

Shaping Our Future

Enhancing Support for our Members as Educational Leaders



Inside



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"...as a strong proponent of strategic planning, and recognizing the need for it – I proposed that we develop a robust planning process that would follow a three year cycle. My involvement with this process was the most rewarding part of my career."

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"I believe that one thing that could show Indigenous people respect in the system is for people to listen. Instead of talking for us, or over us, or about us, respect would mean that those who hold positions of power are taking the time to really listen: listening to listen, and not listening to respond."

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"Within the first few meetings, I found myself creating relationships with people whose paths I may never have crossed, yet who had very similar narratives as we journeyed through this career as female leaders."

My Book Club

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"Through the parallel work that we have undertaken, including the development of our organization's Equity Theory of Change in 2023, the BCPVPA is engaged in a transformation."

Shaping Our Future



The office of the BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association is located on the ancestral unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Selílwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples. The peoples who traditionally lived on these lands were storytellers, sharing their words and history with each generation. We respect and honour that custom of storytelling, have learned from it, and still have much to learn.

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The BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association (BCPVPA) is a voluntary professional association 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 exemplary leadership in public education.

We are proud to have more than 2700 members in the province's 60 school districts, and BCPVPA membership is open to any Principal, Vice-Principal, or Director of Instruction at the school or district level. All school districts in the province have a local Principal and Vice-Principal association recognized as a Chapter of the BCPVPA.

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What Guides Our Work?

The two most important responsibilities of the Board of Directors are to hire an Executive Director as the chief appointed officer of the Association – comparable to a Board of Education's Superintendent – and to establish the strategic direction of the organization via a Strategic Plan.

In 2023, leading up to the adoption of our 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, the BCPVPA Board of Directors sought input from senior staff, advisory committee members, and Chapter Council attendees, and worked on the final stages of development with a consultant who helped us to maintain an objective perspective in setting our path.

Ho-hum, you might say? But this was truly groundbreaking work.

This Strategic Plan was not a dusting off of existing plans, or a mere update to previous goals and objectives. Instead, the Board and senior staff returned to the drawing board and created the new Plan guided by three foundational elements: the **Association's Constitution and By-Laws** (*the Association's purpose*); our **Mission Statement** (*why we exist*); and **member input** (*the support members need*).

A classical Greek temple serves as an architectural model to illustrate how the Strategic Plan fits what we do as an Association. The Constitution and By-Laws are the foundation slabs on which the work of the Association rests. Layered on top of this is our Policy & Procedures, our operational guidelines. This is the first step, or the floor of our model. Rising from this floor are five vertical columns, each pillar representing one of the five goals of our Strategic Plan. Above these rests



by
Brian Leonard
2022-2024 President
BCPVPA

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2023-2026 Strategic Plan

See page 88 for more information

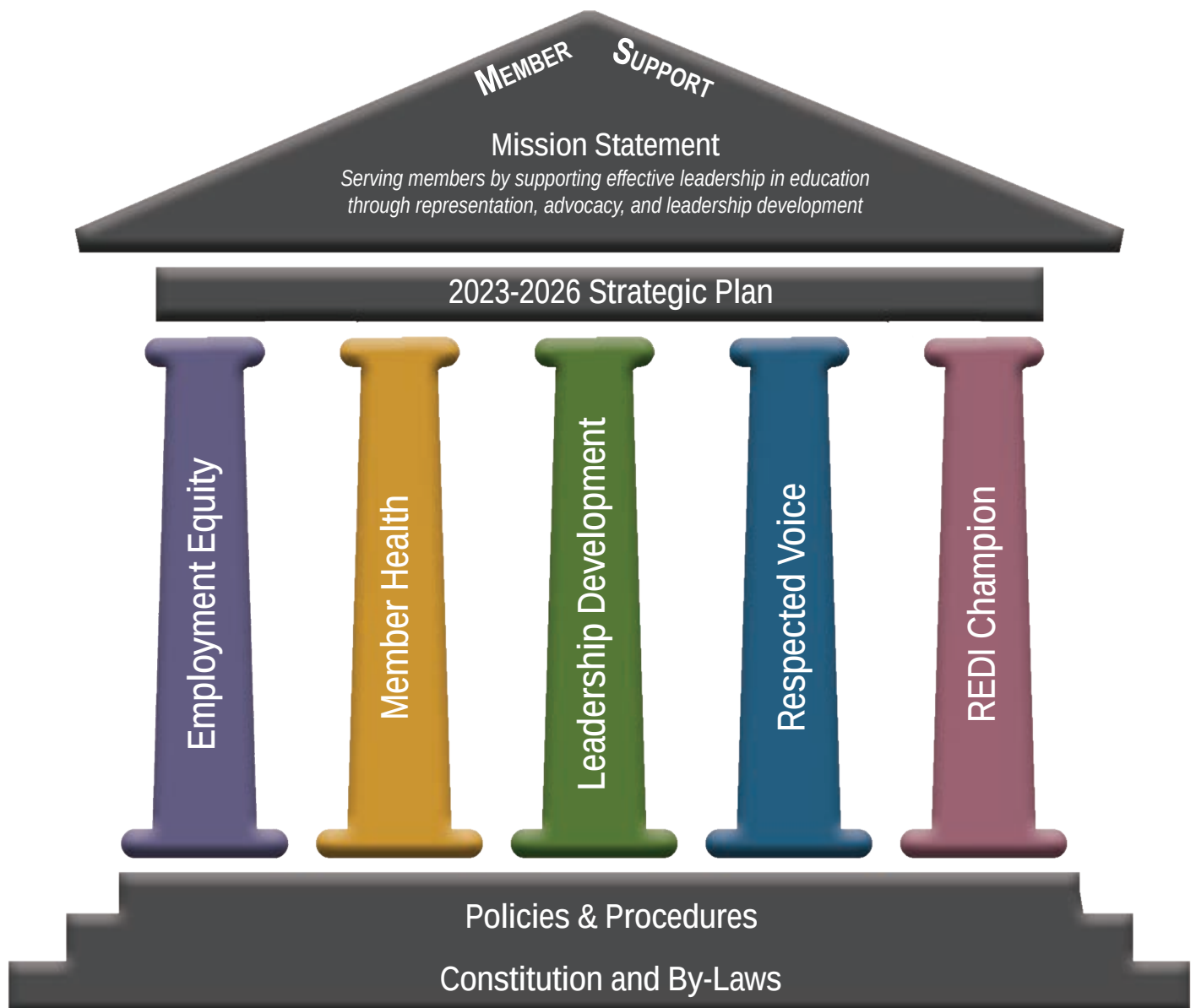
one of the five goals of our Strategic Plan. Above these rests the lintel, or horizontal beam that spans the columns, and this is the Plan document itself. In architecture, the lintel is commonly decorated with a cornice, like a crown molding, and our Plan has a coloured ribbon that beautifully delineates and links each goal.

The front-face of our diagram – in the centre, above the lintel and cornice – is the pediment, a triangular-shaped form or gable for our construct. Rather than

marble carvings from Greek mythology, on our temple we have the mission statement ‘carved’ and prominently displayed. The BCPVPA exists to support the work of its members, and so ‘member support’ is the roof of our building, the pinnacle.

The Strategic Plan establishes the priorities for the Association, and outlines how the Association will provide support for members to best meet their needs. An operational plan is devised from the Strategic Plan, and outlines how the Executive Director and senior staff plan to implement the specific objectives of the Plan.

So, how is this Plan different, and what are the ‘five pillars’ in the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan?



As the name suggests, the Plan represents the 'big picture' objectives of the organization. Previous plans delineated specific objectives, often with lengthy timeframes for achievement, and sometimes beyond our circle of influence. While those objectives were important and appropriate at the time, they no longer completely served the current needs of our members.

The 2023-2026 Strategic Plan broadens the key objectives of the Association into five goals. The Board added a measurement objective for each goal to evaluate progress, while recognizing that some goals will require additional time or resources for successful implementation.



EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

Fair and equitable terms and conditions of employment are in place that reflect the competencies, responsibilities, and needs of Principals and Vice-Principals.



MEMBER HEALTH

Principals and Vice-Principals have the support and resources required to maintain and improve their overall well-being.



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Principals and Vice-Principals have access to the learning opportunities and programs needed to build their leadership capacity.



RESPECTED VOICE

BCPVPA is an influential partner and a respected voice within public education.

*"As the name suggests, the Plan represents the
'big picture' objectives of the organization."*

The Board was pleased to announce our newest goal, formulated through collaboration with and input from members of our Indigenous Leadership Advisory Committee and members of the Ad Hoc Anti-Racism Committee, alongside Indigenous leaders and trusted partners in the sector.



Finally, while this Plan guides the work of the Association, it more importantly represents what our members have identified as their current needs and priorities, so they can be successful in their roles. The Board hopes that members can find their needs represented in the final document, and through the programs, offerings, and support available to them from the Association.

British Columbia has one of the highest performing educational jurisdictions in the world, due in large part to the leadership of BC's Principals and Vice-Principals. The work of a school leader is complex and challenging, but it is also invigorating and rewarding.

The role of the BCPVPA President is to work with the Board of Directors, the Executive Director, and senior staff to breathe life into the goals and objectives developed for our Strategic Plan, to communicate and give voice to the experiences of our members, and to speak to our sector partners and rightsholders about the vital work of Principals and Vice-Principals in keeping schools safe and operating, with a focus on student success and achievement. As President, I am proud of the work of our Board and staff in adopting this Plan, and the strategic direction it has set for our Association for the years ahead.

The Strategic Plan is the framework that guides the BCPVPA's actions, initiatives, and resources, ensuring that they align with our identified priorities. By pursuing these goals, we aim to create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment, enhance the well-being of our members, foster continuous professional growth and leadership development, and strengthen the Association's voice and influence in public education.

I will conclude my term as BCPVPA President on June 30, and I have been grateful for this exceptional opportunity to lead and learn, to meet with and listen to our members and partners, and to help bring this dynamic Strategic Plan to life.

Have a great summer!

Brian



@bcvpvapresident



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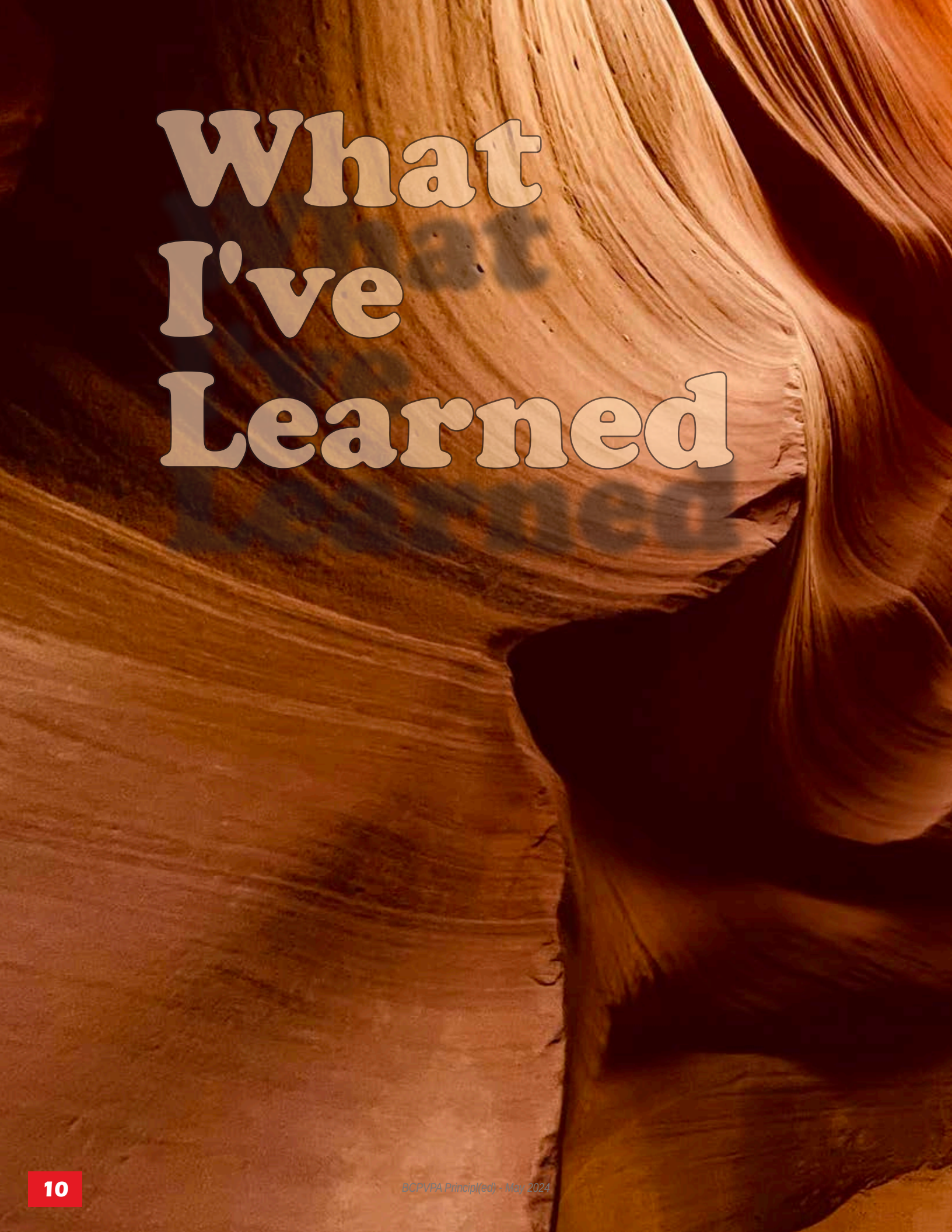
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What I've Learned

**BCPVPA's Former
Director of Finance
Reflects on 34 Years
of Serving Members**

by

Carol Powell

Retired BCPVPA Director of Finance

The B.C. Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association opened its doors in January 1988, and I became the organization's first accountant in March 1989. The weeks and months leading to my retirement inspired me to think more deeply about what makes a non-profit organization successful. Here are the top five lessons I learned during my career with the BCPVPA:

1. Remember the Purposes of the Organization

These are the guiding lights that determine the intentions and direction of a non-profit. BCPVPA's purposes are outlined in its Constitution:

- a) Represent, develop and promote the professional and economic interests and welfare of its members;
- b) Foster education leadership as a means of promoting and advancing education at all levels and for all people;
- c) Encourage wide communication and involvement among members;
- d) Maintain a strong organization through constant assessment of efficiency and effectiveness of its activities;
- e) Promote excellence in personnel practices;
- f) Render assistance to members on any matter, upon request and when not inconsistent with the policies of the Association; and
- g) Support and coordinate professional development activities for members.

These purposes are member-centric and are reflected in our mission statement of 'Serving members by supporting effective leadership in education through representation, advocacy and leadership development'. Everything that the Association does needs to align with these purposes, and this has surfaced two thoughts for me.

"Our Association has thrived on providing work-related support, space for community members to exchange ideas, and various avenues for member involvement."

The first is the importance of building a community of individuals who feel supported in their profession. Our Association has thrived on providing work-related support, space for community members to exchange ideas, and various avenues for member involvement. When addressing Chapter Council representatives at their November 2023 provincial meeting, I mentioned that the biggest reason for my 34 year tenure with BCPVPA was that I was doing purposeful work, and working with and for a community that has come to mean so much to me.

The second is the importance of remembering where we came from. I am a big fan of Simon Sinek's book *Start with Why*. In the chapter "The Origins of Why", under a section entitled "The WHY Comes from Looking Back", Sinek states that, "every company, organization or group with the ability to inspire starts with a person or small group of people who were inspired to something bigger than themselves." When British Columbia's Principals and Vice-Principals were no longer a part of the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF), effective October 1987, there was recognition that a new association was needed to support these education leaders. BCPVPA's purpose is echoed in George Buckley's President's Message in the January 1989 edition of BCPVPA's publication *Adminfo*: "I am grateful that we have a strong organization of dedicated principals and vice-principals to support each other as we move ahead... One of the key questions under consideration is that of keeping 'lean and mean.' We believe that the demand to keep 'lean and mean' is a demand from the members to engage only in those activities that are directly related to support for principals and vice-principals in doing their job".

I do not intend to offer a full history lesson, but instead to stress how much we can learn about the Association through an understanding of our early years. I would encourage you to read the article “In Their Own Words: The history of the BCPVPA” by retired BCPVPA Director of Communications, Richard Williams, to find out more about the BCPVPA’s journey.



In Their Own Words

2. Strategic Planning

One of my favorite quotes from all-time great Yankee catcher Yogi Berra is, “if you don’t know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else.”

Planning is important for an organization to end up where it wants to be, and to prioritize the achievement of goals that fulfill one or more of its purposes. The use of resources is maximized by providing the most beneficial services for our community.

A Constitution, which outlines an organization’s purposes, is a foundational document for creating a Strategic Plan. Without consistent reference to this document, an organization could stray from its intent.

There was a lot of work to be done in establishing the Association, and our BCPVPA archived documents reflect the value of planning in those early years. Priorities were established that addressed both the needs of a new organization, and shifts in the labour environment. These priorities were addressed while the Association continued with the activities previously undertaken by the former Principals’ and Vice-Principals’ Provincial Specialist Association of the BCTF. There was an amazing amount of work done to prepare the Association for a January 1, 1988 launch, and this was all possible because the individuals knew their priorities.

"Planning is important for an organization to end up where it wants to be, and to prioritize the achievement of goals that fulfill one or more of its purposes."

A strategic planning committee was established, and Provincial Chapter Council representatives were included in the planning process. I used to chuckle each time one of BCPVPA’s Directors commented that we needed to get the ‘horse before the cart’, instead of ‘the cart before the horse’, when describing the need to set priorities before setting the budget. This was one of my first real-life strategic planning lessons.

In later years – as a strong proponent of strategic planning, and recognizing the need for it – I proposed that we develop a robust planning process that would follow a three year cycle. My involvement with this process was the most rewarding part of my career.

I observed several benefits:

1. The planning process opens up in-depth conversations about our environment, where we are, where we want to be, how we will get there, and how to measure our progress. It identifies the resources needed, areas of responsibility, and timelines. *Yes, Yogi: we know where we are going.*
2. Monitoring the plan enables an adjustment to our actions if necessary.
3. The process sparks strategic thinking, and not just when the plan is being developed. Conversations over time can become more meaningful as we look towards fulfilling the Association’s goals.



L to R: BCPVPA Board Director Heidi Grant, Carol Powell, BCPVPA President Brian Leonard
at November 2023 Chapter Council Meeting

"The process sparks strategic thinking, and not just when the plan is being developed. Conversations over time can become more meaningful as we look towards fulfilling the Association's goals."

4. The cart is no longer in front of the horse. The budget building process used by BCPVPA involves reviewing the plan to identify the resources needed to meet its goals. One of the questions consistently asked of the Budget Committee is whether the budget aligns with the Strategic Plan.

3. Adaptability

The environment in which an organization operates changes, and this necessitates the ongoing monitoring of changes and the development of adaptive strategies as needed. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic had a tremendous impact on how things were done. BCPVPA rose to this challenge through the quick implementation of alternate ways of doing business, such as a new approach to utilizing technology. Chapter Council meetings, the AGM, Board, and Committee meetings were held online when in-person meetings were not possible. Our provincial Connecting Leaders Conference and IDEAS Forum moved to online formats. Chapter Presidents who were unable to gather for a provincial meeting were offered online 'Town Hall' sessions throughout the year to receive updates, and for opportunities to discuss issues.

In British Columbia and beyond, there are increasing challenges for Principals and Vice-Principals due to the pace of educational change, the increased use of technology, and the volume and complexity of the

work. Our 2023-2024 Strategic Plan illustrates our willingness to adapt so that we can better serve our members. It includes the Member Health goal that "Principals and Vice-Principals have the support and resources required to maintain and improve their overall well-being", and this is just one example of how our strategic planning is responding to change.

4. Collaboration on all Levels

Collaboration on all levels includes collaboration amongst staff, members, and sector partners. This creates a conduit to hear the opinions of individuals who bring various expertise and lenses to the work, and leverages resources to achieve the goals that are important to the organization. Collaboration is powerful in strengthening relationships.

Internally, collaboration can help with development of our office team. Instead of working in silos, individuals can work on items that are related to multiple program areas. For example, while the focus of Member Well-being falls mainly in the Member Support Services program area, Communications contributes to designing messaging and advocacy information that can lead to clearer understanding and more support from the Ministry of Education & Child Care and school districts. Professional Learning and Development consistently integrates well-being content into the Association's educational programs.

A wonderful example of the power of sector partner collaboration is the Association's recent involvement as a leader in the development of the Foundational Management Modules. This was achieved through a consortium of education partners, and directed by the Ministry of Education & Child Care and the BC School Superintendents Association (BCSSA). The Ministry and BCSSA provided an opportunity to create a program that was strengthened by many sector partners bringing their unique expertise to the table. The project benefits the education sector and fulfills a need that was identified by Principals and Vice-Principals in past strategic planning sessions.

5. Effectively Manage Resources

There is a reason that purpose (D) was included in BCPVPA's Constitution:

(D) Maintain a strong organization through constant assessment of efficiency and effectiveness of its activities;

I will state the obvious: it would be difficult – or impossible – to achieve the goals that are most important if the resources are not accessible.

Achieving a balanced budget in 2023 was increasingly difficult due to rising costs and demands. It is critical that we consistently review our services, how they are being provided, and how effectively they are supporting our members. We always need to prioritize.

I would argue that as a service organization, our most important resource is our employees. To achieve continued success, it is necessary that we recruit and train the best staff possible.

Summary

Through my thirty-four years at the BCPVPA, I received the gift of knowledge and understanding. I had the opportunity to recognize the effectiveness of the five components discussed in this article, alongside hundreds and thousands of other moments of learning. I believe that these five lessons have made the Association what it is today, and continued attention to these tenets will lead to continued success. I will carry these lessons with me, along with the many moments and interactions that I have enjoyed with our members, far into the future.



BCPVPA Members can find member news, information on member services and professional learning, contacts, resources, and so much more through My BCPVPA



Visit bcpvpa.org
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The BCPVPA is pleased to offer its members
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AI in the Principal's Office:

Leading Schools
in the Age of
Artificial Intelligence

by

Peter Johnston

*Director of Professional
Learning & Development
BCPVPA*



Colleagues: the future is here!

You thought leading a school was all about juggling timetables, defusing the occasional food fight, and deciphering cryptic messages in student bathrooms. Well, it's time to add to that list: you need to become an Artificial Intelligence whisperer. Yes, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has entered our schools, and it is not just another tech fad like the overhead projector, or the infamous laser disc player.

Artificial Intelligence can now see, hear, and speak. Artificial Intelligence can write essays, pose philosophical questions, and even provide therapy. Artificial Intelligence can create a computer program that will write whatever you want, quickly and convincingly, *and* with good grammar.

When Open AI released its wildly popular ChatGPT in November 2022, it made the science fiction version of Artificial Intelligence seem very, very real. *"Open the pod bay doors, HAL... I'm sorry, Dave. I can't do that."*

Suddenly, anyone with a Wi-Fi connection had an endless source of knowledge right at their fingertips in a convenient, open-source chatbot. Nothing was off-limits. You name it: university admission exams, cover letters, novels, computer codes.

And the team at Open AI, headed by Sam Altman, promised that artificial general intelligence, that can complete any task a human can, was on the horizon. This will be one of the greatest technologies humanity has yet developed. We can all have an incredible educator in our pocket that is customized for us, and helps us achieve what we want. Sam Altman has said the biggest surprise about his ChatGPT was how quickly education adopted Artificial Intelligence into their classrooms.

Now, as educators, we cannot open an educational magazine or go to an educational conference without an expert in AI telling us how Artificial Intelligence has impacted our school system.

It has been said that, at present, Artificial Intelligence is neither artificial nor intelligent... Or is it?

Calling the computer program 'Artificial Intelligence' is a bit like calling a microwave a 'Miniature Personal Chef'. Sure, it heats your food, but it can't discern between gourmet cuisine and last night's pizza. Similarly, Artificial Intelligence in schools might grade tests or personalize learning experiences, but AI is not yet about acting out Shakespeare or solving the mystery of why kids can't keep their desks tidy.



Intelligence, as we know it, involves learning from experiences, understanding complex concepts, and using knowledge in new situations. Artificial Intelligence, on the other hand, is like the student

who memorizes facts for a test but forgets everything the next day. It operates on algorithms and data - it's more about processing information than pondering the meaning of life or why the school mascot should be a narwhal.

So, why do we call it Artificial Intelligence? Well, 'A Remarkably Efficient Data Processing and Pattern Recognition System' hardly rolls off the tongue, does it? Plus, 'Artificial Intelligence' has a certain sci-fi charm that makes us all feel like we are living in the future.

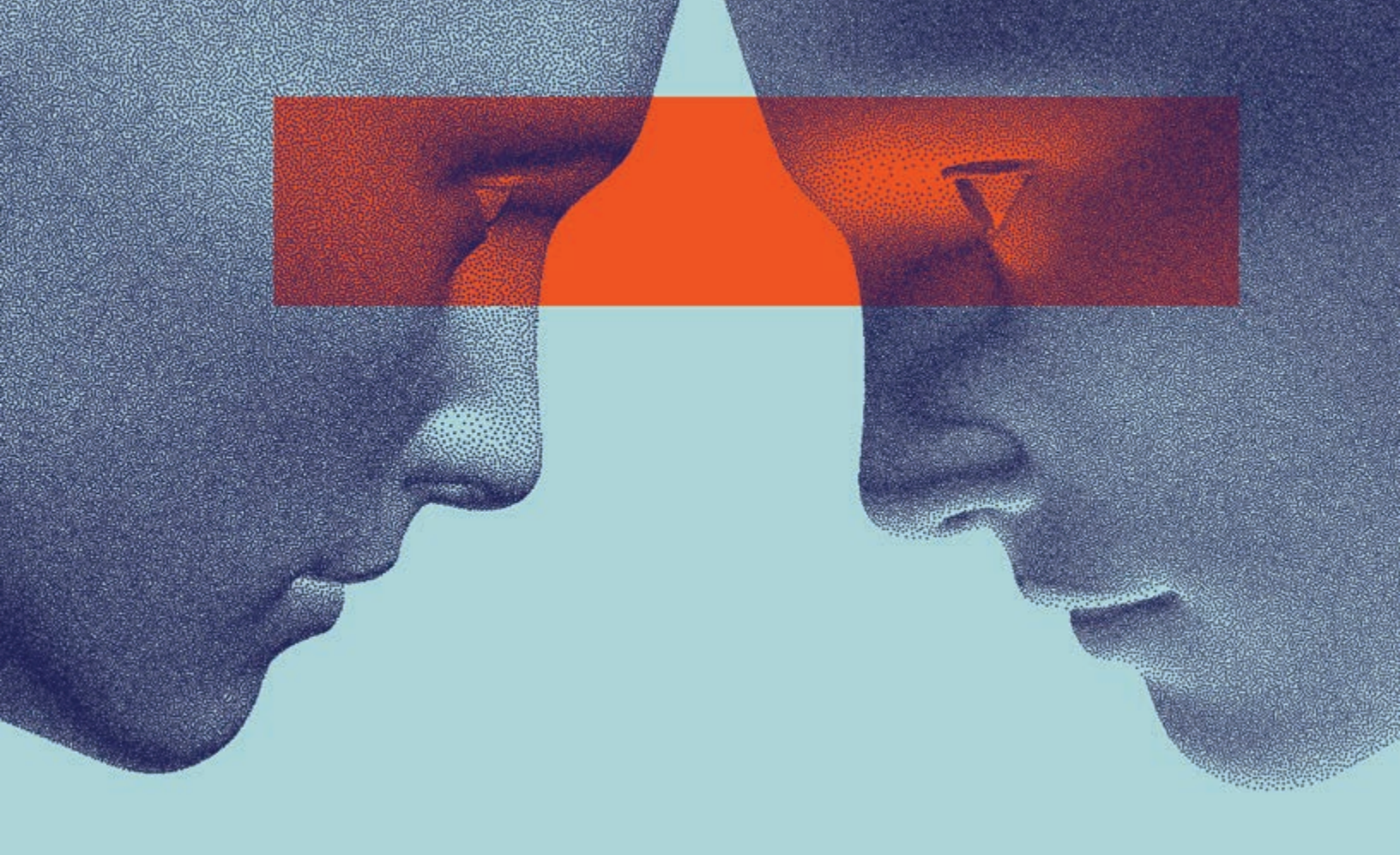
In the classroom, Artificial Intelligence is the quiet digital assistant that helps teachers without ever needing a coffee break. It is the magical genie in the school's computer lab that can generate test questions faster than you can say 'pop quiz'. But, let's be honest, it is not about to replace the wisdom and guidance of a real-life Principal. After all, can Artificial Intelligence understand the art of managing a cafeteria during pizza day? I think not.

Artificial Intelligence in education: not quite artificial, not entirely intelligent, but an incredibly useful tool in our ever-evolving schools.

Sci-Fi Charm

My office includes a collection of posters and artifacts of Star Wars, Star Trek (yes, I am a Trekkie), Dr. Who, and J.R.R. Tolkien. I clearly remember when Artificial Intelligence was something you only saw in sci-fi movies, usually playing the bad computer or robot trying to outsmart human civilization.

Well, it is time to welcome our new Artificial Intelligence colleagues (and no, they don't look like the Terminator). Artificial Intelligence is now a part of our educational landscape, helping to personalize learning, automate administrative tasks, and even grade those essays so that your teachers can finally rest their red pens.



Leading the Artificial Intelligence Charge

As a Principal, you are no longer just an educational leader; you are now the Captain of the USS Enterprise (NCC-1701) on an exploratory mission in the AI galaxy. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, involves guiding your school through the exciting yet sometimes bewildering galaxy of Artificial Intelligence. Here are a few steps that will help you become one of the Guardians of the AI Galaxy.

Embrace the Change (and Keep Your Sense of Humour)

First things first: don't panic. You've handled fidget spinners and TikTok dances; you can handle Artificial Intelligence. Approach this new challenge with an open mind – a growth mindset – and perhaps a bit of humour. After

all, laughing is better than crying when your new AI home phoning system mistakenly calls a snow day in June.

Build Your AI Fantastic Four, or Five, or Six...

You need a team. Gather the tech-savvy teachers, the curious students, and maybe that one staff member who always has the latest gadgets. Together, you will explore how Artificial Intelligence can benefit your school. Remember, there is no 'I' in 'team,' but there are in 'Artificial Intelligence,' so maybe let J.A.R.V.I.S. join too.

Train Like You're in a Montage

It's time for a training montage: every superhero movie has one. Think Rocky training to face Apollo Creed, and start running those Artificial Intelligence stairs. Start reading from the

massive amounts of ‘Artificial Intelligence In Education’ materials that are out there. Learn alongside your teachers, your students, and your colleagues by attending workshops, and start experimenting with AI tools in your office. Cue the inspirational music: you are “Gonna Fly Now”!

Ethical Artificial Intelligence is Happy Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence comes with great power and, you guessed it, great responsibility. Use your spidey senses to ensure that your Artificial Intelligence initiatives are ethical, transparent, and equitable. You don't want Skynet on your hands, do you?

Innovate, Iterate, Celebrate

Try new things. Some will work (celebrate those!) and some will flop (learn from those!) Maybe Artificial Intelligence can help with personalized learning paths or provide insights into student performance. Or perhaps it can finally solve the mystery of who keeps stealing sandwiches from the staff room.

Communicate Like an Artificial Intelligence (But Stay Human)

Keep everyone in the loop. Communicate with your staff, students, and community about how

Artificial Intelligence is being used in your school. Transparency is critical, and it deters rumours that the school is being run by robots (though that could be cool, right?)

Prepare for the Future, But Don't Forget the Present

While you're preparing your staff and students for a future with Artificial Intelligence, don't forget the present. Balancing tech with traditional teaching methods is like trying to connect with Wi-Fi in a 100-year-old school building – challenging, but possible.

The Principal, the Artificial Intelligence, and the Future

So, there you have it, brave school leaders. Leading a school in an Artificial Intelligence environment might sound daunting, but remember, you are not alone. You have your staff, students, the BCPVPA, and – yes – even Artificial Intelligence to help you navigate this journey.

Embrace the change, lead with confidence, and ask for assistance from the latest AI. After all, if you can manage ‘failure to fill’ each day, you can certainly handle a little Artificial Intelligence. And, who knows? Maybe, one day, Artificial Intelligence will figure out how to get that photocopier to work properly. Until then, keep leading in the age of Artificial Intelligence with humour and wisdom – no algorithm can match that!



Visit the BCPVPA website and select Professional Learning

You can choose to register for an upcoming program or event, and find out more about the available workshops and networking opportunities. Members can select My BCPVPA to explore content in our member portal. *See you there!*

D2L

BRIGHTSPACE

... has arrived!

The BCPVPA Professional Learning and Development (PLD) team offers a range of leadership development programs that are designed to equip school leaders across the province with essential competencies. Our learning theme this year is 'Your Learning, Your Choice'. With this theme as their guide, we believe that education leaders want to choose what, where, and when they want to learn, and with whom they will collaborate during their learning journey.

This belief aligns with the principles of adult learning. Adults want to apply their experiences, learn through real-life situations, maintain autonomy, and choose what is relevant to them, with support if necessary.

As part of this vision, the PLD team is acquiring content and developing relevant programs for BCPVPA members. Within this evolving landscape of professional learning and development, the choice of a learning management system (LMS) played a pivotal role.

D2L Brightspace, with its robust features and user-centric design, emerged as the LMS of choice for adult professional learning and development.

Brightspace has powerful tools to customize content and stimulate a personalization of learning. The flexible platform allows users to curate content that supports easily accessible, high-quality educational experiences that learners can engage with at their own pace.

BCPVPA prides itself on foundational leadership programs, including Explorations for Aspiring Leaders, Foundations for New School Leaders, and Amplification for Experienced School Leaders. Brightspace provides a robust space for blended, personalized learning, making it a perfect fit for these programs. Our learning programs include resources, discussion boards, pre-learning activities, group learning opportunities, and the chance to reflect on the content central to each offering. This ultimately supports the learning in the room, and leaves participants with the rich resource of quality documentation of the learning.

In addition to our foundational programs, the PLD team will continue to work to develop content that can be accessed at any time. These offerings may be topical, and members can access them when they need them. Examples of these courses include Preparing for a Difficult Conversation and Preparing for a Professional Development Day.

The BCPVPA is in the midst of revising our Leadership Standards to a competency-based approach. As the world of school-based leadership

by
Dr. Andrea McComb
*Director of Professional
Learning & Development
BCPVPA*

becomes increasingly complex, a competency-based approach is learner-centered and adaptive to the changing needs of our environments.

Professional growth is an ongoing process of exploration, learning, processing, and reflection by Principals and Vice-Principals. The PLD team is looking for a way to keep the competencies of the principalship alive and relevant. To this end, we see the LMS as a valuable tool to support not only content, but also crowdsourcing of ideas, best practices, resources, and ways of collecting evidence and feedback, along with community engagement. In this way, the Brightspace platform can support a community practice model.

The Brightspace platform can also support the planning, management, and crowdsourcing of competency development for school leaders. We can customize course content, activities, self-assessments, and feedback loops to suit the needs and preferences of our learners. The platform can serve as a repository of resources from various sources. It can also act as a space where we can communicate and collaborate so that our members can exchange ideas, best practices, and tools. BCPVPA is also exploring the use of Brightspace portfolio tools to support members, sharing their learning journeys in real time.

We are looking forward to hearing what our members have to say about their own learning journeys using D2L Brightspace – send your feedback, requests, and reviews to pldinfo@bcpvpa.bc.ca



Dr. Andrea McComb, BCPVPA Director PLD; Whitney Williams, Customer Success Specialist/Coach, K-12 (BC), D2L Corporation; Peter Johnston, BCPVPA Director, PLD

Check Under the Hood:

How does your Organization Really Work?

by
Read Jorgensen
SD 61 (Victoria)
Retired



After a short tenure as a Vice-Principal, I picked up the phone on a March night. It was my Assistant Superintendent, and he cut to the chase with, "Would you like to be a Principal?"

"You bet," I said.

"Great," he responded. "Can you start on Monday?"

As a new administrator, I basically learned my role on the job. Although I had some skills, I was aware that I lacked a great deal of the organizational knowledge I needed to run a school full of employees, lead a community of parents, and harness it all to best serve my students. Sure, I could get by on instinct; but I was a single administrator in a small school, and I still had questions. Just like with a car, I was compelled to look under the hood to see what made my organization run. Policy manuals, provincial legislation, and administrative colleagues were helpful but I wanted to know more about organizational forces such as politics, using influence, and making rational decisions. I used to joke with my Assistant Superintendent about when I would receive my instruction manual on operating a school.

There is no 'School Administrator's Instruction Manual'. Learning the art of school administration relies heavily on the apprentice system where you become a Vice-Principal, learn from a wise and supportive Principal, then become a Principal yourself and figure out the rest on your own. Evolving from classrooms, administrators are well schooled in educational practice, but not in the job of managing and excelling in a complex, multifaceted organization. Instead of Reading, Writing, and Math, your tasks are now Organizing, Motivating, Communicating, and Negotiating, mostly with adults. Unfortunately, the accumulated knowledge from your instructional days is not sufficient when dealing with unions, a remote boss, funding shortfalls, and political interplay. Administrators need PLD that is more than teaching and learning so that they can understand the organizational nuts and bolts which

include how to motivate employees, why teachers perform at different levels, and objective decision-making. Seek PLD beyond the familiar topics in the learning realm that reveal more of the fundamental underpinnings of how your organization functions. It benefits us to look not just at what we do, but how we do it.

Organizational Behaviour (OB) is the study of how people work and interact in groups – large and small – as they pursue common goals, and the study of OB is the first step in helping people function more efficiently in an organization. Just as you learned about pedagogical practice as a teacher, administrators need to learn about the ways our schools and districts function as large collectives.

As examples, I have offered two areas in OB and – to whet your appetite – each topic is punctuated with questions that may be helpful in generating discussions or continued professional learning.

Motivation: More Than Just Money.

Every leader needs to be well-versed in the art of motivation. People assume that money is the most effective motivator, but that is not necessarily true. Case in point: after you received your last (well-deserved, I might say) salary increase, I am willing to bet that you did not work harder, arrive earlier, and stay later. Although money can be a motivator, it works best when tied to a specific outcome like the number of ditches you dig or how many boxes you pack; it is not as effective in salaried positions. On the other hand, if your Superintendent publicly recognizes you at a monthly admin meeting, or announces your appointment to an important district committee, you might gain a little bounce in your step. Among the ten motivators generally recognised as effective in the workplace, being appreciated for your work, having work with intrinsic value, or having an understanding boss who keeps you informed can be more powerful than cash in your hand. Most

interestingly, many of the top ten motivators cost no money at all.

A general list of the top 10 best motivators looks like this:

- Recognition for your work
- Positive work environment and culture
- Thoughtful, understanding management
- Intrinsically motivating work
- Good wages
- Job security
- Opportunities for growth and career advancement
- Trustworthy management
- Being included in a meaningful way
- Trusted autonomy

Thinking question:

Which of these motivational factors are most present in your workplace, and which ones could you easily implement? Which motivators do you best respond to?

While a raise in pay is not necessarily a direct motivator, if you feel you are not being compensated fairly in relation to your responsibilities or compared to your peers, even that small amount of money can become a demotivator, as inequity is a powerful, negative force. A raise of \$500 might go unnoticed, but if you discover that you are earning \$500 less than your peers, that gap would have a significant negative effect.

The psychologist Frederick Herzberg divided his motivational theory into two parts: Motivational and Hygiene Factors. Increasing Motivational Factors such as job recognition, achievement, personal

"Among the ten motivators generally recognised as effective in the workplace, being appreciated for your work, having work with intrinsic value, or having an understanding boss who keeps you informed can be more powerful than cash in your hand."

growth opportunities, or job responsibility can motivate workers and increase productivity. On the other hand, increasing Hygiene Factors such as pay, working conditions, or supervisor quality only maintains job satisfaction but does not act as a motivator. However, if the Hygiene Factors are not provided in sufficient quantity, they become a source of demotivation. I recently saw an interesting notice posted by a construction company at a busy worksite that listed how the company was 'committed to elevating the work experience of every worker' by providing amenities like breakrooms with shelves for work helmets, coolers for lunches, hydration stations, and provisions for prayer and wellness. Someone in that company had a good understanding of Herzberg, and while nobody is going to work harder because they have a shelf in the breakroom, they are likely to be more satisfied with their employer and less likely to quit. Retention is a huge issue in the construction business, and this company seems to have a good understanding of how to keep their employees.

Thinking question:

Is retention an issue in education and, if it is, how could districts and schools address the problem?

There are several motivational theories to be explored such as Herzberg's Two Factor Theory of Motivation, McClellan's Human Motivation Theory, and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which may be familiar to many educators. McGregor's X-Y Theory deserves consideration as Theory X managers believe that workers dislike work, avoid responsibility, need close supervision, and only respond to rewards or punishments. In contrast, Theory Y managers believe that workers enjoy their job, embrace responsibility, need little supervision, and work best in a cordial and collaborative environment. In the workplace, managers are not all X or Y, but have a tendency to favour one or the other and will gravitate to that extreme when managing under pressure. Education in general is a very collaborative workplace but there are still, in my experience, Theory X managers out there.

We spend around 90,000 hours of our life at work. More than just getting paid, employees look to their employer to provide the right conditions to motivate them to do their best, therefore administrators need to have a sophisticated understanding of motivational practice to fully engage employees as they work towards our primary goal of educating our students.

Thinking question:

How could you use Herzberg to attract and increase the retention of Educational Assistants in your school or district? Do you tend to be more of a Theory X or Theory Y manager, and how does your staff respond to each approach?

People, Perceptions, and I Know What You Are Thinking.

An old family story goes like this. My grandfather wanted a new car, so he dressed in his usual, well-

worn set of clothes, and set off. After receiving no attention at the first dealership, he walked across the road to the competing lot where he was greeted by a smiling salesman. Minutes later, he wrote a cheque for the full price of a new car and headed home. It was arguably the fastest sale of the day, and all it took was managing perceptions.

Our perceptions are built by gathering information from our environment and then making sense of it all by using our knowledge, needs and desires, personal interests, and cognitive bias. The saying 'perception is reality' is true, but it is only your reality; other people see the world differently. All eyes are upon you as a leader while you make hundreds of decisions. It is incumbent upon you to manage your perceptions, as you want to be seen as open and objective. The problem is that we all have cognitive biases – strong, preconceived ideas – in our thinking. These preconceptions are like little shortcuts that help you to quickly process information. If you walk into a restaurant that is dirty or a little shabby, your bias or mental shortcut will tell you that it is time to look for another place to eat. On the other hand, cognitive biases can distort your perceptions, so it is important to understand how bias can have a powerful grip on your thinking as you make decisions and manage work relationships. You might identify with some of these examples of bias.

Have you been in a meeting where it doesn't really matter what you say, because the other person has it all figured out? Any evidence you present that does not fit this person's pre-established mindset is discounted, but facts that confirm their preconceptions are readily accepted. This is an example of Confirmation Bias, where one tends to only listen or pay attention to information that confirms their thinking, yet discounts any information that is contrary. Another bias is the Bandwagon Effect. I am sure you have experienced this, where a person will adopt a belief based on the number of other people who support that belief. Asymmetric Insight is another bias that, in my experience, is

fairly established in education. This cognitive bias is where you assume that you have greater insight into others than they have into you. For example, in your position as a school leader, you can clearly identify the various groups and alliances within your staff, yet you are quite certain that your staff does not see that you may have your own favourites.

And then there is the teacher who often comes in just before the bell, mumbles something about 'the traffic', and rushes off to their room to get ready. But you know better. The 'traffic' is just another excuse, and the real reason is that this teacher is not committed to their job. If they cared, they would be here early. In contrast, when you are late, the reason is always 'circumstances beyond your control', like being stuck in the Tim Horton's drive-through, and your lateness has nothing to do with commitment. Fundamental Attribution Error is another cognitive bias where, when observing others, you attribute their behaviour to personal traits (they are uncommitted) and discount the external factors (they were late because of traffic); yet when you analyze your own behaviour, you over-attribute your actions to external reasons (a slow drive-through) and discount your personal traits (you don't pay attention to the time).

It is critical for a leader to understand they have cognitive bias, especially in the fast-paced pressure cookers that schools can be. These mental shortcuts may save time and effort but, in the end, they can skew your perceptions, sway your decisions, and affect both how you lead and are perceived as a leader. You may not see bias in your actions, but likely your staff does.

Searching for patterns in your thinking, seeking out contrary information, and embracing multiple perspectives can help you reduce cognitive bias. Carefully testing your perceptions and checking for bias allows you to be a better leader, be seen as open, empathetic, and collaborative, and to act more objectively.

Thinking question:

Do you have Blind Spot Bias which is not allowing you to recognize your own cognitive bias? What biases show in your thinking, and how do these affect your subordinates?

'I Don't Do Politics.'

You have heard it many times – maybe you have voiced it yourself – but it is not true. The reality is that politics are everywhere that you find people, and political behaviours are a natural part of every organization. Politics is the process of exercising influence when finding solutions to problems in an environment with limited resources. When people vie for what they feel is best, given the resources they have, the politics begin. Put four friends in a car, and try to decide where to go for dinner. There is only one dinner, and competing interests begin to arise — some don't like certain types of food, others don't want to pay too much, and the driver is worried about where to park.

What most people object to is the dark side of politics, when individuals use unsavory means and when influence and persuasion transition to intimidation and coercion. In our dinner scenario, this might be when someone attempts to force the decision by threatening to reveal personal information about another passenger, or the driver pulls rank by announcing that because they are driving, they will

"Searching for patterns in your thinking, seeking out contrary information, and embracing multiple perspectives can help you reduce cognitive bias."

pick the restaurant. Unfortunately, unpleasant politics are part of the workplace, and we have all seen where spreading rumours, lying, gaslighting, using the power of position, and associating with powerful people can be used to force an outcome. So, do you engage in politics? Yes, you do, because you can't divorce yourself from every decision made in the workplace. But as you use your influence to shape outcomes, put your focus on behaving ethically, speaking up for yourself, and staying professional to avoid the sullied stain of unscrupulous politics that everyone dislikes.

Thinking question:

Small 'p' politics are everywhere in the workplace. What examples can you find where politics were used in a positive way to benefit your Organization?

Your PLD

When I started as an administrator, I didn't know what I didn't know, but I wish that part of my learning had been about Organizational Behaviour. I had too many questions and not enough information about how things worked; because I never did receive my 'School Administrator's Instruction Manual', I created my own. School administrators are amazing educators and leaders who need both a superior understanding of teaching and learning and a thorough understanding of the organizational forces in our schools and districts. Looking under the hood and studying Organizational Behavior will provide you with important insights into your workplace, support your efforts as a leader, and help improve the organization in which you work as you pursue the best educational outcomes for your students.

There are many topics available to you for PLD and I have highlighted Organizational Behaviour as an

area that needs attention as it is vital to a healthy and efficient workplace.

Here are some PLD ideas for you and your colleagues to explore.

- The BCPVPA provides a wide variety of professional development that can be tailored to the questions and needs of you and your district colleagues, with topics such as 'The 4 Essentials of Leadership', '5 Choices to Extraordinary Productivity', and one of my areas of interest, 'Unconscious Bias.' Visit the professional learning tab at bcpvpa.org
- Use the principles of adult learning for PLD. 'Sit and Git' does not work for knowledgeable, experienced professionals like you. For PLD, use case studies and real-life examples, set clear goals for learning outcomes that can change behaviour, and ensure that learning has strong intrinsic value.
- Look outside of education: the business world struggles with the same issues we do. The Harvard Business Review has great case studies, short, helpful articles, and an extensive back-issue library covering hundreds of useful topics. It is an excellent resource and can be accessed on-line for about \$15 per month. In addition, I enjoy the podcast, 'Work Life' by Adam Grant, who discusses problems in the workplace with interesting guests. In his opening, Grant tells listeners that his job as an organizational psychologist is, 'how not to make work suck.'

Have you studied Organizational Behaviour to enhance your practice? Tell us more!



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Visit bcpvpa.org to find articles related to professional learning, workplace well-being, employment relationships and much more.

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Support

The Role of a 'witness' in a workplace investigation



by

Carmen Eberle

Director of Member Support Services, BCPVPA

Magdalena Kassis

Acting Executive Director, BCPVPA

Ellen Roberts

Retired Director of Member Support Services, BCPVPA

The Expectations of Witnesses, and the Support Available from the BCPVPA

The Directors of Member Support Services (MSS) represent members undergoing an investigation, most commonly as a respondent who has had a complaint lodged against them. Sometimes, Principals and Vice-Principals may be called into an investigation process in the role of a 'witness' when another employee is the respondent in an investigation.

It is the view of the MSS team that a Principal or Vice-Principal should always have representation, as an investigation is a complex, nuanced process that can take an emotional toll. Less attention has been focussed on the role of the *witness* in workplace investigations, but this proves to be a key participant for both investigators and for the investigation process.

When an investigator – whether an internal member of the district HR department, or an externally-hired individual – is tasked with carrying out a district-level investigation into allegations of bullying and harassment or misconduct, they often rely on the testimony of witnesses to substantiate what they have heard from complainants and respondents. Investigators for the Teachers Regulation Branch (TRB) and WorkSafe BC also sometimes speak with witnesses related to their investigations. The process is similar, but less frequent than with district investigations.

Workplace investigations are not the same as court cases. Witnesses are not subpoenaed to give testimony, and investigators base their findings on the balance of probability that a particular event occurred a certain way, without having to prove 'beyond a reasonable doubt'.

When employees are involved in an investigation as

either a complainant or a respondent to allegations of wrongdoing, they are given the opportunity to provide the names of individuals whom they believe can speak knowledgeably about the alleged behaviours or situation in question. Most investigators try to limit the number of witnesses they communicate with, in an effort to ensure confidentiality of the process and to secure the personal information of the people involved. Investigators say they will speak to 'as few people as possible' but 'as many people as necessary' to achieve a clear understanding of what occurred.

As such, the role of any particular witness is very important to an investigation. If an investigator wishes to speak with an administrator as a witness who potentially saw, heard, or has knowledge about a situation being investigated, they will get in touch with the district for contact information, and will reach out to witnesses directly by email or phone. The member is being requested by the employer to

participate in the investigation as a witness; this is not optional, and members need to follow the direction of their employer. It is very likely that someone receiving such a 'cold' call will have no knowledge of the situation due to the strict expectations of confidentiality surrounding an investigation. For this reason, it can raise questions when such a call comes unexpectedly. To make things even more unsettling, the investigator is unlikely to share many details on the phone. It is also common practice that the 'witness' will not be directly informed as to who the respondent or complainant is in the investigation process. This is to protect the confidentiality of the people involved, including the witness.

Witnesses are expected to maintain the same confidentiality as complainants and respondents. While it may be tempting for a witness to share the information with the person allegedly involved, it is important not to do so. Questions about the veracity of the investigator or the process can be directed to



one of the MSS Directors, or to the Labour Relations (LR) or HR department at the school district.

While each investigator will carry out their interviews in a slightly different way, there are similar steps and processes that include these common elements:

- The investigator will explain their role as a neutral party who is still in the 'fact-finding' stage of their investigation process;
- The investigator will stress the importance of confidentiality;
- The investigator will reassure the witness that they are not under investigation. As a witness they are a 'helper' to the investigation as they can shed light on what occurred. This is especially important when the investigator is faced with conflicting reports;
- The investigator will not share the names of other witnesses;
- The investigator will be open to a witness having representation on calls or in meetings.

MSS Directors work closely with BCPVPA members who have been identified as witnesses, both by helping them prepare for interviews, and by attending interviews to take notes and support the member. The most important expectation of a witness, other than maintaining confidentiality, is to always be forthcoming and truthful. The requirement to act honestly is part of the fiduciary relationship administrators have with their employer. The role of a witness can be difficult at times, as it may feel uncomfortable to acknowledge or describe a colleague's behaviour. In some situations, witness testimony can expand the scope of an investigation or lead to a new investigation. It is important to remember that a witness is not under investigation unless a complaint is filed against them. This is all part of the process, and can be explained step by step by an MSS Director.

Some interviews are done by telephone; longer interviews tend to be conducted in-person or through

an online platform. A witness should be prepared to share their educational experience, their current role, and their relationship with the individual(s) involved in the investigation. There may be a limited number of questions based on a single incident, or it may be a more in-depth interview into a pattern of behaviour or series of events. In either situation, the witness is encouraged to take their time, listening carefully to each question and asking for clarification if needed. A witness interview should not feel rushed. Sometimes, a witness may recall something after the interview is concluded; the investigator will ensure that the MSS Director and the witness have their contact information, in the event further details need to be shared.

When an investigator has completed the fact-finding stage and has made a determination about what occurred based on a balance of probabilities and/or actions that were taken in a situation, they then must determine whether there has been a breach of a policy, district administrative procedure, clause of the School Act, or other regulation. All of the findings are included in a formal written report submitted by the investigator to the district. This report includes the testimony of the witness(es). Names and roles of witnesses are deliberately omitted or redacted from reports to maintain confidentiality and, in most cases, a number is assigned to a witness in investigative reports. These reports are not shared with witnesses; they are submitted to the school district HR personnel, and redacted versions are shared with the complainant and the respondent. This can be frustrating for a witness, because they never learn the outcome of the investigation.

The BCPVPA recommends that members contact an MSS Director for more information about being a witness, or if they are asked to be interviewed as a witness. The Director will answer questions and guide members through the process, communicate with the district and investigator, and can be present during the interview process.

To find out more, contact mssinfo@bcpvpa.bc.ca.

support

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

Our Member Support Services team has a wealth of experience in school and district based administration in BC, and training in negotiation, investigations, and school law. They are available to support members and provide guidance in a variety of areas relating to employment as Principals and Vice-Principals in the public sector.



The BCPVPA supports more than 2,700 Principals
and Vice-Principals in BC's public education system.
bcpvpa.org

bcp  vpa

Your Stories: Anti-Racism

With the guidance of the BCPVPA Ad Hoc Anti-Racism Committee, the BCPVPA Board of Directors is exploring ways in which the BCPVPA can support effective school leadership for racial equity and anti-racism, and support our members with tools and knowledge to deal with issues of racism in their schools.

This story series is a regular feature of *Principl(ed)* magazine, and we invite our members to share the stories of the anti-racism initiatives taking place in their school communities.

In this issue, we share stories from SD 23 (Central Okanagan), and SD 38 (Richmond), and we look forward to hearing more from our members and their teams — send your stories and high resolution photos to:

sandra@bcpvpa.bc.ca





Melissa Harris

Teacher

SD 23 (Central Okanagan)

Rutland Middle School in Kelowna embarked on a transformative journey for reconciliation through their initiative Walk for Wenjack, held from November 1 to 3, 2023. The school, committed to fostering a culture of understanding and reconciliation, participated in this meaningful event as part of their dedication to the legacy of Chanie Wenjack.

As a Legacy School, Rutland Middle School utilizes resources provided by the Downie Wenjack Fund through legacyschools.ca. This initiative aims to incorporate the tragic yet impactful story of Chanie Wenjack, highlighting the importance of addressing the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization on Indigenous communities.



The call to action is spearheaded by a dedicated group of teachers who are passionate about bringing the pedagogy of decolonization into the school community. Their approach is encapsulated in the catchphrase, "Learn with your head, lead with your heart, and speak your truth with respectful approaches." This ethos emphasizes a holistic understanding of reconciliation, encouraging students to engage intellectually, empathetically, and respectfully with the issues at hand.

The Walk for Wenjack event not only symbolizes Rutland Middle School's commitment to reconciliation, but also serves as a tangible expression of solidarity with Indigenous communities. By actively engaging with the legacy of Chanie Wenjack, and embracing the Downie Wenjack Fund's resources, the school is taking significant steps towards creating a more inclusive and culturally-aware learning environment.





Andrea Phillpotts & Hayley Valliquette

Teachers

SD 38 (Richmond)

Andrea Phillpotts and UBC Teacher Candidate Hayley Valliquette co-planned and launched this unit during Hayley's spring 2023 practicum. Hayley is now a Teacher Teaching On-Call (TTOC) with SD 38.

Touching the Past with Archival Gloves

It was in between watching basketball games at Richmond High that I took to walking the halls and examining the graduate photo composites on the wall. "1941, 1942 ... 1943. What a change!" While the early war years included many graduate portraits of Japanese Canadian students at RHS, starting in 1943 those images disappeared until the 1950s. Wow. As a Social Justice 12 teacher at McMath Secondary, I was



aware of Japanese Canadian Internment and its impact on Richmond's population, but I had never seen it illustrated so poignantly as a primary source.

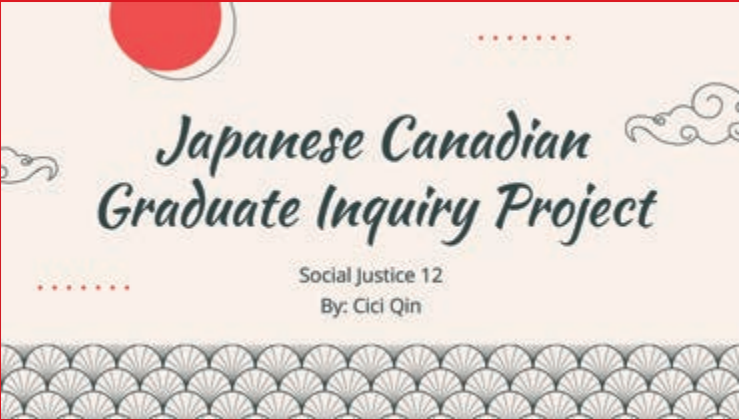
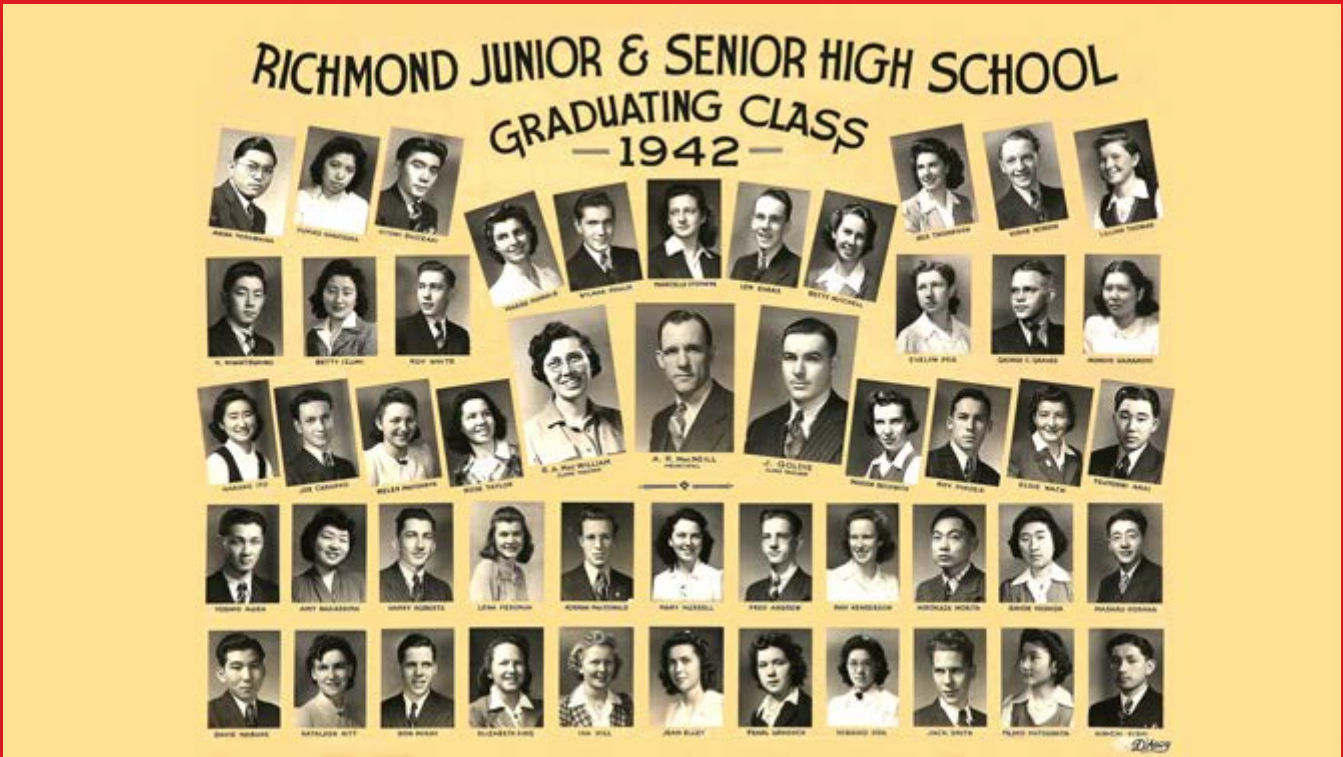
When I looked at the smiling, optimistic faces of these young people in their grad photos, it was hard to imagine what lay ahead for them: dispossession, relocation, and internment, when 22,000 people of Japanese Canadian heritage were forced into camps across Canada.

From this moment, a teaching idea began to develop. In order to make Richmond history more relevant and interesting to students, why not get each Social

Justice student to research the lives of one of these Richmond graduates: their high school lives, their families' contributions prior to internment, the personal consequences of internment, and their contributions to Canadian society following internment?

But how to do this?

In addition to connecting with members of the Steveston Japanese Canadian Community Centre, our school district resource centre, the Richmond High Alumni Association, Landscapes of Injustice, and the Richmond Museum, one of our first big breakthroughs came through connecting with the



Richmond Archives. A world of discovery was before us.

With the expert and meticulous guidance of Richmond archivists, myself and UBC Teacher Candidate Hayley Valliquette gently perused documents in the care of the archives – yearbooks, photos, newspaper articles, books, school board minutes, and so much more. The wealth of resources was mind boggling.

We went down a delightful wormhole of historical research, tracking the Richmond students' journey through the early 1940s to the present day. The Richmond Archives had myriad resources on internment, from the Sakata family's donation of personal photos and documents, to Richmond Review articles tracking the local response to wartime policies, to the historical wartime posters that were put up around Steveston.

Our favourite resources were the Richmond High yearbooks. Class photos, poetry, grad writeups, and valedictory speeches brought the devastating internment to life. "We are graduating at the height of men's cruelty to one another ... Our Japanese classmates will have to translate to their mothers and fathers the reason for the sudden upheaval of their daily lives," writes valedictorian Roy White in 1942.

A poem by student David Naruse entitled "To My Radio" mourns the confiscation of his radio by the Canadian government: "Such numerous things I heard before/ No longer can my ears receive / It shouldn't be for evermore! / So, fare they well, you must now leave." David, a future Ontario doctor, ended up in Westmount, Quebec for internment.¹

Rather than reading from a textbook or watching a canned video, our students would now be able to consult primary sources and come up with their own connections and conclusions through individualized research and inquiry. To support us, archivists digitally scanned fragile paper books and provided archival gloves with which to gently touch other heartier tomes.

The project launched in spring 2023. In addition to making personal connections with Richmond's history, students are learning about the importance – and delight! – of archival research. From this, they can learn about the resilience of Richmond's Japanese Canadians, and the importance of making sure injustices like internment never happen again.

We are grateful that our McMath students are now able to take out those archival gloves and touch history.

1

www.landscapesofinjustice.com/

Leader Life Stories

Every leader has a story: what's yours?

The Leader Life Stories series in *Principled* magazine brings together member voices from across the province on a variety of topics.

We want to hear from you!

Do you have an idea for a theme for an upcoming article?

Contact sandra@bcpvpa.bc.ca

Read the November 2022 Leader Life Stories
"Diverse Women in Leadership"



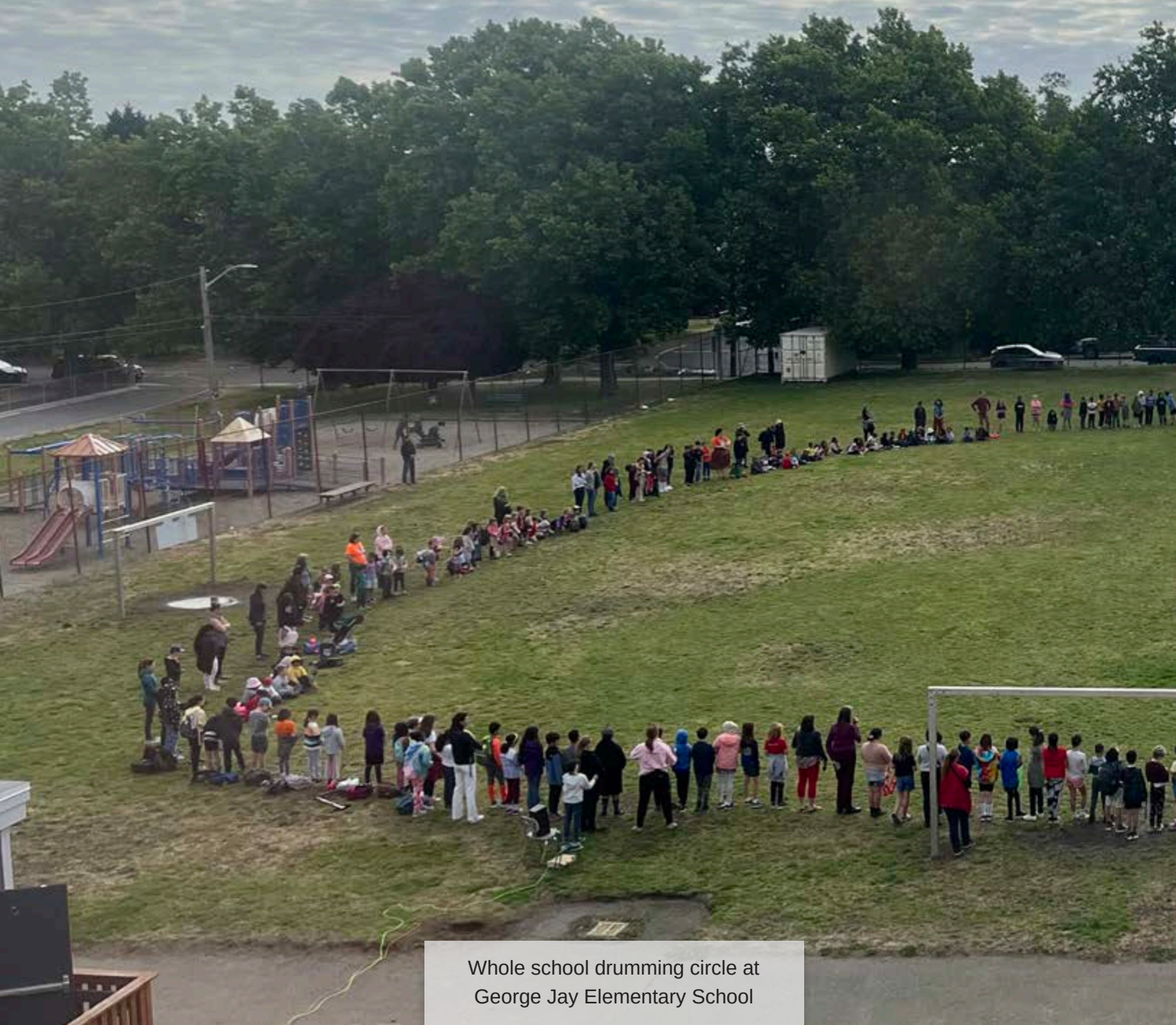
Read the June 2023 Leader Life Stories
"The Family Balance"



ReconciliAction

at george jay elementary

Embracing Indigenous Culture with Staff Drumming Circles



Whole school drumming circle at
George Jay Elementary School

by
Christina Chase
Vice-Principal, George Jay Elementary
SD 61 (Greater Victoria)



Schools in the Greater Victoria school district continue to recognize the importance of fostering a sense of inclusivity and diversity within their communities. The incorporation of Indigenous ways of knowing, traditions, and cultures into everyday school life continues to gain momentum, and staff are learning new ways of approaching learning at school. Drumming in schools is an important and enjoyable way to learn about the diverse Indigenous cultures of North America. At George Jay Elementary, we are proud to share that we are growing a drumming culture, and integrating this as an important component of our family breakfast program.

The Feeding Futures Fund program launched in 2023 by the BC government has helped us address the immediate need for feeding students and their families at George Jay. The Fund builds on the progress made with the Student and Family Affordability Fund to help reduce the challenges of rising food costs for families who need it most.

The program has had a significant impact, extending to a weekly family breakfast, support of our Good Food Box and our Backpack Buddies programs, and the availability of healthy daily snacks for our students; many of our families have given feedback about the positive effect the program has had in their lives.

Featuring Indigenous drumming during our weekly Feeding Futures Fund Family Breakfast Program has created a sense of belonging and community within the school, and gives parents and students a

“The breakfast drumming helps me, no matter how I start my morning. When I join the circle with my colleagues, it reenergizes and refocuses me and grounds me in my day.”

George Jay Elementary Teacher

chance to witness staff members actively embracing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) 94 Calls to Action. A parent of two students said that, “I am an immigrant to Canada and I feel like my children are learning about Indigenous culture through community engagement and actions, like when the staff here drum for us during breakfast. I really love that my children are taught about Indigenous cultures, it is important to learn about and understand this as newcomers to Canada.”

From classrooms, staff circles, assemblies, and whole school recognition events, we believe drumming in school is a powerful and meaningful way to celebrate and share the rich and diverse heritage of Indigenous peoples living on the traditional territory of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations.

One parent shared that, “The family breakfast feels like a community, and when the staff drum it feels like the beating of our hearts together as one.”

A Grade 5 student commented that, “I like it when I come to family breakfast! I like the drumming, too, because it is good to acknowledge the Indigenous people of our community. It is also good to be entertained by the staff!”

A Grade 3 student shared that, “The eggs are always good, and listening to the staff drumming makes me feel calm at the start of my day.”

For the George Jay community, family breakfasts are not just about food; they are about coming together as a school family and building our community's capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect. When staff members engage in **Reconcilliaction** by actively participating in the drumming circles, they demonstrate their commitment to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for all learners. This, in turn, encourages students and their families to be more engaged with the school and its activities.

“When we drum together in the gym I feel our connection”, said an Educational Assistant. “I believe that this fosters a safe community for all our learners,

“The first time I participated in staff drumming
I was overcome with positive emotions.”

George Jay Elementary Educational Assistant



“When the staff drum I can see the sound coming from their drum.
It makes me feel surrounded by sound waves, and so calm.
I really like to listen to the drumming.”

George Jay Elementary Grade 2 Student

Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and staff alike.”

When we engage in Indigenous drumming during family breakfasts, it is one example of how schools in our district are moving beyond the conventional boundaries of teaching and learning. For members of the George Jay staff, drumming is an opportunity to embrace Indigenous culture. It is a practice that is deeply rooted in the history of many regions of North America, and that has a profound impact on the lives of Indigenous communities. By integrating this tradition into our school culture, we hope to not only show respect for Indigenous cultures but to provide a platform for students, staff, and community members to connect with local history, music, and traditions of Indigenous peoples in a hands-on and experiential way. We are so thankful for the songs that have been gifted to the school district for all of us to perform and enjoy, including the Celebration song composed and gifted by Bradley Dick, Songhees Nation.

Music has the incredible power to transcend language barriers and unite people from diverse backgrounds. Indigenous drumming, with its mesmerizing rhythms and harmonious chants, brings people together in a unique way. During family breakfasts, there is always laughter. The participation of parents and students

alongside the staff fills the gym with smiles and an energy of joy and gratitude. It is a truly special way to start off a school day.

“Drumming at George Jay feels like inclusion, because when we drum together, we stand shoulder to shoulder no matter what our roles are here at school. When we drum, we are one,” said an Educational Assistant.

We hope our work inspires others to try a staff drumming circle at their school. This shared experience fosters a sense of unity, where everyone feels connected and valued regardless of their cultural background. It sends a clear message that schools are not just places of academic learning but also safe places of cultural exchange and appreciation. By embracing Indigenous traditions in this way, we are working towards a more inclusive and positive future, where diversity is celebrated, and cultural understanding is nurtured.

In the words of a Grade 4/5 teacher, “The drumming culture at our school really helps ground our day in Indigenous practice. It helps bring us together in a strong way. It shows parts of our willingness and understanding by deeply weaving Indigenous pedagogy in all parts of our practices.”



The George Jay Elementary staff drumming circle,
during Family Breakfast, September 2023



FOUNDATIONS

for **New** School Leaders

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 BCPVA 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.



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

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The 4 R_s

Support for Indigenous Education in Schools

What First Nations people are seeking is not a lesser education, and not even an equal education, but rather a better education — an education that respects them for who they are, that is relevant to their view of the world, that offers reciprocity in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise responsibility over their own lives.

(Kirkness & Barnhart, p.14)



by

Carolyn Roberts

*Assistant Professor, Teacher Education
University of the Fraser Valley*

The opening quote shares the words of Indigenous trailblazer Verna Kirkness and her writing partner Ray Barnhardt, from their 1991 paper, “First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R’s – Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, & Responsibility”. This paper demanded change in higher education for Indigenous students that were being pushed out of the classrooms and were not able to finish school. Kirkness and Barnhardt lay out the systemic barriers that are in place in colonial institutions that do not allow for the success of Indigenous students. The key points they outlined were that Indigenous students do not feel welcome, comfortable, or safe in colonial institutions, mainly because they do not see themselves reflected in the learning or the learning process. Without the ability to see themselves and *be* themselves in colonial spaces, Indigenous students are being asked to leave their culture and traditions at the door. It is challenging and not sustainable to leave a part of who you are as a person in order to learn. The paper was directed to higher education and universities, but it is so relevant to the K-12 system today.

The western colonial education system's approach to fixing these issues that Indigenous students face is to establish supports such as counseling programs,

graduation coaches, writing programs, and so forth; Kirkness and Barnhardt speak to the reason supports such as these fail, as they do not address the problems that Indigenous students encounter in the system. The programs are a reinforcement of the assimilation that the western colonial system wants from students. When the system looks at what they can do to ‘fix’ the problem, they always look at the students as the problem and ‘blame the victim’. This reminds Indigenous students on a daily basis that they need to change into someone else and leave their Indigeneity at the door in order to take part in the western colonial system. Most research from school districts focuses on how Indigenous, Black, and students of colour are feeling in the system, instead of spending that time and money on researching *why* and *how* the system is not able to create the space for Indigenous, Black, and students of colour to succeed. Refocusing the lens in which we view the system will create the space needed for the change that Indigenous, Black, and students of colour need to succeed. As Kirkness and Barnhardt explain:

It is not enough for universities to focus their attention on "attrition" and "retention" as an excuse to intensify efforts at cultural assimilation. Such approaches in themselves

"When the system looks at what they can do to 'fix' the problem, they always look at the students as the problem and 'blame the victim'. This reminds Indigenous students on a daily basis that they need to change into someone else and leave their Indigeneity at the door in order to take part in the western colonial system."

have not made a significant difference, and often have resulted in further alienation. Instead, the very nature and purpose of higher education for First Nations people must be reconsidered, and when we do, we will find that the entire institution, as well as society as a whole, will be strengthened and everyone will benefit. (p.14)

I agree with Kirkness and Barnhardt in their argument that if we change the system for the betterment of one, it will help support the betterment of all. If we put their 4 R's – respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility – into steps for action within the education system, the hope would be that these spaces could change for the better, not only for Indigenous students, but for all IBPOC (Indigenous, black, and people of colour) students.

Respect.

As an action in schools, using myself as an example, respect would mean that those in the building are seeing me in my wholeness, as an educator and an Indigenous person. My wholeness is knowing that my Indigeneity comes with layers of institutional racism and oppression. I believe that one thing that could show Indigenous people respect in the system is for people to listen. Instead of talking for us, or over us, or about us, respect would mean that those who hold positions of power are taking the time to really listen: listening to listen, and not listening to respond. It would also mean that educational spaces were intentionally being created for Indigenous voices to be heard and honoured. This would make educational spaces safer for Indigenous people, and provide an opportunity for them to thrive. One of the most important elements grounded in respect is that if you personally make a mistake, that you take ownership of that mistake and apologize, and add an action step to the apology. Words without actions are just words.

Relevance.

Since the 1972 “Indian Control of Indian Education” paper (National Indian Brotherhood, Canada. Indian, & Northern Affairs, 1972), Indigenous people of this

land known today as Canada have been demanding Indigenous representation in the classroom. If the classrooms are continuing to tell the single-sided story of this place, without the true shared history, then we will never find a way to be here together. Educational spaces should be filled with stories and representations of Indigenous people, and not just the trauma they have endured. If we only tell the stories of trauma, then we will never have the opportunity to share our brilliance. We need to have Indigenous voices, Indigenous authors, Indigenous content, and – most importantly – Indigenous brilliance in all classrooms. This will create the space for Indigenous students to see themselves within educational spaces, and give Indigenous students the opportunity to thrive.

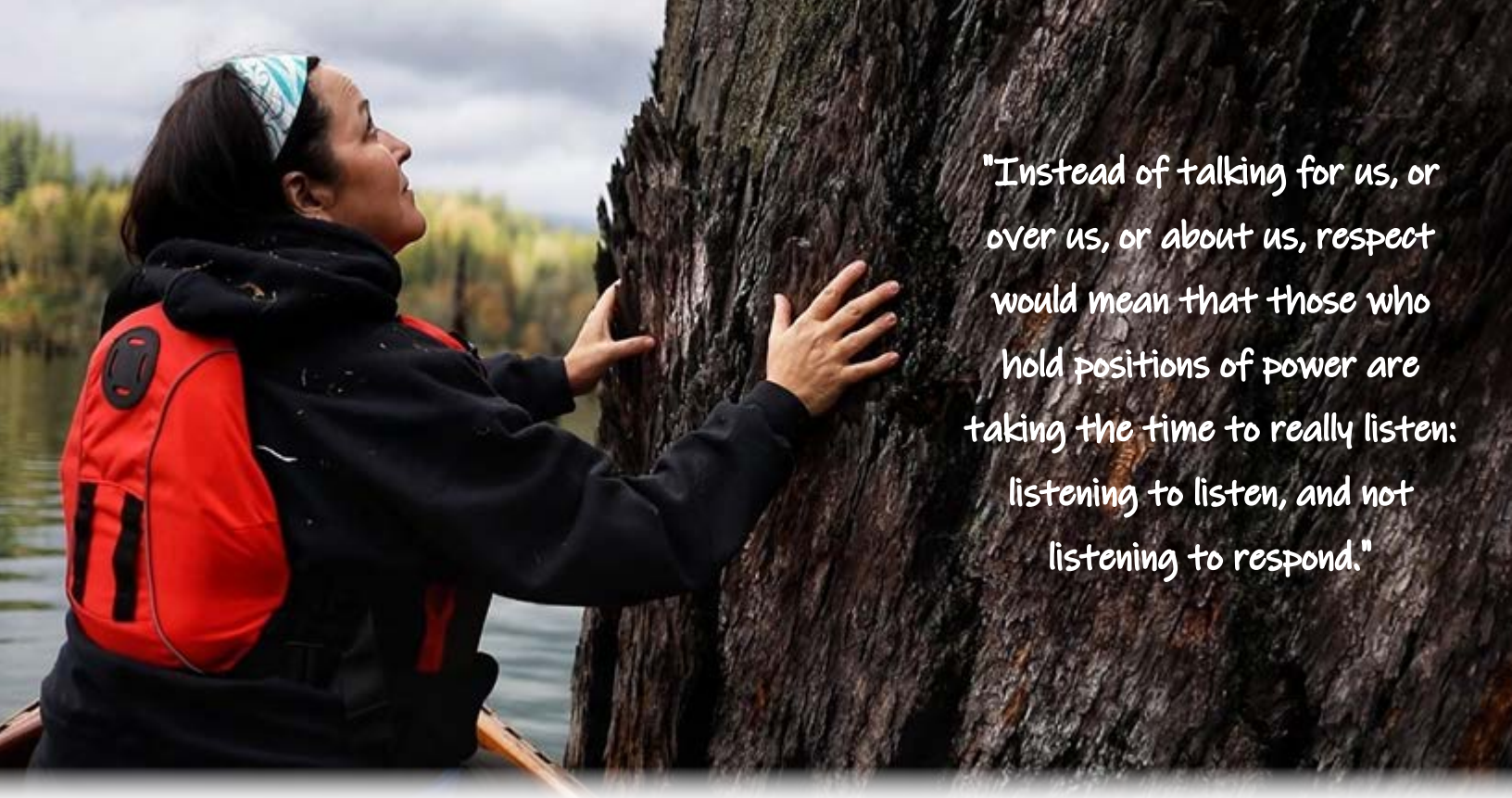
Reciprocity.

Margaret Kovach speaks of reciprocity as “giving back” (2021); Jo Ann Archibald (2008) describes it as listening with our three ears, two on the side of our head and the third is with our heart. School communities can be a reciprocal place for learners when they move away from students solely as consumers of knowledge. Learning is a two-way street: having students be a part of the learning process, in a participatory way, is critical. If schools continue to use the western colonial idea of education, where the educators are all-knowing and students passively take it all in, we will continue to produce people who sit back and wait for things to be given to them, rather than people who are problem solvers, thinkers, knowledge keepers, and their own beings. In leadership roles, this action step means that you are open and willing to listen to Indigenous people, creating space for them to share their worldview and lived experiences, and creating space for the change they are asking for in the education system.

Responsibility.

Beginning with The Bryce Report in 1907¹, report

¹ www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/IRSR11-12-DE-1906-1910.pdf



"Instead of talking for us, or over us, or about us, respect would mean that those who hold positions of power are taking the time to really listen: listening to listen, and not listening to respond."

after report has been issued demanding change in Indigenous education for Indigenous children. Indigenous students need to be able to see themselves in education in order for them to succeed; it is the responsibility of the school system to make sure that this happens for students. Leaders in schools can take action steps to create spaces of learning so that the educators in the building have the support needed to teach and learn about Indigenous education. Leaders must also take action steps to create spaces for all staff to learn about race and racism, and ways to engage with these topics in the classroom. The reflective component of this work is critical: as a leader, how are you holding yourself responsible for creating a welcoming and warm environment for all Indigenous students and Indigenous adults in the school building? Where in your personal growth plan

are you including your own learning about Indigenous education, race, and racism? This action step turns the learning inward, looking at what you need to learn in order to support those around you to learn and grow.

My hope with these action steps and questions is to reach those who are in positions of power, and who have the ability to intentionally shift how the work is done in schools. This intentionality will create the space for Indigenous students to be their whole selves in education, without having to leave a part of themselves at the door. With this work, we have the opportunity for the next generation of Indigenous children to feel like they belong in education, see themselves in education, and thrive in education. This will take critical and intentional work from you, the leaders in education. My hands are raised in deep gratitude to those who are doing this work.

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*by Wendy Yu, Sharon McKay, Pam Becker, Leann Buteau,
Laurie Sviatko, Kim Cuellar, Elspeth Anjos, Cheryl Lloyd
SD 43 (Coquitlam)*

Wendy

For a few years now, I have been part of an informal professional book club comprised of some amazing, strong women. Each year, we choose a book and meet every month to discuss it, with a new person facilitating the monthly meeting. The membership shifts a little here and there, but I always gain something from every person there.

Our little book club is made up of female administrators at all levels, including retired administrators. We all love to read, have a thirst for knowledge, and believe in holding each other up. While I joined the book club thinking it would provide great intellectual and professional learning, I never knew the heights to which it would lift me up emotionally and spiritually, and offer such a strong sense of camaraderie. This is what this group of women has given me:

1. These women are **understanding**. They understand me. And I understand them. We have walked similar paths; we have fought similar battles.
2. These women are **compassionate**. Although not all are mothers, they have the hearts of mothers, those hearts that give you their all, but expand even further to include the woman beside you.
3. These women are **authentic**. They are unapologetic about who they are and the values they hold. They are steadfast in their beliefs, but are always open to new thoughts, ideas, and perspectives.

I believe that this book club has made me a more understanding, compassionate, and authentic leader, not just with my staff, students, and families, but with myself. I am grateful to have these women

as part of my journey, and I highly recommend starting your own club!

Here are some books we have read so far:

Onward by Elena Aguilar

The Art of Coaching Teams by Elena Aguilar

Cassandra Speaks by Elizabeth Lesser

Critical Hope by Kari Grain

Women and Leadership by Julia Gillard & Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

Sharon

I had always been intrigued when I heard about friends in a book club. It sounded fun, getting together with friends, and sharing a glass of wine and a variety of perspectives on a chosen book. I had never joined a book club until the opportunity arose with some administrative colleagues. I had a feeling I would love it, but I didn't know that it would change how I felt about myself as an educational leader, and how close I would become to the women who support me.

Listening to my colleagues' different perspectives on a whole range of topics is amazing but, more specifically, I can listen and learn from female colleagues who are experiencing the same kinds of challenges in their daily lives, both at home and at work. I have come to know and respect this group of women in my book club, and they have made me a better person and a better leader. They have given me the confidence to continue to strive to do my very best daily, to work at my school, and to communicate with my staff, students, and my parent community. We have examined many topics such as coaching teams, women in leadership, and gender bias. My joy of reading has increased.

I know I can always improve my learning, but having a group of women educators to support me in that journey is a gift that I will treasure for the remainder of my career. The laughter – and the idea that sometimes we may take ourselves too seriously – is welcome, as we meet and put both our jobs and our roles into perspective. We have important and stressful roles as leaders in our buildings; the laughter that we share, and our ability to communicate on a common topic, are welcome interactions to look forward to every month.

"My joy of
reading
has increased."



For school administrators, the days are so busy and full that a focus on our own professional development can sometimes end up on the back burner. It can be equally challenging to find dedicated time to connect with our colleagues, and to engage in conversations that matter. This book club emerged from a need to connect, to engage in professional conversations about topics of importance to the group, and to learn and grow with a cohort of diverse individuals.

When the COVID pandemic hit, and our worlds – both professionally and personally – became unrecognizable, this book club was a lifeline. When we could not meet in person, we met monthly on Zoom to talk about our book, and about our role as administrators during that very challenging time. The book club filled some of the vital need for community that many of us were missing deeply. As caregivers

to our communities, it was time to focus on ourselves for a couple of precious hours each month.

Over the years, our professional lives have evolved and changed, just like the book we democratically select each year. This year, our book centres on the lives and lessons of women in prominent leadership roles. What has stayed the same, many books later, is our commitment to each other and ourselves, to our own professional growth, and to the gift of community that has developed as a result.



New to a school district and near the end of my educational career, I wanted to find a way to connect with other female leaders to help ground myself in my new district. It was important to me to begin building strong relationships, to foster my own learning, and to learn about the culture of the school district. As a female leader, it was also important to me to learn alongside those with similar lived experiences, and to have a place where I could share openly.

In chatting with a colleague (I had transitioned into her former role), I discovered that she had such connections, and they invited me into their sacred spaces. I am forever grateful for that invitation. Within the first few meetings, I found myself creating relationships with people whose paths I may never have crossed, yet who had very similar narratives as we journeyed through this career as female leaders. We have gotten to know each other on such a professional and personal level that I value everything about these women, trust them with my successes, and seek support when I struggle.

This book club has been soothing for my soul. Lived experiences in my previous district left me seeking those that valued my work, and I have now found that understanding. I am returning to the learner I

always valued being. The discussions we have had, through the variety of books we have read over the last few years, have re-sparked my personal growth, and helped me to understand the past and move forward with excitement, even in the twilight of my career.

"The book club
has been
soothing for
my soul."



The offer came... And then, the excitement, apprehension, and nervousness. Thank goodness I said yes, and joined a professional book club of amazing colleagues. Of course, I expected to learn from the authors of the books in each round, but I was also happy to receive the following gifts:

Community. The book club gives us something to unpack together – if I am not grasping the connection to my work, life, or role, then I know someone else in the book club is going to speak from a different lens, and I will gain a better understanding through their reflection. Every book club meeting furthered my learning about the topic itself, and about myself as an educational leader.

Wisdom. We never just talk about 'the book'. A circle of women is bursting with shared insight and experience, which spontaneously sparks rich conversation on a myriad of topics. Before and after our dedicated 'book conversation', we exchange the highs and lows of our personal

and professional lives, meeting celebration and support when needed.

Accountability. I am a curious professional who enjoys reading and learning. I am also the Principal of an elementary school that requires a lot of energy, as well as a constant cycle of reflection and action to keep us moving in the right direction to achieve our goals. To be honest, if there was not a deadline for each chapter, and a set date and time to meet and discuss together, I would not be reading the books.

Inspiration. I am inspired to do more by being in a book club that is comprised of some of the most dedicated, intelligent, and personable women leaders I know. My respect for these women pushes me to come to the meetings prepared and ready to listen and share. I come away from each meeting with new perspectives that can be applied to situations, suggestions for next steps, and sometimes validation for those difficult decisions made in isolation in my building.



Being an educational administrator often means navigating a challenging path of responsibilities, decisions, and leadership. By participating in a women's professional book club, I've discovered that personal growth and a sense of community are invaluable, and it has become an essential part of my professional life.

This professional women's book club serves as a sanctuary where I can freely share my thoughts and ideas. It's a supportive community where I've had the privilege to broaden my perspectives through rich

discussions with women from diverse backgrounds. These women have become an invaluable support group where I seek guidance and inspiration. We connect over shared experiences and unique challenges as women in leadership positions, and our discussions often translate into tangible actions that have enhanced and strengthened my leadership role.

Beyond the intellectual growth, the book club has also played an important role in my self-care. With my busy schedule, it encourages me to prioritize my personal growth and well-being. This group of women have formed a sisterhood where we come together to uplift and empower each other by hashing out ideas, sharing challenges, and celebrating our successes. In addition, I was lucky enough to connect to a group of women whose keen sense of humour has brought much laughter to our conversations.

This professional women's book club is a space where I have found a sense of belonging that extends and transcends the pages of the books we read.

"... It has become
an essential
part of my
professional life."



Learning is always more fun with others. Throughout my career as an educator, I sought opportunities to learn with others. I reached out and joined

professional learning networks and action research groups, and when, as a leader, my time became even more limited, I settled on a book club as it filled numerous needs. Our book club selects a professional book each year, and we meet each month to discuss a chapter. We take turns crafting questions or discussion prompts, and we meet in restaurants and homes, on outdoor decks and, of course, via Zoom.

First and foremost, the book club offers camaraderie. Being the only administrator in a building has its lonely moments, and having a group who share the job – if not the community – is a welcome balm for the soul. It is a healthy release to meet each month and have a place to laugh, ask questions, seek resources, and commiserate. Our group has become a sounding board for ideas, a place to share solutions, and a place to receive and offer support. We celebrate the triumphs within the group, and console the tragedies.

I have always wanted to grow and learn, yet time can become so precious that my own professional reading and learning can be pushed further down my lengthy 'to-do' list. The book club provides accountability to keep me doing what I want to do. The chapter-a-month model is neither onerous nor daunting and, by the end of the year, we have read a worthy book. The model also allows for a deep dive into the books we have read. If I was reading the book by myself, I would not take as much time, or consider the ideas, strategies, and theses as deeply. I suspect that the ideas in the book would not come to be woven into my practice in as meaningful a way. It is the slow, deep reading and discussion that allows the concepts to go beyond ideas, and to be put into action.

In order to select our book each year, we each offer up suggestions and then we vote. Sometimes we select a book that I would not have chosen. This is such a gift, as it opens me to new possibilities. There has never been a selection that has not been worthy of our time, although I might not have recognized

that at the start. Our discussions also open me to other viewpoints about the same material, or to other ways to put the ideas into practice. Being part of the book club challenges me to remain open-minded and critical. It provides new insights and alternatives.

To meet each month with a group of friends, to laugh, to be part of a support network, and to expand our thinking together has enriched me as a school leader. I am now retired, and the bonds of the group continue to draw me in to read and learn, to support and celebrate, to be part of a collective of amazing school leaders. I am looking forward to our book for this year, and all the discussions that will follow.

" It is the slow,
deep reading
and discussion
that allows the
concepts to go
beyond ideas,
and to be put
into action."

Cheryl

I am a librarian's daughter, and I have been reading and talking about books since I began teething. However, this is the first and only book club I have ever been a part of where we *actually* read the book, prepare our answers, and learn from each

other. It is a professional learning community, through and through. But that does not mean that it is not full of belly laughs, thoughtful gifts, and music recommendations.

We choose our books in a democratic way and take turns leading the conversation each month. Our book club members are a varied group – various ages, marital and family status, different races. Some are Principals, or Vice-Principals, some now retired, some are at elementary schools, secondary schools, and district positions. This diversity sets off multiple perspectives in our conversations.

We didn't all know each other well when we began; we have used literature to connect, creating solid partnerships through ideas and shared values. We have a foundation of respect and support, which underpins *all* of our discussions. This book club has helped me to find a safe place to be vulnerable, to learn so many things from these amazing women, and to create professional and personal connections that help me grow at my school and within the district. I have never left a book club meeting without being introduced to a new idea or perspective, hearing a thought provoking statement, or just realizing that I am not alone on this educational journey. These women understand me, from my professional challenges to my personal balance of family and work. Using the literature as a third point, we are able to be both introspective and interpretative, to listen and share and to grow as leaders through a network of support.

Share your
book club
experience

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The Homework club

One School's
Effort
to Provide an
Equitable
Educational
Opportunity

by

***Vincent Tourvieille
& Sarith Zabawny***

École Anne-Hébert, SD93

Introduction

“Education is the great equalizer. But is it really?”

Those words expressed by Schimmer¹ during a workshop given to Principals and Vice-Principals of school district 93 struck a chord.

As the authors chose education for their careers, they were convinced (naively) that the education system was providing equal opportunities. Unfortunately, the reality is far more complex. The more we acquire experience and maturity, the more we understand how complex it is to attain the goal of equity.

Nevertheless, we look for “place[s] to begin”² and, for us, this meant an offer of after-school homework support specifically to students with a lower socio-economic status who were also identified as struggling academically. This initiative allows us to provide two of the strategies mentioned by Growe and Montgomery³: individualized support and extended learning time.

Our Initiative

We decided to offer a homework club to students every day from 3:00pm to 4:00pm. In order to ‘qualify’ for this extra support, two conditions need to be met by the student:

- difficulty in either literacy or numeracy, as identified by the classroom teacher;
- belonging to a lower socio-economic category.

1 Schimmer, T. (2021). Posts by tomschimmer. Retrieved January 28, 2024, from <https://allthingsassessment.info/author/tom-schimmer/>

2 Gorski, P. C. (2018). Reaching and teaching students in poverty - strategies for erasing the opportunity gap. Teachers College Press. (p. 172)

3 Growe, R., & Montgomery, P. S. (2003). Educational equity in america: Is education the great equalizer? The Professional Educator, XXV(2), 23–29. Retrieved January 28, 2024, from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ842412.pdf> (p. 27)

Once a week, the school-based team meets and reviews potential ‘candidates’ identified by a classroom teacher. After a conversation with the parents, the teacher in charge of the homework club consults with the school-based team, taking into account both the needs of the students and the existing distribution of support to determine which day or days the student will participate in the club.

During the homework club session – after a light snack provided by the school – a teacher in charge and one or two Education Assistants (EAs) provide individual or small group support to the children. The teacher also liaises with the classroom teachers using a tracking sheet to ensure that the efforts and strategies are aligned with the classroom objectives.

At the end of the sessions, a few students get picked up by their parents while others take a school bus home.

How it Began

In past years, homework support was provided through the school district’s CommunityLINK program. There were several limitations to the program: the funding provided only two evenings each week of homework support, and only a small subset of the vulnerable student population could actually participate.

The Bus Conundrum

As a public school operating in the French language within an English majority population, our school covers a wide geographical area and our students rely on school bus transportation. Our school district provides bus transportation for students, but only immediately after instruction is finished.

The journey home following homework club was an issue. Since most of the parents of the targeted student population are not able to pick



up their children at 4:00pm, we faced a paradox: only parents of the non-targeted population had the ability to pick up their children – it seemed that we were actually contributing to the inequity! We had identified one structural weakness of the system that was contributing to the inequity: only the students who were coming from a higher socio-economic status could participate meaningfully in a homework club scenario. To address this situation, we decided to organize transportation at the school level.

Financing the Solution

Following the advice of Gorski⁴, who recommends to “partner with local organisations to offer wraparound services”, we submitted a funding

request to the Vancouver Sun Children’s Fund’s Adopt-a-School initiative, asking for help to fund the bus transportation following our homework club sessions. We are very grateful to this organization for the funding for bus transportation: this really was the missing piece that we could not resolve on our own.

Since the two days of funding provided by the CommunityLINK program was insufficient, we adapted both the school supervision schedule and the EA timetable to enable every full-time EA at the school to provide one hour of homework support each week. This change was accomplished at no additional cost to the district, and is in line with the principle to build “a school organisation at the service of learning”.⁵

4 Gorski, P. C. (2018). Reaching and teaching students in poverty - strategies for erasing the opportunity gap. Teachers College Press. (p. 172)

5 Archambault, J., Garon, R., & Harnois, L. (2011). Diriger une école en milieu défavorisé : Des caractéristiques des écoles performantes, provenant de la documentation scientifique. Retrieved January 31, 2024, from <https://www.cssdm.gouv.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/Profil-Direction-Diriger-ecole-milieu-defavorise-Characteristiques.pdf> (p. 2)

Since our school has two sites – one small (30 students at Henderson Annex), and one larger (300 students at the Anne-Hébert site) – the CommunityLINK funding covered the two days of homework club at the small site, while the rearrangement of the EA timetable provided homework club support every day of the week at the larger site.

Feedback on the Experience

After one trimester with this initiative, the feedback has been very positive! Here are a few of reflections:

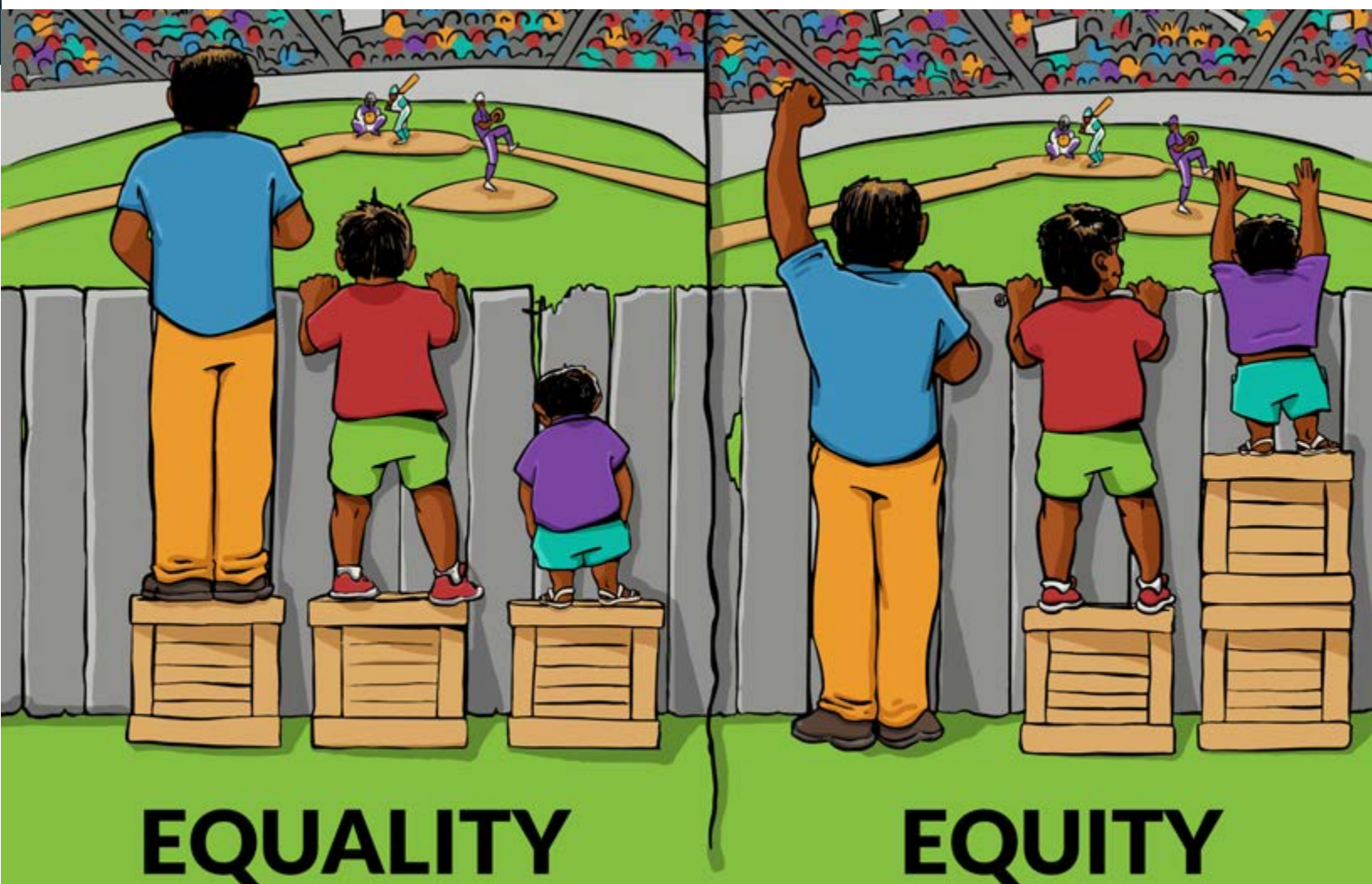
EAs like it The homework club is a special time, with a smaller group and a different setting than with the full class and classroom teacher. EAs can build a special relationship with students who need their help, both academically and socially.

A shared feeling of working towards equity Our school district has made extensive use of the image 'Equality versus Equity', and with this initiative, the whole teams feels that we are working together towards a more equitable education with a "shared project centered on learning".⁶

Not a leveling down We had heard the opinion that giving homework was not advised because it benefits only children from higher socio-economic category. Yet homework has been proven useful⁷ and, notably, a specific type of homework is helpful to consolidate key

6 Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur. (2019). Référentiel pour guider l'intervention en milieu défavorisé - une école pour la réussite de tous. Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec. Retrieved January 31, 2024, from https://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/education/jeunes/Referentiel-milieu-defavorise.pdf (p. 42)

7 Lathan, J. (2017, December 21). Is homework necessary? education inequity and its impact on students [University of san diego online degrees]. Retrieved January 29, 2024, from <https://onlinedegrees.sandiego.edu/education-inequity-and-homework/>



learnings and build good work habits⁸. Not providing homework could appear to be a step towards 'equity', but may not be advantageous to those who could most benefit from having homework. We are happy with our initiative, as it does not level down expectations or learning and keeps expectations high. The importance of maintaining high expectations for students in poverty settings was highlighted by Archambault et al.⁹

Importance of snack time Starting the sessions with a light snack resulted in two benefits. It creates an occasion to practice informally the French language. This is very important for us as we are looking for ways to make French not only the instruction language but also a language of everyday life. It also builds a special relationship between the adults and the students, relationships that have been very beneficial in supporting the student both during the homework club and in the regular school time.

An important question One welcome surprise when we returned in January was that students asked when the homework club would start again. They were eager to do homework!

They don't want to stop studying One very satisfying experience has been that some children who never before did homework are now so caught up in the flow of studying that they don't want to stop when it is time to go home!

Classroom teachers notice the progress Finally, and maybe the most important indicator, classroom teachers have noticed the progress made.

Conclusion

At the time of writing this article in February 2024, we are only halfway through the year but our experience has been very positive.

Several dynamics came into play, and made this whole initiative possible: the flexibility of the EAs with their timetables, our school district's support through allowing extra teacher time dedicated to support the homework club, and the Adopt-a-School agency that funded the bus trips home. It really takes a village to raise a child, and to work towards equity in education!

8 Gauthier, C., Bissonnette, S., & Richard, M. (2013). Enseignement explicite et réussite des élèves. Éditions du renouveau pédagogique. Retrieved January 29, 2024, from <https://www.erpi.com/fr/enseignement-explicite-gestion-appr-9782761355063.html> (p. 216–219)

9 Archambault, J., Garon, R., & Harnois, L. (2011). Diriger une école en milieu défavorisé : Des caractéristiques des écoles performantes, provenant de la documentation scientifique. Retrieved January 31, 2024, from <https://www.cssdm.gouv.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/Profil-Direction-Diriger-ecole-milieu-defavorise-Caracteristiques.pdf> (p. 1)



Courtesy Sarith Zabawny

Does Your School or District have a homework initiative? Tell us more!

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Your Stories: Anti-Racism

As BC Principals and Vice-Principals, you and your teams are working to ensure welcoming and inclusive environments in your schools. Tell us your stories about the anti-racism initiatives that are taking place in your school community, and we will feature your story in an upcoming issue of *Principled* magazine.

Send your stories, along with your high resolution photos, to:

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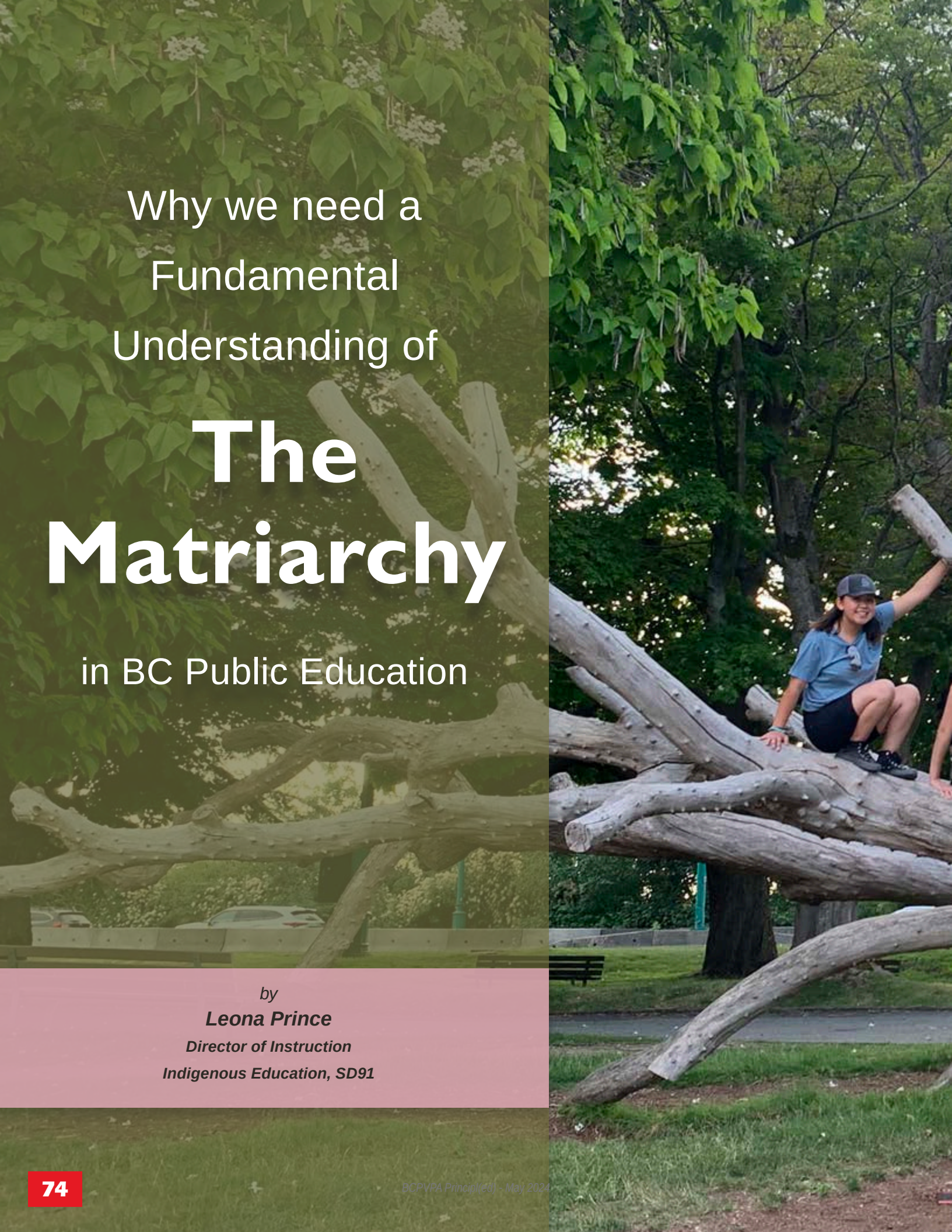


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A young woman with dark hair, wearing a blue t-shirt, black shorts, and a grey baseball cap, is sitting on a large, fallen tree trunk in a park. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The tree trunk is light-colored and has several knots. In the background, there are green trees and a paved path. The left side of the image has a green overlay with white text.

Why we need a Fundamental Understanding of **The** **Matriarchy**

in BC Public Education

by
Leona Prince
*Director of Instruction
Indigenous Education, SD91*



There are many issues related to Indigenous peoples that are now at the forefront of discussion in our country. Recent focus has been placed on Pretendians, a term used for people of non-Indigenous ancestry who falsely claim Indigenous heritage. The main issue with Pretendians is that they fraudulently take away opportunities for Indigenous peoples, and many high-profile cases of this deceit have been revealed in Canada.

While this issue is important, it is critical as educators that we look beyond the headlines and ensure that we are aware of larger issues that are affecting our Indigenous communities and Indigenous learners, and that may not receive the same level of public attention. One of these issues relates to the Matriarchal systems of governance in Indigenous communities in our province. Many of the First Nations cultures in British Columbia are rooted in a Matriarchal system, and this is especially true for the nations that have traditional hereditary systems of leadership. Not all Indigenous communities are Matriarchal, but many of the nations are; the system that I was born into is proudly Matriarchal.

Both in our public education system, and in our social system, we need to strive to decolonize our views of Indigenous women and girls. To do this work, it is important to understand the history of Indigenous women in our province and country, and to recognize how this troubling history has affected Indigenous girls as learners in our education system. In School District 91 (Nechako Lakes), we are underway with a mission to support our girls and Rematriate our communities. Here is an overview of the history that has led us to our mission.

What is a Matriarchal Society?

A Matriarchy is a social system in which positions of dominance and authority are primarily held by women. In a broader sense, it can also extend to moral authority, social privilege, and control of property. This, of course, is a western description of something that exists within my community, and which is sacred and time-honoured. Given this definition, it becomes obvious why this was problematic for the colonial government, as it was in direct opposition to the patriarchal nature of the settler system of governance.

Women have always held positions of leadership in our communities. Our leadership is hereditary and is passed down through the female Ancestral line. We do this through our Balhats (Potlatch) system, which is – in simple terms – our traditional governance, legal and banking system. In our community, we have four main clans: beaver, bear, frog, and caribou. The clan system will vary from nation to nation, but what is consistent is that the foundation is built on the female lines of inheritance. If you are trying to control and break down a society, especially if their ways of knowing and being are in direct contradiction to your own, then you would look to shift fundamental practices within those communities. There were several ways in which this was done through legislation and policy, and in 1867, the federal government's Indian Act imposed western and patriarchal systems of land registration and governance.

Our land stewardship is tied directly to the Balhats. Hereditary Chiefs that are high-ranking will have

"The clan system will vary from nation to nation, but what is consistent is that the foundation is built on the female lines of inheritance. If you are trying to control and break down a society, especially if their ways of knowing and being are in direct contradiction to your own, then you would look to shift fundamental practices within those communities."



Courtesy School District 91, Nechako Lakes

land tied to their titles. It is their responsibility to ensure that those lands are cared for and protected. In our community, the word for this is Keyoh. Both female and male Hereditary Chiefs take on this responsibility of stewardship. Keyohs belong to a distinct clan, and remain in that clan, passed down through the female line. One of the mechanisms in which the government disrupted this practice was through the establishment of traplines. Indigenous-specific traplines were put in place, and tenders for these lines were given out to Indigenous males only, and could only be passed down to the sons of the trapline holder. The mapping of these traplines in BC did not take into account the pre-existing Keyoh boundaries. The Keyoh system is still in place, but it makes governance a lot more difficult in those areas.

Another way that the government undermined the Matriarchal systems of our people was through the Potlatch Bans, and through the establishment of the democratic Chief and Council systems. From 1885 to 1951, the Indigenous ceremony known as the Potlatch was banned by the government of Canada. The government justified their decision to ban the Potlatch because they believed it was preventing the assimilation of Indigenous Peoples. Today, that ban is recognized as an aspect of cultural genocide. Both the trapline systems and the Potlatch bans are recognized as the purposeful marginalization of Indigenous women in communities. There was a very strategic and systemic targeting of Indigenous women, and a reduction of their power and influence within their communities.

Voting for First Nations Women

Another mechanism that was utilized to disempower Indigenous women was the granting of voting rights, or the lack thereof. On May 24, 1918, women were granted the right to vote in federal elections. First Nations women could only exercise their right to vote if they gave up their status or treaty rights: you could choose to participate in the politics of Canada if you would agree to be disenfranchised. Status is often granted through the mother, and by removing their status they could be assimilated into the broader Canadian society. Twenty-six years later, on January 1, 1944, Status Indian servicemen, like my Grandfather Bob Prince, and their spouses were extended the right to vote. In January 1951, as the result of changes to the Indian Act, First Nations women gained the right to vote in Band Council elections. In the first Band Council election of the Lake Babine Nation, they elected a female Chief, Margaret Patrick. Clearly, those female leadership roles were and are still being honoured in our communities. In that same year, First Nations were granted the vote in federal elections, retaining their status and treaty rights. However, they are still excluded from voting in some provinces.

Bill C-31 – Indian Act Amendment

On June 17, 1985, Bill C-31 was passed, and amended the Indian Act. Since the mid-1800s the status of women had been tied to that of their husbands. If a Status Indian woman married a non-Status Indian man, she would lose her status, and if a non-Status Indian woman married a Status Indian man, she would acquire status. Bill C-31 removed these discriminatory provisions. Women – like my grandmother Evelyn who married my Irish grandfather John – lost their status and were forced to move off the reserve. Indian Agents would pay

people from the community to report women who tried to return to the reserve to see their families. This would be one of the precursors to the lateral violence we witness in our communities. This history of betrayal has had a lasting impact on our communities. Many women had to sneak onto the reserve at night to visit with family. It wasn't until the passing of Bill C-31 that my grandmother, my father, and his siblings were reinstated and gained the status that my grandmother relinquished for loving my grandfather.

The Legacy of the Policies and Practices

History shows that there was a targeted approach to disempowering Indigenous women. In addition, there is the aspect of dehumanization through assimilation. Women who were never seen as 'lesser than' now were seen as the weaker sex and subservient. It is then no surprise that crimes against Indigenous women are so prevalent. We wonder why there is an epidemic in this country, and yet we are well aware of the history of marginalization that has torn at the fabric of our communities. We currently face these statistics for Indigenous women in Canada:

- **Between 2009 and 2021**, 490 Indigenous women and girls were killed, at a rate that was six times higher than among non-Indigenous women and girls.
- June 3, 2019 - The National Inquiry's Final Report reveals that persistent and deliberate human and Indigenous rights violations and abuses are the root cause behind Canada's staggering rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls.

"First Nations women could only exercise their right to vote if they gave up their status or treaty rights: you could choose to participate in the politics of Canada if you would agree to be disenfranchised."

- **October 10, 2023** - At both the policing stage and when charges were completed in court, homicides of Indigenous women and girls resulted in charges of manslaughter instead of murder more often than when the victims were non-Indigenous women or girls.¹

We clearly have a problem that needs to be addressed, but this cannot just be done by governments and agencies alone; this will also take public awareness and education. By presenting the historical context for what we are witnessing, my hope is to help educators begin to decolonize our views of Indigenous women and girls.

What are We Doing About It?

In 2019, we conducted research in School District 91 (Nechako Lakes) with Indigenous females from Grade 8-12, asking them about their experiences in the K-12 education system. Through this research, we were able to identify the areas of support we needed to address with this demographic of our student body. The solution, drawn from the voices of our youth, was to develop a Rematriation program. After reviewing our research, we concluded that the girls were lacking knowledge and skills in areas that were traditionally taught through our Rights of Passage, which was rooted in our Balhats. The young women identified these areas where they needed support:

- Culture and Language
- Leadership
- Mental Health
- Physical Literacy

Traditionally, these are the areas of teaching that are covered through the Rights of Passage practices

¹ Court outcomes in homicides of Indigenous women and girls, 2009 to 2021, Burczycka, M. & Cotter, A., 2023, Statistics Canada.

Hundiyyin

This term is from the Nedut'en dialect and is a word used only for the women in our community. It loosely translates into English as 'sharp like a knife', but refers to the strength, mental clarity, and ability for our women to speak for our community.

when a girl became a woman. The young women would be mentored, and would then assume their places in our system of governance. To do our part as an education system, and to help revitalize what has been forgotten, we designed the Hundiyyin Indigenous Girls' Group to support our Indigenous female youth.



Hundiyyin Indigenous
Girls' Group

This is the second year of our program, and the girls have learned that this is a system that they can trust, that cares for them, and where they can see themselves. The program is based solely on a design driven by the youth, and it continues to grow each year. By the end of this school year, we will have established Indigenous Female Leadership programs in each of our high schools, and this is how we are going to Rematriate our communities.

I strongly believe that if you lift up our girls, your lift up our communities. I encourage each and every educator to inquire about the social organization of the Rights Holders of your territories, and to see if there are ways that you can first learn about local structures, and how you can support revitalization efforts. The work is both rewarding and healing, and will support the Indigenous girls in our schools to rise and thrive.

To learn more about our programming visit www.hundiyyin.com or email me at lprince@sd91.bc.ca

Embracing Change

From Powell River School District to qathet School District: One Step Closer to Truth and Reconciliation

by **Dr. Shannon Behan**
Principal, qathet School District
BCPVPA President-Elect

Nestled atop the Sunshine Coast – accessible by sea or air, and 90 miles north of Vancouver – sits the stunningly beautiful community of Powell River. Our city is welcoming, close-knit, connected, and a playground for those who love trails, the ocean, and lakes. It is also a city rich in history, and one that has most recently been navigating churning waters as it moves from a resource-based, single-industry community to a more modern and dynamic economy.

In this same city, a significant transformation is taking place that reflects not only the collective commitment to education, but also the dedication to reconciliation and the acknowledgment of Indigenous heritage. A landmark in this transformation has been the decision to change the name of the school district from Powell River School District 47 to qathet school district.

"We spent our summers 'up Powell Lake', and over the years, our families grew. Through this time, I do not recall any of us reflecting on the name of our town; it was simply where we grew up."

I grew up in this community, and I have a large extended family who have lived here for many generations. Originally from Ireland, my family came here to work in the logging industry. We maintain a strong sense of our Irish heritage, where large family dinners occur regularly, the fiddle comes out at the drop of a hat, and connection, food, and laughter are constants. We spent our summers 'up Powell Lake', and over the years, our families grew. Through this time, I do not recall any of us reflecting on the name of our town; it was simply where we grew up. That has been the extent of my own thinking about our city's name, and what it represents, until now.

In the early part of my career as a high school English teacher, I always shared a lesson about the importance of naming. The lesson involves listing car names and making the connection with the meaning behind the name. We would generate a list – Ford Mustang, Chevy Pinto, Volkswagen Rabbit, AMC Gremlin, Volkswagen Bug, Dodge Viper – and students would reflect and write about how the name influences the car's image, and defines its selling features. Why would the manufacturer choose that specific name for the vehicle? What message does the name send? It is a great lesson, intriguing for the students whose written responses were always insightful.

When it was announced that the district would change its name, I began to reflect upon what this

*"A name is not just a label;
it is a powerful symbol that
carries historical, cultural,
and social significance. It
defines who we are, what we
stand for, and how we are
perceived by others."*

means to me as an individual in this community, as a leader in my school, and as a person with a role in the province's education landscape. There were a few 'a-ha' moments.

Powell River was named after Dr. Israel Wood Powell, the first Superintendent of Indian Affairs for British Columbia in the late 19th century. While Dr. Powell made contributions to the province, it is crucial to recognize that Indigenous peoples suffered tremendously under his leadership; years of unimaginable hardship and trauma resulted from the acts of abuse perpetrated by those who explored this region. The name Powell River not only represents a historical figure, but also carries with it the legacy of colonialism and the erasure of Indigenous identities.

A name is not just a label; it is a powerful symbol that carries historical, cultural, and social significance. It defines who we are, what we stand for, and how we are perceived by others. In the case of our school district, this change signifies a shift towards a more inclusive, respectful, and equitable future.

I want to share that I have been writing this article for a few months, much longer than I would have anticipated. I have sat down to write, only to find myself hours later with a well-organized linen closet, vacuumed and polished floors, and alphabetized books on my bookshelf, and here is why. In writing

about the past and this transition to *qathet*, my worry has been, "what if I make a mistake? What if I discover something about myself that is problematic? What if the name Powell River means more to me than I think it does?" As always, introspection is the greatest teacher, as the process and name change has left me with more questions than answers. While I discovered that the name *qathet* means 'working together', I wondered about the process for naming and – most importantly – what we can do to ensure our school community reflects the intention behind the name change.

Many of us who lead reconciliation work in our district are seeking ways to support our colleagues on a journey of Truth and Reconciliation. This journey is complex, and distinct, as we are all at different places in the journey to reconciliation. A significant action such as a district's change of name is a signal to everyone, in and out of the organization, that the history of Indigenous peoples and the connection to land must be understood and its significance made explicit. If done with the right intention, a name change *should* elicit thought and emotion. We *should* be reflective of our practices and intentions, of our language and context. We need to be thoughtfully and carefully aware of those whom we serve, and those whose voices have historically been silenced.

In T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", as a reflection of his internal struggle and hesitation, the writer asks, "Dare I disturb the universe?" The idea of disturbing the universe suggests a fear of breaking societal norms or causing a disruption. Disturbing the universe means stepping out of our comfort zones and leading change. And, despite feeling the internal angst, sense of unease, discomfort, or awkwardness in having more questions than answers, the answer to the question, "Dare I disturb the universe?" is undeniably YES. The 'how' is where we roll up our sleeves and work together.



@svbehan

SHAPING OUR Future

The BCPVPA 2023-2026 Strategic Plan

Every three years, the BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association has the opportunity to reflect on our service both to members and the sector when we reimagine our Strategic Plan. The process is deep, and our Board is untiring in their exploration of who we are as an organization, and who we want to be as we go forward.

The 2023-2026 BCPVPA Strategic Plan builds on our core goals from the 2020-2023 plan – a commitment to the employment equity, well-being, and professional development of our members, along with the work that we as an association perform in public education – and embraces the critical new goal of becoming a champion in the areas of reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Through the parallel work that we have undertaken, including the development of our organization's Equity Theory of Change in 2023, the BCPVPA is engaged in a transformation. Our mission of, “serving members by supporting effective leadership in education through representation, advocacy, and leadership development,” has not changed, but our recognition of the ways in which we can fulfill this mission are shifting as we continue to learn what is needed to ensure a safe and inclusive educational community. Our collective intentions in our Strategic Plan align with the objective to serve all of our members, in the ways that those members need to be supported.

We invite you to explore the 2023-2026 BCPVPA Strategic Plan.





Serving members by supporting effective leadership in education through representation, advocacy and leadership development

REDI Champion

BCPVPA leads and champions Truth and Reconciliation, diversity, cultural competency, and equitable opportunities to ensure a safe and inclusive educational community.



Employment Equity

Fair and equitable terms and conditions of employment are in place that reflect the competencies, responsibilities, and needs of Principals and Vice-Principals.

2023-2026 Strategic Plan

Respected Voice

BCPVPA is an influential partner and a respected voice within public education.



Member Health

Principals and Vice-Principals have the support and resources required to maintain and improve their overall well-being.



Leadership Development

Principals and Vice-Principals have access to the learning opportunities and programs needed to build their leadership capacity.





Equity Theory of Change

How the
BCPVPA is
learning and
growing,
with a little
help from
our friends

Late in 2020, our BCPVPA President was approached by one of our members, and asked a simple question: *“Is the BCPVPA an anti-racist organization?”*

It’s a question that offers pause. How do we know that? How would we demonstrate that? And alongside anti-racism, how do we model decolonization, reconciliation, equity, and inclusion? What are we doing — or not doing — that would lead a member to pose this question?

As we observed what was happening around the world and in our own country during this period, the question hung in the air. And, quietly at first, but with growing volume, we started to ask that question of ourselves. We can mark that as where this journey began.

We sought the wisdom of an expert to guide the BCPVPA through crafting our own Equity Theory of Change that would help us to establish a roadmap for the work that is ahead.

We approached critical friends, both within our Association and beyond, to help us to examine our practices and our beliefs. To say that we shifted our lens does not capture the depth of the work done by those who joined our committees and those who contributed their ideas and pressure-tested our findings.

The BCPVPA that has emerged from this first part of the journey is a different entity than the BCPVPA that opened that first gate. In the months and years to follow, we will share and demonstrate our discoveries, our intentions, and our learning. To quote one of our valued friends:

“We need to be in the forefront of equitable and meaningful change.”

Developing an Equity Theory of Change requires a deep and honest assessment of how your organization operates, and of the belief systems that have driven the work. It involves a reckoning of whether the structures of reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion are considered in the development and performance of the organization’s work. It draws out the values of the organization, so that those values can be more clearly considered in the actions of the organization. It identifies who we serve, and ensures that the organization refocuses on serving all members and friends in an equitable way. It outlines the approaches and activities that will ensure that the organization will live into its values. And, it defines the expected changes that we expect to see, and for which we are accountable.

Over the next three years, the BCPVPA has an objective to adapt its operations and programs to equip BC Principals and Vice-Principals with the knowledge and resources to recognize, understand, and effectively respond to racism and discrimination in their schools.

The BCPVPA will strive to contribute to cultivating the conditions for BC schools to be vibrant and diverse places that are learning and working environments where everyone can flourish.

We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all of the members and friends who have supported this journey so far, and we look forward to sharing our learning and helping to contribute to change for students, educators, and others in BC’s education sector.



“The work of reaching every child is simply too hard for any one of us to do it alone.”

This is a phrase we have been repeating for years, and it is as true now as it was when we started developing and supporting networks more than twenty years ago. We have learned a lot that we would like to share about networks, but we will start with the origin story.

It was a dark and stormy night when Judy’s phone rang. At the end of the line was Linda, reaching out for advice. We were both secondary Principals, and Linda asked if she could come over to talk through a challenging situation. Over a glass or two of (not very good) wine, we decided that, while sharing ideas as friends was good, expanding the group would be even better. This led us to invite three other female secondary Principals from different districts to meet monthly to exchange resources, strategies, and even a few grad speeches. We talked, laughed, argued, moaned occasionally, and all benefitted from our time together. Our taste in wine improved, too.

A few years later, we were each approached separately by the Ministry of Education with the invitation to encourage teachers to use the BC Performance Standards. Linda turned to Judy and said, “I have an idea. What if we work together on this?” This was the beginning of a partnership that has led us to developing the Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education (NOIIE) and leadership programs at the University of Victoria (UVic), Vancouver Island University (VIU), and now at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

What drove us then – and what drives us today – is our absolute commitment to making school a place where every child belongs and where every learner, especially those who have been historically underserved, is equipped to thrive. Our central goal in the networks is that every learner will cross the stage with dignity, purpose, and options. This is what

motivates us to continue to develop and support networks across BC and internationally.

We have been so busy, immersed in the various networks with which we are associated, that we seldom take the time to reflect on our own learning. After twenty-three years, it feels like it’s about time that we did. We have identified a few ideas that – from our perspective, and from the research on social networks – can contribute to the kinds of networks that lead to real change and stronger systems. This is just a start: see what you think.

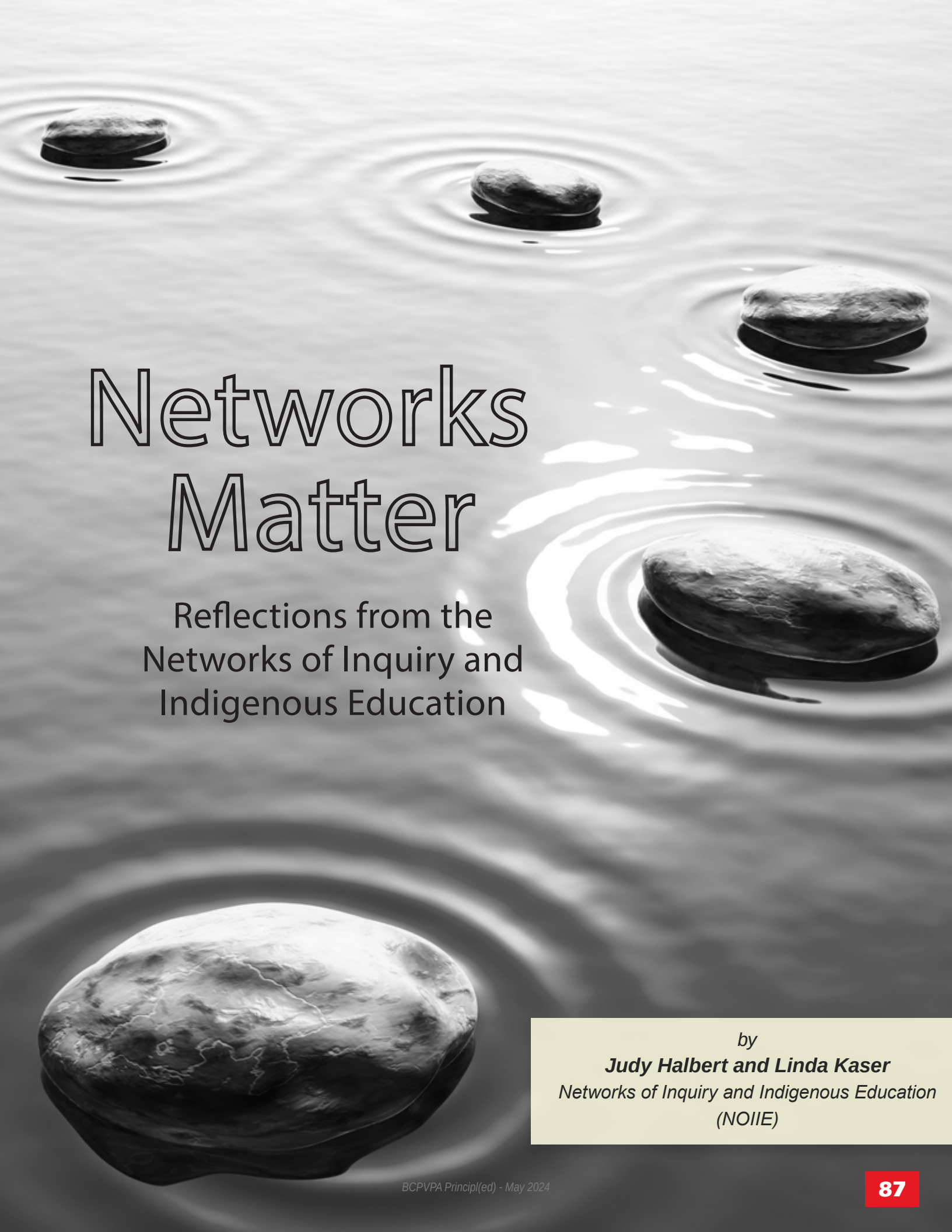
Purpose and Focus

We have experienced and observed networks in many different countries. In one case, millions of dollars were invested to incent schools to join networks. In another, schools were arbitrarily organized into clusters and told to function as a network. Neither approach worked, nor were they sustained.

Among the distinguishing features of successful and lasting networks are a shared purpose and



"What drove us then – and what drives us today – is our absolute commitment to making school a place where every child belongs and where every learner, especially those who have been historically underserved, is equipped to thrive."



Networks Matter

Reflections from the
Networks of Inquiry and
Indigenous Education

by
Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser
*Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education
(NOIIE)*

voluntary participation. Initially, our focus was on formative assessment and building learner agency through the use of the performance standards. With the encouragement of Trish Rosborough, then Director of Aboriginal Education with the Ministry of Education, we expanded our focus. The challenge was to use an inquiry approach to realize the intent of the local Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements in classroom practice.

Nine years ago, we were approached by the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre at UBC to focus on improving transitions for Indigenous learners. This has led to a multi-year study with twenty-four schools currently involved in a third cohort. We have witnessed the value of smaller focused networks within the larger umbrella network, and now there are groups focused on cognitive engagement, literacy, numeracy, and self-regulated learning. Each of these smaller networks is facilitated by experienced NOIIE leaders and supported by inquiry partners.

What connects all these schools is their commitment to collaborative inquiry and to publicly sharing their stories, their successes, and their challenges. It was never our goal to have every school in BC be part of the network. We do, however, want every school to have a chance to learn from a network school. This is why network schools make their inquiries public through case studies on the website, through local celebrations, through the learning bursts and at the annual symposium.

Catalytic Affiliation and Kindredness

We have been fortunate to have UVic's Dr. Catherine MacGregor study the network for the past dozen years. She has written two substantial reports about the impact of educator involvement in NOIIE, and introduced the frame of *Being, Belonging and Becoming* to shape the transitions work. Catherine created the concept of catalytic affiliation to describe



"What connects all these schools is their commitment to collaborative inquiry and to publicly sharing their stories, their successes, and their challenges."

what she has seen in the network, where the strength of interpersonal and professional connections helps to accelerate substantive change.

Among the aspects that she identified as contributing to catalytic affiliation are trust, inclusive and collaborative practices, a shared purpose, and kindredness. Catherine conceptualizes kindredness as a deep regard, love and care for others that implies a responsibility to engage in complex conversations, challenge biases and assumptions, and deepen social links.

One of the first things that we ask of network educators is to (metaphorically) leave their roles at the door. This flattened hierarchy provides a space where all voices are heard and valued. It can sometimes be a relief for formal leaders not to feel they are defined by their roles; they can participate as curious peers. Over time, kindredness has developed across roles.

Shared Leadership

Early on, we recognized that the two of us could not possibly support the network all on our own. We needed help, and we needed a team.

What is most gratifying for us today is to be surrounded and supported by educators – across many different roles – who believe in this work and who are always ready to say yes. There are far

too many to name here, and invariably we would unintentionally leave someone out. You know who you are, and we are deeply grateful.

There are many contributions made by NOIE leaders: they serve as regional coordinators, bringing people together locally; they host and present at learning bursts; they host, organize, and present at the symposium; they manage the website and handle communication; they organize and lead study tours; they develop and freely share resources; they convene regular coffee chats. And this is just a start.

A network is only as good as the people who step up to be involved. It is the involvement, the commitment, the kindredness – and the catalytic affiliation – of BC educators that has allowed NOIE to be sustained for so many years.

Shared Frameworks and Simple Structures

One of the unifying features of the networks in BC and beyond is the use of the Spiral of Inquiry as a framework for collaborative inquiry. Having a common language, and sharing the expectation that listening to learners is the starting point for every inquiry, makes it much easier for schools to learn from each other.

A shared framework for making decisions, as outlined in the *Decision Playbook*, has increased the capacity of school teams to not only make better decisions throughout the Spiral but to also learn more effectively and efficiently from each other. The recent publication of the *Spiral Notebook for Student Changemakers* illustrates the impact that students can have when they work with both the Spiral and the decision frameworks.

From the beginning, we have worked to keep the structure of the network simple. Initially, we asked schools to meet in person three times a year, to

submit the focus for their inquiries in the fall, and to share their learning in person and through their case studies at the end of the year. We know that travel in many parts of BC can be an obstacle for schools to meet in person. Try driving from Squamish to Surrey one day after school, and you will appreciate that these challenges are not limited to remote communities in mid-winter!

So where are we now, in 2024? Every school in BC is welcome to submit a proposal for their inquiry in the fall of each year. These are all available on the website, and we encourage school teams to reach out to others with a similar focus. Throughout the year, we offer a series of short after school online Learning Bursts featuring the work in network schools. Each May, we organize a two-day symposium that is designed to celebrate learning in NOIE schools, and to provide an infusion of new learning from local and international perspectives. The symposium is open to anyone willing to enter with a spirit of inquiry and curiosity. Finally, network teams that submit the focus for their inquiry in the fall are asked to complete a short case study at the end of the year.

We have learned the importance of saying thank you to educators who make their learning public, and for years we have been able to provide a small grant to recognize their contributions. This leads us to the idea of generosity.

Generosity

At an airport several years ago, Linda bumped into a respected Indigenous leader from the BC Interior. He told her that wherever he travelled, he brought something that had personal meaning and value that he could give away. He reminded her that the Chief should be the poorest person in the village because, “you show your influence by what you give away.”

Incenting schools to join networks with an infusion of cash does not work. Saying thank you at the end



"What is most gratifying for us today is to be surrounded and supported by educators – across many different roles – who believe in this work and who are always ready to say yes."

of a year's work is more helpful. We hope school teams use their grants to buy a few resources, enjoy a great meal together, or maybe help subsidize attendance at the symposium.

One of the main ways that we have raised money for the grants has been through selling resources. We are very grateful to the BCPVPA for their support in this regard. By selling the original *Spirals of Inquiry* and the *Spiral Playbook*, we have been able to provide grants to hundreds of schools. This teamwork with the BCPVPA has made a big difference.

Perseverance

It hasn't always been easy supporting the network. Funding support has ebbed and flowed. Job action made some years very difficult. COVID-19 struck. Demands on schools sometimes seemed endless. And yet years later, here we are more committed than ever to the network and to our shared goals.

A few years ago, NOIIE was identified by the Big Change organization in Great Britain as a pioneer in system transformation. In the OECD Handbook for Innovative Learning Environments, the Spiral of Inquiry was listed as one of the most useful tools for system change. In 2019, NOIIE was awarded

the Cmolik Prize for the enhancement of public education in BC. This kind of recognition feels great, but it is not what keeps us going.

What keeps us motivated and energized – and what we believe works for countless educators – is to see the difference that we can make when we work together. Hearing the voices of young people who are on track to a better life because of their experiences in school, and seeing the impact on teachers when they no longer feel isolated or lonely, has its own magic.

Limitless Possibilities

The roots of the network are grounded in that fateful phone call on a dark wintry night. Not long after that call, we went to hear a Buddhist teacher at the Hyatt Hotel downtown. It was another dark and stormy November night, and the city was filled with electric energy. The APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) gathering was taking place in Vancouver. Protestors were vocal, and there was heightened security everywhere. It felt surreal to walk through armed security so that we could hear the gentle chime of bells and listen to the wisdom of the teacher. Even though it was Friday night, and the chimes were lulling us to sleep, some key messages penetrated and have stuck with us ever since. One concept that is central to our belief in the power of networks is the idea of 'limitless possibilities'.

Early on, when we were looking for an image to represent NOIIE, we came across the work of Martin Hill and his image of Floating Stones. Creating the foundations for teams to do good work and being open to where that might lead just felt right, and we appreciated Martin giving us permission to use the image.

Being open to new possibilities and taking the stance of 'saying yes' has taken NOIIE from a group of Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley schools meeting at the Surrey curriculum centre to a global



"What keeps us motivated and energized – and what we believe works for countless educators – is to see the difference that we can make when we work together."

network with connections in Australia, Aotearoa (New Zealand), Rarotonga / Cook Islands, Hawaii, Catalonia, Sweden, Germany, Wales, England, Manitoba, the Yukon Territory, the Northwest Territories, Singapore, Lebanon and Canadian International schools in Asia.

'Saying yes' has also created opportunities for BC educators that we would never have imagined. In 2009, we were asked to host the ICSEI congress, a major international conference linking policy makers, practitioners, and researchers. This led to an invitation to be part of the OECD research study on innovative learning environments. Since then, NOIIE educators have participated in ICSEI conferences all over the world, most recently in Dublin in January 2024. Another outcome of 'saying yes' is that this year, eight BC schools are participating in the OECD Schools + Network, a major initiative involving 40 countries and 140 schools. This work is impressive, and we are proud that there are more schools from Canada than from any other country (and that they are all from BC).

We have hosted many study tours over the years, and the new Global Spiral Student Network led by Oskar Prato and Anna Fahlin from Utbildningsförvaltningen Skönstaholmsskolan School in Stockholm is a result of their visit to schools in Richmond and Delta in May 2023. When educators with a passion for quality work and a commitment to equity come together, the possibilities really are limitless.

Turning to One Another

In the conclusion of the study on innovative learning environments, David Istance observed that lasting change does not come exclusively from the top down or from the bottom up. Rather, he said that real transformation comes through the rich web of networks and relationships that provide the space for change to take hold.

Margaret Wheatley in her book *Turning to One Another* said that she believed we can change the world if we start listening to each other. She said that change happens when we look to each other and say, "I have an idea, what if?" The network started with that one good idea, and it has taken us to places we never imagined. Thank you for being part of this adventure.

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SOGI 123

by
ARC Foundation

Reflecting Back, and Looking Ahead



In July 2016, a change to the BC Human Rights Code to include gender identity and expression as prohibited grounds of discrimination became the catalyst for the BC Ministry of Education and school districts to take action. On September 8, 2016, all BC school districts were advised of the requirement to put in place District and School Codes of Conduct and policy that aligned with the change to the Human Rights Code. At this time, school districts were in various stages of readiness to implement strategies and policy, and needed support, thus garnering momentum for SOGI 123.

In the same year, the BC Ministry of Education, along with a group of provincial education organizations, embarked on a momentous journey that would create meaningful change to improve the lives of students of all sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGI) in BC schools. Because of this incredible effort, SOGI-inclusive education is now a powerful initiative helping to make schools in BC – and in regions across Canada – safer and more welcoming for all students and staff.

Today, SOGI-inclusive education faces many challenges, even though sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression are protected by the BC Human Rights Code. There is a great deal of misinformation surrounding topics such as curriculum, teaching resources, and bathrooms. In some provinces, this has led to changes in policy at a provincial level that hinder the ability for some students to show up as their authentic selves at school. All schools should be inclusive places where students feel safe, accepted, respected, and welcome. And while educators have been working for years to build the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to support 2SLGBTQ+ students and families, those staff need the support and allyship of all their colleagues, including those in positions of leadership, to continue to create inclusive learning environments.

Studies have shown that SOGI-inclusive schools have a positive impact on the well-being of *all students*, not only those that identify within the 2SLGBTQ+ community. It is more important now than ever before that there is leadership voice, as well as subject matter expertise, to overcome the inaccurate ways SOGI in schools is currently being portrayed by individuals, in the media, and by some political parties. Most students go through life seeing themselves represented in the world around them. SOGI 123 helps ensure that 2SLGBTQ+ identities are reflected in the school environment, and that students can learn about the diversity of humanity.

In 2023 the BCPVPA, along with several Principal and Vice-Principal groups across BC school districts, took initiative by having SOGI 123 staff present to their members on managing these newly arising concerns. Through this leadership, educators continue to be empowered to remain inclusive, while handling parent and community curiosity with tact and kindness. Through our regular SOGI Educator Network meetings, educators and administrators alike continue to offer support and guidance to one another, and through our presentations, all school staff can deepen their understanding of what it

means to be proudly SOGI-inclusive. Collaboration within this community of educators is paramount to the well-being of staff, who can feel supported and validated in their experiences, and develop new skills to manage SOGI-related inquiries and concerns.

To support the sustainability of this work, ARC Foundation continues to offer development opportunities for educators such as hosting an annual SOGI Educator Summit, facilitating webinars, and working with District SOGI Leads to meet the distinct needs of districts by recommending both more targeted learning sessions, and support for parents' sessions. These are in addition to the collection of online resources available on our website, SOGleducation.org, which includes our SOGI-Inclusive Education Resource Guide, Learning Bursts for Educators, Parents' Guide to SOGI in Schools, and much more.

SOGleducation.org

[Resource Guide](#)

[Learning Bursts](#)

[Parents' Guide](#)

These resources have been created to support you along your journey and are helpful for those who are just getting started, and for those who have been doing this work for many years.

SOGI 123 resources focus on three key areas:

- **SOGI 1: Policies & Procedures**

The key components of effective policies and procedures that explicitly reference SOGI. Strong, actionable policy can make a huge difference in your SOGI-inclusion efforts; it is important that policies are well known so that they can be well implemented.

- **SOGI 2: Inclusive Environments**

Inclusive operations, language, spaces, and practices to help create positive and welcoming environments for all students and staff.

- **SOGI 3: Teaching Resources**

Lesson plans and other resources – created with educators, for educators – in age-appropriate approaches from K-12 that teach diversity and include examples of SOGI topics.

These resources provide opportunities for learning to reflect the diversity in students' lives and society, while also providing a sense of belonging for 2SLGBTQ+ students and staff.

We know that these are the building blocks of strong, SOGI-inclusive schools, and they can be a stepping stone toward combating the targeted attempts at discrediting this important work.

We are excited to share that SOGI 123 has expanded exponentially. While we once facilitated SOGI Educator Networks in BC and Alberta, we now have additional SOGI 123 Leads in Yukon, Saskatchewan, and Atlantic Canada. Having been developed and initially implemented in BC, SOGI 123 and the SOGI Educator Network proved to be a valuable source of resources and support for educators who were committed to creating SOGI-inclusive learning environments for their students. Through our annual survey process, the majority of SOGI Leads consistently report that ARC Foundation staff and [SOGileducation.org](https://www.sogileducation.org) are among their most helpful resources as it pertains to delivering SOGI-inclusive education. It is through the success stories from BC that this model is now being adapted for use in additional provinces and territories. We are very excited about the impact these ARC Foundation leaders can have on SOGI-inclusive education in their regions, and we are eager to share knowledge, expertise, and connection with educators across Canada.

Forward momentum with SOGI-inclusive education in BC continues to be championed by a dedicated group of provincial education partners, known as BC's K-12 SOGI Collaborative. The K-12 SOGI Collaborative includes the:

BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association (BCPVPA)
BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF)
BC School Superintendents Association (BCSSA)
BC School Trustees Association (BCSTA)
BC Ministry of Education and Child Care
BC Association of School Business Officials (BCASBO)
CUPE BC
BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC)
First Nations Schools Association (FNSA)
First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC)
Métis Nation BC (MNBC)
Federation of Independent School Associations (FISA)

as well as ARC Foundation as facilitator. These organizations work together to identify, support, and provide advice on strategic actions that will facilitate SOGI-inclusive education and policies in BC schools.

One of the priorities identified by the K-12 SOGI Collaborative was the need for resources that further explored and empowered the identities of Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ Indigenous peoples. Since 2021, ARC Foundation and a dedicated group of educators and Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer volunteers have been collaborating on ensuring our SOGI-inclusive education lens includes Indigenous wisdom and knowledge. As a result, we have a full-time role dedicated to incorporating Indigenous perspectives into this work, with our SOGI 123 Lead – Indigenous

Dialogues. The hope is to develop more resources for educators on Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer identities, and to decolonize classrooms by incorporating more opportunities to include Indigenous perspectives on everyday things. Part of this work includes a commitment to Youth Voice and Leadership, as we navigate how empowering educators with these resources translates to students' wellness and belonging. Both FNEESC and FNSA have offered incredible support for this initiative, providing opportunities to share learning and resources through conference participation and presentation. As we continue this work, we hope to gain more membership in our FNSA SOGI Educator Network, and encourage you to participate in our Indigenous SOGI Dialogue Circles as well.

The Indigenous SOGI Dialogue Circles are a space for Two-Spirit, Indigiqueer and LGBTQ+ Indigenous peoples and their **allies** to safely offer relationality and reflection to one another, work collaboratively toward a vision of SOGI-inclusive education that disrupts colonial constructs of identity, sexuality, and gender, and aims to offer culturally safe resources to schools in a way that weaves together the myriad of Indigenous and 2SLGBTQ+ experiences throughout. Time spent in circle is split between holding space for Indigenous joy, and offering community and relationality to Two-Spirit, Indigiqueer, and LGBTQ+ Indigenous Educators, as well as completing project-based, resource-focused work on Indigenous SOGI-inclusive education resources.

- Use this QR code to sign up:



- FNSA staff can use this QR code to join the FNSA SOGI Educator Network:



The BCPVPA has been instrumental in helping foster SOGI-inclusive education in BC through the efforts of SOGI 123. BCPVPA's leadership and voice is a big factor in helping create alignment and ensuring 2SLGBTQ+ students can feel safe, welcome, and see themselves – and be seen – in their school community.

For more SOGI 123 information and resources,
please visit SOGIeducation.org or contact us at info@sogieducation.org



ARC Foundation (ARC)

is a charitable organization that builds capacity within the K-12 education system through a collaborative network model to help reduce 2SLGBTQ+ discrimination in schools. SOGI 123 is a set of tools and resources that help create safer and more inclusive schools for students of all sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGI). This includes policies and procedures, inclusive environments, and teaching resources that help educators develop inclusive teaching practices.

SOGI Leads

Do you know who the SOGI Lead is in your school or district?

If not, please reach out to us at info@sogieducation.org and allow us to connect you!

Did you know that June is Pride month?

Here are a few ways to incorporate SOGI 123 into your planning:

Talk to your SOGI School Lead! Ask them what they need from you and build a plan together.

Check out our website, SOGIeducation.org for resources – including
Ways to Celebrate Pride.



Small changes can make a big difference. Take a look at our **All-Educators page** for SOGI-inclusion tips to support your journey at any stage!

bcp  vpa



CONNECTING LEADERS

Friday October 25, 2024

Join the BCPVA for
our annual learning conference



TAKE 3

Spring Forward

Practicing Curiosity to Build Self-Compassion

So much of our lives require us to be evaluative, cognitive, critical thinkers, all of which are important and helpful capacities. But this lens can take us away from curiosity and, often, curiosity is an important way that we can access self-compassion. Self-compassion is a critical building block to holistic wellness.

Curiosity has three important components – let's Take 3 for curiosity!

With great admiration and respect,

Darby

Take Notice Embrace your inner two-year-old.

In the practice of noticing, we can let go of judging, fixing, and doing. The practice of noticing is a non-judgemental, non-evaluative, non-doing practice of just paying attention: to ourselves, to what is around us, and our experiences or interpretations. In mindfulness practices, we sometimes call it 'mental noting' where we will simply mentally note things that are happening. When I notice I am thinking, I simply note 'thinking', or if I am judging, I note 'judging.' When we engage in a practice of noticing, we are removing any element of judging or responding. There is nothing to do, just to notice. The best examples of this are in two-year-olds who are actively noticing everything around them: "look there's a horse, look there's a leaf, I am hungry, I am sad." Embrace your inner two-year-old and practice noticing.

Acknowledge Name it to tame it.

Our practice of noticing might bring our awareness to some patterns. Of particular interest are our emotional patterns. We are generally very good at analyzing, explaining, justifying, and thinking about our feelings, but we're not always so good at simply acknowledging and experiencing our emotions. When we take the time to acknowledge or name an emotion (without doing anything about it, or hyper-analyzing it), the simple act of acknowledgement of how we feel, and not what we think about how we feel, can achieve two things. It can bring us in-the-moment relief, and it can build our capacity to stay with big emotions when they come up for us, without getting swept away in all the analyzing and thinking we do about our emotions. Simply acknowledge it: "I feel sad," and then notice what happens. *Dr. Dan Siegel offers much more insight into this practice in his work, if you're interested!

Embrace Wonder Imagine the (self-compassionate) possibilities.

In the final component of curiosity, we can bring our imaginations to the table. Again, we're moving away from evaluation and starting to imagine possibility. The way this can be explored is, "I notice I feel sad. I wonder what might happen if I acknowledge that sadness and offer myself self-compassion." Or, "I notice I am tired. I wonder if I can prioritize my needs and rest." Or, "I wonder what might happen if I self-compassionately explore these feelings of anger and resentment." When we approach our wellness with a sense of curious wonder and self-compassion, possibilities start to emerge.

by
Darby Barnes
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Darby is a registered clinical counsellor who describes her work calling as "caring for people who care for people" and has worked supporting leaders and workers in complex human serving systems for over a decade.

In many elementary school libraries, we are likely to find the book *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?: A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids* by Carol McCloud, or perhaps another book with a similar message.

The premise of the story is that being kind and compassionate to others not only fills their buckets, but fills ours too! While this is true, I suspect that there is little left in your buckets at this point in the school year, and with the kindness, compassion, and care that school leaders dedicate each day, your own supply may be seriously in need of replenishment!

Replenishing and Depleting

Our days, weeks, and months are full of moments and behaviours that both replenish and deplete our physical, emotional, and mental energy. This flow of what fills – and drains – our bucket is in constant motion. If we are experiencing more moments of depletion than moments of replenishment, our bucket is in danger of emptying and going dry, and this is a significant threat to our health and well-being.

Let's explore how we can reduce the drain, and increase opportunities to refill.

Identifying What Drains Your Bucket

Each person is unique in what drains them, and the frequency of their exposure to depleting situations.

For all of us, depletion can result from evading the core essentials of health, which can include:

- Eating a poor diet
- Not getting proper sleep
- Not exercising, particularly when tired
- Being dehydrated

Other factors contributing to your feeling of depletion may be:

- **Dwelling on the past:** Aside from learning from it, there is nothing you can do about what has happened in the past. Focus on the present, and move forward. Seek help from a counsellor if you find this difficult.

- **Holding onto anger and resentment:** Anger and resentment are often linked to 'living in the past'. Not only are anger and resentment extremely depleting, but the person suffering most from your anger is you, rather than the person or situation that is the source of the anger. It is not worth the mental and physical cost of the drain from your bucket.

- **Constant worry and rumination:** Worrying does not address a situation; it only depletes your well-being. If you can do something about it, take action. If action is not an option, then stop worrying. This can be easier said than done, and if you are a constant ruminator, you may find our January 2021 series on Rumination in ReCharge to be helpful.



BCPVPA ReCharge

If you cannot stop ruminating or worrying, then seek help from your physician and/or a counselor.

- **Being surrounded by toxic, draining people:** These may be people around you that continually complain and exude negativity. They may be people who constantly demand your attention and leech your energy. Where you can, minimize your exposure to such people. Recognizing that may not always be possible in your job. Try reading this article on '10 Tactics for Working with Difficult People':



10 Tactics

Fill Your Bucket

by
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"If we are experiencing more moments of depletion than moments of replenishment, our bucket is in danger of emptying and going dry, a significant threat to our health and well-being."

- **Complaints and negativity:** What if you are the toxic person that is regularly complaining and negative? This state of mind will forever keep draining your bucket, along with those of the people around you. Be part of the solution, not the problem.
- **Gossiping and drama:** Getting caught up in workplace drama and gossip will neither advance your career nor build positive relationships. Instead of wasting time and energy in the drama, put energy into your own self-care and self-improvement.
- **Worrying about what people think about you:** Worrying about how much people like you – or don't like you – is emotionally draining. You will never really know how others think and feel. Rather than worrying about what people think, simply focus forward. Lighten this load, and feel more energized.
- **Taking things personally:** For those of us who are energized by connecting with others, it is hard when we don't click with someone. This may not mean they dislike you, so do not take it personally if you are unable to find common ground. It can be exhausting if you are analyzing every interaction with someone to diagnose how they feel about you, and your analysis

may be incorrect. How a person is relating in a particular moment may have nothing to do with you.

- **Always checking email or social media:** The constant pressure of needing to respond quickly, alongside everything else you are dealing with, is perpetually draining.

Replenishment

The foundations of health are also critical to ensuring your bucket does not empty. Sleep and exercise are very important, as is a proper diet with enough iron, and favouring foods with a low glycemic index such as whole grains, high-fibre vegetables, nuts, and healthy oils.

Do your best to manage and support your mental health, as being stressed, anxious, and depressed can lead to you feeling sapped. Incorporate stress-relieving activities such as yoga or meditation into your routine. Set aside time to consider how you can reduce your overall commitments either at work, home, or both.

There are many ways to replenish our energy, and each individual needs to find their own fit. Options could include:

- Practicing positive psychology – read more here:



Positive Psychology

- Finding things to laugh at, including yourself!
- Focusing on what you can control.
- Practicing gratitude.
- Doing things that give you a lift: listening to music, dancing in your living room, being

around animals, walking in nature, playing street hockey with the kids.

- Determining your 'why', both at work and outside of work – what activities or plans give you a sense of purpose?
- Being forgiving and kind towards yourself when you make mistakes.
- Calling someone you love, and telling them how you feel, or that you miss them.
- Doing more of what you want by carving out little moments in your day – sitting in the sun, pausing for tea or hot chocolate, reading for pleasure, high-fiving students in the hall.
- Planning small indulgences that you can look forward to such as a short getaway, a weekend bike excursion with friends, or a planned spa or pool trip to enjoy the sauna.
- Learning that it is okay to say no. The greatest emotional drain can be when you deprive yourself of fun when you are feeling emotionally exhausted. It is not selfish to prioritize yourself more often. When you are emotionally drained, you are not giving others your best self.
- Spending time with people whose company you enjoy, and who bring out the best in you. These people are likely positive, compassionate, and interested in you and who you are. This is a sure way to fill up your emotional energy reservoir.
- Starting your day well – finding something unique that helps you prepare your body and mind for the day. Don't scramble for your phone first thing. Have a mindful cup of coffee, play with your pets, do a morning stretch or a 10-minute meditation before responding to emails or reading the news.
- Carving time out for yourself. Self-care is essential.

- Surrounding yourself with what comforts you, whether it is people, activities, or things that make you feel loved, happy, and content:

- *Place flowers or pictures in your workspace*
- *Don comfortable clothes when you get home from work*
- *Light a candle or build a fire in the fireplace*
- *Settle under a heated or weighted blanket*
- *Enjoy comfort food*
- *Set aside time to play video games*
- *Stand outside and listen to nature sounds: the rain, wind, birds*
- *Take a warm bath or shower*
- *Use a diffuser with essential oils, with scents that remind you of a place you love, like the beach or a pine forest*
- *Have friends over for Sunday football*
- *Try a new recipe*

Start Filling and – Ideally – Overflowing your Bucket!

Over the course of a week, keep a list of the activities and situations that energize you, and those that deplete you.

Once you have examples, ask yourself:

- What percentage of my time do I spend on energizing activities?
- What percentage would I *like* to spend?
- What are some ways I can decrease the amount of time I spend on depleting scenarios, and increase time with replenishing options?

"Think about the barriers in your life that inhibit your ability to enjoy the things that energize you.

Some barriers may be minor, and can be resolved through intentional action. Others may require several steps."

Think about the barriers in your life that inhibit your ability to enjoy the things that energize you. Some barriers may be minor, and can be resolved through intentional action. Others may require several steps. Start working through the list of barriers; in imagining ways to remove what is hindering you from filling your bucket, it may be helpful to engage the support of others with an outside perspective and creative ideas!

Sources:

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When you know that your day will involve depleting activities or individuals, think about whether there are better times or places to complete those activities to lessen their draining impact. For example, do you experience your best mood and energy level in the late morning? Consider scheduling depleting tasks or meetings when you are operating at a level that might make the tasks less daunting.

Everyone Will Benefit When Your Bucket is Full!

It is difficult to fill the buckets of others, and to be active in their support, when you feel exhausted, burned out, and ragged around the edges. Your normal, upbeat, cheerleader self may feel flat and frayed as a result of never-ending responsibilities and dwindling energy.

The good news is that time and intent can help you fill your bucket at a rate that prevents you from running dry. You will always be the main source of your own tap, so we hope this article provides ideas and motivation that will replenish you!



The Last Word

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Acting Executive Director
BCPVPA

Every Connection Matters

I have clear memories of my early elementary and secondary school years. Many of those memories are positive, but certainly not all. I can remember moments of feeling awkward, different, and judged. When I think about it, the same can be said for my high school years, and moving into adulthood. But those are not the moments that I recognize as pivotal in the formulation of the human I have become: in my experience within the public education system, there have been positive, meaningful, and memorable moments that ultimately helped to define who I have chosen to be.

My first elementary Principal was kind and gentle with us as students, yet had high expectations about conduct. In later years, I realized how much work they did to help build a strong sense of community within our school, especially with the parents and staff. As young children, what we saw was a kind adult who also took school expectations seriously; unbeknownst to us, they were also intentionally working on building a positive sense of community and capacity within the parent community. Decades later, that group of parents – most of whom are now in their eighties – is still tightly connected as a friend group. I give credit to the work of that Principal in the 1970s for making those connections happen.

I certainly never thought at the age of five – or even 15 – that the Principals and Vice-Principals at my school would have an impact on my future self, or that I would learn some major life lessons from them. It never crossed my mind at the time that some of the teachers in my high school would later become my colleagues, as both teachers and school administrators.

I fondly remember my days as a teacher candidate ('student teacher', in those days), and it has been the 'outside the classroom' experiences that linger. I couldn't predict that the experiences, challenges, and professional connections of those early years would have shaped the professional choices and opportunities awaiting me in the decades to follow.

"I certainly never thought at the age of five – or even 15 – that the Principals and Vice-Principals at my school would have an impact on my future self..."

I had the opportunity to learn from and collaborate with a school Principal while helping chaperone an international school trip. That Principal actively included me in high-level decision-making processes related to some tricky situations with student conduct and medical emergencies, and this was incredibly meaningful and empowering. I was treated as a respected and valued colleague whose ideas and leadership mattered. I felt like part of a team. The small act of including me – of seeking my input and putting trust in me, when they could easily have made a decision alone – meant that as a team we found the best possible outcome for the student, and gave me a sense of being included as part of a collaborative team. Years later, I was able to express my gratitude.

As a teacher, I had the privilege of working with several different Principals at various schools. Not surprisingly, I experienced a variety of leadership styles, and learned something different from each administrator. At first, it never crossed my mind as a teacher that I would have an interest in (or even the skillset to) move into administration. My focus was on my students, on sponsoring extra-curricular activities, on committee work with my colleagues, and on being a local union rep for our school.

As a fairly new teacher, I remember my Principal supporting me in dealing with a parent who was not happy with my assessment practice. It was a challenging time for me, and I recall with gratitude the time the Principal took to ask me some tough open-ended questions and guide me through my

thinking. While I felt supported, I also learned a lot about my own practice and philosophy. Years later, I realized that the Principal was taking the time to coach me, and for that I will always be grateful. It was a moment when I shifted to being true to my own beliefs as an educator, rather than simply following someone else's formula. It was a moment when I sharpened my sense of empathy for the diversity of families, and developed my courage and confidence to have difficult conversations. It was a catalyst for me in trying to ensure I always looked at things from each party's perspective before finalizing decisions. And it was the realization that taking the time to have coaching conversations – and not just 'telling' – can be immensely powerful, and can help the other person find their own sense of personal success.

As a more experienced teacher, I had the privilege of working with a highly skilled Principal. This was a leader who respectfully challenged my teacher colleagues and me, nudged us to ensure we were aware of best practices in teaching, and ensured that we had the required supports to put those practices into action. I remember watching with admiration and appreciation as they respectfully advocated to the

district for the needs of vulnerable students and the whole school community. From them, I learned more about the inner workings of the district, and about best practices for students with diverse learning needs. They shared about the local Principals' and Vice-Principals' association and took the time to invite me to district-level professional development sessions. And then one day, when they needed to be away for a few days, they asked if I would be willing to step in for them. They mentioned that it would be a good opportunity for me to see if administration was of interest. I will forever be grateful for their belief that nudged me into a role I had not considered.

As a Vice-Principal, I was fortunate to work with Principals with a variety of leadership styles. Some leadership styles were similar to mine, and some were very different. While it can be easy to become frustrated by a style and philosophy that is different than our own, I found in those experiences an opportunity to learn the most about *my own* preferred practice and philosophy. I challenged myself to reflect, and use scenarios as case studies. What might I do if I were the Principal? What might I do differently? What factors would I consider? The richest moments



were when the Principal encouraged and welcomed a collaborative and vulnerable team discussion, so that we could learn from each other. I have the highest respect for each of the Principals I worked with as Vice-Principal, and I learned a great deal from each of them.

What stands out in my time as a Vice-Principal were those meaningful moments when my Principals took intentional time out of very busy work schedules to coach me, to give critical feedback, and to express their belief in me.

When I moved into the role of a Principal, I came to better understand and highly respect the work of our district BC School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) colleagues: the Superintendents, Assistant/Deputy Superintendents and Directors of Instruction who lead and support the districts. It was humbling when those colleagues took time with me to provide critical feedback on my professional growth plans, and to encourage and persuade me at times when I might not have had the confidence or belief in myself. As a district leader, my understanding and respect further deepened, and at the same time I was humbled to support and learn from Principals and Vice-Principals across the district.

I have learned that many professional connections are long-lasting, even though we may not expect them to be. They help shape who we are, and I am grateful for each one. I have to come to learn that it is often the unexpected connections that become a true gift in our professional life.

Some personal examples of unexpected 'professional reconnections and interconnections' include:

- One of my teachers when I was a student was later a highly-respected colleague as an administrator.
- A Principal who encouraged me to go into administration was later a Principal that I supported from a district role, and then we were colleagues in the district.

- A Vice-Principal colleague – and also the child of one my Principals when I was a student – later became a valued district colleague and a well-respected BCSSA colleague from whom I have learned a great deal.

It is likely that most of us have similar examples from our own educational leadership journey. These interconnections are powerful, and an example of the richness of our public education system. When we discover them, and learn from them, it is a true gift.

As a student, teacher-candidate, teacher, Vice-Principal, Principal, and district leader in the BC public education system, I am extremely proud of the work and dedication of our Principals, Vice-Principals, and district leaders. Collectively, the time each of these people puts into supporting the community is powerful, and ultimately serves to improve the success of the students within our care. It also builds the capacity and environment of success for the staff that they support.

We all know that these roles are becoming more and more complex. And yet, the time taken by these leaders to support those within their care can be life-changing and empowering. You never know when a small moment or conversation will end up as a catalyst or defining moment for another person.

When a Principal, Vice-Principal or district leader retires, they will have likely impacted the lives of tens of thousands of people in their school communities. I have come to realize that every professional connection matters, no matter how slender it may seem at the time. These connections shape who we are, and make us our best possible professional selves.

To all of you in these roles, and on behalf of everyone you support in your school and district communities, a heartfelt thank you. Although you may not realize it in the moment, our work makes a life-changing difference to the students, staff, parents, and community members you serve.

Every connection you make matters.

LEADERS



Resourceful

Engaged

Transparent

Honest

Listeners

Fun

Passionate

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Ethical

Understanding

Intuitive

Fair

Flexible

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Respectful

Authentic

Compassionate

Social

Competent

Teachers

Inspired

Patient

Creative

Energized

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Responsible

Loyal

Strategic

Empathetic

Disciplined

Accountable

Learners

Courageous

Curious

Optimistic

Smart

Joyful

Decisive

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