



Monday July 1 - Friday July 5, 2024

Foundations is essential learning for leaders new to the role of Vice-Principal or Principal. Presented in collaboration with the UBC Faculty of Education, Foundations explores what new school leaders need in their roles.

As we prepare to welcome the class of 2024 in July, we asked some Foundations alumni to share their memories about this pivotal learning and leadership experience.





BETH PEDDLE

Vice-Principal/Directrice adjointe

École Robb Road Elementary

Coordinatrice des programmes de français

SD 71 (Comox Valley)



Nothing could have truly prepared me for my first job as a Vice-Principal. Nothing can adequately summarize the reality of transitioning from a calm summer beach walk to 500 people suddenly looking to me (and our fantastic Principal!) for guidance, modeling, and support, in what is undoubtedly the most chaotic time of year. Nothing could have truly equipped me for the range of emotions, the hundreds of decisions each day, or the pure number of 'to do' lists I went through in just the first two weeks of being back at school.

Thankfully, while many parts of being a Vice-Principal require a scaffold-free leap of faith, the BCPVPA Foundations for New School Leaders program indeed laid the foundations on which I could stand and be supported as I stepped into this new role. Three invaluable takeaways stand out from this amazing experience.

My first highlight was that the ideas brought forward for discussion and self-reflection by Carolyn Roberts and Dr. Dustin Louie helped to deepen my understanding of reconciliation in our school system, and to conceptualize steps to move not only our classroom practices, but also our school cultures, towards indigenization and decolonization. Both speakers combined theoretical explorations with a brainstorming of practical strategies that I brought back to my school's start up, focusing on opening the year in a relational way.

A second highlight came from the concrete lessons taught by the case study sessions. In groups with new leaders from across the province, we explored scenarios relating to staffing, reporting, unions, complex students, graduation requirements, media influence, conflicts of interest, and much more. The cases gave me a first look into many of the issues that are navigated and solved 'behind closed doors'—discussions to which we have little exposure before joining the leadership team. Our mixed groupings also highlighted how our realities are so diverse — urban/rural, elementary/secondary, big/small admin teams — yet with so many common elements forming the foundations upon which we make decisions.

Finally, the most invaluable takeaway from Foundations was the network of colleagues that I can call when I am looking for clarification, motivation, solidarity, or just reassurance that I am not the only person who had a day like that. I am grateful that my school district supported seven of us in attending Foundations 2023. The opportunity to connect, learn, and network on the beautiful UBC campus with new colleagues from my district and across the province hatched a camaraderie that a year's worth of district leadership team-building activities could not have created.

Reflecting back on the months since the Foundations course, I am struck by the memory of trying to prepare for the unknown. Our roles as school leaders are ever-evolving — we are beacons of school culture whose calendars are overflowing with a countless stream of 'other required duties'. As a school leader, there is no way to be fully prepared for the unknowns of the day to come... but participating in the Foundations course gave me the perspectives, resources, and connections to be a solid support structure for the hundreds of people who rely on us!



L to R: Corinne Kinnon, Beth Peddle, Alex Sabell, Jennifer Rehman, Ursula Wei
at Foundations 2023



SUZI MCCLELLAND

Acting Vice-Principal & Grade 5 Teacher
McMillan Elementary School
Abbotsford School District



L to R: Sergio Chiappetta, Suzi McClelland, Janet Beattie, Teresa Seo, Danielle Griffiths

When asked what I learned at the BCPVPA 2023 Foundations for New School Leaders program, the answer may seem incongruous: I learned the same big ideas that are taught in kindergarten.

Curiosity and wonder lead us to new discoveries about ourselves and the [schools] around us.

Everyone has a unique story to share.¹

Yet, it's not at all incongruous. It is exactly what I needed to learn, taught through the lens of leadership (although learning through a play-based lens would have been engaging, too!) During the week, these curiosities, wonders, and stories were discovered in meaningful discussions with new friend-colleagues, and from the wisdom of the Director of NITEP, the Indigenous Teacher Education Program, an Assistant Superintendent, and other guest speakers.

¹ https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/curriculum/english-language-arts/en_english-language-arts_k-9.pdf

Shifting from a district support teaching role into a Vice-Principal position is a rather curious thing. How do I *do all the things*? Or, in ‘Edspeak’, how do I build my competencies and capacities? I have so many more curiosities and wonders than I expected, because there has been a shift in my thinking, most notably in who I am as a leader. I want to be authentic. I don’t want to follow the mantra of leadership podcasts that suggest I ‘fake it until I make it’. I don’t want imposter syndrome. And here is where the Foundations course comes in to play.

While each speaker shared their incredible stories, I listed my personal epiphanies in my little red BCPVPA notebook, and simultaneously did a slow head nod with colleagues at Table 11². When we met in groups and shared our perspectives and ideas on a topic, I jotted notes and shared, “same here,” and, “I’m going to try this,” responses. The desire to discover our leadership strengths – a medley of relational, instructional, organizational, ethical, and more – was beginning to emerge, yet not without some hesitation.

2 Table 11, aka Champions of Kahoot: Sid, Russell, Chris, Mike, Christine, Dea-Anna, Colin.

The Foundations course helped me to believe in myself as a leader. While sharing things with my Abbotsford School District colleagues, I learned that my ideas have relevance. I learned that applying years of instructional leadership and meaningful relational leadership interactions with students and families has played a part in my developing wisdom. I learned that most of what I fear about leadership stems from not trusting myself, and that I should trust myself and my inner voice.

My process of learning who I am, and what I believe, was supported by many of the guest speakers, and framed by the ethical leadership questions presented. Digging deeply into Truth and Reconciliation topics was incredibly meaningful, because I heard from colleagues about their own experiences as Indigenous Peoples, as leaders in communities where truths were exposed, and from others who were reconciling their past and future choices. The discussion provided a place for me to openly share my questions and wonders. I learned from Dr. Dustin Louie, the UBC NITEP Director, the importance of challenging a single viewpoint, disrupting the expectation that everyone must



Table 11 (L to R): Chris McGarity, Colin Mayer, De-anna Lea, Mike McDowall, Christine Oliver, Russell Mayert, Suzi McClelland, (front) Sid Jawanda

adhere to cultural norms, and dismantling privilege and supremacy.

When Jamie Robinson, Kelowna's Assistant Superintendent, spoke about who we as new leaders aspire to emulate and why, I realized that there are so many great Abbotsford Principals that each influenced me in different ways. There was the Principal who had the best sense of humour, the one who had structures in place for everything, and another who had such power for buy-in that I left her office feeling fortunate for support in so many projects at the school... she was goooooood. Yet, beyond the influence of these leaders, Jamie assured us that it is the, "essence of who we are as a person that will serve us well." I was discovering day by day that authentic leadership is about understanding myself and the guiding influence of my mentors.

The 'task' part of administration came to fruition and held meaning for me when I realized that the everyday tasks – the practicalities, the organizational leadership factors that we think no one sees – are actually the music behind the lyrics. This is what keeps things flowing, that gives foundation to all we do as leaders. This is the trust that things are looked after through system and organization, flow and

rhythm. During one of the sessions, we sat in table groups and explored the BCPVPA monthly 'to do' list for leaders³. With this, I felt like I could exhale. I had a game plan to ensure I was hitting the right notes, and to ensure that my leadership would support both the school and student learning. When I discussed the tasks with colleagues, it confirmed that I had the foundation – or cheat sheet – of what to do. During the last day of Foundations, I felt gratitude to my district for offering me the opportunity to attend this conference, for the new friendships made, for the further connections made with colleagues, and for the many engaging conversations throughout this incredible week.

Foundations for New School Leaders provided me with a place to explore my wonders and curiosities about myself as a Vice-Principal through the powerful stories shared and discussed with a great team of Abbotsford colleagues and province-wide colleagues at Table 11, just as teachers explore self-awareness topics through Play-Doh, picture books, and journals in kindergarten classes. This course helps develop the leaders of today, just as kindergarten helps develop the leaders of tomorrow.

3

<https://www.bcpvpa.org/resources/publications/leadership-planning-guide>, page 85



Table 11 Kahoot Winners! (L to R) Christine Oliver, Russell Mayert, De-anna Lea, Suzi McClelland, Sid Jawanda, Colin Mayer