of choice for business communication; however, many emails are written quickly with little attention to the Purpose and Action.

I am sure you will agree that we are receiving more and more communication via email with less operational value in each message. "A poor carpenter always blames their tools", and we are no exception. We naturally blame the email system for our mounting frustration, but the real problem is that many emails lack clear, well-defined messaging with direct operational value.

Emails have a low effort-threshold in comparison to letters, phone calls, and meetings, which require more preparation and critical thought. With email, small tidbits of information can be rapidly fired to employees with little effort on the part of the sender and hidden in each one is the assumption that the receiver can easily understand the importance, context, and action required for each message. All too often the receiver spends more time deciphering than the sender spent composing. And, in our effort to be transparent with employees, we compound the problem by spitting out chunks of information that have lost context by degrees over multiple emails. The messages, often sent using the misused 'Forward' function, are delivered to hapless recipients who can only guess why they are receiving your email.

We need to recognise that email is easy on the sender, and hard on the receiver.

"I have to do my email,"

we cry, rather than spending time on productive or creative tasks.

Facing dozens – or hundreds – of emails each week, all from well-meaning senders, the sheer effort of curating email now masquerades as real work. "I have to do my email," we cry, rather than spending time on productive or creative tasks. Productivity in your job suffers as your work is fragmented into small micro-actions; as your inbox fills, your day becomes more about shuffling or redirecting other people's priorities and less about focusing on the important tasks that make a difference in your school. Even the time spent just organising your inbox is a heavy cost. If an employee spends 15 minutes a day (a ridiculously low estimate) simply sorting and deleting email, a district with 1,000 employees will collectively spend 250 hours **each day** on electronic housekeeping with zero operational benefit.

It is open season on email as everyone in your district has access to every Inbox, and with each email, a sender is unwittingly appropriating time from the workday of another employee. As a single cog in the machine, you may feel that you are not part of the problem with the few emails you send each day. What is the problem is that every other person, with their cursor poised over the Send button, feels the same way. It's a Tragedy of the Commons¹, that occurs when many users have unrestricted access to a free and open resource. Without a coordinated approach, each user acts in their own self-interest with no regard

to the accumulative effect on the common resource. While a few emails are not a huge drain on employee time, the accumulative effect of thousands of emails on the collective productivity of the organization.

I know what you are saying: "I am too busy, and I don't have time to compose email this way". Look at it the other way. Every recipient you send to is busy as well, but you expect them to stop what they are doing, sort out your most recent message, and decide what to do about it.

What is needed is a fundamental realignment of how, and why, we communicate throughout our organizations. Unfortunately, our casual approach to email is well ingrained and change will take some effort. By using a standard email format supporting clear and direct communication, employees will start to feel that their Inbox is about operational importance rather than organisation annoyance. But, more importantly, as everyone takes time to compose well-formatted, impactful messages, the result will be fewer messages with better communication through email.

If you are looking for an excellent book on email for you or your book club, I would recommend, *A World Without Email: Reimagining Work in an Age of Communication Overload* by Cal Newport. It is an easy, informative read that will help you understand the blizzard of email we find ourselves in each day.

¹ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragedy_of_the_commons



Are you encouraged to make your email communications more effective?

Tell us how you took up the challenge, and the differences that you have seen.

 @bcpvpa @mrjvictoria

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Leaders Welcome!

Every spring, BCPVPA members are eligible to run for a seat on the Board of Directors.

**Nominations open in April for Directors of the Board
and for the President-Elect.**

Watch for details on the News page at bcpvpa.org



SCHOOL DISTRICT GOVERNANCE:

Following the October 15, 2022 elections, every school district in the province installed newly elected trustees to their Board of Education's four-year term in office. Almost one-half of the province's trustees are new to their board, and bring with them different priorities, original ideas, and a range of experiences and political commitments. The future direction of each school and district will be significantly influenced and shaped by the decisions of their new board. For this reason, it is important to understand the governance role of boards and other entities in the education sector, and how they can affect Principals and Vice-Principals in their roles.

by

Ellen Roberts

*Director, Member Support Services
BCPVPA*



WHY UNDERSTANDING THE GOVERNANCE MODEL OF THE BC EDUCATION SYSTEM IS IMPORTANT FOR PRINCIPALS AND VICE-PRINCIPALS

Boards of Education are given the responsibility of governing their school district, not conducting its day-to-day operation. **Governing** is different and distinct from **'running'** the school district. Governance is about the setting the guiding vision, values, principles, and policy that help to shape a school district in response to local needs and priorities. The key intent of this work is to ensure that the needs and aspirations of all students within the school district are met as effectively as possible. This focus and responsibility should be placed above all other considerations for boards.



WHAT DO BOARDS OF EDUCATION DO?

Boards of Education – or School Boards – have four core responsibilities:

1. Setting the educational, financial, capital, and structural **priorities** of the school district based on local input and student needs (e.g. vision, values, and strategic plan).
2. Establishing **policies** to guide the school district, its employees, and students in their intended roles and responsibilities.
3. Providing **oversight** to ensure the responsibilities of employees and district policy are met.
4. Overseeing **processes** and **decisions** regarding the district's finances, capital plan, terms of employment, student and parent appeals, and guiding protections for individuals and groups.

These responsibilities are defined in the B.C. School Act as well as other provincial legislation and statutes.



School districts also have local policies and procedures that help to guide the operation of the board. Individual boards operate and exercise their authority differently from one another, and these differences reflect local context, priorities, personal preference, and tradition.

A key point in understanding the role of trustees is that the authority referenced above is the responsibility of the district's *entire* Board of Education, and not of individual school trustees.

Although a duly elected official and member of a corporate board, an individual school trustee has little authority and no role in directing or overseeing the work or focus of any school district employee, including Principals or Vice-Principals.

A trustee cannot direct the work or decisions of Principals, Vice-Principals, or other staff at the school or district level, nor do they have an individual role in overseeing or judging decisions made at the school or classroom level. Individual trustees should not intercede on behalf of the community, parents, or students when questions or concerns are brought to them. This is important for Principals and Vice-Principals to know, because occasionally community members or parents approach trustees with concerns, and those concerns may come directly to a Principal or Vice-Principal through a trustee. This is not the correct process; it may arise from a misunderstanding of the role of the trustee, and can be easily rectified. In such a situation, the Principal or Vice-Principal should reach out to their district supervisor or Superintendent and make them aware of the situation.

In another situation, a Principal or Vice-Principal may be engaged in casual conversation with a trustee in the community, and may be asked their opinion about decisions, programs, staff members, or other topics of interest in the school or district. It is important for the member to be cautious about how they respond, as this is not the appropriate conduit for a trustee to gain insights about the workings of the district. A member does not have the authority to speak officially about such matters, and would not want to be quoted in a board meeting as having expressed an opinion about a school or district issue.

Principals and Vice-Principals report to the Superintendent – perhaps indirectly through a Director of Instruction, or an Assistant/Associate Superintendent – who is ultimately responsible for the operation, or the 'running', of the district. Before engaging with a trustee, who is responsible as part

of their board for 'governing' the district, Principals and Vice-Principals need to ensure that district expectations for such interactions are being followed.

Not all provinces in Canada have school boards, but BC has retained this co-governance structure. Without boards and locally elected school trustees, governance of BC's school districts would look very different, and would likely fall to a provincial body. Where this has happened in other jurisdictions, there has been a loss of local autonomy and input. Retaining the ability to set local priorities and direction is important for the successful governance of school districts, and speaks to why BC has retained elected school boards.

WHAT OTHER ENTITIES GOVERN OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM?

In addition to local Boards of Education, there are other entities that direct the work of school and school district, starting with the provincial Ministry of Education and Child Care (MoECC). Like school districts, the MoECC also has two distinct sides: the political side led by the Minister of Education and Child Care, and the operational side led by the Deputy Minister. The Minister fulfills the elected role similar to that of a board, but at a provincial level. The focus of the MoECC, through cabinet and the Premier, is to set priorities, policy, strategic direction, and a budget, and to guide decision making, very much like trustees on a school board. The MoECC are the governors of the provincial K-12 education system. The Deputy Minister is the CEO or operational head of the Ministry, and fulfills a similar role to that of a Superintendent

but at a provincial level. These parallel but separate roles mirror the roles and responsibilities of boards and staff at the local level: governance vs. operations.

Another example of this shared governance model is that of the BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association (BCPVPA). The elected Board of Directors, led by the President, sets priorities through the strategic plan, establishes the budget, and guides decision making. The staff of the BCPVPA, led by the Executive Director, operationalizes the work of the Board of Directors in supporting the very important work that Principals and Vice-Principals do in their districts across the province.

A unique feature of BC's K-12 education system is the distinct role of the BC Public Schools Employers Association (BCPSEA) in defining and setting employment relationships for everyone within the sector, including Principals and Vice-Principals. Principals and Vice-Principals in BC are employed under personal services contracts by their school district, rather than under common collective agreements. Although hired by each school district through a local process, the terms of a Principal or Vice-Principal's employment – including wages and benefits – are governed through BCPSEA.

WHAT DO PRINCIPALS AND VICE-PRINCIPALS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GOVERNANCE?

In understanding how Principal and Vice-Principal employment relationships are governed, it is important to know that:

A TRUSTEE CANNOT DIRECT THE WORK OR DECISIONS OF PRINCIPALS, VICE-PRINCIPALS, OR OTHER STAFF AT THE SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEVEL, NOR DO THEY HAVE AN INDIVIDUAL ROLE IN OVERSEEING OR JUDGING DECISIONS MADE AT THE SCHOOL OR CLASSROOM LEVEL.

1. Your supervisor is your school district's Superintendent/CEO, or the person(s) they have charged with that responsibility. Although your work is guided – **governed** – by your local board, trustees do not have the authority to **direct** the work of Principals and Vice-Principals.

2. Although your local board may set the terms of employment – salary grids, for example – for the district's Principals and Vice-Principals, they may only do so within the parameters set by **BCPSEA**.

3. Principals and Vice-Principals are designated as 'management staff' in BC, and therefore have a much more defined **fiduciary responsibility** (e.g. duty of loyalty, good faith, and honesty) to their employer than unionized employees.

BCPSEA is not part of the Ministry of Education and Child Care, but rather part of the Ministry of Finance under the authority of the Public Sector Employers' Council (PSEC). Although responsive to the Minister of Education and Child Care, BCPSEA is ultimately controlled by Minister of Finance. This split of responsibilities can at times add complications to the employment of Principals and Vice-Principals.

The overall governance of K-12 education in BC is a shared responsibility. Through the work of individually

elected school trustees, Boards of Education govern sixty school districts with the intent of providing the vision, values, and strategic direction so that schools may best meet student needs and aspirations. The Minister of Education and Child Care provides governance to the provincial K-12 system on behalf of the elected government; parallel to this, the Ministry of Finance through BCPSEA provides governance to employment relationships within the sector.

As school leaders, it is important for all Principals and Vice-Principals to understand and effectively operate within this context. Misunderstandings about 'who's who in the zoo' can lead to unfortunate or avoidable conflict and confusion. Almost certainly, there will be missed opportunities or a degree of frustration if members do not understand and appreciate the complexity of the governance structure under which they work. Responsible and locally responsive governance is a key factor in establishing and maintaining effective school districts which, in turn, can support great schools. When Principals and Vice-Principals understand and support the governance of their school district, it ultimately impacts their own roles and the success of their students.

For more information, contact a member of the BCPVPA Member Support Services team.



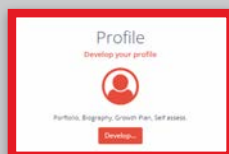


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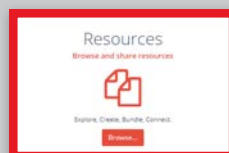
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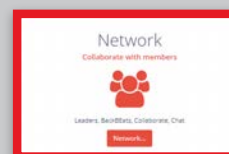
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*"I can think of
no-one I would
rather have in
my corner."*

A Very Fond Farewell

After more than five years of passionate dedication to the support and representation of BCPVPA members during some very complex times in public education, our colleague **Ellen Roberts, BCPVPA Director of Member Support Services**, has announced that she will retire in Spring 2023.

Ellen joined the staff team at BCPVPA in early 2018 after a long and successful career with the Vancouver School District where she worked as a teacher, Vice-Principal, Principal, and Director of Instruction. As an administrator in Vancouver, she was deeply involved both in her local Chapter – serving on the Chapter Executive and as Chapter President – and with the BCPVPA as a member for 14 years before joining the BCPVPA staff team.

Her incredible skill for supporting Principals and Vice-Principals, and deep sense of care for her colleagues, drew Ellen to the role of Director of Member Support Services, and she has since become an integral part of the fabric of the Association. Her sense of ethics, professionalism, and compassion has always placed the needs of members first, and she has tirelessly and respectfully advocated for the varied and important needs of members who find themselves in challenging situations.

Ellen's work and thoughtful support of members has been recognized and appreciated not only by members themselves, but also by district staff members and sector partners across the province. She is a very well-loved member of the BCPVPA staff team, and she has reciprocated that care and support over the years (often with the help of her delicious home baking!)

Colleagues from the membership, districts, and the sector have reached out to express their appreciation of Ellen, and a sampling of their words help to speak on our behalf:

“Ellen Roberts has been a rock-solid ally for so many Principals and Vice-Principals across our province. Her extensive knowledge, compassionate approach, and unwavering commitment to her colleagues (all of us!) is a standard above and beyond. Anyone taking on a role in Member (Support) Services would do well to emulate themselves after her.”

“Musician, linguist, counsellor, world traveler, and pit bull. Ellen has been a tenacious and determined advocate for public education and its leaders. I can think of no-one I would rather have in my corner, and no-one who I would fear (more) as an adversary.”

A woman wearing a green bucket hat with sunglasses perched on it, a dark grey jacket, and a purple hair tie is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is standing in a field of tall, golden-brown grass. In the background, there are green trees and a giraffe standing in a grassy area under a clear blue sky.

"Ellen puts her heart into her work; she is hard on issues and soft on people. This approach has allowed her to maintain strong relations with those with whom she works."

"Ellen has an incredible knack for working through issues, navigating, and foreseeing problems, and providing creative solutions to best support members."

She is skillful in approaching negotiations, and she can see opportunities for members objectively even when emotions may be high. She has a gentle way about her to coach members to ensure they are as successful as possible.

Ellen puts her heart into her work; she is hard on issues and soft on people.

This approach has allowed her to maintain strong relations with those with whom she works."

*"Ellen has a wonderful way of engaging members with a calm, reassuring manner, attentive to their needs. Her rich experience and considerable knowledge reinforce the **confident foundation of BCPVPA** Member Support Services."*

"Ellen will drop everything to help, in my experience, which has been so, so appreciated! She is always matter-of-fact and calm, but a strong advocate at the same time!"

*"I can't thank Ellen enough for everything she has done for me and for everyone she has worked with. She is a gem. She has always put the **needs of others first**, and her calm and caring manner has been such a gift to those she works with. I will miss having the opportunity to work with her, but I hope she has a fantastic, healthy, and happy retirement."*

***"From the first time we met, Ellen** has been not only a colleague but a friend. I admire so much about her: her phenomenal facility for synthesizing information, her boundless compassion, her deep **sincerity and integrity**, her fierce sense of justice, and – of course – her sassy sense of humour. She has touched so many lives in her time at the BCPVPA."*

"Ellen is the ultimate team player. She has respect for those she works with and demonstrates a strong moral compass that guides her work. She is straightforward in her approach to problem solving, and is both trustworthy and reliable. Her integrity and commitment gain the respect of those who work with her and of those that she supports in their day-to-day endeavours."

*I find Ellen to be gracious, thoughtful, and giving. A smile comes to my face as her candy jar is always full of chocolates and other sweets welcoming people to her office – **whether it is to discuss an** upcoming presentation, case, or just to visit. Ellen has a welcoming spirit at heart."*

"I've had the pleasure of working with Ellen for many years and have always been so impressed by how she makes the person she is with feel listened to, cared about and important. She is also the epitome of professionalism, always respectful and always on top of every detail."

"As a new teacher, I was grateful to have the support and guidance Ellen provided as a Department Head. She was knowledgeable, helpful, and compassionate. I was in awe of her leadership. As a woman with a young family and countless responsibilities, she always made time to listen and give you her full attention."

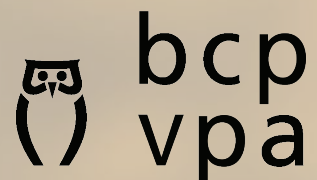
She balanced the needs of students and teachers with empathy and sound reasoning. Ellen was one of my early role models for leadership. Thank you, Ellen, for showing me that you can be yourself as a woman in leadership, without compromising your values."

All the best in your well-deserved retirement!"

We know that Ellen will dearly miss her close colleagues, but she is truly looking forward to spending time with family (and her dog Deacon!), exploring new corners of the world, spending time in the warmth of Mexico, and catching up on sleep and reading. *After presenting countless retirement and pension seminars to others, it's time for her to reap those rewards herself!*

BCPVPA has been extremely fortunate to have Ellen as a support for members and the BC education system. We wish her all the very best, and we thank her for the care and dedication she has provided to members.

Ellen... you will be missed!



THE RODDENBERRY REDUCTION

A reflection on leadership, the challenges
we face, and adopting a journey to 'better'

by
Kevin Luchies
SD 61 (Greater Victoria)

Imagine childhood in small town Nova Scotia... circa 1970. The movie *Pleasantville* most accurately depicts that kind of gentle pace and bucolic charm. Dave Keon and Bobby Orr were our heroes. We knew the words to every Stompin' Tom Connors song. Apple sauce, steamed clams, and molasses on toast powered the endless street hockey games out front, interrupted only by school and fossil hunting expeditions in the slate quarries which surrounded our village. In a word: perfect.

Television was limited. *Hockey Night in Canada* was religion, and for us meant staying up late on a Saturday night. Cartoons on Saturday morning, *Don Messer's Jubilee* on Sunday (maybe Anne Murray might sing tonight?), and an array of formulaic situation comedies rounded out two-channel viewing. Other than the urgency which accompanied a Leafs game, our television life was boring – until I saw the first *Star Trek* rerun which exploded into our lives on Channel 3.

It was a life changer.

From that first episode more than 50 years ago, to anxiously waiting for the next *Star Trek Discovery* episode (on tonight at 5pm!), I have remained a fan and have become a devotee to many universal ideals Gene Roddenberry promoted via the universe he created.

For a then-seven-year-old viewer, the excitement was based on action, space-age technology, an unbelievably cool cast, and the contrast the show provided to my insular childhood. As I grew, and followed spinoff series and movies, the deeper messages intended by Roddenberry seeped in. The lessons delivered by each episode brought me to the place where I believe *Star Trek*, in every iteration, is as important a collection of art – and a clarion call for a shared awareness – as any cluster of works in our species' history. Too bravely stated? Perhaps I can convince...

The United Federation of Planets is a concept predicated on an aspirational vision. A coalition of

intergalactic species work together, within coda which includes a don't-meddle-unless-we-have-to Prime Directive. Preserve life. Share acquired understandings. Engage in the laudable quest to learn, survive, and thrive *without* subjugating other living things. No citizen or species suffers want. All of the basic needs to enable survival and provide the conditions for thriving are rights, not privileges reserved for an elite few. Food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, entertainment, participatory governance, leisure, universal access to technology, and the maintenance of a healthy and balanced ecology are accepted and protected guarantees. Life, *all life*, is precious.

Now, it wouldn't be riveting viewing for a seven-year-old – or most sixty-year-olds – if everything was perpetually peaceful. Even in Roddenberry's quadrant, there must be common and uniting threats to strengthen resolve in a Federation's quest to achieve and preserve Utopia. These threats come in the form of invading species, artificial intelligence running amok, and cataclysmic natural phenomena. The ageless conundrum borne by leaders in crisis plays out week after week. Do we risk the crew to save the 'one'? Do we abandon the 'one', and fly away to preserve 'the many'? As a leader in parts of my life, those terrifying decisions made by James T. Kirk and later protégées resonate deeply. Sacrifice by each, for each, ennobles the many. I hope in my service life I have been more like Kirk and Janeway than not.

The Federation's common good can only be sought by a completely diverse collective of equal members. Species, race, gender, religion, and all variations of 'being' are included without question. The fact that the whole is made more by its many parts is tacit. The irrefutable logic which requires full inclusion to realize absolute potential is clear. Survival depends on it. Thriving is defined by it.

One of the challenges Roddenberry's crew took on early in the original series was artificial intelligence. A.I. gone rogue, and the concept that artificial intelligence can evolve and become 'sentient', and be included

in the Federation as an equal life form, were major themes. Gilbert Ryle's "ghost in the machine" treatise has been reformed many times and has become a primary concern of philosophers and governors of modern life. This concern was forecast by many in Roddenberry's era and has featured prominently, and ominously, in books and films like: *I, Robot*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and *Ex Machina*.

Isaac Asimov provided a simple logical framework to govern the creation of artificial life. The assimilation of these laws is critical to understanding the challenge Roddenberry plumbed, and future series writers brought to life, many times throughout our ongoing *Star Trek* age. We even met a formidable human/machine hybrid who adopted an uncompromising honey-bee-like hive mind and collective. The 'one as integral part of species' and 'species as one' ethic was chillingly brought to life as The Borg assimilated all 'useful' species as part of an ever-expanding hive universe. The phrase "resistance is futile" is one of the most powerful ever uttered in television history. Are The Borg just a terrifyingly effective protagonist meant to be a part of a simple 'us vs. them' shoot 'em up? Or was something more intended by the writers?

Asimov's Laws, formulated in 1942, are as follows:

FIRST LAW:

A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.

SECOND LAW:

A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the first Law.

THIRD LAW:

A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the first two Laws.

In *Star Trek*, and most of these stories, humans and humanoids unwittingly infuse too much capacity in machines, and these often-anthropomorphic machines rise up. In most stories, the afflicted creators regain control, often by employing logic-impeding randomness and intuition, and order is restored. The lesson delivered by Asimov is clear. DO NOT create something which may outgrow and consume the creator. The successful adherence to his Laws implies sentient creators are all wise in their care to avoid creating a potential we may not be able to control. As a metaphor for all technology since the Industrial Revolution, we have been pushing ourselves to the edge of extinction to control 'dumb' inventions already. Will we learn Asimov's lesson before we are tested by something even more threatening than global warming?

Wouldn't it be interesting if humans adopted Asimov's code as a simple constitution for humankind? Try replacing the noun 'robot' with 'human' and reread the Laws. Compelling.

The most important Roddenberry-wrapped philosophical gift is one our species must adopt — and adopt quickly. We must ensure that every human is guaranteed all of the fulsome conditions for survival, and be provided the means to secure the potential to thrive, enshrined in our own 'Federation Law'. No sins of omission. No lack of any requirement expected for every member. All cultures and all ecosystems are restored and balanced. Technology is employed to achieve this balance, rather than ensure less-than-fair and out-of-balance shares for too few.

Citizens compete for responsibility, not resources.

The Captain eats no better than any crew member. The Admiral sleeps no less securely than a farmer. Remove the pursuit of 'stuff'. Infuse the pursuit of knowledge and compete for the right to exercise it for the greater good. This is the only way forward.

I hope Gene Roddenberry will forgive this adaptation of his iconic opener:

***"OUR FULL
COMMITMENT TO
EACH OTHER, AND
COMPASSION FOR
ALL LIVING THINGS, IS
OUR NEXT FRONTIER.
THIS IS THE MISSION
OF OUR VOYAGE ON
STARSHIP EARTH. TO
EXPLORE UNITING
OUR SPECIES. TO
PRESERVE ALL
LIFE. TO BOLDLY GO
WHERE WE HAVE
NOT GONE BEFORE...
TOGETHER."***



Those who have been in educational leadership in British Columbia for a number of years will have heard the name **BCPVPA Short Course** in conversations about new school leaders learning the ropes. Short Course began more than 40 years ago in partnership with the University of British Columbia; over that time, thousands of school leaders and facilitators have come together in the spirit of learning and leadership development.

The program has evolved through the years to reflect and align with changes in educational practice. And, for the two years of the global pandemic, we were grateful to continue the tradition and deliver the program virtually to ensure that we could meet the needs of new leaders. But there is nothing like meeting in person. In July 2022, we burst out of the gate with a return to this live learning event under a new name: **Foundations for New School Leaders**. More than 156 attendees, 22 facilitators, BCPVPA staff, and expert session leaders from the sector and beyond gathered at UBC for a week of intensive and unparalleled learning and connection.

Shortly after the conclusion of the 2022 Foundations sessions, we invited participants to share their thoughts about their learning, about what inspired them that week, and about the deeper dive it might have sparked or reinforced. As we approach the next Foundations session in July 2023, we wanted to illustrate what this learning opportunity means to both new and seasoned leaders.

What better way to do that, than through their own words.

We are grateful to Dr. Rishi Singh, Claudio Bortolussi, Morgen MacDonald, and Dr. Shannon Behan for sharing their personal impressions of the 2022 Foundations for New School Leaders.

DR. RISHI SINGH

**Principal, K-11 Independent School, Vancouver
2022 Foundations Attendee**

This leadership course was an amazing learning experience and fusion of wisdom!

The day began early with the recognition of the Musqueam people. It is on their blessed land that all the Principals and Vice-Principals convened to become learners. The plenary session – about decolonizing educators' approach to leadership – engaged with various issues, concerns, and solutions faced by a school's leadership. Emphasis was laid on moral courage to uphold the values, vision, and mission of the school.

It did not take long before all of us began to feel like a family at Table 21. Lynette (Power, SD34), our facilitator, made us feel as relaxed as one is at home and as alert as one is at school. It was wonderful to listen to everyone's experiences, challenges, and opinions about the similar tasks that we all encounter in our work every day. The challenges brought us closer, with the realization that a lot more must be done to better our system, improve our approaches to solutions, and to ensure that students' future is at the centre of it all.

From July 4 – 8, 2022, a number of pertinent topics were shared and discussed, including

- Leading through a legal lens
- Restorative decision-making
- Student-centered leadership
- An introduction to compassionate systems leadership
- Unconscious bias
- The legal side of leadership
- BCPVPA Connects
- Structures and processes to support inclusion
- Cultivating trust and powered leadership health and wellness
- Understanding teacher evaluations
- Promoting a psychologically safe culture for students, staff, and you
- Learning through the Indigenous Art Walk
- Knowledge about personal services contracts
- Wellness at the intersection of leading learning and living
- Professional learning and development

No other topics could have been more vital for the leaders in the room!

My presence at the course led to a feeling of deep gratitude that will stay with me for as long as I am a Principal. What I learned at the course was derived from the experiences of thousands of hours of school leadership. It was an excellent synthetic interpretation of critical knowledge for all Vice-Principals and Principals.



CLAUDIO BORTOLUSSI

Principal, SD41 – Burnaby

2022 Foundations Facilitator

Building your Culture and Learning Community Through Belonging

Another year is underway, and schools are preparing to bring students, teachers, and parents together into buildings with the hope of creating optimal environments for learning to occur. The element at the heart of the work that is done in schools is relationships. Schools work to build them up, and nurture the spaces and places for everyone to connect.

My impetus here is not about connecting; rather, it's about belonging. You see, belonging is at the heart of learning. Without that acceptance, we can connect all we want, but we will not create the authentic trust that is required.

Connection: happens when people are seen, heard, and understood for who they are (and for who they are not)

Belonging: is when people are accepted for who they are

Trust: is when people can express who they are (and who they are not) with an assurance of being included, and uplifted in the process

What we need to know is that the feeling of belonging is innate in all of us. We each crave that acceptance for what we are, and how we fit into a group. The values we feel are common, the history we feel is close, the relationships we develop are reciprocal. We all want to belong!

So: how do you create belonging? Can you fabricate it? Can you instill it in people? The answer is yes. And with our roles in schools, we are about to go on journey that will show you how, and help you understand the

human emotion that will allow learning to take the lead in the work leaders do.

The key is that each organization is unique, and requires different nurturing strategies. Giving people what they need is different than giving people what they want. Leading – and creating efficiencies in – what organizations want, and need, is different for each one. Understanding the values and culture of your organization will allow a good leader to shift and move the organization in a positive and efficient way, so that everyone takes ownership of cultural growth and organization develops values that everyone understands and nurtures, fostering capacity building.

Leaders need to understand that empowerment in an organization is the most important thing one can do. By creating belonging with trust, your organization can grow internally by creating lateral capacity, instead of operating with siloed experts. Your organization will be much more engaged if people within the organization have the ability – the capacity – to take on other roles to fulfill growth opportunities both for the organization and for themselves (ownership, trust, & belonging). One way is to float the idea of 'How', and to start digging a little deeper by asking pointed questions that are specific to your organization until you get traction and encourage dialogue within the group. Your job then becomes to create opportunity, and invite facilitation, listen, and shift the group values within the ones that exist in the organization.

With each organization, the culture is different. Leaders need to facilitate an understanding of the culture, and manage change within the culture that is not just a change for the sake of change, but a purposeful 'shift'. Your employees are smart enough to know and understand what your onboarding is all about. If the organization does not allow them to be an integral part of the growth required to create ownership, trust, and belonging, then you are delaying and prolonging the 'shift' and efficiency you are trying to attain.

Here are a few examples of how you can facilitate connection, belonging, and trust within your own organization.

Where does your name come from? Ask people to share where their name came from, how their parents came up with the name; the story behind their thinking as they were preparing to bring a child into the world; and the connection and belonging they had in mind for you.

Give and take ideas: Create a process of learning and sharing by giving employees opportunities and resources, and yourself the opportunity to gain more from the employees in your organization. This process helps you build

gratitude, relationships, and trust within your organization. www.giveandtakeinc.com/givitas

Finally, I would like to challenge people to take the time to look at the organization they are connected to, and ask themselves:

What is it that I would like to change about the culture of our group?

How would I go about doing that?

Small changes – ‘shifts’ – can lead to greater group engagement efficiency than a large-scale change. This is due to the inclusive nature of the ‘shift’, the ownership that is developed, the trust that you encourage, and the communication you facilitate with your group.

Appendix: My research and consultation work with these topics have led to some amazing conversations with and about organizations and their Social Emotional Leadership, and capacity-building with their leaders. I would love to share my finding with you! Find out more: csbortolussi@shaw.ca or csbortolussi@gmail.com

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MORGEN MACDONALD

**Vice-Principal, SD83 – North Okanagan-Shushwap
2022 Foundations Attendee**

From across the province, we gathered – arriving by car, bus, commercial airline, and float plane – from the many districts of this beautiful land. New Principals and Vice-Principals descended on the UBC campus located on the traditional unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Itineraries had been emailed, the Yapp app was downloaded, and table groups assigned. Welcome to your new family!

Under the caring, thoughtful, and encouraging guidance of our table facilitators, we got to know table members as more than colleagues; they quickly became our friends. Each morning started with a group reflection, skillfully designed to prepare us for the day's learning. From this connected starting point, presenters helped us explore the four leadership standards of the BCPVPA framework. When challenged to take a critical and reflective look at our own personal values and biases, facilitators and family groups allowed us the space and freedom to express ourselves, and to be authentic and vulnerable. The "Goose-Chase" around the UBC campus offered groups a chance to have some fun and step outside our comfort zones to complete several challenges around the school. This break allowed for some much-needed laughter, and a look at how group members interact and work together in a fun-filled situation. During breakout groups, we met new people and heard new voices as participants listened to presenters talk about being instructional leaders.

Groups explored Indigenous perspectives and the relational aspect of leadership. We heard from many speakers who highlighted the importance of relationship in the leadership role. Following a break, we headed out on a guided art walk of the

UBC campus, which highlighted the work being done towards reconciliation by honouring and remembering the people who were on this land before the campus existed. This was a moving tour that highlighted story and memory. The day ended with an information session about circle, and then some circle work. The challenge of the day was to consider how you, moving forward, could incorporate Indigenous culture into your school or classroom; circle was presented as an option in a skillful and welcoming way.

The nuts and bolts of leadership – the organizational lens – was covered during an intense day of learning that included case studies with new mixed table groups. These put our learning of the week to the test, and helped us navigate some real-life school-based situations. New groupings and partnerships, where the comfort and familiarity of our table group didn't exist, challenged us to be able to work with others in difficult situations. Table facilitators helped us to think critically about our answers, and challenged us to consider our biases, the thoughts of teaching staff and the school community, and encouraged us to explain our thinking.

The week ended with a warm breakfast and a wrap-up of our learning. We gained awareness of resources, courses, and networks that we can access through the BCPVPA. During this time, we were surprised and privileged to be a part of a blanketing ceremony for retired BCPVPA Directors of Professional Learning and Development, Jessica Antosz and Elizabeth Bell, performed by members of the Squamish Nation. This highlighted not only the amazing work of the BCPVPA, but also the efforts of the North Vancouver School District in working with Indigenous Peoples; it was not only a privilege to witness, but also inspiring to see these communities working together so closely.

Throughout it all, we gained exponential amounts of knowledge: by the end of each day, table group consensus was always that our brains were full, and that we were feeling inspired. When asked, “what stood out?” the answer is the friendships, networks, and increased sense of being supported. When asked, “what will you take away for the week?” the answer is to be yourself, be brave, be kind, be humble, and be reflective. Table Ten really did grow to become my friends and collegial family. I left the

campus with a richer knowledge of my new role, but more importantly with an increased sense of self, and a level of confidence and feeling that if I need someone there are seven people from around the province that I can reach out to for support. Memories of this conference will serve as moments of laughter, reminders of reflection and self-care, and feelings of confidence in my knowledge and capabilities as a future leader.



"MEMORIES OF THIS CONFERENCE WILL SERVE AS MOMENTS OF LAUGHTER, REMINDERS OF REFLECTION AND SELF-CARE, AND FEELINGS OF CONFIDENCE IN MY KNOWLEDGE AND CAPABILITIES AS A FUTURE LEADER."

DR. SHANNON BEHAN

**Principal, SD 47 – Powell River
2022 Foundations Facilitator**

British Columbia's education system is often referred to on a global stage as a 'world-class' or 'high-performing' system. Research from the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) tells us that the criteria for a high-performing system include the commonly held belief that education is worth the investment. There is a collective belief in developing talent in humans rather than sorting human talent, that a diversity of learners are welcomed and celebrated, that ambitious goals are set, and that teachers are encouraged to be innovative, creative, dynamic, and to pursue professional development that will ultimately improve their own practice. The best performing school systems provide high-quality education across their entire system, and student success is not defined merely by a postal code. Investment in the leadership in high-performing systems is key to student success.

Each year, throughout BC, school and district leadership candidates are interviewed and hired into

their respective districts. For some, the idea of going into administration has been an aspiration since the day they graduated from university. For others, the idea is one that came with encouragement from a mentor. However each person comes to the role, one of the first steps for many is to attend BCPVPA's Foundations for New School Leaders. This is a one week, intensive, and thought-provoking course where colleagues are provided essential nuggets that will help them to thrive – rather than simply survive – early administrative work.

I was fortunate to attend the program, previously named 'Short Course', as a new administrator. Over the years, I have also attended as a facilitator. Essentially, as the year wraps up, and before you can even really clean off your desk, one needs to quickly pack for a week away to live in the infamous Gage Towers, and to be on and focused from 8:00 am to when the wee hours of the evening begin to wane. One might wonder why you would ever sign up for this week after initially attending as a newbie: here's why.

As a new administrator, we often look for the tangibles that will help us get through the day-to-day minutiae



of running a school: how to set staff meeting agendas, how to organize regular assemblies or assign lockers, or how to inform parents of the 'stop, drop, and roll' parking expectations. Often, signing a personal services contract is confusing and intimidating. New administrators are getting their feet on the ground, excited and filled with the vigour of being a new school leader, and eager to get rolling.

What happens for a facilitator, however, is that the invaluable years of experience and insight become the scaffolding and guideposts for new colleagues. The years we spent navigating difficult conversations, the frameworks we use for ethical decision making, the breadth of our work including the successes and challenges, are the foundational elements that are shared with new administrators. We connect with those who are privileged to be in the role and help mentor them throughout this week, and often for years into their career. It is both a privilege and an honour to connect closely with the amazing talent we have in this

province, and to encourage them as they begin this amazing journey!

In the summer of 2022, Foundations was again held as a live program during the first week of July. Well over 200 participants – both facilitators and newbies – descended on the UBC Point Grey campus which sits on the traditional ancestral unceded territory of the xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam) People. Looking through the lens of equity, and guided by the phenom Dr. Mark Edwards and his team alongside the professional development team at BCPVPA, the week included opportunities to navigate topics such as relational, instructional, organizational, and ethical leadership as outlined in the BCPVPA Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals in British Columbia. It was also a time to make friends, reflect on our own practice, and connect with colleagues all over the province. It is an exhausting week, and one that I hope you might one day have a chance to attend!

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BCPVPA Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals in BC,
and explores what new school leaders need in their roles.

bcpvpa.org/professional-learning/registration



learning

“Time to meet, talk, and debrief
in our groups has been valuable.
My 'table family' will be a group
to connect with moving forward.
(Our facilitator) guides the conversation,
offers thoughts and ideas,
but his best attribute is that
with simple questions,
he is able to force us to dig
just a little deeper in our thinking.”

(BCPVPA Program Attendee)

Giving BACK

A Legacy of Teaching and Learning in Hartley Bay

A passion for education can often run in families. Parents influence their children, and siblings navigate parallel courses as educators. For the Hill family in Hartley Bay, a First Nations community that is part of the Tsimshian nation, about 90 miles south of Prince Rupert, educational leadership and a commitment to students and families in the community has deep roots.

Cameron Hill is the Principal of Hartley Bay Elementary Junior Secondary School in School District 52 (Prince Rupert). His wife Eva Ann teaches at the school, and they were both born and raised in Hartley Bay. As Cam describes, the community is remote. "Within the Tsimshian nation, there are seven distinct groups and we are one of those groups, the *Gitga'at* people. We have a population on our band list of just a shade under 1,000 people, but in our community here, we have a population of about 150 to 180, depending on the time of the year.

We're very isolated; we are only accessible by boat or by seaplane, and we have no roads coming into or out of the community. It can be difficult to get in by boat, even in what you would think of as the spring or summer, as there can be fog, wind and rain. My school and my students always measure the snowfall that happens in our community, because we're totally on boardwalks to get off of the muskeg. In a good year, we've had about seven to ten feet of snowfall, and in a very bad year, we've had in excess of 23 feet that we had to remove from our boardwalks so that we can get around safely, and for our emergency vehicles."

"We just love it here. Our people have inhabited this territory for thousands of years, and it's important for us to be able to connect with the land, the water, the air, and to live and flourish in this area. We go clam digging, hunting, or fishing in the traditional territories that we've been taught to harvest from. I believe that

"We just love it here. Our people have inhabited this territory for thousands of years, and it's important for us to be able to connect with the land, the water, the air, and to live and flourish in this area."

Cameron Hill, Principal, Hartley Bay Elementary Junior Secondary School, SD52 (Prince Rupert)

80% of the fun in doing something like that – the happiness that you gain from it – is just knowing that your ancestors did the exact same thing for so long, and you really feel at one with them.”

Cam originally became involved in the commercial fishing industry, the norm for young kids growing up in the community in the 70s and 80s, and was able to make a good living through the summer months. “I participated in the salmon fishery, both gill netting and seining, and in the herring fishery in the spring. I always say to people that after I graduated, I had no idea that when you went to university, you didn’t have to keep going through April, May, and June! I

was never without a job in the commercial sector. Somebody always wanted me to come and fish with them on their boats. I had some good teachings from my grandparents and my dad, so I was well versed on the water, and I used that money to put myself through school.” Cam was involved in welding, aquaculture, and commercial diving before his teacher training. But the continued downward spiral of the fishery necessitated a change in direction.

“To me, the writing was on the wall – I knew that I had to go back to school. I loved working with youth, and I thought I would take a stab at that. There’s something that I will never forget, when I



"In regard to myself and my home, I consider myself an avid harvester. I always live by the rules that my grandparents instilled in me, and I funnel that into our school. When I do a lot of on-the-water and on-the-land activities with my students, I'm reminded of something simple my grandmother would say: take what you need, but use what you take. That resonates with me, with whatever harvesting I do, whether it's salmon, shellfish, deer, or seals; if we live like that, and if the rest of the world would live like that, I think we'd be in a way better situation, globally. I think that there would be a lot of food to go around, I think there would be a lot of people

that would be looked after. And I really cringe when money is equated with food – if your reason for doing it is financial, I think we need to step back and reconfigure that, and rethink that process, because First Nations people have been living along this coastline for thousands of years and have always been able to look after themselves. So we, globally, need to really take a look at that and understand that, because I think First Nations People have a lot to offer. I don't know one First Nations community on this coast that isn't willing to share their expertise on how they got to be where they are."



was home following the herring season and my dad and I went to fish for prawns. We set our gear, and caught the prawns that we wanted, but within that prawn trap was this tiny little octopus. I took that octopus and kept it alive in its own little container, and I thought that I would bring it home to my mom who had a classroom of primary students. I took it to the classroom the next day, and the little thing was vibrant and swimming all over the place, and the kids were just enthralled. I guess it really was my first lesson in teaching, and that was when my mom said, why don't you become a teacher? And I answered, why – are you crazy? Look these primary kids, they're bouncing off the walls. I have to say, I think every primary teacher should be paid ten times whatever I get, because I don't know how they do it.

"This year we have about 36 kids in the school,

from K to 12. About 20 years ago, our hereditary leadership saw and understood that kids were leaving our school system in grade 9 or 10 to go to high school in the Prince Rupert area; at that time, the numbers in our school were dismal and it wasn't a good situation. You can also look back on the atrocities of the residential school system, and the lingering effects that has on families. We felt that the only way to try and make it more successful for our students was to continue up to grade 12 within our tiny community. It was a daunting task to begin with: education everywhere is always looking for more funding, and it's no different for us. I'll always say that I can teach anything, but am I the *best* at teaching it? No. There are certain areas where I excel. Then, there are other areas where I wish I could do a far better job, and I'll always keep on trying to make myself better in those subject areas.

"We felt that the only way to try and make it more successful for our students was to continue up to grade 12 within our tiny community. It was a daunting task to begin with: education everywhere is always looking for more funding, and it's no different for us. "



"Our school is a band-run school, but we also belong to the school district. We are very proud to be a part of FNSA (First Nations Schools Association) that provides help and support for us – especially at those higher academic learning platforms in grades 10, 11, and 12 – through something called Connected Classrooms. This is where they've recruited some of the best teachers that BC can offer in the areas of the academics, Math, English, and Science, and we get online with those teachers and other First Nations schools. For the first time in our history, I've had students take Physics 11 and Physics 12, and be successful. We are now offering the higher end math courses within the BC curriculum, like Pre-Calculus 12 which is as high as you can go. We have Chemistry 11 and Life Science 11, and Biology in grades 11 and 12, combined with the social studies, the sciences, English, English First Peoples 10, 11, and 12. We are so lucky to partake in those courses. And, at the end of the day, we have some very successful students coming out of those courses;

it opens up so many doors for them, whether they want to go into the trades, or whether they want to go to college, or right on to university. We've been very proud of our students and the effort that they've put in to achieve and take part in those courses.

"In talking about my family, I have to start off with my dad who was born and raised in Hartley Bay. His name was Ernie Hill, and he's known up and down the coast as "Goody", because his second name was Goodlett. At that time, when my grandparents were raising my dad and his siblings, the school system within Hartley Bay only went up until grade 8. And my grandparents and my great-grandparents understood the importance of education, and knew that that my dad and his siblings needed to further themselves, and to get to a place where they could continue their education. So, my grandparents moved them to the Prince Rupert area where they could achieve grade 12 status. It was a very difficult thing for them to do, because for anybody that is



"I laugh about this, but my dad was one of the very first hippies on the hill at Simon Fraser University; he was there right from its inception, and he chose to go there for its openness, and its welcome. "

born and raised in First Nations communities, the First Nations way of life is centered for you. It's hard to leave that. My dad always made sure that he was able to connect or reconnect, and come back to Hartley Bay all the time. He achieved his grade 12 graduation in Rupert, and through graduating there he met my mom. Her father was a doctor who was trained in the army, and his specialty was tuberculosis. We all know the effects of TB on so many people, but in particular for First Nations people; it was something that took a lot of lives and made a lot of people extremely sick and can still have those ill effects today. My mom's father worked to help First Nations people in the local communities as they grappled with the monster of TB. My dad

was working as a commercial fisherman, and put himself through university, along with his own dad. To me, that's just an extreme feat. I laugh about this, but my dad was one of the very first hippies on the hill at Simon Fraser University; he was there right from its inception, and he chose to go there for its openness, and its welcome. My dad felt part of the campus, and got his teaching degree there. I can't emphasize how much of a struggle it was for him to do that, to come from my tiny little community, to go to Rupert, and then go to the daunting Vancouver area. The fact that he did that prepared me, and helped me; he was never one to say, Cam, go be a teacher. He just always supported me in whatever I wanted to do.

"Hartley Bay is so tight knit. We joke that everybody knows everybody else's business, but I always look at it with a positive twist. My mother-in-law has been ill, and we brought her home. This illustrates what is at the core of Hartley Bay and the *Gitga'at* people, the caring that we all have for one another. There are so many visitors, so much love, so much baking, so much cooking. People are bending over backwards to help my wife and her family, to bring her mom home and to pass with family and loved ones around her. This is what we mean to one another. And educating our children, when we

have something like this happen in our community, that's what makes it so real and gratifying to me. My dad always said that in times like this, families are going through so much. I need to make sure that the school is open for the kids that are a part of that, so that they have some sense of normalcy during trying times. I always think about that because my staff tease me and say, you know our school has never been shut down for anything? And I say, that's right. I know. That's the way it's going to stay, because you need to make sure that our school is always open."

The Hills of Hartley Bay

(L to R) Cameron's sister Jodi Lynne Hill, who has her masters in teaching the hearing impaired; Cam's daughter Morgan Hill who has her teaching degree; Cam's son Max Hill who is doing his two-year course in Early Child Care Education; Cam's wife Eva Anne Hill who teaches at the school in Hartley Bay; Cam Hill, Principal; Cam's son-in-law Karl Fisher, and his first grandchild Evie; Cam's daughter Rachel who is an EA in the school. In the front is Cam's mom Lynne Hill who turns 80 this year, officially retired from teaching last year, and is someone Cam always goes to for guidance.

"My mom and dad moved back to Hartley Bay the year I was born – 1968 – and started to teach in our school. I can remember, as a little boy, waking up in the classroom that my mom and dad were going to be teaching in, and we would put all of our bedding away and get the day ready for the kids that were coming in to the school. We did that for about the first year and a half, and then we had a little teachers' cabin until my dad was able to start to build his own home in Hartley Bay. I guess you could really say that teaching is in my blood, sleeping with my sister in a little makeshift bed on the floor in the corner of the classroom. That really brings back fond memories and makes me think about how dedicated my mom and dad were to the teaching profession, and trying to give back to the community. That was his sole purpose: he was so rich for being a *Gitga'at* person, and for the teachings of this community. I've been extremely lucky to be raised by a community so loving as Hartley Bay, and to get guidance from our hereditary leaders. I'm just so lucky to be able to be a part of that.

"My dad was the Principal of the school, and my mom was a teacher. I lost my dad about seven years ago, he had a valiant battle with cancer. He refused to retire, he just wanted to keep on working. When he did retire at the age of 74 or 75, it was six months later he was diagnosed with cancer and it was an uphill battle. My mom continued to come to the school, she was very lonesome for my dad and wanted to do something that she loved, to still connect with

"I can remember, as a little boy, waking up in the classroom that my mom and dad were going to be teaching in, and we would put all of our bedding away and get the day ready for the kids that were coming in to the school. "

the kids. She stopped coming to school just last year, and she is just on the verge of turning 80. She had continued to teach, especially our English classes; she'd only come in the mornings and take the afternoons off, but she was really prominent in helping our students achieve their grade 10, 11, and 12 English marks and I really thank her for that.

"Once I was in the school, my dad would say, "You might want to think about being a Principal: I'm not going to be here all the time." So, I went away to SFU while I was working to achieve my masters. My mom and dad taught here, and myself and my wife teach here. It's really special, because I don't think there's anything more gratifying than teaching the grandchildren of people that I went to school with.

"I get up every morning just happy to go to work, and to be a part of the Hartley Bay school. It's such a boiling-over of emotions, to be able to help people that I care so much about, the families, and the interconnectedness." Cam acknowledges that he hasn't thought so much about the legacy of education that his family has created, but realizes that it is special, and unusual. That was reinforced when he saw the decisions that his own children were making about their careers and futures. "My daughter came to me and said she was thinking about becoming a teacher. And I said, what? Don't you see what I go through? Don't you want to go somewhere? Don't you want to make some money? And she said, you know it's not about money. It's about doing something that you love. I now have a daughter who has graduated from SFU – three generations of us who have gone to SFU – and she is a qualified teacher. My other daughter took her Education Assistant (EA) training, and she's already involved in our school and the education field. And my son is entering his second year of early childhood education. So the whole family is going down the road that I did.

"My grandmother was also a teacher, and my great-grandmother Violet Robinson was an incredible woman and one of the very high-ranking matriarchs

"It's about giving back to the community, but I think it's also the love of doing something – if you get up and you're going to work, and it's something that you *have* to do as compared to something that you *want* to do, that's a huge difference. And your life is just so much fuller when you feel like you're contributing in some way to a good cause. "

within our community here. She was involved in the medical profession, although she wasn't trained by any university; she was basically a midwife that would be called up and down the entire coast to deliver babies. She gave so much of herself to not only our community but to communities that are around us.

"It's about giving back to the community, but I think it's also the love of doing something – if you get up and you're going to work, and it's something that you *have* to do as compared to something that you *want* to do, that's a huge difference. And your life is just so much fuller when you feel like you're contributing in some way to a good cause. That's the way I look at it, and really, with what has happened to First Nations people across BC and across Canada, and the fight that we've had to go through just to preserve our identity; I need to make sure that that's in the school system for the *Gitga'at* people. I'm doing everything that I can to make sure that *Gitga'at* kids are proud of who they are, and where they come from; they're grounded. You have to know where you've come from to be able to figure out where you're going, and our kids need to understand that, that their identity as *Gitga'at* people is something to be proud of. Once that is established, it's an ongoing process, because although First Nations people have made strides, we still have a long way to go to preserve that. I need to make sure that that happens, but at the same time, I have to make sure that I'm preparing my kids for that big world that is outside of the confines of the *Gitga'at* territory that they've been born and raised

in. It's a huge world, and if I'm able to give them the tools to achieve higher education, and the work ethic to go out into the world and be a productive member of wherever it is that they're going to be, when they remember who they are and where they come from, they're going to go far. You always have to be ready to fight. Fight for me just rolls off my tongue, because we have to fight, we need to keep persevering and establishing that identity as something to be proud of. I see strides not only in what I'm able to achieve within my community and in my school, but I see strides with First Nations educators and learners all over the north and all over the province and all over Canada. We have some neighbors, whether it's within BC or Canada, that need help. Whenever we have a catastrophe in our community, or we have a death within our community, we have this saying that our canoe has capsized, it has turned over, and sometimes it's not just up to us to be the ones to right that canoe. Sometimes we have to depend on our neighbours. And I want all First Nations people, wherever they are, to realize just how important their identity is, and to be proud of it. I want to help not only the *Gitga'at* people, but I want to be an example for other First Nations communities, to say that we're all in this together and whatever I can do to help you, you just have to pick up the phone, go to a conference, go to a meeting, text me, talk to me, come visit us. We'll share what we're doing, and what we think is helping us, and by all means I'm sure that you have something to offer us that can help us too. It's reciprocated; we just have to keep striving and moving forward.



Advancing Reconciliation Through Education

BC's Indigenous-focused Graduation Requirement

by

Melanie Stewart

*Assistant Deputy Minister of the Learning and
Education Programs Division in the
Ministry of Education and Child Care*

and

Connor Morris

*Senior Manager, Education Policy at the
First Nations Education Steering Committee*

BC is about to become the first jurisdiction in Canada to take a ground-breaking step forward for truth, reconciliation, and anti-racism.

Beginning in the 2023/24 school year, all secondary students working toward a Dogwood Diploma will be required to complete four credits of Indigenous-focused coursework to graduate.

This change to BC's Graduation Program is part of the Action Plan for the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, and builds on the K-12 sector's efforts to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into the provincial curriculum, educator professional development, and professional standards for BC teachers. The Indigenous-focused graduation requirement will provide students with the time and opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences, cultures, and histories of Indigenous peoples in Canada, and directly supports the K-12 sector's mandate to develop the Educated Citizen.



Students and parents may want to know what the implications of this change will be for student workloads and post-secondary admissions. The new graduation requirement will not be accompanied by an increase to the total number of credits required for graduation, which will remain at 80. In addition, some of the eligible provincial courses will be able to meet multiple graduation requirements. For example, English First Peoples 12 would meet both the Language Arts 12 requirement as well as the new Indigenous-focused requirement.



Flexibility and choice are integral features of the new requirement, with students having different options for earning Indigenous-focused graduation credits. These include completing existing provincial courses (e.g. English First Peoples 10-12, BC First Peoples 12), locally developed Board/Authority Authorized (BAA) Courses, or First Nations language courses at the Grade 10-12 level. Criteria for BAA courses to meet the requirement and a full list of eligible provincial and First Nations language courses can be found online.

"Flexibility and choice are integral features of the new requirement, with students having different options for earning Indigenous-focused graduation credits."

The provincial courses themselves explore the diversity of Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit), cultures, histories, contemporary contexts, and worldviews with a primary focus within BC. These courses are academically rigorous, being equivalent to the English Language Arts and Social Studies curricula in terms of competency development and meeting post-secondary admission requirements. The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) has also developed comprehensive teacher resource guides for English First Peoples 10-12 and BC First Peoples 12 to support educators in delivering the courses respectfully and effectively.

So, what's next? Leading up to the launch of the new requirement, the Ministry of Education and Child Care and FNESC are working with the BC School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) and the Federation for Independent Schools Association (FISA) to provide regional workshops for educators designed to support implementation of some of the provincial course options. The FNESC-facilitated workshops will support educators in bringing authentic Indigenous resources into BC classrooms, and will be offered across BC over the 2022/23 school year.

The Ministry's Indigenous-focused Graduation Requirement web page (*QR code on previous page*) also contains a number of resources for school administrators, including an Implementation

Handbook, Q&A document, and a presentation that can be used to support conversations with staff, students, and parents. Questions and requests for assistance can also be directed to the Ministry at gradrequirements@gov.bc.ca.



Indigenous-
focused Graduation
Requirement:
Implementation
Handbook

The introduction of an Indigenous-focused graduation requirement has been many years in the making. Several organizations, including the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC), FNESC, British Columbia School Trustees' Association (BCSTA), the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), and the BC Association of Institutes and Universities (BCAIU) have expressed formal support for this change to BC's graduation program. By taking this important step, BC will be enhancing the cultural competency of future generations and setting an example for the rest of the country of what lasting and meaningful reconciliation can look like.

"By taking this important step, BC will be enhancing the cultural competency of future generations and setting an example for the rest of the country of what lasting and meaningful reconciliation can look like."



Transparent

Social

Passionate

Proactive

Loyal

Flexible

Empathetic

Listeners

Ethical

Motivated

Creative

Disciplined

Responsible

Resourceful

Authentic

Optimistic

Curious

Fun

Confident

Intuitive

Consistent

Smart

Focused

Strategic

Accountable

Compassionate

Patient

Courageous

Decisive

Understanding

Honest

Respectful

Learners

Organized

Bold

Engaged

Competent

Teachers

Energized

Fair

Joyful

Inspired

LEADERS



bcp  vpa

A WARM WELCOME

The Important Role of Administrators in Practicum Placements

Representatives from the University of British Columbia's (UBC's) Teacher Education Program attended the BCPVPA Connecting Leaders Conference in Victoria on October 21, 2022. They appreciated the opportunity to engage with Principals, Vice-Principals, district leaders, and BCPVPA executive members about issues related to teacher education in BC. The acute need for qualified teachers in schools and communities was a common

point of conversation, so many educators were keen to learn more about UBC's practicum and field experience opportunities.

UBC has the largest and most comprehensive teacher education program in British Columbia, and has partnerships around the province where the University and schools work together to prepare outstanding future educators. UBC teacher candidates



by

Cynthia Clerc

*Program Manager, Practicum and Field Experience (Secondary)
Faculty of Education, Teacher Education Office, UBC*

have opportunities for practicum placements and Community Field Experiences in all parts of British Columbia and, once certified, BEd graduates are qualified to apply for certification to teach in K-12 schools anywhere in the province.

School administrators play important roles in the coordination of practicum placements with university program managers, and in supporting practicum experiences of teacher candidates. Placement decisions are made by the practicum program manager in collaboration with school administrators. Each spring, UBC reaches out to administrative practicum contacts to request recommendations of experienced teachers to serve as UBC school advisors. Many teachers express an interest in participating in this rewarding experience. Administrators also 'shoulder tap' potential school advisors who they consider to be open to inquiry-based learning, and who are interested in co-planning, co-teaching, and co-learning. These dedicated teachers not only contribute to the profession by engaging with future educators, they also enrich their own professional

development.

Elementary and middle years teacher candidates are typically assigned to a particular geographic area(s) for the practicum, based on their selected cohort. Secondary teacher candidates request two geographic areas or school districts for their placements, and every effort is made to arrange practicum placements based on these submissions.

The teaching practicum is an exciting part of the Bachelor of Education program because it is the time when teacher candidates put theory into practice alongside their experienced school advisor(s). The first point of contact with the school community is often a warm welcome by the administrative team. Many leaders use this time to review health and safety protocols, and to offer a school tour. Teacher candidates are gaining important insights about the philosophy and culture of the school right from this initial reception, and Principals, Vice-Principals, and district leadership teams encourage teacher candidates to be contributing members of their school community. Administrators might encourage teacher



candidates to participate in extra-curricular events or include them in professional development sessions.

The fall orientation practicum provides teacher candidates opportunities to first observe and then to gradually engage in leading teaching activities through weekly one-day visits and a two-week practicum early in the school year. The focus for teacher candidates is on cultivating professional relationships and understandings toward teaching, learning, inquiry, and reflection. Through these experiences, teacher candidates learn first-hand how teaching is enacted and how learning occurs in classrooms.

After this acclimatization period, the focus shifts to meeting the challenges of an increased teaching load and added responsibilities. The school placements for the orientation practicum usually become the settings for the longer certifying practicum. The ten-week, extended practicum provides teacher candidates with opportunities to demonstrate that they are capable of assuming the responsibilities expected of a beginning teacher.

Upon completion of the certifying practicum, UBC teacher candidates also participate in a three-week Community Field Experience. The key purpose of the Community Field Experience is for teacher candidates to experience teaching and learning in a new context that provides a more holistic view of teaching and enhances the teacher candidate's formal teaching experience. Teacher candidates are matched with



Community Field Experience

community partners or school-based partners in provincial, national, and international sites.

UBC teacher candidates complete their teacher education journey through one of the following program options:

Elementary & Middle Years

Teacher candidates learn to teach all subject areas in the elementary curriculum: Kindergarten to Grade 7. While the particular theme or approach varies in each cohort, the courses are the same for all teacher candidates, with each cohort and instructor tailoring the courses in unique ways. The Middle Years cohort emphasizes teaching students in Grades 6 to 8 (ages 11 to 14 years).

Secondary

Teacher candidates in the secondary program option are grouped according to their teachable subjects (e.g., Math, English, Physical Education) and practicum placements are arranged within the appropriate subject area(s). During the BEd program, teacher candidates are introduced to adolescent development, and prepared methodologically to teach their subject(s).

Technology Teacher Education (TTED)

The Technology Teacher Education (TTED) program prepares teacher candidates to teach technology education in BC's middle and high school system. Offered as a joint program with UBC and the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), this program explores the technical components at BCIT and the teaching component at UBC.

French Specialization

Options are available for teacher candidates wishing to pursue French language teaching opportunities in Core French, Intensive French, French Immersion, or French as a first language. Placements are at elementary, middle, and secondary schools.

WKTEP

West Kootenay Rural Teacher Education Program

The West Kootenay Rural Teacher Education Program (WKTEP) is a rural education option for elementary and secondary years located in Nelson, BC. WKTEP practicum placements are hosted by four main school

districts: SD8 (Kootenay Lake), SD10 (Arrow Lakes), SD20 (Kootenay-Columbia), and SD51 (Boundary), as well as many other rural BC public school districts upon request.

Rural and Remote Program

The rural and remote program is a new two-year blended teacher education program offered by the Faculty of Education at UBC. The first of its kind in BC, this program focuses on the elementary & middle years option of the UBC Bachelor of Education program. Participants have the opportunity to complete their studies in both face-to-face and online platforms, allowing them to stay in their home communities for the majority of this program. All practica experiences are in rural and remote areas of British Columbia.

International Baccalaureate (IB)

UBC is Canada's first IB-recognized teacher education institution. Teacher candidates admitted to our IB programs will be eligible for both BC and IB certification at the completion of their programs

Teacher candidates selecting the Primary Years

Programme (IB-PYP) cohort have an interest in international education that is student-centred and inquiry-driven for students in Kindergarten through Grade 5.

Secondary teacher candidates have the opportunity to be a part of the International Baccalaureate Educator Stream within their chosen subject(s). Teacher candidates in International Baccalaureate Education (Middle Years Programme and Diploma Programme) have an interest in international education that is concept-based and inquiry-driven.

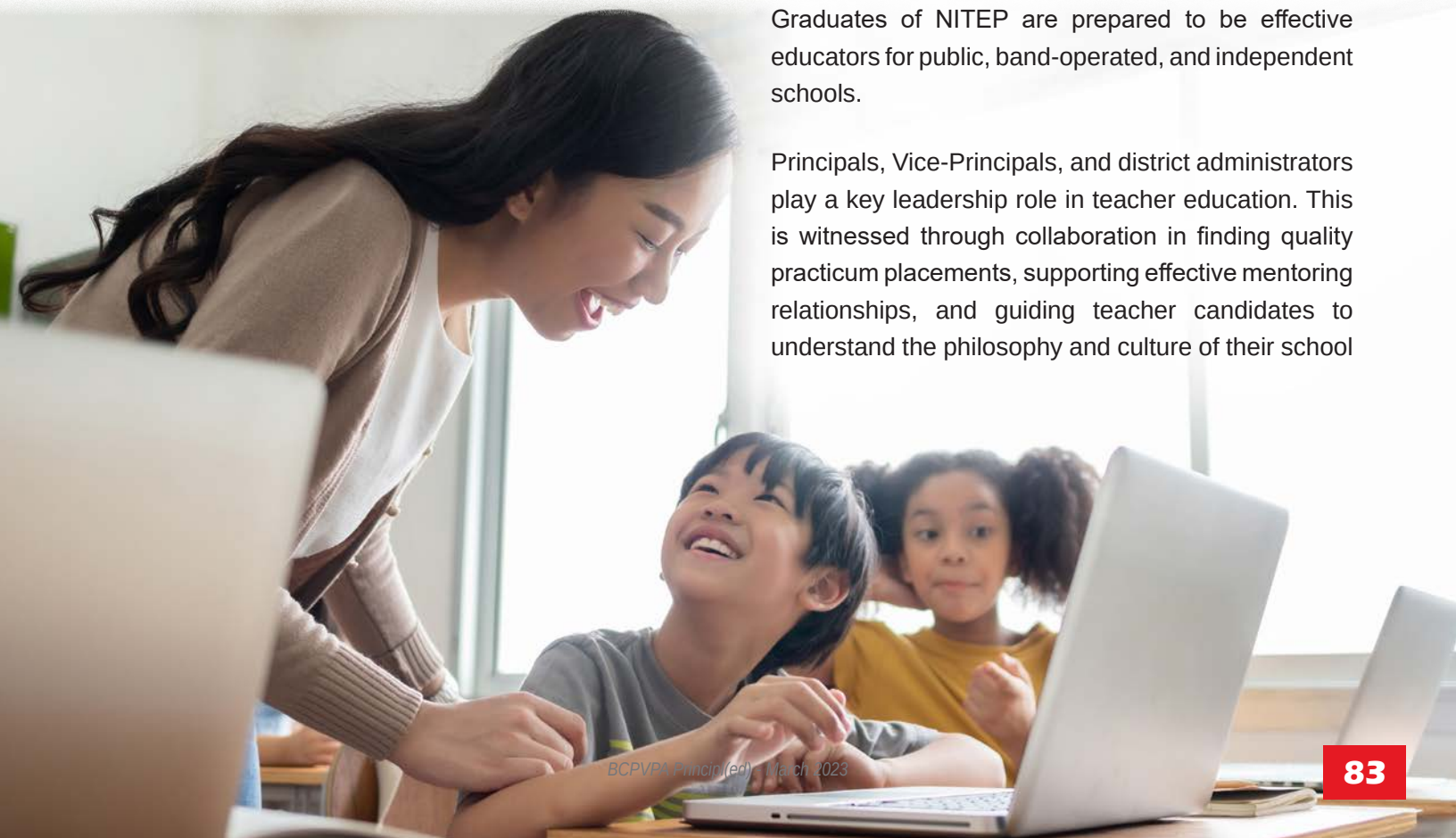
Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, & Decolonization (EDI-D) Cohort

The newly developed EDI-D secondary cohort supports and inspires teacher candidates – and the students and mentors they work with – to explore, develop, and deepen curricular and pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning within the particular lenses of equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization.

Indigenous Teacher Education Program (NITEP)

NITEP is a cohort model with courses and curricula enhanced through Indigenous perspectives. Graduates of NITEP are prepared to be effective educators for public, band-operated, and independent schools.

Principals, Vice-Principals, and district administrators play a key leadership role in teacher education. This is witnessed through collaboration in finding quality practicum placements, supporting effective mentoring relationships, and guiding teacher candidates to understand the philosophy and culture of their school



support

The BCPVPA is all about people, and making sure that our members are successful and supported in the important work they do.

Our Member Support Services team is here for members who have questions about their employment relationships, their contracts, their pensions and retirement plans, and their health and well-being.

The BCPVPA offers support and advocacy to more than 2,600 Principals and Vice-Principals in BC's public education system.

bcpvpa.org

bcpvpa

TAKE 3

With the Spring season right around the corner, and days growing longer, we find ourselves drawn to be more active. Here are three ideas to help invigorate your wellness focus, and motivation to embrace the dawning of Spring.

by

Jack MacNeill

*MEd (Coun.Psych.), RCC, CVRP, RRP
President, humanworks*

Salutations

Springtime often represents rebirth and new beginnings. Coming out of our winter ways and habits, the increased daylight and early new growth in nature can cue us to adjust our intentions, reflecting the changes of the season. Spend time in the morning reflecting on what this time of year means to you and what you need to alter in your day-to-day practice to harness the energy of spring. Many enjoy starting their day with sun salutations at this time of year to reflect the changes of the seasons. This 15-minute morning ritual can help set the tone for how you orientate yourself to your daily interactions with others, and it provides a great means to generate gratitude in a consistent and comforting way.

Connection

With the days becoming longer, temperatures slowly rising, and buds growing, spring offers us an opportunity to come out of our winter doldrums. For many, creating a wellness plan over spring break offers a chance to become more active and to be outdoors during the last stretch of the school year.

Partner up with a colleague, partner, or community friend and establish a twelve-week plan to enhance your physical activity outdoors. It's always inspiring and motivating to be outdoors as our local environments start the process of renewal and growth. Get moving outdoors and spring ahead with the season at hand. Seek more human contact and reduce your screen time on all devices and means. Find the joy and wonder of human interaction in a deliberate and active way.

Renewal

With the longer days, we are drawn towards movement and rejuvenation. Take some time over the break to identify what you need to do for yourself as you prepare for the final stretch of the year. This is the time for action, and accessing the resources that you need to make your health needs a priority. Reflect on what small micro goals you can set for yourself to help navigate the next few months. Remember, as James Clear recommends in his book *Atomic Habits*, most people benefit more from consistency of behaviour over intensity of behaviour. Identify a few things you can do differently, consistently, for the latter part of the year to make your health a priority. Keep it simple and consistent.

empathy



by
Rochelle Morandini
Director, Member Health and Well-being, BCPVPA

A Positive Force We Need to Manage

The Power of Empathy

Empathy is the ability to emotionally understand what other people feel: to be able to see things from their point of view and imagine yourself in their place, feeling what they are feeling. Empathy means that when you see another person suffering, you can instantly envision the experience, and feel what they are going through.

For many of you, empathy is natural; it may even be so strong that you feel overwhelmed by the emotions of others.

For some of you, it may not come as easily, and requires intent and effort.

Read any article these days on the qualities of a successful leader, and you are bound to come across the concept of Emotional Intelligence – or EQ, Emotional Quotient – that includes empathy as one of its five pillars. Great leaders that demonstrate empathy with their staff build better social connections, provide supportive coaching, promote healthy behaviours, help the team self-regulate, and build trust.

There are three types of empathy:

- **Affective empathy**

The ability to understand another person's emotions and respond appropriately. This may lead to a feeling of concern for another's well-being, or it may lead to feelings of personal distress.

- **Somatic empathy**

Having a physical reaction in response to what someone else is experiencing. When you see someone else feeling embarrassed, for example, you might start to blush or have an upset stomach.

- **Cognitive empathy**

Being able to understand another person's mental state and what they might be thinking in response to a situation.

The Value of Empathy for Leaders

The September 2021 Forbes article "Empathy is the Most Important Leadership Skill According to Research" states that empathy is important in cultivating positive relationships, but is also important for everything from innovation to retention in the workplace.



The article goes on to say that demonstrating empathy, particularly when our staff or people in our community struggle, can have constructive effects such as:

- Enhanced innovation on the part of staff
- Increased staff engagement
- Retention of valued staff
- A feeling that the workplace is inclusive
- A better ability to manage work-/life blending
- An increase in team cooperation
- Better mental health and team resilience

Empathy really comes down to showing care and paying attention, and can be demonstrated through checking in with our staff, asking questions, and being responsive to cues as to how much an individual wants to share. Understanding an individual's perspective and emotions helps a leader be more compassionate, and helps action steps to move forward.

“Leadership is about empathy. It is about having the ability to relate to and connect with people for the purpose of inspiring and empowering their lives.”

Oprah Winfrey

Empathy Starts in the Mirror

What if you find demonstrating empathy difficult: does that mean you should not be a leader? Of course not! It does, however, require you to be particularly self-aware, and provides an opportunity to develop a

skill that enhances your ability to better connect with those around you.

A few years ago, I taught a leadership course on strengthening coping skills and enhancing EQ and empathy. I asked my PhD colleague at the time, “How does someone learn empathy, if this is not a strength?” His answer was that the first step is to learn self-empathy.

When you are feeling challenged and misunderstood yourself, empathizing with someone else is difficult. Without an awareness of your own experience, and your emotional and mental state, how do you know that you are not just projecting your own self upon others?

Self-empathy is not the same as self-compassion. Self-compassion involves treating yourself with the same care, kindness, and support you would show to a good friend. Self-empathy means you observe yourself and your situation, in an empathic manner, and feel and understand what you are experiencing. It requires that you notice and recognize what is happening within you, undertaken with an attitude of suspended judgment and openness towards yourself.

If you still find developing or practicing self-empathy to be challenging or painful, reach out to a professional. There may be psychological ‘blocks’ as to why you struggle with empathy, and a counsellor may be able to help with a release.

The Health Impact of ‘Too Much Empathy’

Vice-Principals and Principals are expected to demonstrate empathy, to understand the experiences of others, and to validate emotions. After all, we are good leaders, and therefore more empathy is better... right?

Empathizing with students, their families, and other community groups is an important and valuable

part of the role of a school leader in supporting the well-being of others. *But, can too much empathy negatively impact your own health?*

Those who are very empathetic – a common trait within our membership – can feel overwhelmed, burned out, or even overstimulated from always thinking about other people's emotions. This can lead to empathy fatigue.

Empathy fatigue refers to the exhaustion you might feel – both emotionally and physically – after being repeatedly exposed to stressful or traumatic events. You may begin to feel numb or powerless, seek ways to isolate yourself, and feel a complete lack of energy. Empathy fatigue is a concern in certain situations where we can't manage the depth of our feelings of empathy (affective empathy, in particular), which can result in compassion fatigue.

Compassion fatigue is a term that describes the physical, emotional, and psychological impact of helping others, often through experiences of stress or trauma. Common compassion fatigue triggers that align with our roles as school leaders include:

- Being physically or verbally threatened when providing care and support
- Being confronted by suicide, or threats of suicide, by someone under your care
- Providing support to others experiencing extreme stress, trauma, or depression
- Specializing in providing care for those experiencing death, grief, bereavement, or mourning
- Providing care under a heavy workload, excessive demands, or long hours
- Providing service that requires you to visit accident scenes, or deal with evidence or reports of trauma



Compassion fatigue is often mistaken for burnout, which is a cumulative sense of fatigue or dissatisfaction. *This form of fatigue is sometimes called a secondary stress reaction, second-hand shock, secondary traumatic stress, or vicarious trauma; this is largely due to compassion fatigue's link to those in professional roles such as Principals and Vice-Principals that are regularly placed in stressful situations dealing with the trauma of others.*

Over time, both empathy fatigue and compassion fatigue can lead to physical and mental symptoms, including:

- Feeling overwhelmed, questioning, *"What's the point?"*
- Mood swings, with drastic shifts in mood, pessimism, and irritability
- Withdrawal from social connections
- Blaming oneself for failures and the pain of others, a feeling that, *"If I had done more, this wouldn't have happened."*
- Feeling detached and unable to identify with others, a feeling of, *"Why should I care anymore?"*
- Reduced empathy, and an inability to react to bad news or support others; a feeling that, *"I can't deal with this right now."*

- Ruminating (dwelling on) negative thoughts or feelings; a recognition that, *“I can’t stand feeling like this.”*
- Addiction, particularly self medication
- Anxiety and depression
- Trouble being productive, feeling challenged to concentrate, experiencing memory issues
- Insomnia
- Exhaustion, fatigue
- Appetite changes and digestive issues
- Nausea, dizziness, headaches, fatigue, insomnia, and mental exhaustion
- Lack of pleasure in activities that were previously enjoyable
- Lack of participation in – or even avoidance of – work
- Hypersensitivity to perceived criticism

Managing Your Empathy

We bring many strengths to our role, but over-extending these strengths – such as perfectionism – can be detrimental to our health.

How can you protect yourself from emotional distress and create separation from the suffering student or family member without becoming indifferent to that person? How can you nurture empathic concern and better navigate empathic distress? Here are some strategies.

• Set Emotional Boundaries

Setting emotional boundaries helps you to maintain a connection while still remembering and honouring

the fact that you are a separate person with your own needs.

Allowing for a form of detachment from those we aid does help us manage our empathy. For example, those who operate from a position of empathic concern, with its focus on others, can encourage us in relieving another person’s suffering. When you experience empathic concern, you are not necessarily sharing the same painful feelings as the other person – their sadness, or their fear. In fact, you may be quite aware that you are distinct and different from the person who is suffering.

• Check in with Yourself

You see the fearful child in your classroom overwhelmed by her emotions. Your heart is across the room with her, and you’re at a loss, emotionally. In this state, it is hard to help her.

When you notice yourself feeling distressed by someone else’s struggle, it is worth pausing, taking a breath, and asking yourself what you are feeling. What do you need right now? When and how might you respond to this child? Those of us in the helping professions need to foster this level of conscious self-awareness on a regular basis. It is important to assess your needs before moving forward to help others, and to ask, “Do I have what I need to move forward? Have I taken a deep breath and sensed my feet on the ground? Am I calm, composed, and able to respond thoughtfully?” Otherwise, you may perpetuate feelings of distress.

Taking short breaks throughout the day to close your eyes, focus on your breath, or put your hands on your heart and send yourself some compassion can all make a big difference.

• Question Your Thoughts And Feelings

When navigating feelings of distress that are hopelessly intertwined with thoughts and behaviours, consider changing your interpretation of a situation or



event. This may help to lessen the emotional and physical feelings of anxiety. If you are empathizing with a child or staff member experiencing pain – or feeling frustration, fear, or sadness – consider the following questions, either in the moment or at the end of the day:

- What is the situation that triggered me?
- What am I thinking or imagining?
- What does this thought make me feel?
- What makes me think the thought is true or accurate?
- What makes me think the thought is not true or, at least, not completely true?
- Is there another way to look at this? If so, what is it?
- Is there an action I might choose to take right now?

By regularly questioning your thinking in a structured way, you can begin to shift your perspective, tone down feelings of distress, and ultimately respond more thoughtfully to your students and colleagues.

- **Nurture a Concerned, Compassionate Response**

Research shows that regular mindfulness meditation enhances our ability to respond compassionately to the distress of other people. There is specialized compassion meditation which often features a 'loving-kindness' meditation, where you extend feelings of warmth and care toward yourself, a close person, a neutral person, a person in difficulty, and a complete stranger.

- **Engage in Outside Hobbies**

When all your time is spent working or thinking about work, it can be easy to burn out. Making time for leisure activities and personal hobbies outside of work can help lower stress levels and improve overall life satisfaction.

- **Cultivate Healthy Friendships Outside of Work**

While it is great to have strong relationships with your co-workers, it is equally important to cultivate and maintain healthy relationships outside of work. It can sometimes be difficult for co-workers to avoid talking about work even outside the workplace. *(And recognizing that many of our members are married to other school leaders or teachers – this is important to note!)* Connecting with friends who are not aware of the ins and outs of your work situation can provide you with much-needed emotional and professional relief.

- **Use Positive Coping Strategies**

Put down the wine glass and make a list of positive coping strategies, including deep breathing, meditation, taking a walk, talking with a friend, watching a funny movie, or relaxing in a hot bath.

- **Self-Care**

Self-care is so important: eating well, staying hydrated, getting enough sleep and exercise, and practicing meditation. This cannot go by the wayside, which is often the case for those caring for others. Self-care is imperative for your own fortitude and resilience.

And, finally:

- **Seek Personal Therapy**

A therapist can help you process your feelings and implement strategies to help you combat the empathy fatigue and maintain a better life balance.

Takeaways

Empathy is a valuable leadership skill, and benefits you and those around you. Through self-awareness and self-compassion, you can further evolve your ability to be empathetic. Practice good self management, and do regular check-ins to side-step taking on the stress, emotions, and trauma of others, and causing harm to your own health. By practicing the setting of boundaries, self-care, and positive coping strategies, you can mitigate compassion fatigue and continue to be a great school leader!

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"All the topics were perfect! The forum came at a great time, during a very busy and stressful time of the year. It gave me the opportunity to take a step back and reflect on our practices. Most importantly, it re-energized me and I am ready to face the rest of the school year."

(Member Event Feedback)



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The Last Word



Throughout my career as a teacher and leader, I worked primarily in middle schools.

However, when I first became a Principal, I found myself leading an elementary school despite having no previous experience as an elementary teacher. My only exposure to elementary teaching was a brief stint subbing for a kindergarten class as a TTOC (Teacher Teaching On-Call) one afternoon. It was a disastrous experience that my colleagues still tease me about today.

As is true for any Principal, I was responsible for overseeing all aspects of the school and ensuring high levels of academic achievement for all students. This was a challenging task, as I had little understanding of how to create successful learning environments for primary and intermediate aged students, and no personal experience as an elementary teacher. I felt hesitant to ask the kindergarten teachers to share their literacy programs with me, as I lacked the context that a kindergarten teacher needs to fully comprehend the approach and its effectiveness.

This past fall, I enrolled in the Organizational Coaching Program at the University of British Columbia. Unfortunately, life has gotten in the way, and for now my participation in the program is on hold. However, what I have experienced in the program so far has led me to wish that



Cultivating Coaching Conversations

I understood the power and impact of coaching conversations when working as an elementary Principal all those years ago. I believe that incorporating coaching strategies into my leadership could have helped me to better support and guide teachers, ultimately leading to better outcomes for our students.

One of the main reasons I was drawn to UBC's coaching program was because I wanted to develop and enhance the BCPVPA's Mentoring Program. For more than five years, the BCPVPA has trained mentors to work with our newer members early in their careers. While the program has been successful, I have often wondered if we could improve the program by adding more elements of coaching.

Mentoring and coaching are both forms of development in which an experienced individual helps

another person to grow and improve. However, they differ in a few key ways.

Mentoring is a long-term relationship in which the mentor provides guidance, support, and advice to the mentee over an extended period. Coaching, on the other hand, is more focused on specific goals and is often more short-term. A coach works with the individual to help them develop the skills and knowledge they need to achieve a specific objective. Coaching tends to be more action-oriented and goal-focused, and the coach helps the individual to develop a plan of action to achieve their goals.

All those years ago, it would have been quite presumptuous of me, as a 'fish out of water' Principal, to approach our kindergarten teachers to share with me their strategies for developing emerging literacy skills in their students. My own



lack of experience and understanding of the context for our earliest learners would have been sadly on display. However, if I had taken more of a coaching approach to the process and conversations, I wonder if I could have offered a more positive influence.

Coaching conversations between Principals and teachers could foster an effective way to support teacher development and improve student learning outcomes. To structure these conversations effectively, Principals could consider the following tips:

1. Set clear goals and expectations: In

advance of the conversation, it is important for the Principal to have a clear understanding of the goals and expectations for the coaching conversation. This could include desired outcomes, or next steps for the teacher.

2. Create a safe and supportive environment:

Coaching conversations should be conducted in a safe and supportive environment where teachers feel comfortable and empowered to share their thoughts and ideas. This may involve creating a confidential space, setting ground rules for the conversation, and using positive and non-judgmental language.

3. Use open-ended questions: Open-ended questions can be a powerful tool for guiding a coaching conversation. They encourage teachers to think critically about their practice and to share their thoughts and ideas.

4. Focus on the teacher's strengths: While coaching conversations may address areas for improvement, it is important to also focus on the teacher's strengths and successes. This can help to build teacher confidence and motivation.



5. Use active listening: Active listening involves fully engaging with the teacher and showing interest in their perspective. This can involve restating or summarizing what the teacher has said, asking follow-up questions, and avoiding distractions.

6. Provide actionable feedback: Feedback should be specific, objective, and actionable. It should focus on the teacher's behaviours and practices, rather than their personal characteristics.

7. Follow up: After the coaching conversation, it is important for the Principal to follow up with the teacher to check on their progress and provide additional support as needed. This may involve setting up additional coaching sessions, or providing resources or other support.

In one of my sessions with a mentor coach through UBC's program, I was struck by his perspective that the coach's 'dumbness' can actually be a superpower. While I was concerned about my lack of knowledge of the kindergarten curriculum and the learning needs of our youngest students, my mentor-coach would suggest that the lack of knowledge and understanding can free the coach from any bias or assumptions. Focusing on open-ended questions as opposed to content specific questions could also encourage a more effective coaching conversation to help assist the teacher's development.

Below are a few examples of coaching questions that Principals could use, and I am sure that you will have great examples of your own:

1. What is most important to you in your teaching right now?
2. What do you see as your biggest challenges or obstacles in your teaching?
3. How do you envision your teaching evolving over the next year or two?
4. What are your goals for your teaching, and how can I support you in achieving them?
5. What resources or support do you need to help you achieve your goals?
6. What small steps can you take to move towards your goals?

7. How can you celebrate your progress and accomplishments along the way?

8. What are some strategies you have used in the past that have been successful for you?

9. What might you try differently in the future to achieve your goals?

10. How can we work together to create a supportive and empowering environment for your students, and your development as a teacher?

While I still have a great deal to learn about coaching, I can see the potential for school leaders to use coaching tools to help build a positive and supportive school culture, as coaching can promote a collaborative and growth-oriented approach to professional development. Overall, coaching tools can be a powerful means for Principals to support the development and growth of their teachers, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes.

Kevin Reimer is the Executive Director of the BCPVPA, a previous Director of the Board and served as President 2016-2018.

Share your proven approaches to coaching conversations, and your own examples of coaching questions that have supported teacher development.

What kind of feedback have you received, and what have you noticed?



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