

The Leadership Competencies

"We are all paddling together through changes in the waters and weather, are coordinating with others within and beyond our vessel, are continually defining our direction of travel, and will face moments when moving forward, backward, or sideways are all natural choices."





14

"One of the key takeaways from my conversations with Association leaders in BC and Ontario was how different the communication landscape was in 2018 compared to when those provinces went through similar transitions."

A Conversation with PSAANS

44

"Inclusive systems value the unique contributions students of all backgrounds bring to the classroom and allow diverse groups to grow side by side, to the benefit of all."

Provincial Outreach Programs are Inclusive Practice



72

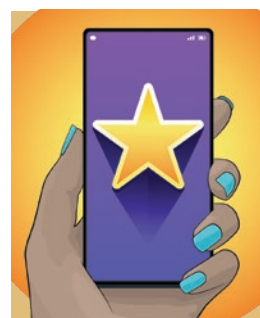
"Although receiving my late mother's name was bittersweet, I felt deeply honoured, especially as I was embarking on a new leadership role that perfectly aligns with my name."

A New Journey of Leadership

104

"If the learners at my K-7 school must be without their cell phones from 8:30 am - 2:13 pm each day, could I do this too? It has been easier said than done, but I am trying."

The AnXious GENERation: A Gen-X Principal's Perspective



04 Perspective

The Power of Reflection and Renewal
by Dr. Shannon Behan, President, BCPVPA

08 Feature

The BCPVPA Leadership Competencies
by Dr. Andrea McComb, BCPVPA

14 Partners

- 14 A Conversation with the Public School Administrators of Nova Scotia (PSAANS)
26 The Power of Community: BCPVPA Partnership Awards
by David A. Serpa, BCPVPA

30 Learning

- 30 The Human Element: Why School Leadership Can't Be Automated
by Peter Johnston, BCPVPA

34 Support

- 34 Equity and Due Process:
The Role of School Leaders in Upholding and Working with the BC Human Rights Code
by Lynda Bonvillain, BCPVPA
44 Inclusive Outreach Programs are Inclusive Practice
by Kathy Keyworth
48 Exploring the Landscape of Human Rights Cases Impacting Canadian Schools
by Anna Zadunayski, Pendulum Law Ltd.

56 Voices

- 56 From Connection to Transformation: Affinity Groups in School Leadership
by Iram Khan (SD43) & Mandy Wong (SD36)
60 Connections Before Content: Prioritizing Relationships in a Secondary School Setting
by Sarah Garr (SD61)
66 Becoming an Anti-Racist School Leader
by Sylvie Mazerolle (SD93)
72 A New Journey of Leadership
by Simgit Hitkws (Rosetta Doolan) (SD92)
78 Going Outside with Fort St. James Secondary School
by Jaclyn Boyes (SD91)
86 Leading with Heart: Emotional Leadership and the Power of Storytelling
by Naomi Hazon (SD38)
92 Paddling Together: Reconciliation in Action at École Phoenix Middle School
by Rachel Nelson (SD72)

96 Wellness

Moments Count
by Rochelle Morandini, BCPVPA

104 Books

- 104 The AnXious GENeration: A Gen-X Principal's Perspective
by Dani Morrow (SD79)
108 The Inner Work of Racial Justice: Healing Ourselves and Transforming Our Communities Through Mindfulness
reviewed by Carmen Eberle, BCPVPA

110 Community

Wondering if That Field Trip Will be Safe? YouthSafe Outdoors is Your Source
by Glenda Hanna, Ph.D., Quest Research and Consulting Inc

115 The Last Word

One Person at a Time: The Power of Human-Centered Leadership
by Scott Robinson, BCPVPA

We are deeply indebted to Cyril Pierre, Elder of the Katzie First Nation, and Spencer Pierre, member of the Katzie First Nation, for their narrative of navigating a course, as shared alongside our cover image.

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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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THE POWER OF REFLECTION AND RENEWAL

It's May and the school year is winding up before it winds down. On the horizon, you can envision the quiet road to the cabin, the trails you will enjoy, the books you will read, and the people you will connect with. It is time to prepare for the summer ahead but, before we do that, it is important to take a moment to reflect on the journey of the past year. For school and district leaders, the end of the school year is often a blur of activities: graduations, leaving ceremonies, staffing decisions, budget planning, building and maintenance lists, and planning for September. In the midst of this business, we can lose sight of one of the most valuable opportunities this season offers: a chance to reflect and renew.

Reflection is a vital aspect of effective leadership. It allows us to step back and consider the impact of our decisions, the growth we've experienced, and the challenges we've overcome. Take time to think about the moments that made you proud, whether they were small victories or large accomplishments. It might be the subtle change you have noticed in your interactions with a student who has spent a considerable amount of time with you in your office. Or, it might be the way you were able to bring your staff together with a professional development program that hit the mark. Celebrate these moments and recognize them as your jumping off point and motivation for what lies ahead.

Equally important is your reflection on the challenges. Leadership is not without its hurdles, and this year may have brought its share of difficulties. Whether it was navigating policy changes, supporting students



by
Dr. Shannon Behan
2024-2026 President
BCPVPA



"ON THE HORIZON, YOU CAN ENVISION THE QUIET ROAD TO THE CABIN,
THE TRAILS YOU WILL ENJOY, THE BOOKS YOU WILL READ,
AND THE PEOPLE YOU WILL CONNECT WITH.."



“... THESE ACTS OF RENEWAL ARE NOT INDULGENCES;
THEY ARE NECESSITIES.”



and staff through crises, or simply managing the day-to-day demands of your role, these experiences have shaped you as a leader. What lessons have you learned? How have these moments strengthened your capacity to lead with empathy and resilience? Reflection doesn't mean dwelling on what went wrong, but rather finding the growth opportunities in every experience.

This summer, make renewal take centre stage. The demands of educational leadership are constant, and it can be easy to neglect your own well-being in the process of supporting others. Prioritize rest and self-care, and – especially – joy. In one school where I taught many years ago, I had three friends who, for the first week of summer, headed out on their sailboat, threw their watches in the water, and wandered the seas. I always thought that was a great way to start the summer, with a very clear definition between work and downtime.

I hope you can find your own path to disconnect from the trappings of our daily demands. Consider stepping away from emails, calendars, and clocks, and allowing yourself the time to recharge. Whether it's spending time with loved ones, pursuing hobbies

that bring you joy, or simply embracing the quiet moments, these acts of renewal are not indulgences; they are necessities.

Renewal also means reigniting your passion for the work you do. Use this time to reconnect with your purpose as a leader. Attend a conference, read an inspiring book, or explore innovative ideas that you can weave into your practice next year. Summer is the perfect time to cultivate curiosity and expand your perspective. When we return to our schools in the fall, it is this sense of renewal and inspiration that will empower us to lead with intention and energy.

May is a time to celebrate, reflect, and prepare for renewal. It is a time to honour the incredible work you have done as leaders, and to look forward to the opportunities ahead. Thank you for your unwavering dedication to your schools, staff, and students. I hope that this summer brings you the chance to rest, recharge, and return with a renewed sense of purpose and resilience.

  @bcpvpapresident

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The BCPVPA Leadership Competencies

*Honouring the Values, Beliefs, Stories,
and Identities of BC's Educational Leaders*

“The importance of story as pedagogy...

Stories grow from the communities and contexts in which we work...

The Competencies cannot be static, as engaging voices create renewal...”

by

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

As one of the BCPVPA's Professional Learning and Development Directors, I work regularly with large groups of our members. Over the past few years, I have noticed that traditional images of leadership are being complemented by diverse expressions of what it means to be a leader. As our membership becomes more diverse, we see leaders grounding themselves in their values, beliefs, stories, and identities to redefine a personalized image of leadership.

The BCPVPA Equity Theory of Change (ETOC) emphasizes the need for genuineness and humility, encouraging leaders to honour their true selves and remain open to learning from others. This theme highlights the necessity for leaders to be adaptable, humble, and committed to continuous learning. It recognizes that effective leadership involves collaboration, shared responsibility, and a deep understanding of diverse community needs.

The shift from traditional leadership standards to a competency-based approach aligns with the evolving landscape of educational leadership. The BCPVPA's move towards a competency-based environment focuses on practical, applicable skills that leaders can use in real-world situations. This approach ensures that leadership actions are grounded in core values, beliefs, and system goals. In following this approach, leaders can effectively manage both operational and organizational tasks while staying committed to equity and maintaining high-expectation relationships. This alignment helps create a cohesive strategy where leadership competencies directly support the dynamic and inclusive models of leadership that are now essential in education.

Educational leaders are not only responsible for promoting these values but also for encouraging others to do the same. This emphasizes a commitment to stewardship for the future of all children, focusing on fostering life opportunities for students and preparing them to take care of themselves, each other, and their environment.

The Journey

In 2020, together with our members, the BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association began the process of revising our foundational documents through the lens of equity.

The journey so far has been rich, and has offered a new perspective on professional growth and our role and responsibility as an organization committed to reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion. We developed our Equity Theory of Change which has outlined core values that form the foundation of our work: Recognition, Right Relations, Responsibility, Humility, Distributed Power, and Collaboration. The development of our Leadership Competencies was a welcome and natural progression.

We have ensured that our Leadership Competencies align with the BC School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) Spirit of Leadership: Leadership Competencies for System Leaders, so that we can know that while our roles and paths may differ, we are all paddling in the same direction.

The spirit of the First Peoples Principles of Learning lend wisdom to the Leadership Competencies, and the voices, stories, and values of our members are deeply woven within their relational connections. Leadership evolves, and what we have written today will grow to meet the needs of the generations of leaders to come.



**“We see these
Competencies not as a
checklist, but as a series
of themes in a story of
evolving leadership.”**

Leadership is responsive to the community it serves. It is contextually different to lead in a high school in a large city, with a culturally diverse student population of 2,000 students and a staff of 125 with three Vice-Principals, than to lead on a small island with a student population of 25 from K-7, where you are a teaching Principal with six staff. The Leadership Competencies are deeply connected to the context in which they are applied, as skills and relationships developed in one school may not directly transfer to another. Leaders draw on the unique stories and experiences of their communities. This approach fosters continuous renewal and adaptation, ensuring that leadership practices remain relevant and effective.

Educational leaders model curiosity and rigorous inquiry to ensure that the best services are provided to students. Engaging in critical inquiry involves identifying needs, critically looking at systems and structures, and creating evidence-informed, value-based decisions toward shared goals. This competency involves allocating resources, teacher time, and additional spaces to support student learning. By knowing their students well, leaders can better plan for learning and align school goals with student needs.

Educational leaders make many decisions in a day and perform a variety of roles, so they become fluent in various “languages”, from finance to human resources to community engagement. In one moment, a leader may be providing first aid to a kindergarten child, then ten minutes later running a fire drill, and then returning from the drill to a school-based team meeting, before sitting down to balance the budget and make learning resources purchases. Leaders make informed decisions while navigating different contexts and adapting to the shifting and often complex demands of their roles.

A unique aspect of the BCPVPA's competencies is the addition of “Bridging Policy and Practice”. This competency emphasizes the importance of

Stewardship for
the future of
all children

Fostering a
culture of
curiosity and
inquiry

Growing the
capacity of self
and others

Contextual literacy
and agency

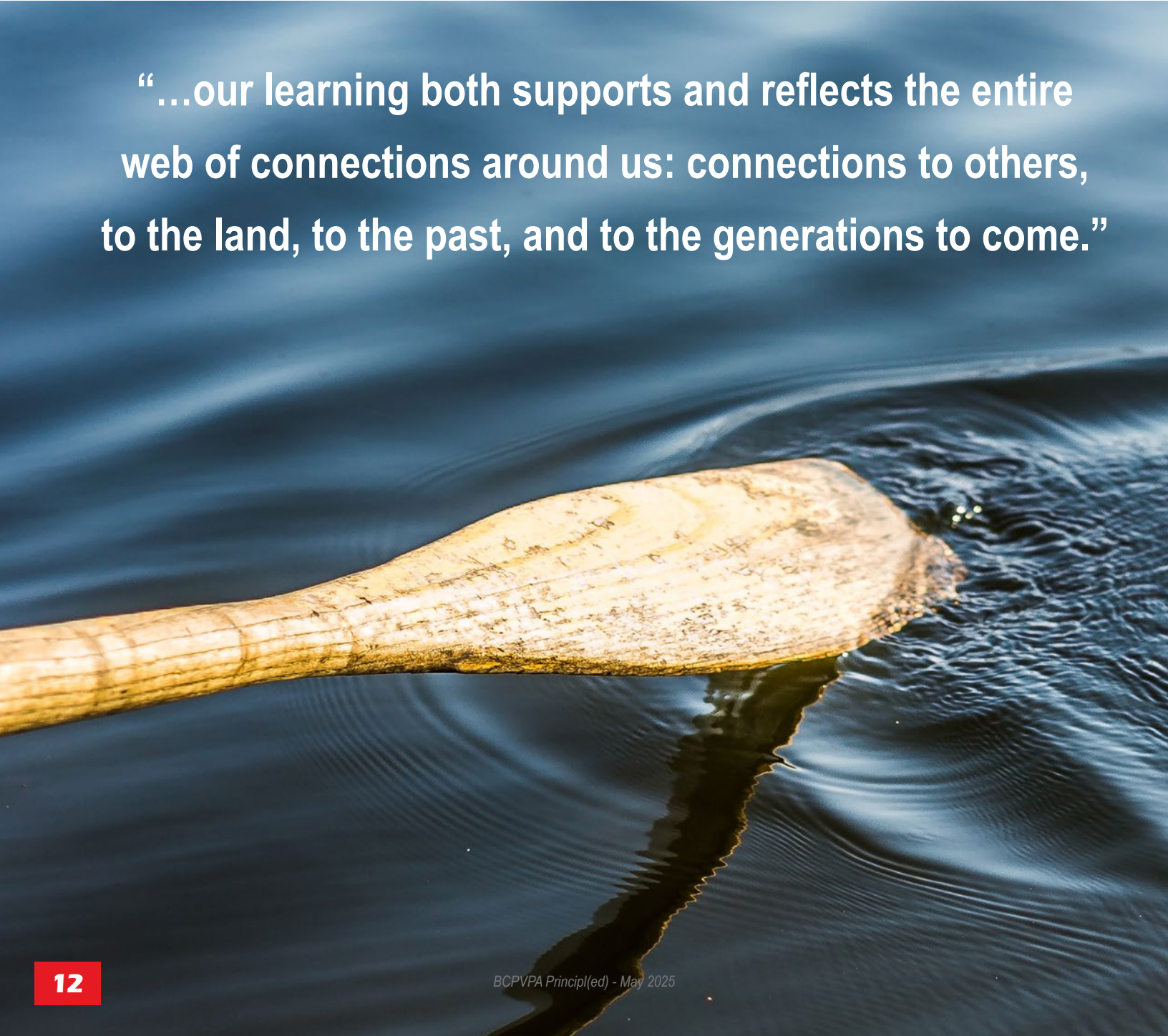
Bridging policy
and practice

coupling policy with practice, ensuring that the vision set by system leaders is effectively enacted by school leaders. Principals and Vice-Principals, who are “in the canoe” with students, staff, parents, and communities, play a crucial role in effectively implementing these policies with a high standard of care. The strength of the educational system depends on how well educational leaders effectively translate these policies into practice at the school level.

For systematic values and priorities to have real meaning in schools, educational leaders must be

genuine in their role modeling. The competencies are not a checklist but a series of themes in the evolving story of leadership. Leaders skillfully navigate different contexts to ensure that their actions align with the values and priorities of the educational system.

The Leadership Competencies: Being in the Canoe represent a significant step forward for the BCPVPA. By focusing on equity, continuous adaptation, and community connection, these competencies aim to foster a more inclusive and effective educational environment for all.



“...our learning both supports and reflects the entire web of connections around us: connections to others, to the land, to the past, and to the generations to come.”

learning

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

Our Professional Learning & Development team
creates and delivers relevant professional learning
and development opportunities to BCPVPA members,
programming based on member input and consultation.



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

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Public School Administrators Association of Nova Scotia

British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec are three Canadian jurisdictions where Principals and Vice-Principals are not members of the provincial teachers' unions. In recent years, these provinces were joined by a fourth: Nova Scotia is the most recent province to bring educational leaders together outside of a union framework.

Tim Simony, Executive Director of the Public School Administrators Association of Nova Scotia (PSAANS), has been involved in the leadership and evolution of PSAANS since its inception in 2018. The BCPVPA was pleased to speak with Tim about the formation of PSAANS, the journey, and what lies ahead.

What led to the formation of PSAANS?

TS:

"The formation of the organization stemmed from a report written by Dr. Avis Glaze, who was commissioned in 2017 by then-Premier Stephen McNeil and the Nova Scotia Liberal government to review the public education system and recommend ways to improve its effectiveness. At the time, the government believed that, given the province's population of fewer than one million people, there should be ways to make the system operate more efficiently.

"Several key recommendations emerged from the report, one of which was board governance. First, over the years, there had been challenges with elected school boards, including instances where the province had to step in due to dysfunction. Second, a major issue was a labour dispute between the Liberal government and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU) during a previous contract negotiation. Multiple tentative agreements were presented to NSTU members, but each was rejected, leading the government to impose a contract. This was preceded by a prolonged period of work-to-rule, which highlighted, at least from the government's perspective, the difficulties of having Principals, Vice-Principals, and central office administrators



"The reaction in early 2018 was largely one of concern about what this would mean for the future."

Tim Simony
Executive Director
PSAANS

within the NSTU. The work-to-rule action imposed strict limitations on when administrators could report to work and what tasks they could perform, creating significant challenges.

"The third concern was the province's difficulty in implementing systemic change. Any government-mandated initiative had to pass through elected school boards, often resulting in variations across the province. What was intended as a uniform policy would ultimately take on eight different interpretations as it was implemented regionally. These were three of the major issues, among others, that the report addressed.

"The timeline was remarkable in hindsight. I was traveling to Calgary in January 2018 when the report was released, and I started receiving text messages

from colleagues asking what it meant and what I thought the province would do. At the time, I reassured them that the report had just been released and that no decisions would be made hastily. But, within 48 hours, the government announced it would adopt the vast majority of the recommendations, one of which was the removal of administrators from the teachers' union."

What was the reaction after that?

TS:

"The reaction in early 2018 was largely one of concern about what this would mean for the future. Looking back at why the government made

this decision, I think it was clear to most people. It stemmed from the challenges of the work-to-rule period, which highlighted the difficulty of meeting the obligations outlined in the Education Act while also adhering to the restrictions imposed by labour action. For school and system administrators, balancing those two realities was impossible. It's like the saying about holding two truths simultaneously, but you simply couldn't do it in this case. As that spring unfolded, the focus shifted to understanding what this change would mean moving forward.

"At the time, I was part of the Department of Education's Principals' Forum Standing Committee, which had been established in the fall of 2017 to bring forward the voice of school-based administrators. That committee became the precursor to forming an association because when the question arose about what the future might look like, this was the group that was already in place to begin the work. We reached out to both the BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association (BCPVPA) and the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC) to learn what it was like to operate outside of a union.

At the first PSAANS AGM in 2018, more than 800 members participated in a visioning exercise led by Brave Space. This graphic captures the shared priorities, from immediate challenges to long-term goals, shaping the Association's advocacy and leadership development in public education.



"This committee essentially planted the seeds for that work. We were already discussing the future, and since we were a vetted group of administrators selected through an application process from across the regions, we were well-positioned to take on the challenge. It was a high-performing group, and we recognized that the stakes were significant – both for the education system as a whole and for individual administrators. The province chose a design approach that not only removed administrators from the teachers' union but also established the Association's structure, pension and

benefit protections, professional learning grants, return-to-the-classroom provisions, and long-term compensation safeguards. Many of these elements directly addressed concerns raised by our colleagues in BC and Ontario about challenges they had faced in their early years.

"To implement this, the government set up an application process for an interim board of the Association, which would begin on August 1, 2018, and lead the organization toward its first Annual General Meeting at the end of October. In just two



and a half months, the interim board was tasked with establishing a democratic election process so that elected directors would be in place by the AGM. Through my role on the committee, I became part of this interim board. The board elected me as the interim chair, I was subsequently elected to the board, and then the board chose me as the first chair of the Association."

How important was it that you had the support of government?

TS:

"It was critically important. One of the key takeaways from my conversations with Association leaders in BC and Ontario was how different the communication landscape was in 2018 compared to when those provinces went through similar transitions. With the presence of email and modern communication tools, the process in Nova Scotia unfolded much differently than it had across the vast geographies of BC and Ontario. The Nova Scotia government responded quickly to the need to establish something new.

"The Deputy Minister of Education at the time, Cathy Montreuil, had been involved in the early days of the OPC, so there was internal expertise and institutional knowledge, along with valuable insights from external experiences. Many of our discussions centered on fundamental questions that, in the end, we didn't have to navigate; these included the continuation of health and dental benefits, the transition from one benefits plan to another, and the risks that could have posed. Once it was confirmed that the vast majority of employment conditions would remain similar to what administrators had historically experienced within the union, it eased a lot of concerns.

"At the time, there was speculation that a significant number of administrators would leave their roles to remain in the NSTU. In reality, only a handful made that decision, and for some, it had nothing to do with the union but rather personal circumstances."

"One of the key takeaways from my conversations with Association leaders in BC and Ontario was how different the communication landscape was in 2018 compared to when those provinces went through similar transitions."

What were some successes, and some obstacles, that you experienced?

TS:

"One of our key successes was how we structured the Board of Directors. Instead of allocating seats purely based on population, we built flexibility into the bylaws, allowing additional board seats to be used for appointing members to enhance diversity. This could include efforts to balance gender, sexual orientation, race, or professional roles. For example, if all elected directors were Principals and there were no Vice-Principals or central office staff, those appointed positions could help ensure broader representation.

"This flexibility proved valuable and, two years later, we were able to add a designated position for a member representing administrators of African descent and one for Indigenous ancestry. That was a significant win – it allowed us to further move away from rigid structures while ensuring no one felt compromised. The board has a strong track record of making decisions by consensus, with a balanced composition of elected and appointed members. True board success and collaboration goes beyond simply selecting like-minded individuals: the strength

of its diversity is demonstrated in how effectively the board leads, engages in meaningful dialogue, and reaches consensus.

“The other watershed moment was how the legislation was written. It allowed PSAANS to continue accessing NSTU services, except for grievance and arbitration processes related to employment concerns or contract negotiations. Since we were no longer eligible for collective bargaining, there was no mechanism for arbitration in the event of an impasse. However, the NSTU could have provided negotiation representation for the Association. With this in mind, we worked hard to establish an interim affiliation agreement with the union, whereby PSAANS would pay a percentage of the dues collected. Our dues,

by legislation, are tied to the same rate as those of unionized teachers, so it seemed logical to explore an affiliation model.

“But there was a pressing concern. We were only two and a half months old, and what if a member needed protective services on September 1? How would we support them? Initially, we operated under a temporary affiliation agreement with the NSTU, but we needed to formalize it. Certain legislative entitlements – such as Professional Development (PD) grants, and allowing administrators to return to teaching while maintaining seniority and competing for positions on equal footing with unionized teachers – depended on maintaining affiliation.



PSAANS 2024-2025 Board of Directors

Standing (L to R): Mike Corbett, Scott Murchison, Danielle Aucoin, Stacy Thorburn (Secretary), Amy Hunt (Chair), Cheyanne Gorman-Tolliver, Sheldon States, Isaac Schurman, Paul Landry

Seated: (L to R): Brian van den Heuvel (Treasurer), Kevin Gobien, Natalie Hagerty, Mamoon Brace (Vice-Chair), Keri Butler, Kathy Weatherbee, Theresa Nickerson

Absent: Marc Poirier, Steve Wells

"In February 2019, when it came time to vote on affiliation, we realized that we had been treating two separate issues as one: the affiliation itself, and the affiliation funding and service arrangement that came with it. The proposed affiliation agreement we had negotiated with NSTU staff was ultimately not supported by their elected provincial executive. Moreover, the financial arrangement they countered with would have left PSAANS unable to sustain itself.

"The analogy I used when speaking to members was that we were looking for a simple one-bedroom apartment with basement laundry and no parking. The union, however, only offered a two-bedroom penthouse with access to a swimming pool and two parking spaces. We simply couldn't afford that – we needed only the essentials.

"As a result, we did not enter into any financial arrangement with the union, and no funds flow to them from PSAANS. In early March 2019, we established our own internal protective services and hired a Coordinator of Member Services. We brought everything in-house. While the membership ultimately voted to remain affiliated with the NSTU, there is no financial agreement between the two organizations."

How is your relationship with the teachers' union?

TS:

"Our relationship with the NSTU has been very positive. One advantage we had in how events unfolded was that, prior to being removed from the union, there was no movement among administrators advocating for separation. The work-to-rule period had been difficult, and there was no particular warmth toward the government of the time regarding its treatment of public education, teachers, and administrators. But there was also no broad desire or urgency among administrators to leave the NSTU.

"In terms of the separation from the union and the affiliation agreement, that, too, was not a PSAANS

"From the beginning, our approach has been rooted in collaboration and strong relationships."

decision. We actively worked toward securing a manageable agreement that would have allowed us to retain significant services from the NSTU, at least through the early stages of our development. However, we were unable to reach a financial arrangement that we could sustain. That necessity – not a choice – led to a clear separation. Everyone understood the reality: we could not afford to send 80% of our dues to the union while also funding services and having the resources to be responsive to priorities that were directly relevant to administrators.

"From the beginning, our approach has been rooted in collaboration and strong relationships. We have been deliberate in avoiding conflict unless there is a clear and necessary purpose, and we ensure that everyone understands our reasoning when we do take a position. Much of this thinking was shaped by conversations with colleagues in BC and Ontario, where early divisions at the separation of administrators from the teachers' unions have had generational impacts on both groups.

"The same principle applies to our relationship with government. One of the key differences between PSAANS and the Associations in BC and Ontario was the issue of legal disputes over assets. At the time of our separation, administrators made up about 10% of the NSTU membership. While we could have pursued legal action over financial assets, we carefully weighed the relational cost of such a move. Given the time and energy that would have been required for a lawsuit, we ultimately chose not to pursue that path, because you can never underestimate the long-term consequences of a fractured relationship."

What is the structure of PSAANS? How do you fit into the provincial education framework?

TS:

“A major structural distinction of our Association is that we represent not only Vice-Principals and Principals but also all educational leaders in central offices across Nova Scotia’s seven English Regional Centres for Education and the provincial French school board, Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP), as long as they hold a Nova Scotia teaching license. Typical job titles include Coordinator of Student Services, Family of Schools Supervisor, Director of Programs, and Regional Executive Director of Education (RED) who serves as the CEO of the regional centre. One of the major outcomes of the Avis Glaze report was the dissolution of the seven English school boards, which were replaced by Regional Centres for Education, while the CSAP remained as the province’s only school board. Unlike in any other province, our membership encompasses all educational leaders, from Vice-Principal to Regional Executive Director, which is our equivalent to a CEO.

“It has been insightful to engage with organizations like the OPC, the Association des directions et des directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO), and the Catholic Principals’ Council of Ontario (CPCO) to learn about their structures. From the outset, our dual mandate has been a defining part of our identity: serving both the system’s needs and the needs of individual educational leaders. Our members—including Principals, Vice-Principals, and all central office roles—are, in fact, the leadership of the entire system.

“We have consistently amplified this position to distinguish ourselves from the NSTU, emphasizing that we are not a union, but a professional association dedicated to educational leadership and excellence, all in service to the students of Nova Scotia. That is our core mandate.

If you think of regional education structures in corporate terms, in some Canadian jurisdictions the CEO is equivalent to a Superintendent, while in others, it is a Director of Education.

In Nova Scotia, the CEO is referred to as the Regional Executive Director (R.E.D.).

The next level down includes directors – such as the Director of Human Resources, Director of Programs, or Director of Operations – who are the next most senior leaders. In Nova Scotia, the Director of Programs often steps in as Acting CEO when the Regional Executive Director is away.

Below that, Coordinators play a key role, and Family of Schools Supervisors serve as the direct contacts for Principals, overseeing and supporting 20+ schools within a region.

All of these individuals are PSAANS members.

"In terms of provincial structures, we have secured key agreements that strengthen our role. When our terms and conditions of employment were established in 2018, much of the language was adapted from the existing Teachers' Provincial Agreement (TPA), with some modifications, primarily around discipline and grievance procedures. In 2022, we successfully negotiated our first formal terms and conditions of employment, which included a key provision: PSAANS representation must be included at every provincial committee table related to the work of school and system leaders. This significantly enhanced our voice with the Department of Education in ways that did not exist prior to 2018.

"This was particularly valuable during the pandemic, as we were able to provide input alongside the NSTU in shaping back-to-school and remote learning plans. Having an administrator's perspective at the table proved essential, ensuring that discussions always considered how policies would be implemented and operationalized at the school level through the leadership of Principals and Vice-Principals, as well as at the system level through coordinators and directors.

"One other unique aspect of PSAANS, due to the language in the legislation, is that membership is automatic – it is not voluntary. All educational leaders are automatically PSAANS members. Even a retired administrator who subs for a day at Halifax West High School is a PSAANS member for that day. Membership is entirely tied to role and employment status."

Is there anything that you think you would have done differently in forming the organization?

TS:

"There have likely been times when some members wished we had been more vocal or taken a stronger public stance on certain issues. However, our strategy has always been to work directly with government,

whether that is through the Minister or the Deputy Minister. While this approach has proven effective, it can sometimes be difficult to communicate. Members may assume that some of our successes just happened on their own when, in reality, they were the result of behind-the-scenes advocacy.

"The NSTU has a well-established communication approach, amplifying both achievements and challenges with equal clarity. In recognition of our members' roles, our Association's messaging is responsive while also measured. We highlight our successes, and we strive to communicate about our challenges thoughtfully and with restraint. As a result, there is a natural oscillation in our communication, but it tends to be delivered with a moderate tone. We continue to refine this approach, and the board has identified areas for further improvement. However, through our strategic planning process, we heard directly from administrators, and their feedback has been largely positive. Members appreciate that they aren't overwhelmed with emails, value the professional tone of our communications, and recognize that we speak up when it matters. Many also understand that much of our advocacy happens behind the scenes, beyond what can be shared in a newsletter. That's encouraging feedback as we continue strengthening our communication.

"One of the ongoing questions for us has been local engagement. By design, we did not establish a local structure modeled after the NSTU, but that has meant we've had to navigate how we can best engage members across broad geographic regions. In some areas, a Principal may be the only administrator for 50 to 100 kilometers before reaching the next Principal. This is a different experience than that of teachers, who often have many colleagues within the same building.

"I also realized early on that the Liberal government, having created PSAANS, had a vested interest in ensuring its success. There was a lot at stake for them, as our Association represents all education system leaders. When the Progressive Conservative government took office, we were pleased that they recognized the value of the organization and

its structure. They didn't make any changes or discuss returning administrators to the union, which reinforced the importance of what we had built.

"We have benefited from strong relationships, though we recognize that this will inevitably be tested at some point in the future. That is why we have prioritized setting a solid foundation for independence, because we know that not every day ahead will be marked by a climate of support. Through careful financial management, despite leaving behind our assets, we are now in a stable financial position with the means to operate independently."

What does the future look like for PSAANS?

TS:

"We are merging with a partner organization that has been in Nova Scotia for 30 years – the Educational Leadership Consortium of Nova Scotia (ELCNS). Established three decades ago, ELCNS was created to provide professional development for aspiring education leaders. It began with small courses, such as a 10-module program covering key foundational areas, including education law and labour relations.

At the first PSAANS AGM in 2018, members captured key priorities from table discussions, shaping the vision that informed the facilitated graphic, and that continues to guide the Association's work today.



“Over time, ELCNS has developed a structured Aspiring Leaders Program, which many regions now use to prepare teachers for Principal and Vice-Principal roles. In addition, they offer the Instructional Leadership Academy, which is equivalent in depth to a master’s degree but is designed with a strong focus on the practical aspects of instructional leadership in classrooms. The theoretical framework includes a full semester on diversity, equity, and inclusive classrooms, as well as coursework on coaching practices and action research. The program runs over three years, with six full Saturdays of class time in each semester.

“For PSAANS, the challenge has been planning for future growth. We were looking at expanding professional learning to develop educational leaders, but ELCNS has already been operating effectively in that space for 30 years. Their work began as an initiative supported by the Department of Education, as it continues to be, but ELCNS also brings together representatives from the NSTU, PSAANS, all of the universities, the Black Educators Association (BEA), and Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey (MK), which oversees the Indigenous education system in Nova Scotia.

“When we considered the future, it became clear that competing with ELCNS would benefit no one. That left two options: establishing a closer partnership or integrating ELCNS within PSAANS. We chose the latter. By bringing ELCNS into PSAANS, we are positioning it as our professional learning branch while maintaining its distinct identity.

“This is particularly important because school leadership development begins with teachers – most participants in these programs are not administrators yet. By maintaining ELCNS as a separate entity, teachers who are NSTU members may find it easier to engage in its programs without the perceived complexity of taking a course directly from PSAANS.

“We are now in the process of making this transition happen, with the goal of bringing ELCNS in-house by August 2025. This is a major step forward, not just for maintaining and refining existing models,

but for reimagining what professional learning for educational leaders will look like in the future.”

Is there anything else that you would like to share?

TS:

“I want to express my gratitude to the BCPVPA for our ongoing relationship, which dates back to 2018. Over the years, we have built on that connection, along with the OPC, ADFO, and CPCO. This network of Associations forms a strong foundation for the work ahead and the challenges we will all continue to face. As we know, the complexity of our work is only increasing.

“It has been invaluable to have a seat at the table with government, bringing a perspective that is informed not just by the Nova Scotia experience but by insights from across the country. This reinforces that the issues we face are not unique to us – they are part of a broader national conversation. Education, by its nature, can be quite siloed. It has a distinct culture that is not always easily understood by those outside the field, which is why external perspectives can be beneficial. Without them, we can often fall into the habit of doing things the way they have always been done.

“As educational leaders in each of our provinces, we carry enormous responsibility for public education – it is the backbone of society. The future of Canada rests with the students in our schools today. As professional associations, we must continue using our voices to amplify the significance of our work. It is critical, both now and in the future, that we champion our profession and advocate for the continued strength of public education.”

psaans.ca





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OTHERS, WE MAKE NEW CONNECTIONS, LEARN, AND THRIVE.

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WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED AS AN EDUCATOR AND LEADER,
AND WHAT INSPIRES YOU IN YOUR ROLE.

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TO PITCH YOUR ARTICLE IDEA TO *PRINCIPL(ED)* MAGAZINE.



The Power

of community



by
David A. Serpa
Communications Assistant
BCPVPA

The BCPVPA believes that student success is supported not only by school and district leaders, teachers, and peers. There is something else that is of great importance, both inside and outside of the classroom: their community.

For more than two decades, the BCPVPA's Partnership Awards have celebrated the people and organizations that dedicate their time and expertise to supporting BC students and schools. Any of our sixty Chapters can nominate a partner that has contributed to the school community. Over the years, recipients have included a company with a 'floating classroom' that teaches students about the sea, musicians dedicated to volunteering with students with special needs, a retired teacher who regularly travels to volunteer at a school, and a senior whose crafted birdhouse project engaged a whole community.

Denisiqi Services Society: Keeping Indigenous Culture Alive

Denisiqi Services Society aims to provide a safe, caring, and loving environment for children, supporting their development within their own homes wherever possible. Their services support students across schools including Alexis Creek, Columneetza, Tatla Lake, Naghtanequed (Xeni Gwet'in), and Anahim Lake. As part of their Mental Health program, they offer counselling and other mental health supports where they work directly with children. Helen Wight, Principal of Alexis Creek School, notes that, "Their clinicians are caring and professional. Our students have built many positive relationships with Denisiqi's clinicians and look forward to their sessions." They work with students who are struggling with addiction, social, or family challenges, and Principal Bonnie Sauder from Anahim Lake stresses that, "They have a remarkable ability to connect with students who are difficult to reach by others."

Kimberley Ikebuchi, Principal of Tatla Lake Elementary and Junior Secondary School, says, "At our school, they have played a pivotal role in enhancing Indigenous cultural learning by teaching students about the medicine wheel, leading smudging ceremonies, and conducting drum-making workshops." Kimberley adds that "Their work contributes directly to the academic success and personal growth of students by cultivating a sense of pride and belonging in their cultural heritage, while also equipping them with essential life skills."



Left to Right: Board Director Charity Peal (SD92); 2024 Award recipient Linda Bingham, Outreach Manager of Denisiqi Services Society; Yvonne Davis, Vice-Principal (SD27); and BCPVPA President, Dr. Shannon Behan (SD47)



School District 87 Award recipient, Ryan Wank



School District 47 Award recipients
Melanie Jordan and Sue Cecconi,
Friends of qathet



Board Director Sid Jawanda (SD57)
and School District 57 Award recipient
Selen Alpay

At the November 2024 Partnership Awards, we recognized five recipients doing important work across BC: the Denisiqi Services Society in School District 27; Friends of qathet in School District 47; the Laichwiltach Family Life Society in School District 72; Selen Alpay in School District 57; and Ryan Wank in School District 87.

The Denisiqi Services Society in School District No. 27 plays a very important role in the Cariboo-Chilcotin School District. It is a community-based organization that focuses on delivering culturally appropriate child and family programs to First Nations communities, including the ʔEsdilagh, Xeni Gwet'in, Tsideldel, Yunesit'in, Tl'esqox, and Ulkatchot'en communities. Their offerings are vast, including a Mental Health program for Aboriginal children and youth, the development of Tsilhqot'in curriculum and programming, and guardianship services in specific cases.

Friends of qathet in School District 47 quietly and carefully supports students in the community, addressing student needs in many different ways that include paying for extracurricular activities, food, clothes, bus passes, swim lessons, and summer program fees. Friends of qathet also provides

"Our hope is that from our program, others will create programs they feel passionate about to help others in need."

*Sue Cecconi and Melanie Jordan
Friends of qathet*

resources and support for families in need, aiming to help students have a stable home environment that is conducive to learning.

Laichwiltach Family Life Society in School District 72 received the 2024 award because of their support for First Nations' families and students in areas that include students' social and emotional wellbeing, culture, counselling, and addiction and recovery support. Counsellors from this organization regularly provide support to students at different schools. The main goal of the organization is to support children's goals and development.

BC school communities value the work of different organizations, but they equally value specific individuals who support them. Selen Alpay lives

***"This award celebrates
the efforts made in
supporting Indigenous
families and communities
in School District 72."***

*Audrey Wilson
Laichwiltach Family Life Society*

in Prince George in School District 57, and has donated to his community for many years, impacting thousands of students and their families. His donations are often to support students in pursuing sports, and he has provided education bursaries for students competing in the 2022 BC Summer Games, and bought hockey and basketball equipment for school students. He has also donated to the School District 57 Indigenous Education Department.

Ryan Wank lives in the small community of Dease Lake in School District 87, and runs the grocery store Dease Lake Super A Foods. He received the award due to his support for schools through donations of large amounts of groceries to support school lunch programs and other events. He has also prepared meals for students, and his grocery store offers students the opportunity to get work experience under his mentorship, with caring accommodation for students with special needs.

Every community needs supportive leaders and organizations to thrive. If your Chapter has an individual, organization, or business that you would like to recognize for their support of your students and community, nominate them for a 2025 BCPVPA Partnership Awards. Nominations will open in August.

Visit: bit.ly/BCP_Partnership



Left to Right: Board Director Bryn Williams (SD43); 2024 Award recipient Audrey Wilson, Executive Director of Laichwiltach Family Life Society; and BCPVPA President, Dr. Shannon Behan (SD47)

As educators, we live in an era where AI promises to streamline everything from lesson planning to student assessments. As we begin our work with the BCPVPA's landmark Leadership Competencies this year, grounded in the First Peoples Principles of Learning, I am reminded of philosopher Jean Baudrillard's caution about the danger of simulation replacing authentic human connection. Baudrillard's concept of 'Simulation' is particularly relevant today: it occurs when something fake becomes real to us – say, when we start believing that the lush life an influencer portrays on Instagram is their reality. Or, when people believe that the video they are seeing is a real video with real people, rather than an AI-generated performance.

"When the real no longer is what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality: of second-hand truth, objectivity, and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of lived experience, a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared."

Jean Baudrillard, Simulation

Inspired by Indigenous wisdom, the metaphor of the BCPVPA's Leadership Competencies – Being in the Canoe – captures an essence of leadership that cannot be automated.

The First Peoples Principle of Learning that states, "learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors", fundamentally shapes how we view leadership in British Columbia's schools. This holistic understanding demands something no AI can provide: genuine humility in recognizing that we are part of an interconnected web of relationships, histories, and futures.

As school leaders in BC navigate the AI revolution, as explored in our groundbreaking webinar series **AI, Your School, and You: An Exclusive AI Roundtable Series for Education Leaders**, we are witnessing a proliferation of automated solutions. Want to generate personalized learning plans for 500 students? There's an AI for that. Need to craft parent communications? ChatGPT stands ready. Looking to analyze student data? AI algorithms await your command.

But here's what our Leadership Competencies emphasize through their core themes: while AI excels at processing data and generating content, it fundamentally cannot embody the genuine humility and authenticity or genuineness that define effective educational leadership. True leadership, as our competencies recognize, begins with the humble acknowledgment that we are always learning, constantly growing, and always in service to our communities.

The Competencies' *Contextual Literacy and Agency* and *Growing the Capacity of Self and Others* remind us that genuine leadership requires being fully present – and genuinely humble – within the complex web of relationships that make up our school communities. This aligns perfectly with the First Peoples Principle that, "learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational."

Authentic school transformation happens in our hallway conversations with struggling teachers, in the careful navigation of complex parent meetings, and in those crucial moments when a student needs not just academic guidance, but genuine human understanding. These moments demand what is at the heart of our Leadership Competencies: authentic presence and humble leadership.

THE HUMAN ELEMENT

WHY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP CAN'T BE AUTOMATED

by

Peter Johnston

Director of Professional
Learning & Development
BCPVPA

*"Authentic school
transformation
happens in our
hallway conversations..."*





Plan your Team's 2025-2026 Learning With Us!

In addition to our core programming, scheduled workshops, events, and webinars, the BCPVPA offers a number of À La Carte Workshops for Chapters through a Request for Service that can be found in My BCPVPA.

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The core elements of effective school leadership – trust-building, emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and ethical decision-making – cannot be reduced to algorithms because they require something fundamentally human:

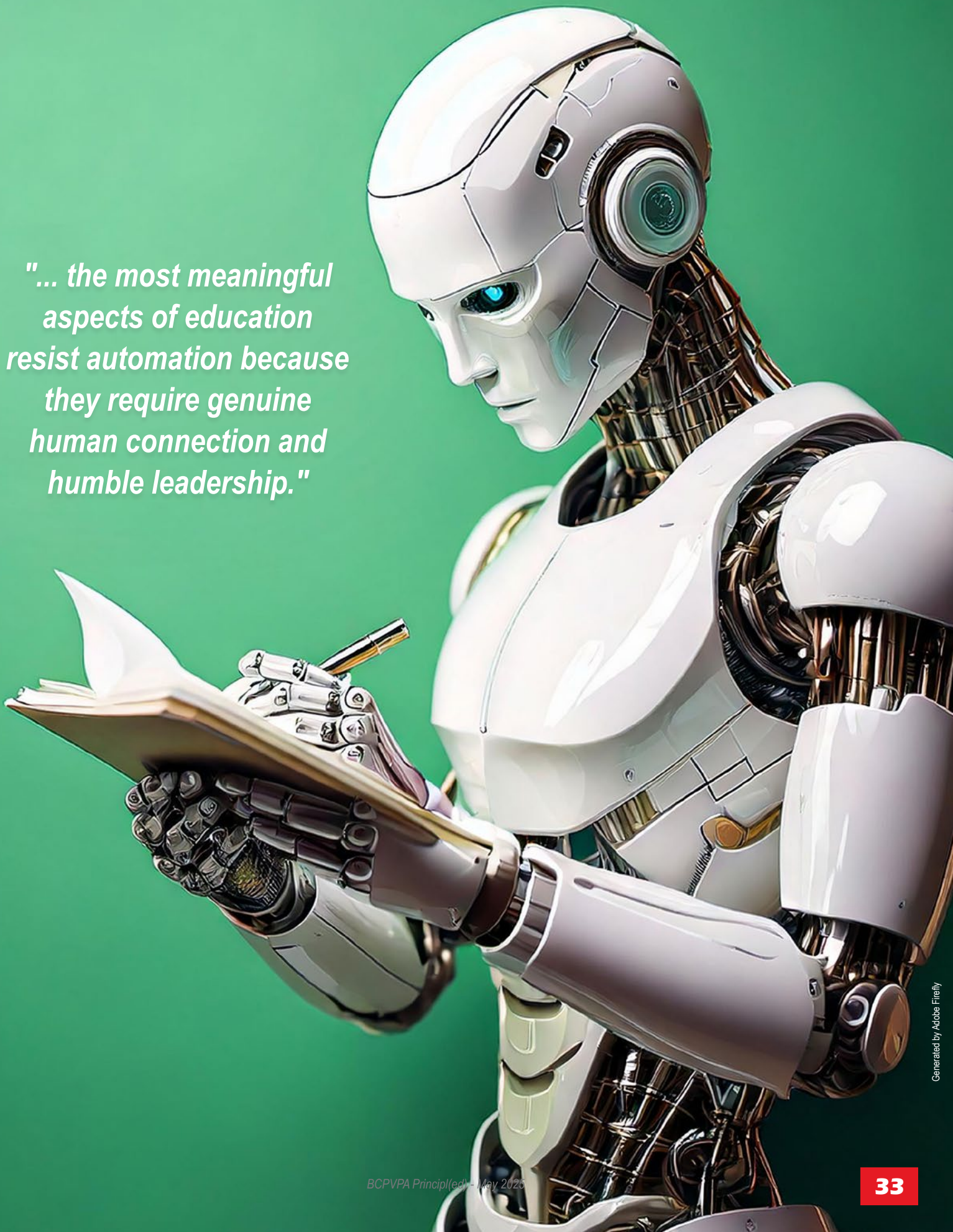
- The humility to know when we need to learn from others
- The genuineness to admit when we don't have all the answers
- The authenticity to build genuine connections with our communities
- The courage to lead with both strength and vulnerability

The Competencies *Stewardship for the Future of All Children* and *Fostering a Culture of Curiosity and Inquiry* remind us that as we embrace technological tools, they should amplify our humanity, not replace it. These Competencies, deeply rooted in Indigenous teachings, emphasize that leadership is about fostering relationships, understanding, and growth through genuine human connection.

As a counterbalance to our haste to streamline and scale educational processes, the BCPVPA Leadership Competencies ground us in this truth: the most meaningful aspects of education resist automation because they require genuine human connection and humble leadership. Connections like student engagement. Like teacher mentorship. Like school culture. These are worth doing the slow, human way.

After all, we are not just managing institutions; we are nurturing communities where the next generation learns not just what to think, but how to be human. This work demands leaders who understand, as our Competencies emphasize, that true leadership begins with humility, thrives on genuineness, and is sustained through authentic connection. And that is something that no algorithm can replicate.

"... the most meaningful aspects of education resist automation because they require genuine human connection and humble leadership."



EQUITY AND DUE PROCESS

The Role of School Leaders
in Upholding and Working with
the BC Human Rights Code

by

Lynda Bonvillain

Director, Member Support Services

BCPVPA



Human rights are essential to fostering safe, inclusive, and equitable public education environments.

In British Columbia, where schools reflect the multicultural nature of communities, it is crucial that the principles of equity, dignity, and non-discrimination are upheld. In January 2023, the Ministry of Education and Child Care introduced the **Anti-Racism Action Plan** for K-12 students.



This plan is designed to improve the school experience for racialized students, staff, and families, reinforcing the role of BC public schools in addressing and dismantling systemic racism. By embedding these principles, schools will play a transformative role in shaping a more inclusive and just future for all students.

With this commitment in mind, it is essential Principals and Vice-Principals understand the protections outlined in the BC Human Rights Code (BCHRC, or the Code). The Code safeguards the rights of all individuals — regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, Indigenous identity, ability, or other protected characteristics — ensuring they are treated with dignity and respect. BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (BCOHRC) enforces the Code, promoting human rights through public education, inquiries, and recommendations on systemic issues. Central to the Code's approach is a focus on non-discrimination, equality, and decolonization, recognizing both individual and collective rights and addressing the intersectional ways in which people experience both discrimination and privilege.

Principals and Vice-Principals have a key role in embedding human rights principles in the culture,

and practices of schools. Understanding the legal protections of the BCHRC both supports and empowers you to foster environments that honour diversity and that promote equity, inclusion, and decolonization. Embedding human rights principles not only ensures compliance with the BCHRC, but also nurtures an educational environment where all students, staff, and families feel respected.

The Role of School Leaders in Fostering Equity Under the BCHRC

Equity involves recognizing and addressing the unique barriers that certain groups face, and providing them with the necessary resources and supports to succeed. By committing to equity, school leaders create educational environments that meet individual student needs and ensure every student has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Fostering equity requires policies, procedures, and practices that actively promote inclusion and combat systemic inequalities. One of the primary responsibilities of school leaders is to ensure that schools are free from discrimination, harassment, and bullying and, in alignment with the Anti-Racism Action Plan for K-12, all schools and districts must establish Codes of Conduct that specifically address racism and discrimination.

As leaders of school communities, you are uniquely positioned to implement proactive strategies that prevent discrimination before it occurs. This important shift from reactive responses to preventative approaches involves adhering to district policy and administrative procedures that are aligned with the BC Human Rights Code to protect all students.

In addition, establishing clear, school-wide practices that set expectations for equity, inclusion, and non-discrimination can help create a supportive school environment that is responsive to the school community. Encourage and support teachers in using



"Central to the Code's approach is a focus on non-discrimination, equality, and decolonization, recognizing both individual and collective rights and addressing the intersectional ways in which people experience both discrimination and privilege."

culturally responsive and diverse teaching materials that reflect a variety of backgrounds, histories, and perspectives to foster a sense of belonging and respect for diversity. Creating spaces where students can express their identities, experiences, and perspectives also raises awareness and empowers them to contribute to positive change both within your building and in society. Engaging with families and communities, especially those from underrepresented groups, provides valuable opportunities to share school-wide practices, invite input, and strengthen partnerships.

Principals and Vice-Principals must also model equity-minded leadership by openly addressing issues and demonstrating a commitment to an

inclusive school environment. By being a visible advocate for equity, school leaders set a strong example for staff, students, and families. Further, prioritizing human rights principles enables you as a school leader to address systemic inequalities, ensuring that marginalized students receive the support and accommodations they need. This commitment enhances student well-being and academic success while fostering a positive school culture. Aligning school-based practices with the BC Human Rights Code, and embedding cultural competency into daily practices, are essential to a proactive approach. These efforts raise awareness of human rights, nurture empathy and understanding, and ultimately create a more inclusive and equitable environment for all students.

ABOUT THE BC HUMAN RIGHTS TRIBUNAL

The BCHRT is a direct-access Tribunal, meaning that people who believe they have experienced discrimination can file a complaint directly with the Tribunal against the person or organization they say discriminated. Legal representation is not required to file a complaint. In 2022-2023 a total of 2,624 new cases were filed with the Tribunal.

The Tribunal offers free mediation services to parties, and works to make these services available at any stage of the proceeding with an emphasis on early resolution. Mediated settlements may result in systemic change that is beyond the scope of remedies available under the Human Rights Code after a hearing. In 2022-2023 the Tribunal conducted 452 mediations, of which 262 resolved.

In the 2022-23 year, disability remained the most common ground of discrimination alleged (32%); followed by ethnicity (which includes race, place of origin, ancestry, Indigenous Identity, and colour) (29%); sex (13%); family and marital status (8%), and religion (6%). The grounds of sexual orientation and political belief composed 5% of new complaints. Notably, many complaints allege more than one ground. Under age 19 represents 2.6% of complaints filed.

Source BCHRT Annual Report

Guidance for School Leaders: Navigating the BC Human Rights Complaints Process

The BC Human Rights Code establishes clear expectations for equity by prohibiting discrimination based on specific protected characteristics. Beyond setting these expectations, the Code provides a structured complaint process for individuals who believe they have experienced discrimination. This process empowers individuals to formally express their concerns, seek resolution and, if necessary, pursue further action through the Human Rights Tribunal.

Principals and Vice-Principals in BC have both ethical and legal obligations to uphold the BC Human Rights Code within schools. In accordance with the Code, all complaints of discrimination must be addressed promptly and effectively, ensuring that appropriate actions are taken to resolve concerns. Establishing clear, transparent, and accessible school-wide practices for addressing complaints, and following identified district policy or administrative procedure, is essential for enabling students and staff to report incidents of discrimination. This ensures that these issues are managed fairly and with due process, fostering a culture of respect and inclusion within your school community.

It is crucial for leaders to be familiar with district policy and administrative procedures, and to follow them as a means of support. These established expectations not only provide a framework for addressing complaints but also ensure consistency and fairness in handling sensitive issues. By adhering to district policies and administrative procedures, you ensure due process for the complaint process. Reaching out to the district also provides you with the opportunity to leverage additional resources and expertise when needed. This comprehensive approach reinforces accountability.

Despite your best efforts, students or members of the school community, including parents, may choose

to initiate a formal complaint with the BC Human Rights Tribunal (BCHRT). In some instances, they may opt to bypass the school and district complaints processes altogether and directly file a complaint with the BCHRT, as every individual has the right to do. The BCHRT independently manages complaints related to discrimination under the Code.

Complaints from the public education sector often include discrimination related to race, inclusion and accommodation, gender identity, sexual orientation, and religion. Parents may also act on behalf of their children if they perceive that the school's actions —'or lack of action'—'have contributed to a hostile or inequitable environment. Complaints often arise when issues are not adequately resolved at the school level in a timely manner or are perceived to not be resolved. In some cases, a complaint may arise when parents and students feel that school-wide practices or staff behaviour have unfairly limited the student's opportunities or participation in school life. As a process, the BCHRT offers a formal avenue for seeking resolution.

The BCHRT's complaints process begins with the filing of a complaint, where the student, parent, or guardian submits details of the alleged discrimination. The Tribunal conducts an initial screening to determine whether the complaint falls within its jurisdiction under the Code. If it does, the Tribunal will serve notice of the complaint to the person named. Typically, it is the school district that is named in the complaint, along with individual district and school-based staff. If you receive a notice of complaint directly, ensure you reach out immediately to your district senior manager to ensure a coordinated and timely response. As with most legal matters related to your role as a school or district Principal or Vice-Principal, most Terms of Employment Contracts with a board of education include indemnification language providing support for legal consultation and representation in a human rights process through district-coordinated legal services.

It is not uncommon for it to take up to a year before the school district receives a notification of filing. It

"By being a visible advocate for equity, school leaders set a strong example for staff, students, and families."



is also not uncommon in the context of the public education sector for human rights filings to be a continuing contravention — or inclusive of a series of complaints that span several years — filed as one complaint to the Tribunal. Human rights complaints can also coincide and occur along with other complaints processes, including Freedom of Information requests and Teacher's Regulation Branch Complaints. It is important to ensure that due process through coordinated and consistent communications continues to guide your best practice when working with students and/or parents who may intend to file, or who have filed, a complaint to the Tribunal. Further, when a complaint is filed it is important that you seek guidance and support from your district senior management team to ensure an ongoing collaborative relationship with a family or student who remain part of your school community during a complaints process.

BCHRT outcomes may include mediation to resolve the issue without a formal hearing. In fact, many complaints received by the BCHRT are resolved through mediation. If mediation fails, the case proceeds to a Tribunal hearing, where a legally binding decision is made. If the complaint is successful, the Tribunal can order remedies such as policy changes at the district level, staff training at the school level, or financial compensation to the student and/or parent. When financial compensation is awarded to a student or parent through the BCHRT, it is intended to compensate the complainant for harm suffered due to discrimination. This can include compensation for injury to dignity, feelings, and self-respect awarded for the emotional impact of the discrimination, or lost wages or expenses where discrimination caused a financial loss, such as missed educational opportunities, therapy costs, or other related expenses. The BCHRT determines the amount based on the nature and severity of the discrimination and the impact it had on the complainant.

In this sense, the human rights process ensures that students and families have access to recourse and due process outside of the district's own internal

complaints and appeals processes. When complaints escalate to the BCHRT, your district will navigate the formal process, even if you as the school or district Principal or Vice-Principal are solely named in the complaint.

Embedding the principles of the BC Human Rights Code (BCHRC) in school culture and practices is essential for creating safe, inclusive, and equitable environments. As school leaders, Principals and Vice-Principals play a vital role in ensuring school policies, practices, and culture align with the Code. By embedding these principles into school culture and practices, you foster environments that not only comply with legal standards but also actively promote equity and inclusion.

Supporting due process in the complaints process is a critical component of this commitment. It ensures that all complaints are handled fairly and transparently, allowing all parties involved to present their perspectives. Being responsive to complaints demonstrates respect for the concerns of students and community members and reinforces trust in the school's leadership. By establishing clear procedures and maintaining open lines of communication, Principals and Vice-Principals can effectively navigate the complexities of complaints while upholding the principles of justice and equity.

As with any investigation process, including BCHRT, BCPVPA Member Support Services are here to support you.

Support from your district, including legal indemnification, may be available under your Terms of Employment Contract in a human rights investigation process.

mssinfo@bcpvpa.bc.ca

CASE SPOTLIGHT

READ THE CASE



In this case, a parent filed a complaint against a school district under section 8 of the Human Rights Code, claiming discrimination on the grounds of mental disability. The parent argued that the district did not provide adequate educational accommodations for their child, who had multiple mental health and developmental challenges, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The school district countered that it had fully accommodated the child to the point of undue hardship, and maintained that any issues stemmed from the parent's lack of cooperation. The school district also argued that the complaint was untimely and did not meet the requirements for a "continuing contravention" under section 22(2) of the Code, which would allow for filing beyond the six-month limit. They argued that the alleged discriminatory incidents related back to a decision made in 2014. The district claimed any subsequent interactions after the 2014 decision were merely continuations of the initial stance, not new acts of discrimination.

The district argued that the Tribunal should exercise discretion under Section 22(3) only in rare circumstances, asserting that significant delay and lack of compelling justification made it inappropriate to accept the complaint. The parent countered, claiming the complaint reflected an ongoing failure to accommodate. The Tribunal determined that the complaint constituted a "continuing contravention" under Section 22(2), rendering it timely. Consequently, the Tribunal denied the District's dismissal request, allowing the complaint to proceed.

READ THE CASE



In this case, a parent filed a discrimination complaint against a school district on behalf of his daughter, alleging that family status influenced disciplinary actions taken against the student. The complaint centers on the student's suspension for vaping at school and the student's subsequent disqualification from an extracurricular school trip to Europe. The parent argued that the school's actions were biased, affecting the student due to the parent's identity and previous challenges to school decisions.

The school district denied these claims, citing disciplinary actions based on evidence of the student's misconduct, not family status. They requested dismissal of the complaint, arguing there was no reasonable prospect of success. The Tribunal reviewed the parent's assertion that their perceived "aggressive" conduct led to unfavorable treatment of the student. However, evidence of the parent's interactions with the school primarily emerged after the decision to disqualify the student from the trip.

The Tribunal concluded that the complaint relied on conjecture, lacking concrete evidence to establish a link between the parent's identity and the disciplinary actions taken. The Tribunal found the school district's decisions were based on documented incidents involving the student, and did not constitute family-status discrimination. Therefore, it dismissed the complaint under s. 27(1)(c) of the Human Rights Code, citing no reasonable likelihood of success at a full hearing.

READ THE CASE



In this case, a parent filed a human rights complaint on behalf of their child against both the school district and school staff, alleging discrimination based on mental disability. The complaint claims that over seven years, the school's teaching methods exacerbated the student's learning challenges, causing the student distress, and that the school inadequately addressed bullying incidents. The respondents argued that they provided appropriate, respectful support and addressed bullying incidents responsibly.

The respondents sought dismissal of the complaint, citing the parent's failure to comply with a disclosure order for relevant documents and alleging that proceeding would not further the purposes of the Human Rights Code. The parent refused to provide the ordered documents, did not file a response, and indicated they would ignore the Tribunal's order. The Tribunal determined that the parent's non-compliance undermined procedural fairness and the Code's purposes. Citing the parent's conduct and lack of diligence in pursuing the complaint, the Tribunal dismissed the complaint without a hearing.

THE PRUNING PRINCIPLE

Dr. Simon
Breakspear

October 24, 2025
Whistler, BC

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How Strategic Subtraction Can Unlock Surprising Progress

The BCPVPA presents an exclusive session with Dr. Simon Breakspear at the 2025 Connecting Leaders Conference in Whistler, October 24.

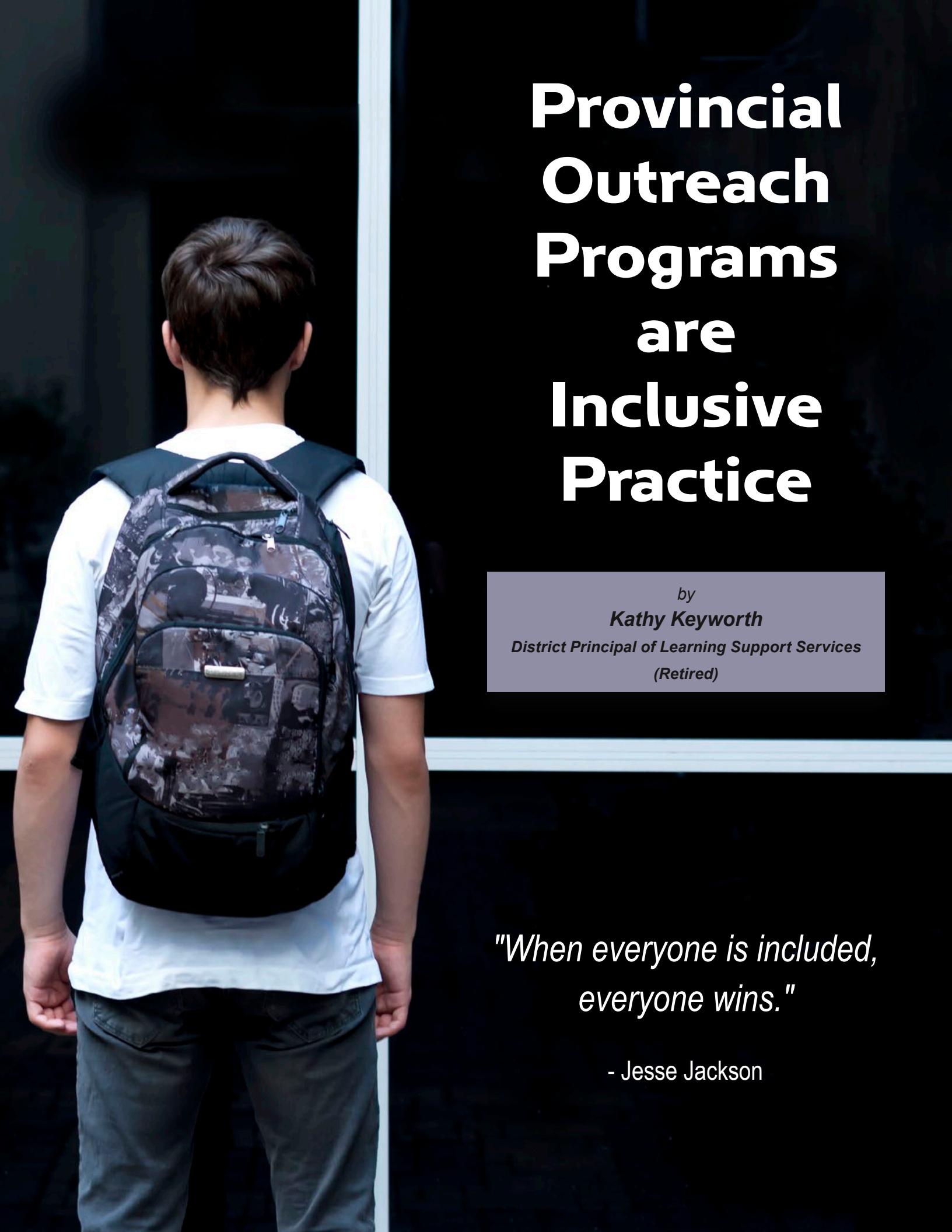
Dr. Breakspear presents the case for strategic subtraction: what if the answer to inducing positive change in our teams, organizations, and systems lies in *doing less*?

- Unravel the misguided tendency to keep adding more
- Surface the power of subtracting, streamlining, and simplifying
- Explore how to apply The Pruning Principle across roles and contexts
- Consider why pruning will require courage and creativity



Dr Simon Breakspear is an educational researcher, former high school teacher and father of three. As the founder of Strategic Schools, he focuses on supporting teams to enhance their impact on learning through evidence-informed processes and tools. He is an Adjunct Senior Lecturer at the University of New South Wales and advisor to the NSW Department of Education on Leadership Development and Curriculum reform.

Simon holds a Ph.D. in Education from the University of Cambridge, where he was a Gates Scholar. He works globally with teachers, schools, and policy leaders.

A person with short brown hair, seen from behind, wearing a white t-shirt and a large black backpack with a camouflage pattern. They are standing in front of a blackboard with white text.

Provincial Outreach Programs are Inclusive Practice

by

Kathy Keyworth

District Principal of Learning Support Services

(Retired)

*"When everyone is included,
everyone wins."*

- Jesse Jackson

By ratifying the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2010, Canada committed to ensuring an “inclusive education system at all levels.” Article 24 specifically states that education systems should be directed so “persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live,” and “effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion” ¹. The purpose of the Human Rights Code in BC is to “foster a society in British Columbia in which there are no impediments to full and free participation in the economic, social, political and cultural life of British Columbia” ². It goes on further to say that we cannot discriminate against someone “because of the Indigenous identity, race, colour... physical or mental disability... of that person or class of persons.” ³

As inclusive educators, we believe that all students belong in their neighbourhood schools, and we work diligently to ensure equitable access to academic and social programming for all. To do this, the school leaders must provide opportunities for staff to develop skills and understanding about educational practices that support students with disabilities and diverse abilities. The school administrator must have a vision for inclusion, the ability to organize (and re-organize) school structures and supports, and the understanding of how to clearly set goals and directions for staff to follow. In addition, school leaders must provide for collaborative opportunities to build staff capacity. Through transformational and instructional leadership, schools can truly become a place of inclusion.

Provincial Outreach Programs

One way I have been able to engage school teams in the collaborative process while promoting inclusive practices is through education, training, and

1 UN CRPD, 2006.
 2 <https://bit.ly/48R0iBv>
 3 <https://bit.ly/48R0iBv>

promotion of regular school-based and district team meetings. When strategies related to intervention and prevention require another layer of support beyond district specialists, I have enlisted the support of Provincial Outreach Programs (POP). These programs are funded by the Ministry of Education and Child Care, and each POP provides unique specialized services designed to serve schools well. POP provide outreach services to support educators, students, and families to meet the needs of students with diverse abilities within the public education system. Staff are experts in their field who work to support the academic, physical, social, and emotional needs of students.

Each POP listed below has a distinctive mandate and operates under its own service delivery model; however, the following services are generally provided by all programs:

- Sharing of best practices based on current research
- Building capacity amongst school-based teams by providing in-person training, webinars, mentorship, and in-service
- Developing and sharing quality learning resources and tools
- Providing tools for accessibility to curriculum that nurtures inclusion

ARC-BC	Accessible Resource Centre
POPARD	Provincial Outreach Program for Autism and Related Disorders
POPDB	Provincial Outreach Program for Students with Deaf-Blindness
POPDHH	Provincial Outreach Program: Deaf & Hard of Hearing
POPFASD	Program Outreach Program for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder
PRCVI	Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired
SET-BC	Special Education Technology – British Columbia
	Inclusion Outreach
	Auditory Outreach



*“We will all profit from a more
diverse, inclusive society,
understanding, accommodating,
even celebrating our differences,
while pulling together for the
common good.”*

- Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Benefits of Enlisting Services

All POP offer both in-person and virtual professional development. While the programs are designed for specific disabilities and diverse abilities, they are really the basis of good teaching and can be applied in many classrooms and situations. POPFASD, for example, has an FASD-Informed Teaching (FIT) Framework. It focuses on four areas: knowing your student, brain-based needs, environment, and teaching practices to create a sense of belonging for students. POPARD offers half, one-, and two-day workshops centered around working with challenging behaviours and supporting students who are minimally verbal. POPDHH offers cultural opportunities for students, including Friendship Day and Showcase. They also offer mentorship to Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) teachers. PRCVI offers resources and training, as well as alternate formats of texts. ARC-BC offers a workshop on Designing for Inclusion: Creating Accessible Educational Materials for All Learners, and provides alternative texts for any student with a print disability, including learning disabilities.

A Personalized Experience with Inclusion Outreach

In my role as a District Principal of Learning Support Services, I was able to work with Inclusion Outreach to support a student with complex and multiple disabilities. The purpose of Inclusion Outreach is to develop meaningful and inclusive programs for K-12 students. I worked alongside a school team, district staff, and the provincial team to identify barriers towards inclusion, reduce violent incidents, and increase the school team's confidence in their ability to change instructional practices to meet students where they are at.

The process for accessing support through Inclusion Outreach was having the student's case manager complete a referral form, and send it to the District Partner for approval before submission. A consultant from Inclusion Outreach came to the school and worked onsite for the entire week to observe the student, and collaborate with school staff and caregivers; they helped create Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals around five quality of life outcomes and provided training on instructional strategies. All

documents are stored by Inclusion Outreach on a student-specific website that is designed to be used by all case managers as the student progresses through school. Through the student website, the Inclusion Outreach team provides follow-up service at a distance. School teams can upload videos for feedback. Inclusion Outreach remains involved with the student for their entire school career. As a result of Inclusion Outreach's involvement, the student in our care has been able to strengthen their gifts and improve their quality of life while participating in events with their peers. Additionally, the school team was excited to participate in the four-series course on Supporting the Inclusion of Students with Complex Needs, which is a free course on Open School BC that is available to anyone. ⁴

The Value of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education strives to ensure that every child has the right to quality education and learning. I

4 openschool.bc.ca/inclusionoutreach

believe that inclusive education is the most effective way to give all children a fair chance to go to school, learn, and develop the skills they need to thrive. Inclusive education is essential in changing societal discriminatory attitudes. Respect and understanding grow when students of diverse abilities can learn and play together. Inclusive systems value the unique contributions students of all backgrounds bring to the classroom and allow diverse groups to grow side by side, to the benefit of all. My career has been based on these core values and I have enjoyed every aspect of my chosen career helping school and home teams access the resources they need to best support students in their communities.

Accessing POP

If you would like to learn more about Provincial Outreach Programs, contact your Director of Learning Support services, visit the Ministry of Education and Child Care website, or visit the POP website to locate your district partner.

Links

- bit.ly/CRPD_
- bit.ly/BCHRC_
- bit.ly/SEPMK12
- bit.ly/IERK12
- bit.ly/INCLBC_

- Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Human Rights Code
- Special Education Policy Manual
- Inclusive education resources - Province of British Columbia
- Home - Inclusion BC

*"Strength lies in differences,
not in similarities."*

- Stephen R. Covey



Exploring the Landscape of Human Rights Cases Impacting Canadian Schools

by
Anna Zadunayski LLB, MSc
Pendulum Law Ltd.

In May 2024, Donna Reid and I started Pendulum Law Ltd., a legal publishing firm surveying education law cases, identifying and documenting trends related to Canadian schools and universities law, and disseminating important and timely information within the education law community. We aim to update educational leaders and professionals on new legal developments, emphasizing practical implications and applications for professional practice. In contemplating an article related to human rights in the educational setting, we knew there was no shortage of recent cases to draw upon. We acknowledge that all human rights cases involve the lived experiences of others, and we respect and appreciate the knowledge gained from their trials.

Provincial Human Rights Legislation

In Canada, provincial human rights legislation prohibits discrimination in the provision of educational services on the basis of race, colour, ethnicity, place of origin, religion, marital or family status, physical or mental disability, sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, or class. This applies to public schools, independent schools, colleges, and universities.

In British Columbia, there is the opportunity to resolve a concern or complaint at a school, district, or Ministerial level, but a person may also file a human

rights complaint with the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal (BCHRT), alleging discrimination under the BC *Human Rights Code* ¹ (the *Code*). Where a complaint involves a child, the complaint is typically filed by a parent or guardian. Only in very specific circumstances will a human rights complaint in the educational setting fall under the ambit of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Human rights complaints are presumptively public. Once filed, human rights complaints at the tribunal or court level, like other litigation, become a matter of the public record. While tribunals may grant an anonymization order or publication ban regarding minor students and individual educators (pending the outcome of the case), there is less willingness to do so for schools and districts. ²

Recent Human Rights Cases Impacting Schools

In the past year, there have been several human rights cases involving teachers, administrators, and schools in Canada. Topics have included teacher privacy (Ontario), private prayer space for students (Alberta), differential treatment in

¹ RSBC 1996, c 210

² *Child K and another v. Queen of All Saints School*, 2024 BCHRT 150



Anna Zadunayski and Donna Reid
Pendulum Law Ltd.

"While tribunals may grant an anonymization order or publication ban regarding minor students and individual educators (pending the outcome of the case), there is less willingness to do so for schools and districts."

denial of re-enrollment (Ontario), and reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities (BC). Legal outcomes depend on the specific facts and legislative framework for each case.

In *Webber Academy Foundation v. Alberta (Human Rights Commission)*³, the Supreme Court of Canada denied leave to appeal a decision of the Alberta Human Rights Commission that failing to provide students with access to quiet, private prayer space at school was discrimination on the basis of religion. That case ultimately took more than twelve years to resolve through the legal system; the Commission awarded each of the students – none of whom had attended the school for more than a decade – \$18,000 in damages, along with other systemic remedies.

In *S.R. v. Matthews Hall*⁴, the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario held that failing to provide sibling students with a re-enrollment package (denying school re-enrollment) was discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity contrary to the *Human Rights Code*.⁵ In addition to public interest remedies, highlighted later in this article, the school was ordered to pay \$75,000 in compensation for injury to dignity, feelings, and self-respect, with interest in accordance with the *Courts of Justice Act*.⁶ The HRTTO also held the Principal personally responsible for their part in the discriminatory conduct – they were ordered to pay

an additional \$20,000, in part, for refusing to meet with the family.

More recently, and closer to home, is the ongoing case of *Child K*. In that case, a parent filed a complaint with the BCHRT alleging that the child's school had failed to meet the child's disability-related needs. The parent later added themselves as a complainant, alleging that they were adversely impacted by the school's failure to accommodate their child's disabilities, constituting discrimination based on family status.⁷ The case has been permitted to proceed to a full human rights hearing for a decision on the merits.

What About the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

The vast majority of human rights cases are navigated at the provincial level. Cases invoking the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (the *Charter*) are more limited, as the Charter applies to entities which are considered an extension of government.⁸ Where an entity is found to be "government", the *Charter* applies to its actions.

In *York Region District School Board*, a recent workplace privacy case involving two elementary school teachers, the Supreme Court of Canada held that the *Charter* applied to Ontario public school boards, with the caveat that each case depends upon its specific factual and statutory context.⁹ In this case, a Principal took screenshots of a private Google Doc and used them in subsequent reprimands, which was found to be an invasion of the teachers' privacy contrary to section 8 of the *Charter*: the right to be secure against unreasonable search or seizure in the workplace.

The teachers were instructed by their union to keep notes of workplace concerns and had a reasonable

3 2024 CanLII 22674 (appeal from 2023 ABCA 194)

4 2024 HRTTO 680

5 R.S.O. 1990, c. H. 19

6 RSO 1990, c C.43

7 *Independent School Authority v. Parent*, 2022 BCSC 570

8 *Eldridge v. British Columbia (Attorney General)*, [1997] 3 S.C.R.

9 *York Region District School Board v. Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario*, 2024 SCC 22

"The vast majority of human rights cases are navigated at the provincial level."

expectation of privacy in the Google Doc, given that it was stored in the cloud rather than on a school board server. The union grieved the reprimands, requesting damages for breach of privacy.

The case went to the Supreme Court of Canada, providing an opportunity for the Court to determine *Charter* applicability to Ontario public school boards. A review of the *Education Act*¹⁰ confirmed that Ontario public school boards are government by nature and therefore subject to the *Charter*. The Court held that actions carried on by Ontario public school boards are subject to *Charter* scrutiny, including the Principal's actions in this case, as the Principal acted in their official capacity as an agent of the Board – a statutory delegate – and not in their personal capacity.

Not all jurisdictions have legislation identical to Ontario's *Education Act*, so the case is not a blanket precedent. The Supreme Court carefully cautioned that whether the *Charter* applies to Canadian public school boards depends upon the specific factual and statutory context of each case. However, the facts of the case were straightforward and could have happened anywhere. The decision serves as an authority for the legal proposition that where public school boards are an arm of government, exercising powers conferred upon them by a provincial legislature – powers and functions the legislature would otherwise have to perform – there is a strong likelihood that *Charter* rights and freedoms, and correlating responsibilities, will apply. Public school boards should take this decision seriously, and use it to inform their conduct.

**Monetary Awards, Public Interest
and Systemic Remedies**

The usual remedy for a human rights breach – such as discrimination or invasion of privacy – is an award of monetary damages, intended to restore a person to the position they would have been in had the

breach not occurred. A monetary award provides compensation for intrinsic harm – injury to feelings, dignity, and self-respect – caused by discriminatory conduct,¹¹ recognizing that human rights have intrinsic value independent of actual monetary or personal losses suffered by an individual.

In rare cases where it is not possible for the legal system to make a person “whole” through a damages award, a public interest remedy or systemic remedy may be ordered. Typically, in addition to a monetary award, a systemic remedy may include measures intended to address the systemic “root cause” of the discrimination, prevent it from happening in the future, and promote the purposes of human rights legislation.

In *Webber Academy*, the Alberta Human Rights Commission ordered the school to refrain from future contraventions of the *Alberta Human Rights Act*¹² and ordered a representative of the school's administration to attend or subscribe to an educational program on the duty to accommodate.

Similarly, in *Matthews Hall*, the school was ordered to hire, at its own expense, a recognized human rights expert to conduct a human rights audit and provide in-depth human rights, diversity, equity, and inclusion training to the school's Board of Governors and all administration, teachers, and staff. The audit had to include a review of the school's communication policies, procedures, and contingency plans, together with an assessment of whether the school required a social worker for community support and counselling services for students and staff. *Matthews Hall* was also ordered to hire, at its own expense, an independent expert in leadership and communication to provide leadership, conflict resolution, and communication

¹¹ *Arunachalam v. Best Buy Canada*, 2010 HRTO 1880

¹² *RSA 2000, c A-25.5*

¹⁰ *RSO 1990, c E.2.*

"In rare cases where it is not possible for the legal system to make a person "whole" through a damages award, a public interest remedy or systemic remedy may be ordered."

skills training for senior administration and the Chair of the Board, and to provide confirmation of completion of the mandated audit and training within 60 days of completion.

Additionally, in a recent but already much-cited case, the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario mandated a university admissions pilot project for students with disabilities, impacting the postsecondary admissions landscape in Ontario and elsewhere.¹³ In that case, a student made a human rights complaint based upon their experience of the university admissions process, alleging discrimination with respect to educational services because of disability, contrary to the *Human Rights Code*.¹⁴ Given the passage of some eleven years in that case – owing in part to

the legal process – the complainant no longer sought university admission. Instead, they sought systemic change, so that others in similar circumstances could rely upon an enabling admissions process with accommodations if needed.

Why is an Exploration of Recent Human Rights Cases Important?

These cases were selected and shared to cultivate awareness and learning from the experiences of others. It is important for educational leaders to have a basic understanding of the implications of human rights legislation on the education system, including the fundamental categories and grounds for discrimination, together with the duty of reasonable accommodation to the point of undue hardship. An awareness of the rights and responsibilities of stakeholders – students, teachers, and administrators – will lead to better decision-making, enhanced professional practice, and promotion of the fundamental purposes of human rights legislation. Creating quality educational environments is not easy in an increasingly complex and demanding world, but basic knowledge of human rights legislation and processes will promote inclusive, accommodating environments which are happier learning spaces for all.

¹³ *Longuepée v. University of Waterloo*, 2024 HRTO 707

¹⁴ R.S.O 1990, c. H.19



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Practical Legal Information for Interdisciplinary Professionals

About the Author

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FROM CONNECTION TO TRANSFORMATION

AFFINITY GROUPS IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

"AFFINITY GROUPS CREATE
POWERFUL SPACES WHERE PEOPLE
CAN DROP THEIR BAGS ON THE
FLOOR AND TAKE A BREATH, WITNESS
EACH OTHER'S EXPERIENCES,
AND HOLD EACH OTHER UP."

by

Iram Khan
Principal
SD 43 (Coquitlam)

Mandy Wong
Principal
SD36 (Surrey)

It all started with a message on Twitter.

"Hope it's okay I reach out this way. I'm a new VP in the district and I was wondering if you know of any PVP networks in Surrey doing work around BIPOC in educational leadership or leadership in general? Specific to BIPOC women would be a bonus. I know you co-run the B.C. Women of Ed Twitter so I thought you may be a good person to ask."

The role of a school administrator is often a solitary one, shaped by a mix of challenges and successes that frequently go unnoticed. However, for those of us who walk this path as minoritized administrators, the complexity of our responsibilities are further compounded by unique layers of nuance and experiences.

It is challenging to work within an education system that was designed to uphold the power structures, values, and norms of colonial groups. Systemic biases embedded in policies and practices often result in exclusion, limited representation, and fewer opportunities. The lack of representation in leadership roles perpetuates inequities and limits opportunities for systemic change. At gatherings of school leaders, the lack of diversity can become apparent, creating a sense of isolation and unease. There is often an expectation to work harder, to serve as a "good representative" of diversity, and to navigate the mental exhaustion of challenging decisions made from a dominant perspective.

Additionally, the subtle yet pervasive impact of microaggressions presents a unique challenge that often is concealed beneath efforts to maintain harmonious relationships within school communities. For many, particularly those from immigrant backgrounds, there is a deeply ingrained mindset of staying quiet and avoiding conflict, an approach shaped by the need to adapt to a culture markedly different from their own.

What began as a simple idea to gather like-minded people and share stories evolved over two and a half years into an affinity group specifically for BIPOC

(Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) women in education leadership.

Affinity groups provide a safe space for people with shared identities or experiences to connect, share, and support one another. These spaces foster a sense of understanding, value, and belonging. Affinity groups create powerful spaces where people can drop their bags on the floor and take a breath, witness each other's experiences, and hold each other up.

Our affinity group started off small and slow. Naturally, there was some hesitancy and nervousness about gathering as BIPOC women, especially since we faced questions like:

Can white women be included?

Can BIPOC men join?

What kind of funding are you seeking?

Why can't we try to be all the same?

Will this group further marginalize us from other administrators?

Being challenged created a sense of defensiveness. It felt as though the existence of the group was being questioned, raising concerns about whether the protective reaction was overly "sensitive." There had been no anticipation that the space created would need to be actively defended.

Our group began with an idea, a conversation on Twitter, and a vague note in a confidential memo for administrators. At that time, there was no vision, just the deep need for connection. In the early days of meeting as a group, we discussed our purpose and, beyond that, why we needed to exist. As the group expanded, it became clear that although we were all looking for connection, the "why" was more complex.

Over the years, we have discussed having a clear definition or direction beyond providing spaces to connect but, as time has progressed, it has been left open-ended. This is purposeful, as definition can be limiting. Instead of a fixed definition, we

"STORIES DRAW PEOPLE
TOGETHER AND HAVE PUSHED
US TO REFLECT; THEY ALLOW US
TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND
CHALLENGE COLONIAL SYSTEMS
THAT HOLD US BACK."

have embraced a shared vision: to stay open to connections, ideas, and possibilities as we continually learn and evolve.

This shared vision comes to life in our BIPOC Women in Education Leadership Network in the variety of opportunities we have provided to our members. We meet informally at restaurants, where we come together to share our experiences and cultivate deeper connections in a relaxed setting. We have offered coaching sessions tailored to the unique needs of our members, providing them with personalized support and opportunities for professional growth. To foster creativity and fun, we have hosted imaginative activities like paint nights. Additionally, we have invited speakers to present valuable information, resources, and perspectives that enrich both our personal and professional journeys.

As a result of these opportunities, our stories of identity, intersectionality, adversity, and success can be shared with our wider communities. Stories draw people together and have pushed us to reflect; they allow us to better understand and challenge colonial systems that hold us back.

Affinity groups further the movement toward decolonization, as they create spaces where marginalized communities can reclaim and affirm

their identities, and discuss issues related to their identities, without the judgement or fragility of those who may not share their experiences. By collectively addressing and challenging systemic inequities, affinity groups work to resist colonial structures and practices. Participating in such acts of decolonization not only helps foster healing, but also plays a crucial role in dismantling systems of oppression.

The evolution of the BIPOC Women in Education Leadership Network from providing not only informal gatherings but a platform for personal and professional growth, highlights the importance of creating spaces that are not only safe but open to learning, creativity, and growth. Affinity groups play a pivotal role in fostering empowerment, dismantling systemic inequities, and creating a more inclusive, supportive environment for all.

While the BIPOC Women in Education Leadership Network started in Surrey, it has grown to include leaders across Metro Vancouver. We warmly invite more leaders to join us as we continue to expand. Our network is committed to offering meaningful opportunities for connection, collaboration, and support, and we are open to exploring ways to meet the unique needs of members in diverse locations.

Please reach out if you are interested.

Iram Khan
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Mandy Wong
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Jody Billingsley

Program Manager – Practicum (Secondary),
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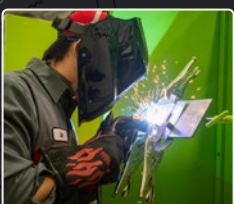
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Resources/Publications



An artistic illustration of three otters floating in water during a golden sunset. The otters are looking towards the viewer with calm expressions. The water is dark blue with shimmering golden reflections from the low sun. The background is a warm, hazy orange and yellow, suggesting a peaceful evening scene.

by
Sarah Garr
Principal
SD 61 (Greater Victoria)

“It was just fun to have a Raft of people my own age, and to get used to high school.”

CONNECTIONS BEFORE CONTENT

Prioritizing Relationships in a Secondary School Setting

“Before we can learn, we need a connection.”

This simple, yet profound statement was made by a student in May of 2022, and it sparked a multi-year journey of reflection and inquiry that has resulted in an initiative with a single focus: building relationships.

The importance of relationships between students and a trusted adult in a school community is not a new concept. Strong relationships, and the resulting increased sense of belonging in educational settings, are positively related to good academic performance¹, prosocial behaviours², and psychological well-being.³

A study in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*⁴ showed that strong teacher-student relationships significantly enhance student motivation and achievement. Numerous other studies point to the power of relationships not only as a foundation for academic success, but as an essential component for a student's social-emotional well-being. These foundational relationships contribute to a student's sense of safety and belonging – ultimately, a student who feels *connected and safe* is a student who is *better equipped and motivated to learn*.

But although there is ample evidence, finding the time (and energy!) to build intentional relationships in the midst of busy days can be a challenge for educators. Specifically, at the secondary school level, teachers can feel pressured to cover curriculum, provide accurate and timely assessment, and prepare students for potential post-secondary pursuits. With increasingly complex demands on their time, relationship-building can sometimes be viewed as something that is less valuable or worthy.

So, how do we help educators to see the value – the ‘payoff’ – of putting *connections* before *curriculum*?

How do we shift the perception of relationship-building as an *extra*, to relationship-building as an *essential component* of instruction?

It was with these questions in mind that a team from Esquimalt High School in School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria) embarked on a Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education (NOIE) project in 2021. In partnership with Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser, NOIE is a voluntary network of inquiry-based schools and school districts in British Columbia. In addition to providing a framework for inquiry and a supportive network of educators and coaches, teams also receive grants that can be used for release time, resources, and professional development to support initiatives. Judy and Linda's book, *Leading Through Spirals of Inquiry For Equity and Equality*, provided our team with a structure that helped us move from speculation and “hunches” into action.

In conversation with students and school-based teams, our “hunch” was that focusing on the transition of our Grade 9 students into high school would have the greatest impact on long-term success. Initially, our focus was on prioritizing and improving transitions for our Indigenous students, with the ultimate long-term goal of improving graduation rates.

From the outset, we agreed that if we were going to prioritize the building of relationships, connection, and belonging, we first needed to build this time into our bell schedule. We determined that this focused time would occur once a week, between our two afternoon blocks. As an otter is our school mascot, this period of time soon became known as Raft, the collective noun for otters. The image of these fuzzy creatures connected and floating together became a great metaphor for the relationships that we were striving to form with students.

1 Sari 2012

2 Demanet and Van Houtte 2012; Lonczak et al. 2002

3 Jose et al. 2012

4 Wentzel, K.R., 1998

As we moved through our preliminary planning meetings with students and staff, we began to envision what our Raft classes would look like, and we worked together to identify a list of priorities. These included:

- Small class sizes to foster a sense of safety and connection
- A balance of prepared activities to maintain a consistent focus, combined with flexible impromptu options to allow Raft teachers to respond to the needs of the students
- Activities that focused on connection and team building, designed to be fun, relevant and inclusive

Not surprisingly, food was a recurring theme in conversations with both students and staff. We recognized the central role of sharing food in creating a sense of community.

In addition to establishing a clear focus for Raft classes, we also determined our indicators of “success”. While the collection of quantitative data was relatively straightforward – tracking attendance rates, class completion, numbers of conduct concerns – we also understood that the collection of qualitative data and anecdotal evidence was equally important.

In *Street Data: A Next Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy and School Transformation*, Shane Safir and Jamila Dugan remind us that, “what is *measurable* is not the same as what is *valuable*.”⁵ Street data is the “qualitative and experiential data that emerges at eye level and on the frequencies when we train our brains to discern it. [It is] asset based, building on the tenets of culturally responsive education by helping educators look for what’s right in our students, schools and communities instead of seeking out what’s wrong.”⁶ As such, impromptu conversations with students, informal observations

5 Street Data, 12

6 Street Data, 2



Circles

**Visits from
"Alumni"**

**Class Coat
of Arms**

**Gratitude
Board**

**Raft
Challenges**

**Board
Games**

**Team
Teaching**

**"Make
Fast
Friends"
Activity**

**Class
Field Trips**

**Team
Building**

**School
"Behind
the
Scenes"**

Raft Letter to My Grade 12 Self



It's May of 2028. You are in your final months of your Grade 12 graduating year. You open a letter that you wrote in 2024...

What would you tell your Grade 12 self?

What is happening in your life right now? Who are your friends, what are your interests (music, sports)?

What current events (news stories) are happening now that you think your Grade 12 self would be interested in?

What are some goals/dreams/hopes that you hope you will achieve over the next four years (personal, academic)?

What advice would you give to your Grade 12 self as they embark on the next stage of their life?

GRADE 9 RAFT THEMES AND TOPICS

September: Self-Discovery + Reflection

Purpose of Advisory - Rationale

Circle

Survey

Goal Setting (Definition of Success)

Letters to Grade 12 Self

Study, Organizational Skills

October: Relationships, Community and Connection

Team Building - Advisory Challenge

Identifying Trusted Adults

Truth and Reconciliation, Orange Shirt Day

November: Social- Emotional, Mindfulness, Mental Health & Resilience

Resources and Supports at Esquimalt

December: Winter Celebrations

Cultural Exploration

January: New Year!

Guest Speaker (Alumni ?)

Goal Setting Reflection

Survey

February: Gratitude & Community Project

Black History Month

Pink Shirt Day - Spread the Love!

Charity Raft Community Project

March: No Raft

April: Community Project Continued

Charity Raft Community Project

May: Inclusion and Diversity

Rainbow Week

June: Celebrating Success

Survey

Goal Setting Reflection

Celebration of Success



Above: Raft Connection and Community Day

Right: School Mascot, Ollie the Otter, with Sarah Garr



of behaviours in classrooms and hallways, and input from staff regarding the overall “feeling” of our school community were noted.

And so, in the Fall of 2022, we launched our first Raft classes with a Grade 9 “Community and Connection” day. We took students off-site to a local park to participate in team building activities led by staff and leadership students. The intention was to provide an environment in which both students and Raft teachers had the opportunity to step outside of their comfort zones, to take risks, and – importantly – to have *fun*. Throughout the year, we continued to provide opportunities for a balance of more formal learning along with less structured exploration, creativity, and fun.

Now in our second year with Raft classes, our model has continued to grow and evolve. We find that each Raft class evolves into its own unique identity, a perfect blend of student personalities and interests combined with the skill sets and qualifications of

each Raft teacher. Some Raft classes are boisterous and revel in inter-Raft competitions and physical activities, while others are more reserved, choosing to spend time on crafts, personal reflection, and goal setting. Raft teachers continue to meet throughout the year to plan and provide support to their colleagues

Looking ahead, we will track our Raft cohorts as they make their way from Grade 9 through to graduation, gathering data as indicators of success. Preliminary data gathered through student surveys has already suggested that students are feeling more connected to the adults in our building, and experiencing an increased sense of safety and belonging.

As we share the data with our wider school community, our hope is that teachers will continue to see value in investing the time in relationships, and in placing connections before curriculum. Our hope is that our students will view school not only as a space to receive an education, but as a space where they feel *seen, safe, and respected*.



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BCPVPA Early Intervention Program

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We are a team of professional counsellors, consultants, and therapists who are committed, experienced and passionate about what we do.

For more information, visit www.humanworks.ca



Your Stories: Anti-Racism

With the guidance of the BCPVPA's Equity Theory of Change, we are exploring the ways in which we can support effective school leadership for racial equity and anti-racism, and support our members with tools and knowledge to deal with 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 the perspective of **Sylvie Mazerolle** of School District No. 93 (Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique), and we look forward to hearing more from our members and their teams. Contact:

sandra@bcpvpa.bc.ca





Sylvie Mazerolle (elle/she/they)

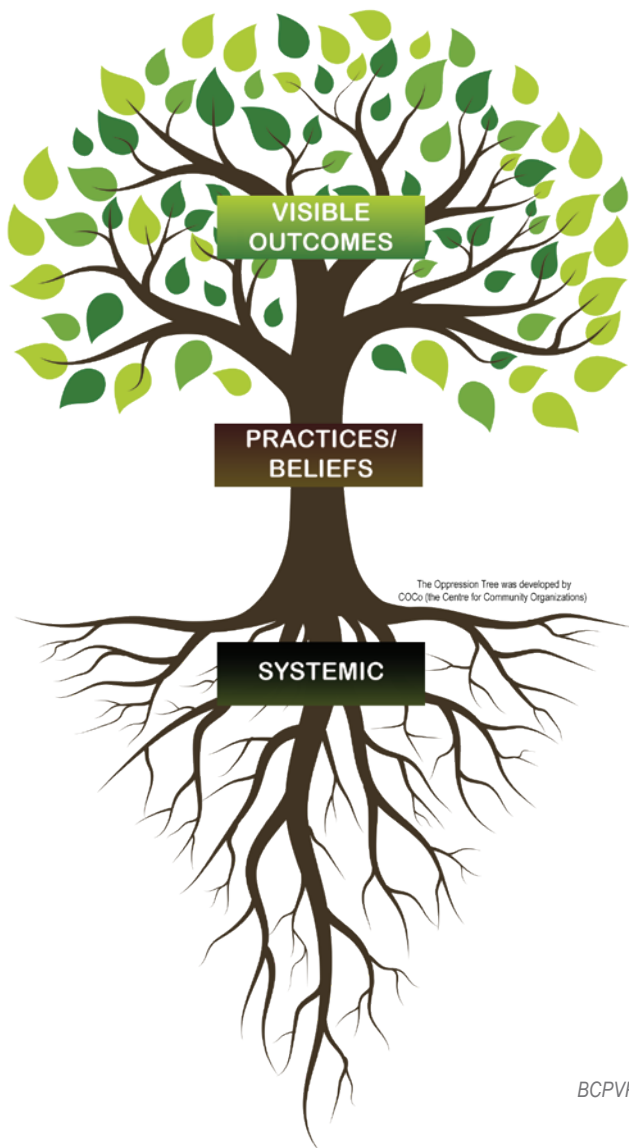
K-12 School Principal

SD 93 (Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique)

Becoming an Anti-Racist School Leader

Introduction

At the heart of education is the potential to transform ourselves, each other, and the world. Within this aspiration for transformative change is the belief that each student, as well as the adults, ecosystems, and communities supporting them, should be able to flourish both in and through education. And yet, education has been – and continues to be – a place of harm for marginalized students, staff, and families. Canada's Indian Residential Schools are a haunting reminder that we must work actively and consciously to listen to Survivors and decolonize education.



So much generous, good work has been gifted to help non-Indigenous folks move towards Truth and the recognition of ongoing racist, white supremacist, and heteropatriarchal colonial harms. As educational leaders entrusted with being school Principals or Vice-Principals, we are called upon to envision, embody, and implement changes – individual, relational, and systemic – that might bring healing to our school communities. How can we tend to such aspirational goals as we navigate the increasing complexities of school leadership? Or, better yet, how can we *not* tend to these goals as leaders empowered to change the lives of children in our educational care?

This goes beyond aspiration, of course. We are mandated to uphold the rights and dignity of each child, to act *in loco parentis*, guided by a potent combination of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) Calls to Action in education, BC's Human Rights Code, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Ministry of Education and Child Care directives, frameworks and anti-racism action plan, and more. Our own Association has included REDI Champion as a goal

"... education has been – and continues to be – a place of harm for marginalized students, staff, and families. Canada's Indian Residential Schools are a haunting reminder that we must work actively and consciously to listen to Survivors and decolonize education."

in its 2023-2026 Strategic Plan and has developed a BCPVPA Equity Theory of Change. They have also created an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee, and I am fortunate to have a seat at this table.

My Own Journey

My name is Sylvie Mazerolle, and I am a white-bodied, Queer, Acadian settler who lives on and benefits from the occupied, stolen, unceded, traditional, ancestral, and contested territory of the Sinixt Nation. In my eighth year as a rural francophone school Principal, I am a certified master practitioner in Compassionate Systems Leadership (MIT) with an MA in Curriculum Studies (UBC). In my previous career as a contemporary dance artist, I was guided by the same passion for social justice, care, and healing that I carry with me now as an educator.

I have been on my anti-racism (un)learning journey, belatedly, since June 2020, when George Floyd was brutally murdered by police as the world watched in horror from the confines of pandemic lockdowns. More recently, I have been re-centering the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration of Human Rights in my practice as a school leader and teacher, holding onto radical hope as violence and genocides tear apart the lives of children in so many places in the world.

I am deeply indebted to Black and Indigenous authors and thought leaders, and authors and thought leaders of Colour; there are too many to name, but they include Ibram X Kendi, Layla F. Saad, Ijeoma Oluo, Patrisse Cullors, Jo Chrona, Carolyn Roberts, Arthur Manuel, Rodney Saint-Éloi, Susan Abulhawa, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, James Baldwin, Dr. Eve Tuck, Desmond Cole, adrienne maree brown, and Octavia Butler. Reading their works these past four years has radically (in the sense of "at the root," as Angela Y. Davis teaches us) changed my understanding of leadership in education and my own personal and professional journey towards anti-racism. As Maya Angelou eloquently said, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

Anti-Racism Initiatives

Several organizations, including the province-wide school district in which I currently work, Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique (CSF) SD93, created anti-racism initiatives in the wake of the assassination of George Floyd. In June 2020, the Board of Trustees enacted an Anti-Racism Working Group, or *Groupe de travail antiracisme* (GTAR). Reporting directly to the Board of Trustees, the working group includes representation from Indigenous leadership, students, parents, support staff, teachers, Principals and Vice-Principals, community partners, board trustees, as well as district representatives. Its mandate has been renewed, and continues.

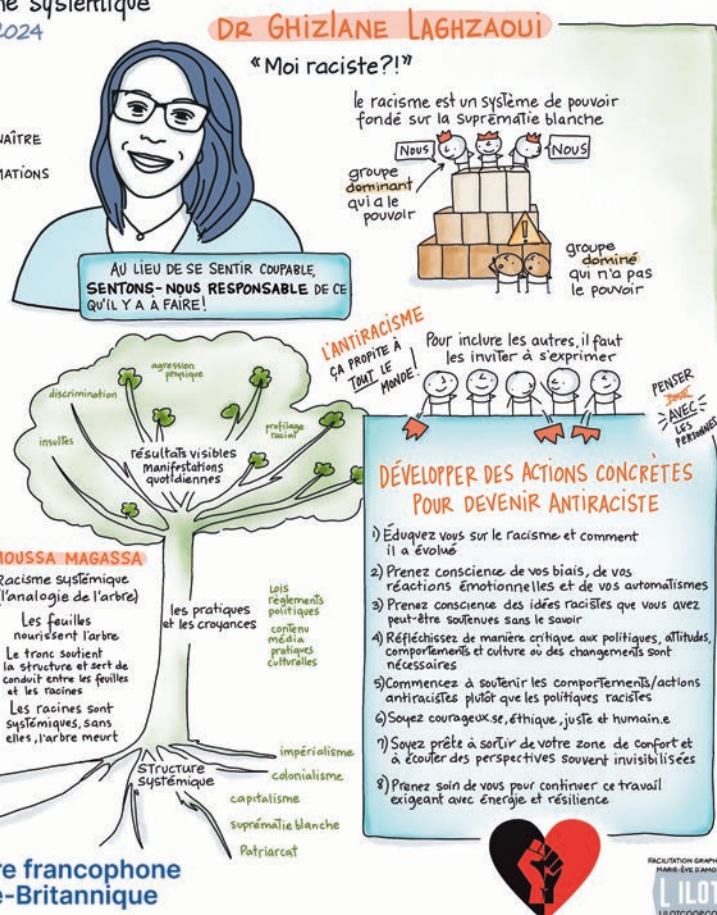
The working group conducted an equity scan of our school district through Bakau Consulting in 2021. Its report was published by the district in 2022 and confirmed what Indigenous, Black and People of Colour already knew: racism and discrimination are a daily occurrence in our schools and district. The working group immediately took the data to elaborate further recommendations to the board. Two major recommendations have been enacted: the creation of an *Equity and Anti-Racism Director* position within a revised, decolonial organizational chart, and an annual district anti-racism training day, implemented in November 2022.

TÉMOINS
20 NOVEMBRE 2023



Déconstruire le racisme systémique

18 novembre 2024



During the anti-racism training days, all staff – including on-call staff – are paid to attend in their respective schools. We have been fortunate to welcome an incredible range of speakers, including Elaine Alec (Syilx and Secwepemc), Fabrice Vil, Chanelle Tye, Xavier Watso (W8banaki, Odanak), the Honourable Rachna Singh, Rhiannon Bennett (Musqueam), Dr. Ghizlane Lhaghzaoui, Kenza Derkaoui, and Dr. Moussa Magasa. Necessary, often painful, conversations are happening thanks to these successive anti-racism days and the vital work of the Anti-Racism Working Group. We are grappling with case studies and concepts to help uproot systems of domination and stop the harm of everyday racism.

In my own school community, we acknowledge having to deepen conversations and transform our (un)learnings into actions. Adopting practitioner inquiry to connect theory and practice, we have each read and reflected upon *Me and White Supremacy* by Layla F.

Saad, reviewed our school Code of Conduct using an equity and anti-racist lens, and are dedicating time each staff meeting to continue our exploration towards becoming anti-racist.

The urgency of anti-racism cannot be overstated. The (un)learning must be a life-long commitment embedded in Truth, cultural humility, deep compassion, and continuous action and reflection. As my esteemed anti-oppression sociology teacher at McGill University, Dr. Kimberley Ducey, used to frequently remind her students, “To those that much is given, much is expected.” Those who carry the most privilege benefit from systems of oppression; at the same time, they also carry the most systemic power for radically uprooting systemic racism. As leaders in education, let’s call people in, and call harm out. Together, we must continue the work of becoming anti-racist school leaders.

Recommended Reading

Me and White Supremacy
by Layla F. Saad

Teaching for Black Lives
edited by Watson, Hagopian and Au

A Talk to Teachers
by James Baldwin

Wayi Wah! Indigenous Pedagogies: an Act for Reconciliation and Anti-Racist Education
by Jo Chrona

Re-Storying Education: Decolonizing your Practice Using a Critical Lens
by Carolyn Roberts

Recommended Learning



PDCE UBC
Indigenous Institute



Reconciliation
Education



My Training BC
Anti-Racism Course



Anti-Racism
Microcertificate



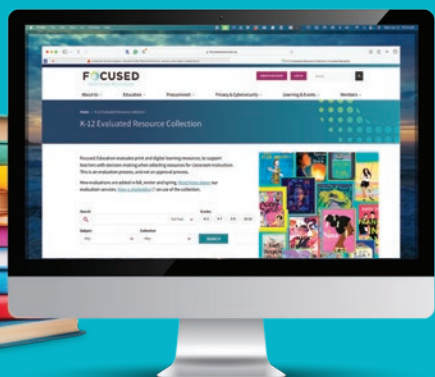
PDCE UBC
Reconciliation Through
Indigenous Education



Government of BC
Anti-Racism Education

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Resources designed for teachers and students, the K-12 Evaluated Resource Collection and Digital Classroom are already at your fingertips. Accessible now directly from your school site.



THINGS TO KNOW:

- Resources are available from your school site.
- Tools are available for teachers and students.
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K-12 Evaluated Resource Collection

Are your teachers overwhelmed by the thousands of resources available to support classroom instruction? The K-12 Evaluated Resource Collection includes expert evaluated educational websites, novels, picture books and non-fiction references.



Digital Classroom

Access quality digital reference resources that have been evaluated for their usefulness in supporting B.C. curriculum and instruction.



Catch Us Here:

IT4K12 2025

November 4-5, 2025 | Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre

IT4K12 is a nexus for educators to explore the forefront of educational technology.

Foundations for New School Leaders 2025

Come say “hi” and learn more about how Focused ED can enhance and support your work.

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A New Journey of Leadership

My given name at birth is Rosetta Doolan. My Nisga'a name is Simgit Hitkws (Standing Strong). I am Ksim Giska'ast (killer whale clan) of the Nisga'a nation. I belong to Wilps (House) Niisyuus. I come from the Nisga'a community of Gingolx. I began my leadership journey back in 2022 as Vice-Principal with our School District No. 92 (Nisga'a) at Nathan Barton Elementary School. I then became Co-Principal in 2023, and Principal in September 2024.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the people of the Musqueam (xʷməθkʷəy̓əm), Squamish (Skwxwú7mesh), and Tsleil-Waututh (səlilwətaɣ) Nations for allowing myself and many other leaders to attend the BCPVPA's Foundations for New School Leaders. This opportunity has enabled us to grow and learn together as we embark on our new journey of leadership.

I arrived at Foundations not knowing what to expect, and feeling a bit nervous around people I didn't know. I found my table – number 4 – and noticed a little moose stuffed animal in the centre of the table. Before the first guest speaker was to start, our table team leader said that we needed to come up with a name for our moose, and this suggestion was in my mind as the program began.

I really enjoyed listening to the speakers who addressed decolonization and reconciliation. Carolyn Roberts shared a quote by Jackie Ottmann, "Indigenizing/Decolonizing education is about transformational but sustainable change that requires strong enduring leadership". To me, this signifies that we, as Indigenous people, must share our historical narratives to foster enduring changes that will strengthen our Indigenous identities and enable us to live in greater harmony within society.

After listening to Carolyn speak, I told our team leader that we shouldn't give the moose stuffed animal a name. Moose's name should remain unchanged. To me, renaming Moose exemplifies how colonization altered our traditional names, and how our names were taken away. I explained to my table group that our Indigenous ancestors experienced forced name changes with the arrival of the Europeans and, as part of reconciliation, we need to honour Moose and not give him a western name. Let Moose be Moose. At the end of the week, Moose came home with me and his Nisga'a name is Xadaa, which means Moose.

This little Moose story has reminded me once again of the importance of reconciliation and how we can decolonize for the benefit of our Indigenous identities. For many years, I have wanted to legally change my given name at birth, Rosetta, to my first Nisga'a name, Yuuhadaax, which means, "Taking the Lead." I never did change my given name legally; little did I know that one day I would be taking a name that has become very important to me.

During the week I attended Foundations, I had my last week with the name, Yuuhadaax, as it was passed down to one of my nieces at my late mother's Stone Moving Feast on the Saturday following Foundations. There, my late father's brother, Niis Naganuus, blessed me with my late mother's second Nisga'a name, Simgit Hitkws, with its meaning of "Standing Strong". Although receiving my late mother's name was bittersweet, I felt deeply honoured, especially as I was embarking on a new leadership role that perfectly aligns with my name.

"Standing Strong" reminds me of how far I have come and the importance of carrying the strength of my mother's love and guidance. My late mother

by
Simgit Hitkws
(Rosetta Doolan)
Principal
SD 92 (Nisga'a)



always provided us with encouragement. During her Stone Moving Feast, I gifted out memorial cups bearing a cherished message of hers: *“Be calm, be at peace with one another. Be strong, be respectful at all times.”* I carry her words of encouragement with me always. I now use my name, Simgit Hitkws, daily; by doing so, I am reclaiming my Indigenous identity and strengthening my true self.

I also appreciated a slide that Carolyn shared, highlighting four key aspects of Decolonizing Leadership:

- **Relational accountability:** holding ourselves accountable for building strong relationships and allowing the relationships to guide the work we do as leaders.
- **Restoring capacity:** understanding that we come with our own lived experiences, and that counts for our own understanding of what leadership means from our own worldview.
- **Reimaging:** understanding that the colonial hierarchy of leadership isn't made with relationships in mind, so where are the points where we can disrupt and dismantle the system and create a system of care?
- **Humanizing:** connecting with people, honouring people, and treating people in a human centered way.



Simgit Hitkws with Simoogit Niis Naganuus

These four aspects collectively define what decolonizing leadership should embody. I find these aspects valuable because I believe they can guide me in my leadership role as I learn to unlearn and learn.

I am inspired to keep finding ways to strengthen myself first, so that I can share my growth with my learners. This led me to write my own version of a poem called, “Where I am From”. The inspiration comes from George Ella Lyon, who wrote the original poem. This is a meaningful way to connect with my own roots and express my own identity of who I am, and where I come from.

*I am from where the river meets the ocean,
I am from the boat that leaves early in the morning and
returns late at night filled with food for the winter,
I am from the cockle beds and clam tides that gravitate to the surface
as the ring around the moon shines its brightest
I am from a hard-working fisherman who runs along the beaches with
burning lanterns, rakes and buckets, digging with the tide
I am from a forest filled with medicine and food
the aromas of the plants and the sweet taste of berries come to me
I am from where cedar is harvested and transformed to tell our story
through totems, carvings, rattles and drums
I am from grandmothers and aunties who teach me to sit quietly and gather
I am from where driftwood is collected along the beaches
I am from smoke houses that are lit day and night
where the lightness of the smoke penetrates the season's catch
I am from fishing camps that sit along the river
where seagulls and sea lion gather also waiting for the gold to arrive
I am from elders who share stories of the past
They have songs and stories to share, and I sit and listen
I am from hard working hands guiding me
I am from the ancestors who inspired me to carry on.
I am Simgit Hitkw̓s*

“Where I am From” is a widely taught poem in classrooms around the globe. It focuses on personal identity, using a template that highlights our unique qualities. This poem encourages a deep exploration of one's background, home, childhood, upbringing, and family culture, celebrating what makes each of us special. By strengthening my own identity through sharing grounding activities, such as this poem, I am holding myself accountable to decolonizing leadership practices. I hope that this poem activity will inspire others to do the same.

Taking the Foundations course has encouraged me to delve deeper into my own Nisga'a culture, strengthening my identity and inspiring others to do the same. Through the week of this course, I learned of the importance of

decolonizing my leadership practices. True leadership in education involves not only mastering technical skills but also fostering inclusive and equitable environments that honour and respect diverse ways of knowing and being.

Decolonizing is about reclaiming our heritage, strengthening our communities, and ensuring that future generations can deeply connect with our culture. If we, as Indigenous educators, don't work to decolonize our formal western education curriculum, we risk continuing to colonize future generations and perpetuating the cycle. By learning to decolonize, we honour our ancestors and empower our people to thrive.

I feel encouraged by the leadership opportunities I have encountered, which motivates me to continue learning my Nisga'a language and culture so that I can become a Nisga'a knowledge keeper. Our future's prosperity lies in our past. We must always remember who we are and where we come from to build a future with a strong sense of belonging. As we strive to move past the challenges faced by our parents and grandparents, we must remember our duty to uphold the cultural traditions that have made us resilient Indigenous people.

I encourage everyone to join me in this journey of cultural reclamation and learning. Together, we can honour our ancestors, strengthen our communities, and ensure that future generations thrive with a deep connection to our heritage. Let's work collectively to decolonize our education systems and celebrate the diverse ways of knowing and being that define us.

My son, Jean-Paul, is my guiding inspiration in my leadership journey. His Nisga'a name, Hli Oots'in Gibuu, (Spirit of the Wolf), was lovingly created by my late mother a few months before her passing. As his mother, I aspire to instill in him a deep sense of belonging to his Nisga'a heritage and to pass on the legacy that I carry.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the organizers of the Foundations for New School Leaders course, the inspiring speakers, and everyone at table number 4. Your contributions have provided me with a wonderful learning experience that has set me on a strong path in my journey.



Simgit Hitkws and Hli Oots'in Gibuu



Makhli-yak (Lyla), Simgit Hitkws, Dean, Blair, Simoogit Siisbiguut (Steven) at the Stone Moving Feast

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. We want to hear about the anti-racism initiatives that are taking place in your school community, and can share your story in an upcoming issue of *Principled* magazine.

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

sandra@bcpvpa.bc.ca



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TELL A FRIEND!

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

bcpvpa.org/membership/application



GOING OUTSIDE

with Fort St. James Secondary School



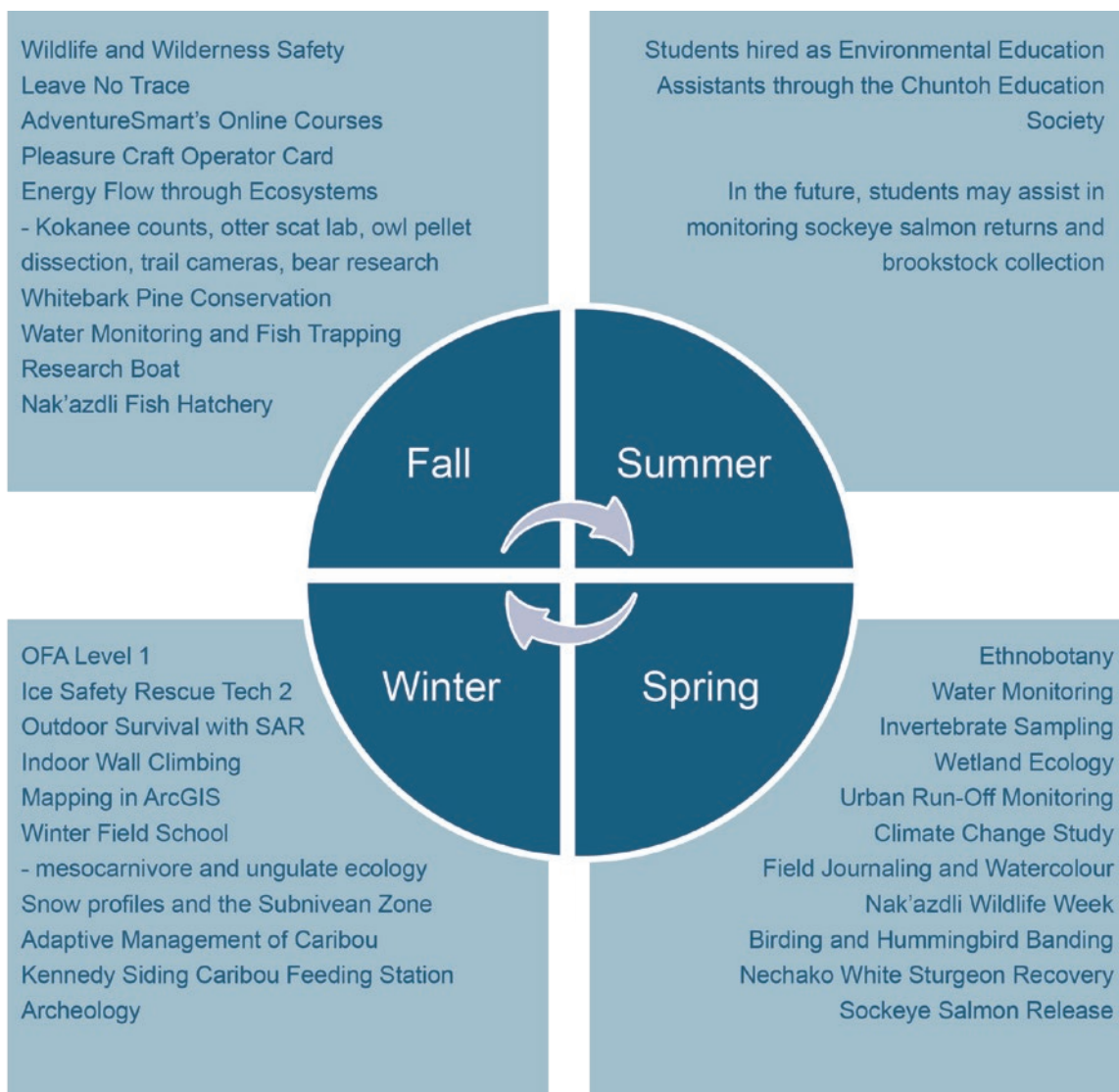
ENSOE 11/12 students monitor dissolved oxygen, pH, turbidity and temperature in a local creek

by
Jaclyn Boyes
ENSOE 11/12 Teacher
SD 91 (Nechako Lakes)

Class looks a little different for some students at Fort St. James Secondary School. Rather than grabbing a chair and taking a seat when the bell goes, students pull on a pair of chest waders, turn on a GPS, and head into the great outdoors. Binders are replaced by field notebooks and data sheets, densimeters and water test kits fill student backpacks, and local experts and field guides direct the day's learning targets. Our classroom might be the creek, a research forest, the fish hatchery, or even our school's very own research boat. This is ENSOE 11/12!

Situated in north central British Columbia, Fort St. James is a mecca for natural resource management and outdoor recreation. Many of our families' cultures, values, hobbies, and sources of incomes are connected to the land, inspiring myself and a colleague to develop a course that promoted both student engagement and stewardship of our local environments. And so ENSOE 11/12 came to be, an eight-credit cross-curricular course that combines Environmental Science and Outdoor Education.

I do not consider myself to be a seasoned outdoor teacher, but I would like to share what we have accomplished with this course, along with our challenges and plans for the future. Guided by BC's curriculum, the activities in ENSOE 11/12 largely depend on seasonal field conditions, student interests, access to local experts, current research, and funding. While every semester looks a little different, the figure below highlights the broad range of fieldwork and skills introduced to students in this course.



A Summary of the ENSOE 11/12 Fieldwork and Skills by Season

LEANING ON LOCAL EXPERTS

The phrase “guide on the side” certainly describes my teaching approach in ENSOE 11/12. My role has shifted from delivering content to connecting students with experts who deliver the content for me. I model active learning as I engage in the activities beside my students. I encourage them to be curious, and to ask questions about their surroundings. I look out for their safety. I often use the pronouns “we” and “ours” to describe this course, because it truly takes a team of invested people to make it happen.

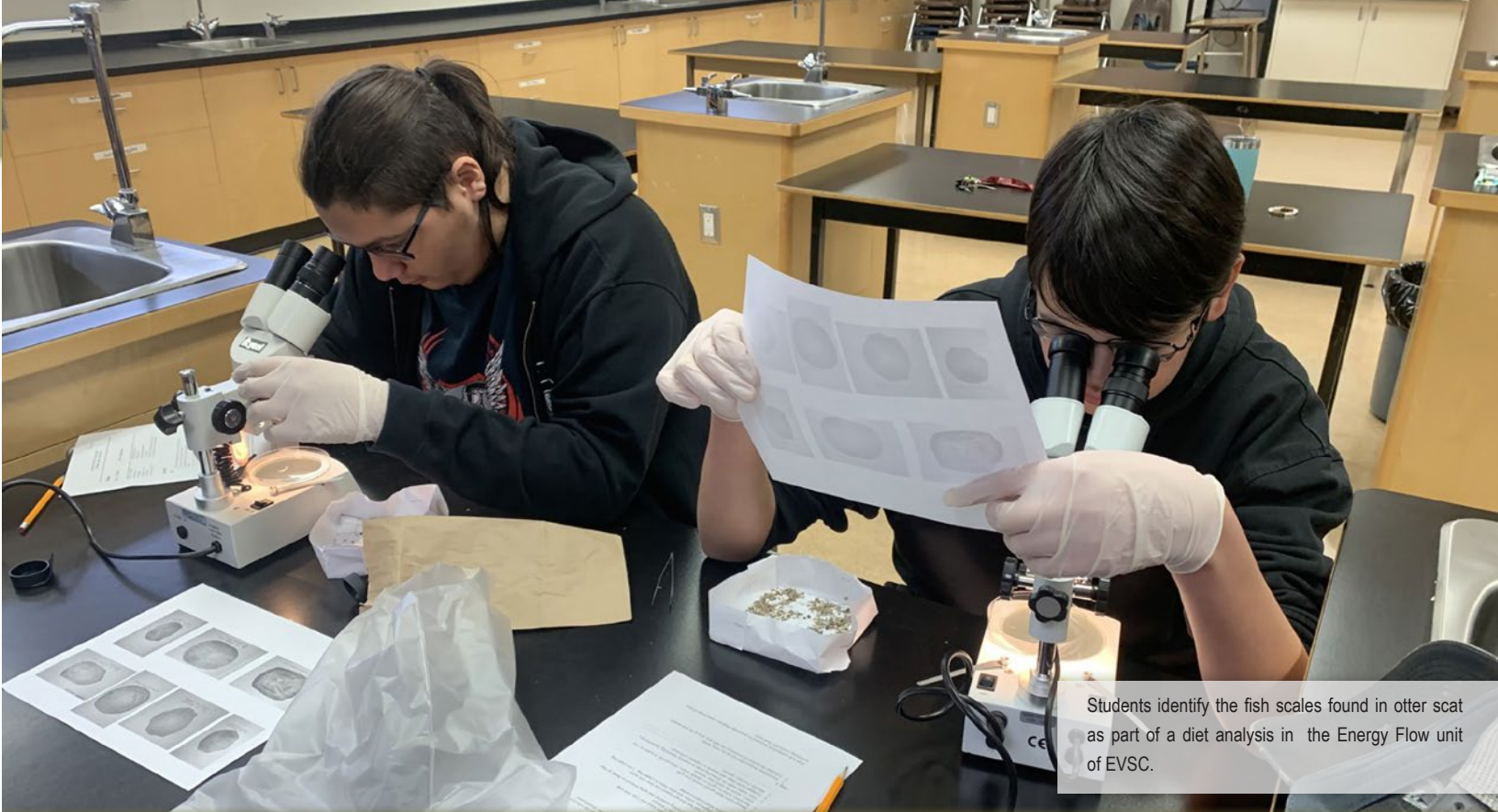
The Chuntoh Education Society, a local nonprofit charity, plays an integral role in connecting us with Dakelh Indigenous knowledge holders, wildlife biologists and foresters, and they also secure critical grants. The Yinka Huwunline Stewardship Department and Nak’azdli Whut’en Fish Hatchery host tours and loan equipment to the course. Wildlife biologists and foresters from the John Prince Research Forest host quarterly field schools. The University of Northern BC’s (UNBC) KOH – Koh-Learning in our Watersheds – program has provided us with monitoring equipment and ecologists. Search and Rescue volunteers guide us through wilderness survival. Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) technicians dissect fish with us, and help us identify future restoration work. BC Parks has introduced us to soapberry and squirrel monitoring, and OVERhang (Outdoor Vertical Education and Recreation) trains us in first aid and ice rescue. The list goes on and my motto has become, “If you ask them, they will come.”



A wildlife biologist at the John Prince Research Forest shows students how to identify and collect hair from a bear hair snare for identification and diet analysis.



A student sets up a pump for water sampling on the RTX platform with Peter Krahn, P.Eng., of GESL (Genesis Environmental Sciences Ltd.)



Students identify the fish scales found in otter scat as part of a diet analysis in the Energy Flow unit of EVSC.

BUILDING CAPACITY AND CONTRIBUTING TO RESEARCH

ENSOE 11/12 is starting to engage in a few longer term, specialized monitoring projects. Since 2020, SD No. 91 (Nechako Lakes) and Fort St. James Secondary School (FSJSS) have partnered with Nak'azdli and Takla First Nation Fisheries Teams, Chuntoh Education Society, and Genesis Environmental Science Ltd. (GESL) to develop a RiverTraps Selective Fishing System (RTX), commonly referred to as our research boat. Shop students help fabricate and maintain the boat and equipment. ENSOE 11/12 students obtain their Pleasure Craft Operator Cards and operate the boat.

Although we are in the early stages of this project, we look forward to:

- Working with local agencies to identify research gaps and to develop student-led inquiries that can be explored using our KIST groundwater sampler, YSI water quality meter, and Davis climate monitoring station.
- Sharing student findings with regulatory agencies, such as the DFO and BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resources.
- Job shadowing with local agencies who use the RTX platform and ARIS sonar for sockeye stock assessment.
- Pursuing students' personal interests (field work, data analysis, equipment maintenance, safety, ethics, media, networking, grant writing, and more).

For more
information on
this project,
please visit



Genesis
Environmental
Sciences Ltd.

CO-TEACHING

I originally developed and co-taught this course with a colleague from the Humanities department. It was a linear course that combined Physical Geography 12 and Environmental Science 11. While we collaborated on all aspects of the course, and normally presented material together, she took the lead on the Physical Geography content, and I led the Environmental Science. Co-teaching prevented inevitable burn-out in the early days when we were consumed with establishing new partnerships with local agencies, purchasing and learning how to use new equipment, navigating field trip policies and forms, and developing locally relevant curricular resources.

GETTING CREATIVE WITH THE TIMETABLE

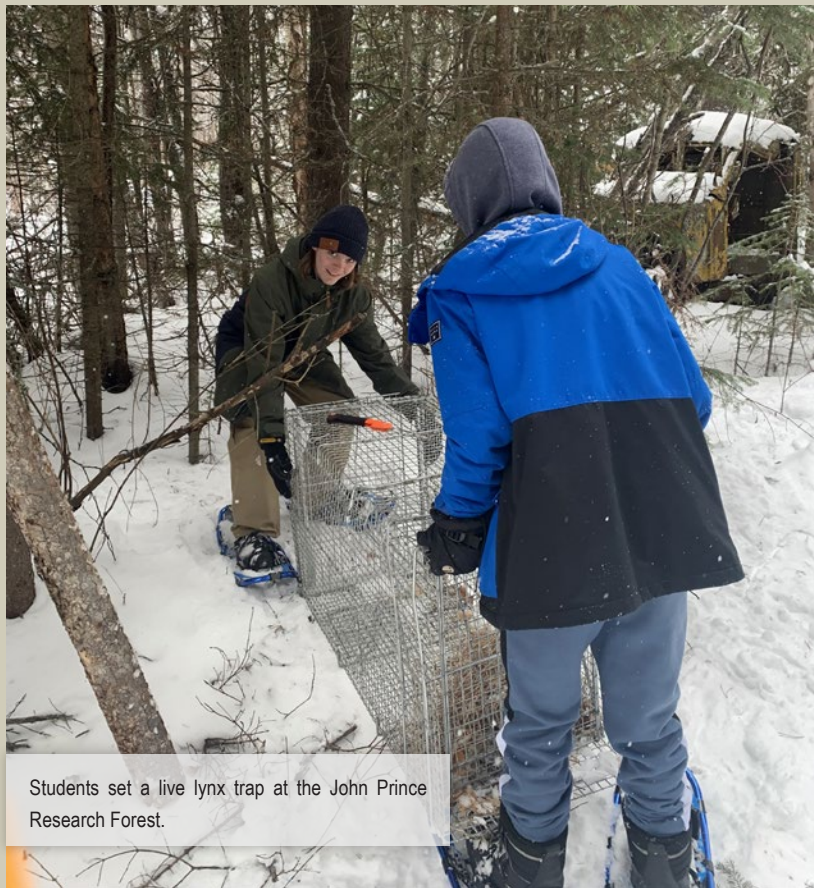
When my colleague retired, we had to rethink the Physical Geography component, and decided to adopt the semester-based ENSOE 11/12 model we now offer. Students can opt to enroll in ENSOE 11/12 twice, either in two consecutive semesters or over two years. They receive credit for EVSC 11/ODED 12 the first time they take the course, and EVSC 12/ ODED 11 the second time. This has also made the course more accessible to those students who could not fit a full year course into their schedules. We also try to schedule this course in a different block than the other, more university-recognized science courses to reduce scheduling conflicts.

“Field work has taught me how to multi-task, improvise and problem solve.

It feels like a real job, not school. I’m learning things, like tying knots, that I use outside of class.”



A student builds a fire outside an emergency shelter with Search and Rescue.



Students set a live lynx trap at the John Prince Research Forest.

“I’ve learned how to connect with my peers who I normally wouldn’t have talked to outside of this class. We choose to work together in the field. We use each other’s strengths to get our jobs done.”

ACCEPTING THAT ASSESSMENT LOOKS DIFFERENT

Assessment in ENSOE 11/12 is completed almost entirely in the field as I observe students working with their peers. Using the proficiency scale, the assessment often resembles a job performance evaluation. Field journals and data pages are collected after each field session. Students provide both self and peer assessments at reporting times. Tests and quizzes are virtually nonexistent, as they do not feel authentic or reflective of the skills students learn in this course. Certifications that are recognized by employers, like Occupational First Aid (OFA) Level 1, are prioritized. Some courses are online, such as the Safe Boaters course, and help students learn how to navigate online learning environments in our digital world.

I hope to incorporate more cross-curricular projects, by making our Photography students responsible for our social media posts, and our Foods and Nutrition students directing our meal prep. We are currently producing a billboard to inform our community of the RTX project, and students will receive some English Language Arts (ELA) credit for the work they complete.

BUYING GOOD GEAR

I have learned a few things about gear over the past couple of years: no students can learn if they are physically uncomfortable, most students underestimate the amount of clothing they will need, and few students will ask for help in sourcing their own clothing and equipment. I now have a selection of outdoor layers that students can borrow and, in some cases, choose to keep. Perhaps the best purchase has been our class set of Reddington chest waders and boots. While gumboots suffice in the shallow water where we conduct our assessments, wearing

waders enables students to move along the creek with more ease and confidence. We also go on field trips to secondhand clothing stores to show students how to purchase affordable, non-cotton clothing.

HAVING ADMINISTRATION SUPPORT

Having administrators and office staff who are supportive, innovative, flexible, and equally passionate about the outdoors is key to this course's success. I have made mistakes: I've booked last-minute trips, I've broken equipment, I've stressed about our lack of progress, and through it all my administrators have remained positive and patient, highlighting our successes, and reminding me that innovation takes time.

CELEBRATING THE WINS

We have had former students carry on to pursue university studies in Wildlife and Fisheries, Forestry, and Ecotourism. We have had students take up new hobbies, like hiking and fishing, and develop a new respect for their bodies, their cultures, and their local environments. I truly believe that connecting youth with our forests and waterways will help us better cope with both our climate and mental health crises. It certainly makes the work I do every day a little bit brighter.



A student practices banding a model of a hummingbird at the John Prince Research Forest.



A student identifies a minnow trapped in Nahounli Creek.



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Leading with Heart

Emotional Leadership and the Power of Storytelling



Self

Staff

Students &
Community

by
Naomi Hazon
Principal
SD 38 (Richmond)

“The most effective leaders are those who are in touch with their leadership stories... The story shapes our attitudes, actions and reactions. When we know our stories, we know ourselves.”¹

I opened our first staff meeting of 2024 by sharing a video clip of the New Year address given by Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary Simon, Governor General of Canada. In her address, Simon called on Canadians to commit themselves to kindness. She acknowledged the challenges presented by climate change and global conflict in the preceding year. She acknowledged that Canada had made “important strides” towards reconciliation and remarked that people were adapting to change in various ways, one of which was kindness. She spoke in English, French, and her first language, Inuktitut. Simon introduced the word “ajuinnata”, which means “never give up”. She ended her remarks by asking Canadians to “commit to action, no matter how daunting the situation may be,” and to face the challenges over the year ahead “with a renewed sense of unity.”

Self

I intentionally selected Simon’s clip because it resonated with me, both personally and professionally. After the recent loss of my father during a time of both global conflict and an increase in antisemitism worldwide, I was becoming disheartened. Professionally, I was highly committed to equity work, but the barriers in the system made this work feel challenging. Simon’s words were a reminder to continue to push forward and be hopeful.

Her words also aligned with conversations I was privileged to have with Dr. Wanosts’a7 Lorna Williams, Professor Emerita of Indigenous Education, Curriculum, and Instruction at the University of Victoria. Dr. Williams talked about the power of sharing stories as an important stride in equity work. She also remarked that, during challenging times, there is often a greater focus on conflict than there is on connection:

1

Tichy 1997, p.77

I gave our staff a few minutes to quietly reflect on Governor General Simon's address, and the meaning of the word "ajuinnata". I asked them to consider choosing a word to guide them as they thought about the year ahead. The images evoked by the collective words were powerful. Before our next meeting, I had their words printed on journals. The journals were gifted to all staff to invite reflective writing and to encourage participation in our book club, which was exploring Jo Chrona's *WAYi WAH!* and Lisa Baylis' *Self-Compassion for Educators*. My word was HOPE.



The focus of our book club combined important themes. It proved to be a powerful mix, as we learned more about how our education system underserves Indigenous children, and thought deeply about our own assumptions, while also emphasizing the importance of educator self-care. The format of our meetings was designed to be intentionally open and supportive, allowing story sharing to evolve in an authentic way. Our final session was co-facilitated by our Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Coordinator, alongside our district Indigenous Education Consultant. Several of our staff shared their vulnerabilities and challenges. One person became emotional when reflecting on how they worried for learners as school holidays approached, and how they were struggling with workload demands as a full-time classroom teacher. Their connection to colleagues in the book club allowed them to receive the support and encouragement they needed. Our leadership team also met with them privately, and worked to provide extra support, care, and time.

Taking part in UBC's Transformative Educational Leadership Program (TELP) opened my eyes to the deeper complexities of leadership in times of struggle, conflict, and crisis.

It was the feedback I received from Dr. Linda Kaser – the TELP lead alongside Dr. Judy Halbert – following the submission of an assignment that led me to reach out to Dr. Williams. The TELP assignment had included a personal story of my father's experiences as a Jew in an Arab country in the 1940s when he was persecuted and forced to flee, and the current concerns about the rise in antisemitism. I was grappling with what felt like silence in educational settings, and at the same time I was trying to support colleagues and families who also felt this way. I was worried about how we, as leaders, were responding to, supporting, and navigating issues of polarization and global conflict, and whether we were giving space for all members of our communities to feel safe to share stories.

Dr. Williams shared an impactful story with me, one that gave me new hope. When she was searching for ways to support Indigenous learners in British Columbia many years ago, she came across the work of Dr. Reuven Feuerstein. Dr. Feuerstein had studied ways to help Jewish refugee children from Arab countries (like my father), and orphaned Holocaust child survivors. He developed the mediated learning approach and spent decades of his life researching ways to help improve outcomes for vulnerable learners. Dr. Williams was inspired by his work, and their connection would end up as a long-lasting friendship that spanned more than 20 years. It was transformative to listen to the story of friendship between these two educators – one Indigenous and one Jewish – who were both looking for ways to help children who had experienced trauma and disconnection from their home cultures.

Dr. Williams was profoundly impacted by Dr. Feuerstein's work, so much so that she attributes some of her own learning and work – including her contributions to the development of the First Peoples Principles of Learning – to his influence. This has helped me see the Principles in a new light, as universal ways of learning, culturally responsive practices and ways of being that help us all work within an imperfect system in ways that are inclusive, accessible, supportive, and holistic. This is true for children, as much as it is for our staff. When we incorporate the Principles in meaningful ways, we improve the well-being of staff, students, and families.

In the journal article, 'Toward a New Model of Emotional Leadership in Schools', we are reminded that many of our leadership programs focus on the managerial aspects of the jobs, often leaving out any emphasis on well-being.

*"Many of these programs concentrate on the administrative, communal, and instructional facets of the job (Lashway 2002; Militellow et al. 2009; Murphy 1992). However, there is a dearth of knowledge about handling relationships and emotions, even though this is vital to the sound management of teachers and other knowledge workers. Based on our conclusions, principals are advised to champion faculty wellness."*³

We need to strive for genuinely trusting environments – and safe spaces – to allow educators to share stories. I hope that by continuing to keep emotional leadership at the centre, our staff will further strengthen their connections and become a more cohesive team, one that finds meaning and purpose in our collective work.

Despite the everyday demands of the job, our team is very involved in creating a belonging and connected community. They care about each other and our learners. We have numerous inquiry grants (Social Emotional Learning, Library Learning Commons, Learning Environments and Literacy) as well as teacher-sponsored student-led clubs. We recently started a staff wellness committee supported by a district grant. We offer nutritional snacks,

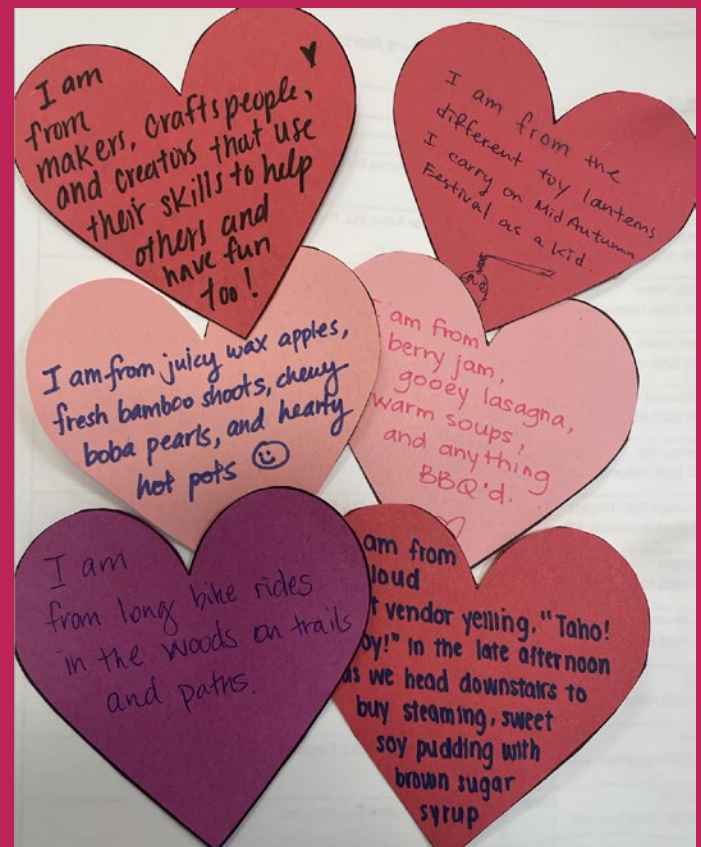
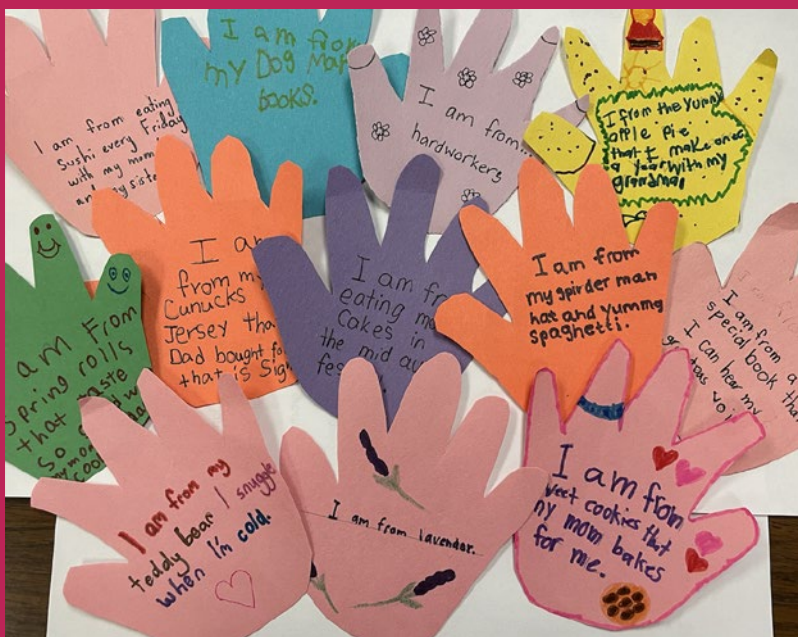
and wellness activities, and share topical articles related to education (the most recent was Jonathan Haidt's "End the Phone-Based Childhood Now", in The Atlantic).

Valuing well-being is helping to grow an environment where innovation is supported, creativity is encouraged, and distributed leadership is valued and embraced. Staff find meaning in their work and are motivated to do what is needed. As our next staff meeting approached, I was delighted to receive an email from a teacher who led our Shenanigans Squad, asking for time at the start of our meeting to distribute paper hearts to each staff member filled with uplifting and complimentary messages written by other staff members.

Being intentional about caring and strengthening our faculty relationships helps to encourage and instill commitment in our work. A deeper focus in this area can be transformative:

*"Emotional leadership conveys a message of healing. More specifically, it draws on works in the fields of psychotherapy or medicine that explore the building of narratives as well as emotive aspects of healing, with the objective of promoting wellness, emotional homeostasis, and proper functioning."*⁴

When I reflect on what has been one of the most heartbreaking and challenging years of my life, I am heartened to know that my time as a student in TELP has, as Monique Gray Smith would say, "held me up". Although they may not realize it, my staff has done the same, and Dr. Williams' gifts to BC public education have left me both grateful and hopeful.



Students & Community

As we value and care for our educators, we must also align our support for students and families. As Dr. Williams commented during one of our talks, *"It's very important that people understand that people here in Canada and in the United States have had very few opportunities to really tell their stories and to have them heard. And you know, we still have such a limited and narrow view of the people who make up the population of Canada which leads to a real lack of understanding."*⁵ Learning more about our parent community helps our educators better understand the stories of our learners and their families.

In my pursuit of gathering stories, I was recently connected to a group of educational leaders in Nanaimo who are working with a newly-developed Collecting Story Toolkit. I began sampling the toolkit by meeting with our Indigenous families following our learning update meetings. I found that the key to these connections wasn't necessarily the specificity of the questions, or in some cases the initial answers, but rather how the questions led to genuine conversations and story sharing. The sharing helped me understand more about what our families are experiencing, both at home and at school. I hope they felt heard and that we are beginning to foster more trusting relationships. Rethinking and being intentional about how I spent my time during learning update meetings allowed me to focus in on some families in our school community in a meaningful way. I am curious about sharing my findings with our staff and have a hunch that this might help them "commit to action" to deepen their teaching and learning about reconciliation and equity. I am also curious about possibly adapting this tool for use with staff and/or students.

The focus of sharing stories and building a connected community was extended into the start of this school year. In September 2024, I worked with interested staff to create a school wide mural focusing on belonging.



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The mural was inspired by Yuval Zommer's *Big Book of Belonging*, and we incorporated George Ella Lyon's inspirational "I Am From" poetry project, which added literacy and identity reflections to the artwork. The resulting mural is a collective art piece that honours and celebrates the diversity of our identities, experiences, histories, interests, and backgrounds. It incorporates stories and contributions from students, staff, families, trustees, our Assistant Superintendent, and our Superintendent. In Zommer's words, "*The Big Book of Belonging celebrates the wondrous connections between humans and the natural world.... Because we all belong to nature and nature belongs to us all.*"

The mural created opportunities for conversation, sharing, and learning about different members of our community.

I also came across a helpful insight shared by Andy Hargreaves at the BCSSA fall 2024 conference. Hargreaves shared 12 guiding principles to help guide civil discussion about difficult issues – the principles remind us that now, more than ever, we need to come together. We need brave leadership to facilitate and support discussion and story sharing related to difficult topics.

The final slide of Hargreaves' presentation included this quotation: "*The closer we get, the better we lead, the more courageous we become.*"



Promoting Identity in Schools:
12 Principles to Advance
Inclusion and Equity

When I circle back to the beginning of 2024, I see it as the start of a remarkable and focused journey, one of hope and connection, and one driven by the determination to never give up. Through the conscious act of setting aside time to share stories and really listen, we are improving the well-being of all members of our school community and setting the necessary conditions for more learners to cross the stage with dignity, purpose, and options.

PADDLING TOGETHER:

RECONCILIATION IN ACTION AT ÉCOLE PHOENIX MIDDLE SCHOOL

Two years ago, I transitioned into the role of Principal at École Phoenix Middle School in School District No. 72 (Campbell River), where I had previously served as Vice-Principal for four years. This transition was enriched by the strong familiarity and shared commitment to our Student Achievement Plan, focused on Belonging, Hope, and Achievement. Our district's focus on reconciliation, guided by the leadership of our Indigenous Director of Education, Debra Martel, became central to our collective work. Debra's mentorship played a critical role in my own learning, teaching me to listen deeply, reflect thoughtfully, and take meaningful action.

Debra's leadership in conducting a district-wide equity scan and the adoption of the Grandmother Perspective¹ data collection were pivotal in shaping our school's approach to reconciliatory action. These initiatives, and Debra's vision for the District Indigenous Department, sparked important conversations and actions around supporting the well-

being and academic success of Indigenous students, forming the foundation for our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

The concept of *nogé* in Kwakwaka'wakw is multifaceted, encompassing the ideas of heart, thoughts, knowledge, and decisions. It reflects a deep, holistic understanding of a person's inner being and the processes through which they make decisions, reflect on their thoughts, and hold knowledge. *Nogé* is connected to the core of a person — both intellectually and emotionally — and can refer to their mindset, intentions, and wisdom. Its meaning changes based on context, reflecting a layered depth of understanding. Similarly, the context in which educational leaders operate shapes the decisions they make in guiding their schools. This reflection on the journey of developing a RAP at École Phoenix Middle School aims to offer insights and guidance to other educational leaders navigating the complexities of fostering actions that meaningfully contribute to reconciliation within their unique school environments. A RAP as a specific framework originates from the work of Reconciliation Australia; in 2006, they publicly shared their practical planning framework to help organizations explore how to advance reconciliatory actions by embedding principles of respect, opportunity, and relationship into their own learning organizations. In schools, engaging with the RAP principles in a contextually relevant way can promote actions for equity that not only support Indigenous students, but foster a broader awareness and respect for Indigenous cultures, histories, and contributions.

¹ Introduced as a framework by BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (BCOHRC) in their September 2020 report "Disaggregated demographic data collection in British Columbia: The grandmother perspective", with acknowledgement to Gwen Phillips of the Ktunaxa Nation and the BC First Nations Data Governance Initiative.

by
Rachel Nelson
Principal
SD 72 (Campbell River)



"When we honour local traditions and wisdom, we create a foundation for meaningful change and lasting reconciliation. These practices help us strengthen bonds and demonstrate respect for the knowledge and contributions of Indigenous peoples, ensuring that learning is rooted in mutual understanding and respect."

Audrey Wilson
Laichwiltach Family Life Society



PRINCIPLES

1. Commitment to Reconciliation through Leadership

As an educational leader, my role in the development and implementation of a RAP was essential, in that I had an opportunity to model for our team the orientation of a leader who listens deeply and identifies as a learner when engaging our Indigenous staff, students and community rightsholders, and knowledge keepers. Reconciliation cannot be achieved through passive support; it requires active, visible leadership. Our school's success in embedding reconciliation principles into everyday practices was made possible by our strong commitment to this work, driven by both data and a willingness to learn from the Indigenous communities we serve. Leadership means championing reconciliation not only by directing initiatives but also by engaging with Indigenous community members, creating partnerships, and fostering respect.

2. Data-Driven Actions and Student Success

Understanding the experiences of Indigenous students within our school required a nuanced approach. We initiated a data collection process that involved a wide range of educators and support staff, including Indigenous Youth Workers, counsellors, and academic support teachers. This collective audit revealed gaps in school connectedness, which we prioritized in our RAP. Our focus became the promotion of student belonging and the fostering of hope, using measurable outcomes such as attendance, student well-being, and academic achievement to track progress.





"All learning comes through relationships, and understanding local protocols is essential to fostering those connections. By involving our students in learning the protocols of gifting, inviting, listening to understand, and honouring our local Indigenous knowledge keepers, we are not only deepening our cultural awareness but also building trust within our school and community."

Tami Johnson
Indigenous Youth Worker
École Phoenix Middle School

3. Building Relationships, Kinship and Respect for Indigenous Perspectives

True reconciliation involves not just actions but a deep understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems, worldviews, and values. We sought to build genuine, reciprocal relationships with Indigenous Elders and communities, ensuring their perspectives were central in our planning. This relationship-building was extended to students and staff, in the spirit of creating a learning environment that was culturally safe, inclusive, and reflective of Indigenous traditions. This involved creating opportunities for Elders to be engaged in school life, integrating Indigenous perspectives into our curriculum, and designing culturally responsive school spaces.

4. Ongoing Engagement and Cultural Safety

The process of reconciliation is an ongoing journey, not a one-time initiative. At École Phoenix Middle School, we recognized the importance of continued learning and growth, both for our students and staff. This was embodied in our professional development activities, such as the transformative cultural immersion experiences with local Indigenous communities, and the inclusion of cultural safety in our school's environment. Furthermore, we prioritized the creation of spaces that were conducive to reflection, healing, and celebration, ensuring that Indigenous students felt supported in their identity and connected to their culture.

CONCLUSION

At École Phoenix Middle School, the Reconciliation Action Plan has evolved to become a vital part of our educational mission. We have learned that reconciliation is not a singular event but a continuous process of learning, unlearning, and rebuilding relationships. By centering Indigenous voices in decision-making, integrating Indigenous perspectives into our curriculum, and committing to long-term, data-driven actions, we strive to create a school environment where every student — Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike — feels seen, heard, and valued. Our hope is that through these efforts, we can foster a sense of belonging, resilience, and cultural pride in our students, empowering them to embrace their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society. Reconciliation, for us, is not just a goal; it is an ongoing action that shapes the present and future of our school community.

Content Advisory:

Please note that the following article will reference situations and personal reactions that may be sensitive for some readers.

MOMENTS COUNT

by

Rochelle Morandini

**Director, Member Health & Well-Being
BCPVPA**

The outcome of a day is the sum of its moments.

A year is then the aggregate of those days.

We have many moments that bring us joy.

That young Grade 2 student who struggles to regulate in class, and was opposed to your efforts at the start of the year. Now, she occasionally joins you in your office where she feels safe. She arrives today to present you with a picture she painted of the two of you reading together.

That high school student whose attendance at school was rare, but with whom you

have worked to develop a relationship and build trust. He approaches you on a Friday afternoon and, with a wink and a grin, says, "Hey, Principal: that's five days in a row I have showed up!"

Your small town's school basketball team wins the Provincials!

These are heart-filling moments.

Ideally, we pause to be present in these pleasure-filled moments and allow ourselves to feel the sense of gratification and purpose they bring to our day. It is the sum of these moments that remind us of why we chose educational leadership.

On occasion, there are moments in our work that result in sadness, despair, even pain.

That same Grade 2 student now clings to your hug as summer vacation approaches; you know that she feels safer at school than at home.

That same high school student gets in a fight in the school parking lot and is injured; you call 911 and comfort him until help arrives. He is now hospitalized.

Your small town experiences a significant flood, damaging homes, and requiring your school to function as the emergency hub.

These are heavy moments. If you are exposed to many, the impact can add up over time. School administrators, teachers, and support staff are in a unique societal position that results in exposure to the daily realities – both happy, and difficult – in the lives of students, their families, and their communities. You develop relationships and connections with your “clientele” in deeper ways than employees do in other sectors. The support those students and families need may not be readily available, yet when these children arrive at school you welcome them and accept them as they are on that day.

We are in a time when society’s mood can be fractious, and our members are reporting that their exposure to trauma and other difficult moments has increased.

MOMENTS COUNT AFTER TRAUMA EXPOSURE

In the heat of the moment, during and after a traumatic event, educational leaders jump into action to do what needs to be done.

However, when the dust settles in the immediate aftermath of an incident, there may be a perceived expectation that leaders can shake it off and carry on.

Heavy emotions can get buried, and may accumulate over time which can have an impact on health.

Mitigating the impact of primary or even secondary trauma begins in the critical moments that follow the events and/or exposure. Research on mitigating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after a traumatic event has provided valuable insights into effective prevention and treatment strategies. Not everyone who experiences trauma will develop an adjustment disorder or PTSD. However, certain interventions can significantly reduce the risk of long-term psychological distress.

One of those interventions is Psychological First Aid (PFA). Research suggests that early intervention is crucial in preventing the development of PTSD. PFA, which focuses on providing immediate emotional support and practical assistance, has been shown to be effective in the immediate aftermath of trauma. It involves:

- **Safety and comfort:** Helping individuals feel safe and providing reassurance.
- **Stabilization:** Assisting people in managing emotional distress (for example, offering grounding techniques).
- **Connection to support:** Encouraging individuals to seek help from loved ones or professionals.
- **Practical assistance:** Helping access basic needs (for example, food or shelter).

PFA is designed to prevent the escalation of stress responses into long-term mental health issues, although it does not necessarily involve detailed discussions about the traumatic event itself.

There are many strategies that can be employed to assist in recovery from the trauma that someone has experienced. Whether they lived through the event itself, witnessed it, acted in the role of an emergency responder, or experienced traumatic stress in the aftermath, there are a number of ways to calm the nervous system and regain emotional balance.

When something traumatic happens, how an individual reacts in the days that follow can either help or delay their recovery. Coping after a traumatic event can be a challenging process, as that person may experience a range of emotional, mental, and physical responses. However, there are several strategies that can help individuals manage their reactions and begin the healing process:

- Acknowledging their feelings and understanding that they are valid. Feelings such as confusion, anxiety, or detachment are common after trauma. Allowing themselves to grieve, and to “be” with the variety of emotions, without judgement.
- Allowing time to recover by asking or making space and time to process the events, helping enable the individual to recoup at their own pace.
- Talking with others about how they feel; seeking support, and not isolating themselves.
- Calming and grounding through meditation, mindfulness, deep breathing exercises, or progressive muscle relaxation which help to calm the nervous system.
- Engaging in physical activity to help reduce stress and improve mood by releasing endorphins (the body’s natural mood boosters).
- Taking care of themselves by ensuring plenty of sleep, eating a healthy diet, and drinking enough water.
- Resting and recovering, as trauma can be physically hard on the body.
- Avoiding the use of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco.
- Getting back into a daily routine. Doing the things they would normally do, even if they don’t feel like it. This enables them to feel a sense of normalcy and control.
- Setting small goals. If the event has left the individual feeling overwhelmed, they can break

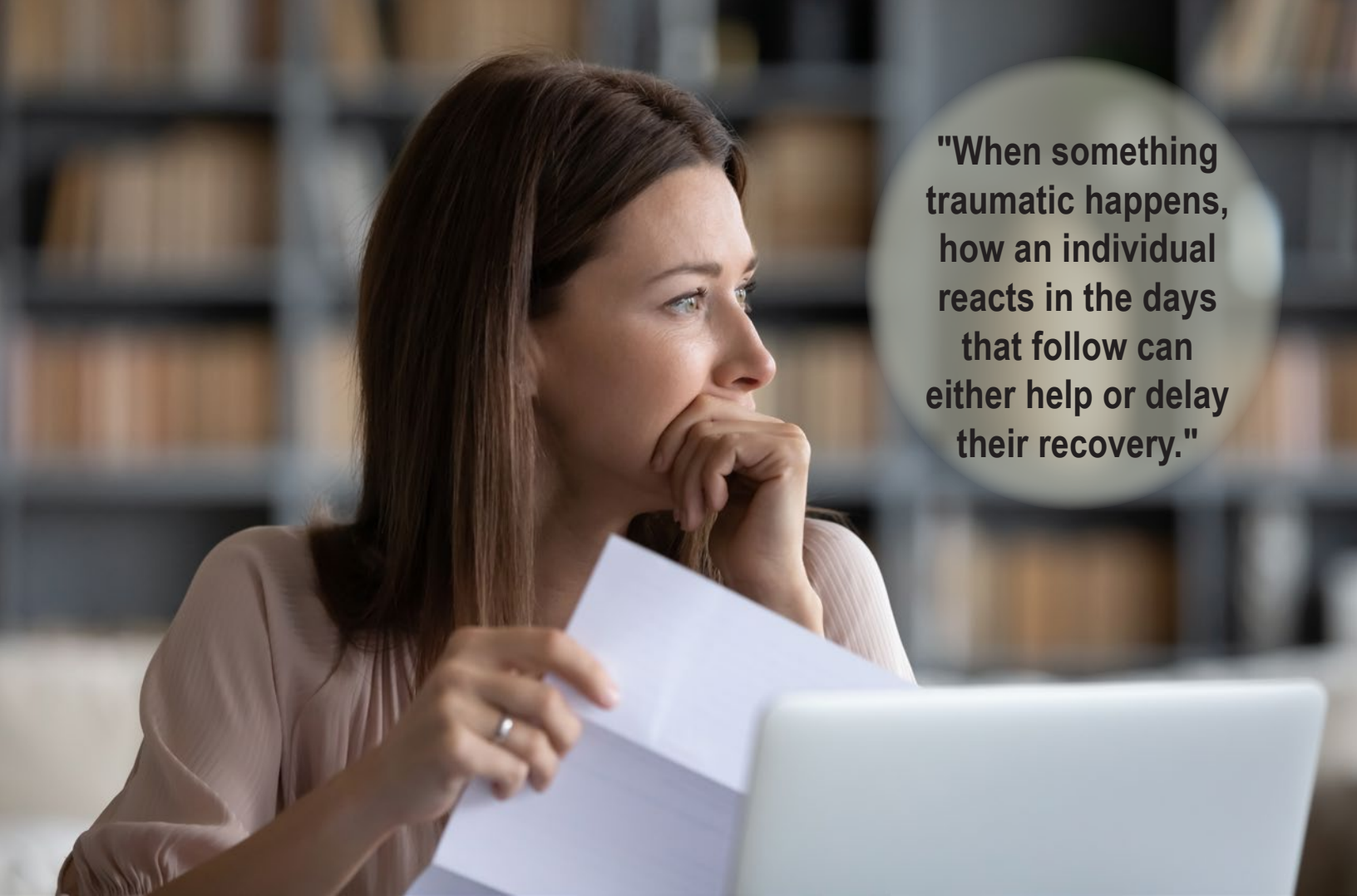
tasks into smaller, manageable steps, and celebrate small accomplishments.

- Limiting exposure to stressful triggers. Minimizing their media consumption, where exposure to the news or images related to the traumatic event can exacerbate feelings of distress. If certain places, people, or activities trigger intense emotional reactions, they should give themselves space and time before facing them again.
- Focusing on what they can control. Trauma often leads to feelings of helplessness. Therefore, the focus should be on the aspects of their life they can control, such as self-care routines, their responses to situations, and reaching out for support when needed. This may include engaging in activities that give them a sense of agency and empowerment, whether it is helping others, setting boundaries, or taking time for themselves.
- When trying to help a colleague, listening to find out where they are in the coping process.
- Most of all, it is important that people are patient with themselves, taking the time it takes to feel better. Experiencing the emotions and taking the time to heal without forcing the healing process. This often involves learning to reconnect with uncomfortable emotions without becoming overwhelmed.

How an individual reacts when something traumatic happens, and shortly after the event, can help or delay recovery. Coping with trauma is a unique and personal experience, and there is no right or wrong way to heal. Everyone’s journey will look different. Over time, with the right support and coping strategies, individuals can heal and regain a sense of safety and normalcy in their lives.

MOMENTS ADD UP

Educational leaders are in a role that is at risk for trauma exposure, whether a single significant event,



"When something traumatic happens, how an individual reacts in the days that follow can either help or delay their recovery."



**"Mitigating the Impact of
Vicarious Trauma"**

Rochelle Morandini

BCPVPA Principl(ed)
November 2023

or the accumulation of vicarious trauma over time. The response of your nervous system to vicarious trauma, over time, can have a health impact. (See *"Mitigating the Impact of Vicarious Trauma"*, above)

While the symptoms of traumatic stress and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) look very similar in the wake of a disaster or disturbing event, they progress very differently. As unpleasant as the symptoms of traumatic stress can be, they tend to gradually improve over time, especially if the impacted individual takes steps to care for their

emotional health. However, if traumatic stress symptoms do not abate and the nervous system remains "stuck," unable to move on from the event for a prolonged period of time, an individual may be experiencing PTSD.

The indicators that someone may be struggling with traumatic stress symptoms include:

- They are not feeling better after six weeks.
- They are having trouble functioning at home and work.
- They are experiencing terrifying memories, nightmares, or flashbacks.
- They are having an increasingly difficult time connecting and relating to others.
- They are experiencing suicidal thoughts or feelings.

- They are avoiding the places or people that remind them of the disaster or traumatic event.

If any of these signs are present, it is important for that individual to reach out to a mental health professional for further evaluation and support.

GETTING HELP IN THE MOMENT

Mitigating the impact of trauma is strongly linked to accessing early and appropriate treatment that helps to process, rather than shield, the body's and mind's response to trauma.

Coping and recovery are enhanced when individuals access treatment specifically for trauma. These treatments include:

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) that is specifically tailored for trauma is one of the most researched and effective treatments for PTSD. CBT helps individuals understand and change negative

thought patterns and behaviours that are contributing to their distress. Different CBT therapies include:

- Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), which involves challenging your perspective about the traumatic event and related unhelpful thoughts (such as self-blame, guilt, or catastrophic thinking) and replacing them with more balanced and realistic thoughts. This form of therapy can be performed in an individual or group setting.
- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), which helps address inaccurate beliefs and unhealthy behaviour patterns stemming from trauma.
- Prolonged Exposure (PE), a component of CBT that involves gradual, controlled exposure to trauma-related memories or situations. This helps individuals process the traumatic event and reduce avoidance behaviours, a key feature of PTSD.

"Social support plays a significant role in mitigating PTSD. "



Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)



"EMDR – A Growing
Treatment for Mental Health"

Rochelle Morandini

BCPVPA ReFresh
October 2024

EMDR is another effective treatment for PTSD. It involves bilateral stimulation (usually through guided eye movements) while the individual recalls traumatic memories. (See *"EMDR - A Growing Treatment for Mental Health"*, above)

Medication

Medication is often used as part of the treatment for PTSD, particularly when combined with psychotherapy.

Social Support and Peer Support

Social support plays a significant role in mitigating PTSD. Research consistently shows that individuals with strong social networks and supportive relationships are less likely to develop PTSD following a traumatic event.

AVOIDING AVOIDANCE

Avoidance, including burying emotions and reactions, is often a concerning symptom of PTSD where individuals actively avoid thoughts, places, or people that remind them of the trauma. Research has found an individual's effort to avoid feeling their emotions may make some PTSD symptoms worse, or even contribute to the development of PTSD symptoms after experiencing a traumatic event. Also of note: if someone is determined to avoid feeling their emotions, they may eventually turn to more drastic and unhealthy ways to avoid them, such as substance use.

Avoiding emotions takes considerable effort and energy. As the emotions being avoided grow stronger, it takes more and more "brain space" to keep them at bay. As a result, little energy may be left for the important things in that person's life, such as family and friends.

Trauma denial may serve as a shield, or defense mechanism, that emotionally and mentally disconnects the person from the traumatic event in an effort to protect them. Sadly, this may not be an aid in healing the pain when, in fact, healing may be on the other side of that pain.

Avoidance behaviour can keep the emotional pain active and at the front of the mind. This results in the brain continuing to think there is an active threat, and not processing and filing these old experiences into the memory banks. The brain may recognize the effort of avoidance, and then will keep the experience "active". By desperately trying not to have emotional pain, we may invite longer-term suffering.

ADDRESSING UNRESOLVED TRAUMA

Unresolved trauma is often an invisible illness. To the outside world, someone may seem fine, but the reality is that they are stuck in the past, battling emotional and physical symptoms that are impacting the quality of both their life and their work. Unresolved trauma causes a person to experience disruptive physical and emotional reactions in the present as their body and mind continue to defend against a threat that belongs in the past. These reactions can include:

- Hypervigilance and the inability to relax and let their guard down
- Lack of trust and difficulty in being open with other people
- Dissociation and a persistent feeling of numbness
- Control issues, and overcompensation for feeling helpless during the traumatic incident

- Low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness
- Anger issues and difficulty regulating emotions
- High blood pressure and cortisol levels
- Sleep difficulties, including insomnia and nightmares
- Headaches, nausea, sweating, or digestive issues
- Tightness in the chest or the pit of the stomach
- Somatic preoccupation (excessive focus and extreme distress about physical symptoms)
- Bodily memories that cause physical flashbacks of the sensations, including smell, taste, pain, and pressure of the traumatic experience

- Mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, substance use disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

THE HEALING JOURNEY

The good news is that healing from trauma is possible, even if it takes time. Confronting the thoughts and feelings of the traumatic event may be hurtful, yet research indicates that confronting these fears in a gradual, controlled manner — such as through exposure therapy or other forms of processing — can help mitigate the impact of PTSD.

This underscores the importance of early intervention and accessing the right treatment to process these challenging emotions. Early intervention, particularly through methods like PFA, CBT, EMDR, and



**"The good news
is that healing
from trauma is
possible, even if
it takes time."**

social support, can significantly reduce the risk of developing PTSD following a traumatic event.

LIVING IN THE MOMENT

There are difficult and challenging situations that arise in the working life of Principals and Vice-Principals, and it is important to recognize these moments and to access the many tools and strategies that will support and enhance your health and well-being.

While our brains are still primitively wired to focus on our reaction to danger in order to survive, there are amazing moments in our days, weeks, and years that fill us up, bring us joy, and provide a feeling of accomplishment. It is important to develop a habit to notice, embrace, and “be” in those positive moments. The simple act of an intentional pause to celebrate helps our nervous system build resilience, putting us in a better place to cope and recover when exposed to those the occasional, traumatic moments.

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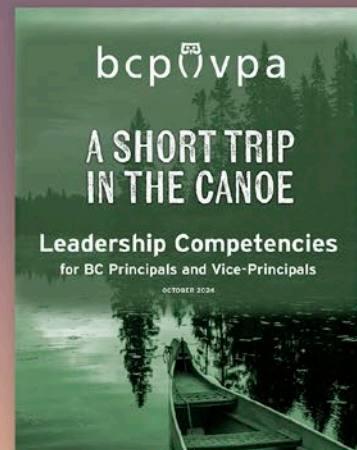
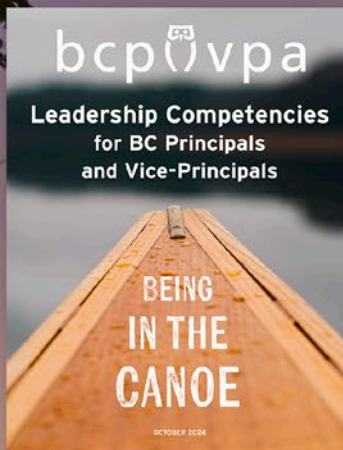
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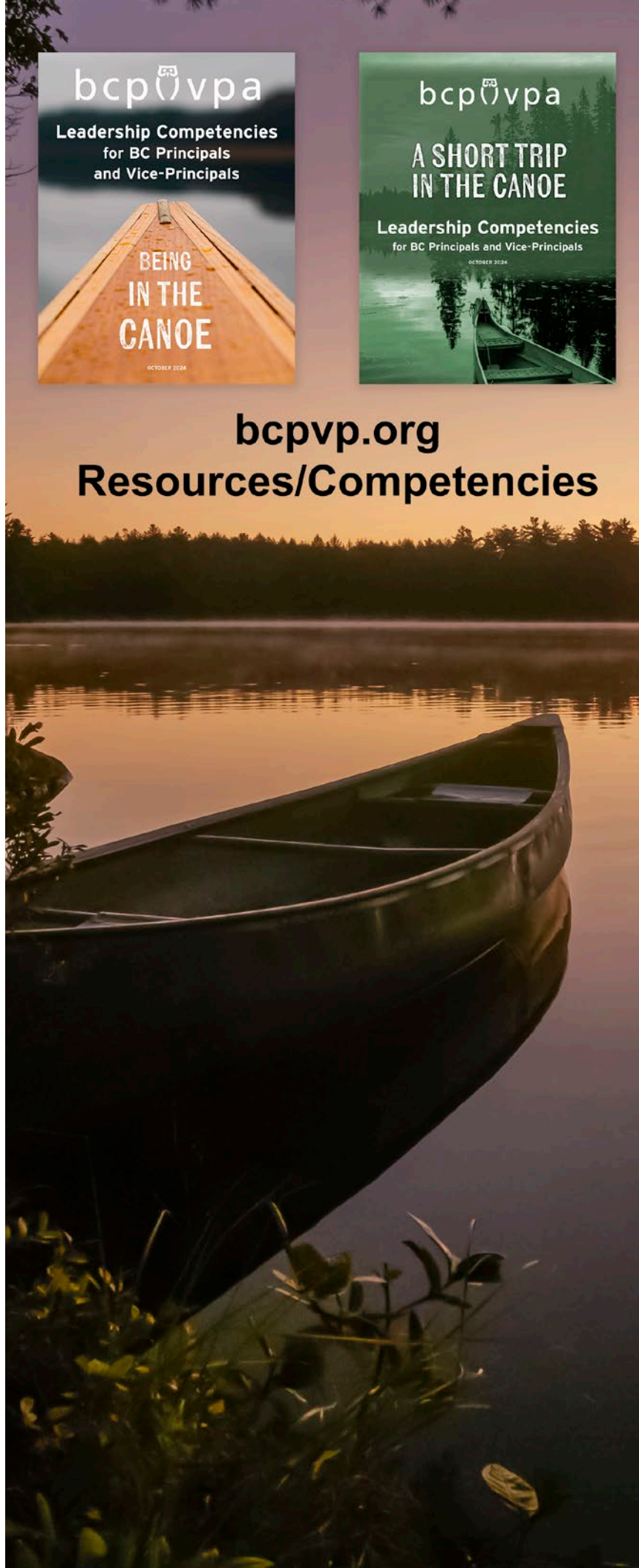
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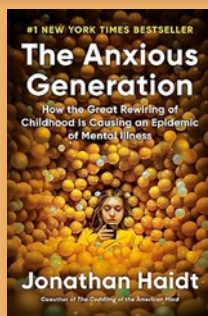
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bcpvp.org
Resources/Competencies



Books



The Anxious Generation
by Jonathan Haidt
Penguin Press
March 26, 2024

I just finished one of the hottest non-fiction books of 2024: *The Anxious Generation*, by Jonathan Haidt. I am left wondering how I – a Generation X elementary school Principal and stepparent of a 15-year-old – can not only *share* the important and alarming message of this book, but also do my *own* part to help combat the negative impacts of smartphone and social media use. As I read *The Anxious Generation*, I considered not only the need to share this information with students and families, but – as an adult who gets to work with hundreds of impressionable young learners each day – I realized that I might have some responsibility to be more responsible with my own tech.

The information in this book needs to be shared. Since we no longer live in a time of town criers, I settled on the most obvious contemporary solution: social media. And, yes: I recognize the irony in using our school's social media platforms to share information with families about the negative impacts of social media.

In an epic work session with two other elementary school leaders, we created a shared document of the standout tidbits from *The Anxious Generation*, and then jumped into Canva to create catchy social media visuals that we could share with our respective school communities, with full credit to the author, his book, and his research. We then relied on the single greatest time-management hack of the 21st century – Meta's "scheduled-post" feature – to

set up our posts for the weeks and months ahead. I also purchased extra copies of the book and, relying on the honour system, offered them to parents and teachers to borrow.

Spoiler alert: we have not gone viral with our posts and, so far, the book sharing strategy has been moderately successful with three parents borrowing the book. But our small school social media accounts haven't *lost* any followers; in fact, a few of our followers have even shared some posts. We persist because, like that story of the kid throwing clams back into the ocean, if this work is making a difference for just one learner or one family, then it is worth it.

The responsibility I feel around *sharing* the information from this book has not been quite as heavy as the responsibility I feel about *doing* something about it. *The Anxious Generation* is filled with information, but only a few action ideas. Fortunately, the first and most obvious "to do" has already been done, thanks to the Ministry of Education and Child Care: limiting cell phone use at school. At our K-7 school, we are trying to keep students' cellphones off and out of sight between the morning and end-of-day bells. There are challenges, but fewer than I had anticipated.

We have lock boxes in each of our Grade 6 and 7 classrooms, and a safe in the front office. The kids have been surprisingly accommodating at turning their phones over – but so far, only when they have been observed using their cell phone during the school day. We began the school year with the lofty idea that students would happily lock the phones in classroom lockboxes at 8:31am each day; while we are at about a 0% success rate on that score, we are all getting used to the new system.

As I read *The Anxious Generation*, I couldn't help but reflect on my own cell phone use. I would like to think that I am a wise, unaddicted user. But, as Jonathan Haidt points out, the concept of "time" is warped when we get lost in the quick hits of TikTok and Reels. So, to prove to myself that my relationship with my phone was not negatively impacting the young people in my life – 400+ students, and one teenager at home – I tried some things.

THE ANXIOUS GENERATION

A Gen-X Principal's Perspective

by

Dani Morrow

Principal

SD 79 (Cowichan Valley)



If the learners at my K-7 school must be without their cell phones from 8:30 am - 2:13 pm each day, could I do this too? It has been easier said than done, but I am trying. My general goal is that, for most of the day, I keep my cell phone in my office – on my desk, next to my computer – where I am free to use it. If I must leave the office, I try to do so without bringing the phone with me. When I go out for morning, lunch, or after-school supervision, I do need to bring the phone, but tuck it deep in my pocket with the self-imposed rule to leave it there. No checking email, no texting myself reminders, and no responding to every notification sound. I am no longer checking my phone if I am in a conversation that leads to a question that we could easily answer using Google. As it turns out, there are a surprising number of moments in a person-to-person conversation that open the door for a smartphone to join the conversation. What year *did* Elvis die? When *is* the Easter Break this year? What does "skibidi toilet" *really* mean? How often *do* birds sleep? My favourite part of this whole experiment is the transparency. When those natural "let's check our cellphone" moments arise, I voice how hard it is *not* to check, and *why* I'm not checking. Depending on my conversation partner, the explanation will vary. Sometimes, I will reference *The Anxious Generation*, and data and anecdotes from the book; other times, I will simply explain that if the kids are not using their phones, then I can keep my phone away, too.

The one exception? Our school secretary knows about my goal, and I have programmed her number into my phone with a special ring and text tone. If there is an emergency, she will call, or text. So far, the number of lunch recess emergencies that I have been called for is zero.

I also routinely used my cell phone to quickly text myself, or jot down those "in the moment" things that come up, like putting in a work order for a leaky fountain, or checking in with a student after the bell. With my new goal in mind, I am resorting to more ancient, analogue strategies, like moving a bracelet or my watch from my usual wrist to the other wrist. That way, when I return to the office, the wrong-wrist item is my reminder. The ancients were on to something with this one: having my watch on the

wrong wrist is a surprisingly effective way for me to remember things!

I do have an advantage in my goal to be off my phone and to be a better role model for students, and that's my personal penchant for paper-based systems, with a tangible notebook or a spiral-bound agenda. This is proving to be very helpful. I like my beautiful notebook, where I create my daily lists, jot down thoughts or ideas, and record notes from meetings. In this age where "Digital Literacy" is a common Pro-D theme, and there are so many options around digital organization systems, I used to feel like I was behind the times with my notebook, pencil case, and coil-bound agenda. The new digital systems are probably effective, efficient, and amazing, and they are tempting. But when I pull out my notebook at a meeting, no one mistakes my notetaking for an email check, social media peek, or other disengagement from the meeting. While I might lose efficiency points for not multi-tasking in every moment, that is a price I am willing to pay. In attempting to be a positive role model to youth, I am rooting for them to figure out their own healthy ways to engage in smartphone use as they grow and learn.

The other thing that *The Anxious Generation* has brought to my consciousness is the location of my cell phone when I am with others. Is it out of sight, or present? Is it in my hand, or on the desk? If I am talking or hanging out with colleagues before, during, or after a meeting, I am now conscious of not pulling out my cell phone at every available moment, and this has resulted in an overwhelming awareness of how frequently this can happen in groups.

At home, I am working on keeping my cell phone downstairs and away from the bedroom more often. I began to do this before I ever opened *The Anxious Generation*, but the book has nudged me to be more consistent with the practice. For example, before our teenage daughter got her cell phone, I was a very informed victim of "The Knowing-Doing Gap". While I *knew* that I should not bring my phone in the bedroom, I didn't *do* anything about it. When our child received her first smartphone, I wanted to be a better role model, and have started to leave the



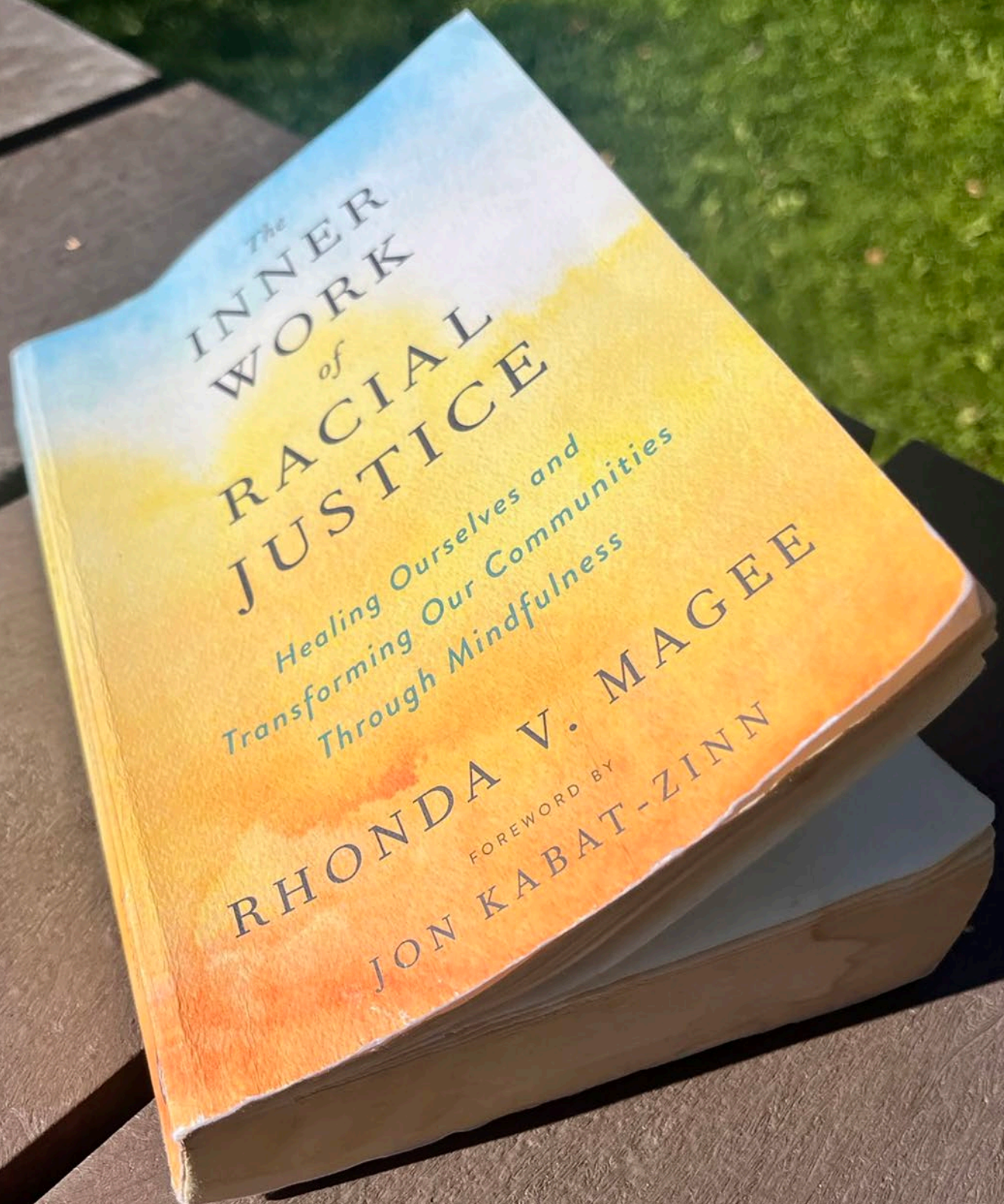
phone downstairs almost every night. Was it hard? Yes. Do I miss a few Wordle games? Yes. Do I sleep better? Absolutely. Do I miss my phone? Yes. Full disclosure: if there is a snowstorm in the forecast, I will bring my cell phone into my room at night. I wouldn't want to miss an early morning snow-day phone call!

In my goal to be a good role model for my students and my kid, I am *not* writing off all technology. I like our shared school calendar, and only add to it when I'm in my office or on my laptop. I like using Canva, and only do so when I've carved out the time. I like sharing TikTok videos with my teenager, and I have added "screen time" limits to my social media apps. I am a proficient smartphone user, know how to

complete a multi-factor authentication, can create a killer Excel spreadsheet, and can trouble-shoot most tech issues that pop up. I can do *all* these things and still aim to decrease my reliance on this very handy, pocket-sized computer that follows me around.

Jonathan Haidt has taken what we probably already knew, and provided compelling data – and graphs! – in an accessible, easy-to-read book. If his fact-based argument that less screen time + more play time = happier and healthier kids, then I am sure the same can be said for adults. And, if we happen to be adults who get to work with hundreds of impressionable young learners each day, then we probably have a greater accountability to be more responsible with our own tech.

"It is only by healing from injustices and dissolving our personal barriers to connection that we develop the ability to view others with compassion and to live in community with people of vastly different backgrounds and viewpoints."



The Inner Work of Racial Justice: **Healing Ourselves and Transforming Our** **Communities Through Mindfulness**

by Rhonda V. Magee

TarcherPerigee (September 2019)

Reviewed by
Carmen Eberle

Director, Member Support Services, BCPVPA

This past summer, I found myself on the shore of Kootenay Lake, against a backdrop of stunning mountains, book in hand. Nelson BC is known for being the “prettiest small town in Canada” - there is no more scenic and peaceful place to read and reflect upon issues of social justice.

Rhonda V. Magee is an author and professor of law at the University of San Francisco who wrote the book *The Inner Work of Racial Justice: Healing Ourselves and Transforming our Communities Through Mindfulness*. I chose this reading to deepen my understanding of racism, while increasing my confidence and ability to act when faced with social injustice. From the introduction, I quickly learned that the book is a very practical read for anyone who wants to better understand the historical context of colonialism, microaggressions, unconscious bias, oppression, and new ways of being.

Magee takes a compassionate approach to her work towards social justice, demonstrating how mindfulness, education, and self-reflection can help individuals approach racial justice work in a caring and supportive way. Throughout this book, systemic injustices are exposed alongside the impact of inequities that exist. Emphasis is placed on the importance of perspective-taking, reflection, inner work, and sensitive approaches to the difficult

and sometimes uncomfortable conversations that are necessary to address issues of racism. Magee believes that through mindfulness, one can create conditions for positive change. Magee also poetically describes the practice of paying attention to your own thoughts and feelings, while recognizing your own biases.

Readers are provided with the foundational tools to respectfully confront the racism that continues to permeate our culture. Magee instills hope that work on oneself, between us, and then towards changing systems, will lead to practices that are more inclusive and supportive of racial justice. Such practices include finding ways to “support the cultivation of the ability to sit compassionately with and talk about our own particular experiences with race, race-related injury, and alienation”. Through story, data, and research, mindfulness is explained as a means to increase empathy, and reduce prejudices and implicit attitudes, not just around race or gender but also around other protected grounds.

This book is sure to resonate with different people for different reasons. For me, the book has further raised my level of awareness around the importance of supporting one another in bringing issues of racism to the forefront, while examining race and racism mindfully and continuously.

*Wondering if That
Field Trip Will be Safe?*
Youth**Safe** Outdoors
is Your Source



by

Glenda Hanna, Ph.D.

Principal, Quest Research and Consulting Inc.

Principal Investigator and Author

YouthSafe Outdoors

“Not guilty.”

Those two words, uttered in an Ontario Court in 2021, led to teachers, Principals, and Vice-Principals across Canada emitting a collective sigh of relief. For the first time in Canadian history, a teacher who had organized a field trip during which a student had tragically died had not only faced civil litigation, but a charge of criminal negligence causing death. Had the teacher been found guilty, a serious pall would have fallen on Canadian schools offering outings that involve risk. No one is prepared to go to jail for doing their job.

In the case when a 15-year-old Toronto student, Jeremiah Perry, drowned in a lake swimming incident during a canoe trip, prosecutors claimed that the lead teacher, Nicholas Mills, had failed to follow district policy requiring that students pass a pre-trip swim test without a personal flotation device (PFD). The teacher admitted to ignoring the policy, saying it was impractical and would have led to the exclusion of almost half of the under-served students for whom the trip was designed.

The school board had unintentionally installed a policy that did not take into consideration the use of PFDs, the financial limitations of many families, and the needless loss of educational opportunities the policy caused. There was no reason – based on actual data related to canoeing and lake swimming – to preclude students from wearing a PFD for their swim test. The incident would have been very unlikely had there been a simple requirement for all non-swimmers and weak swimmers to wear a PFD when on or near the water.

Educators in BC are fortunate that appropriate guidelines related to PFD use are found in YouthSafe Outdoors (YSO), the comprehensive research and consensus-based field trip risk management and safety education resource that is used in most BC schools. Schools using this resource are far less likely to suffer a tragic incident such as the one described.

YouthSafe Outdoors (YSO) was first introduced in BC school districts in 2005, following an extensive



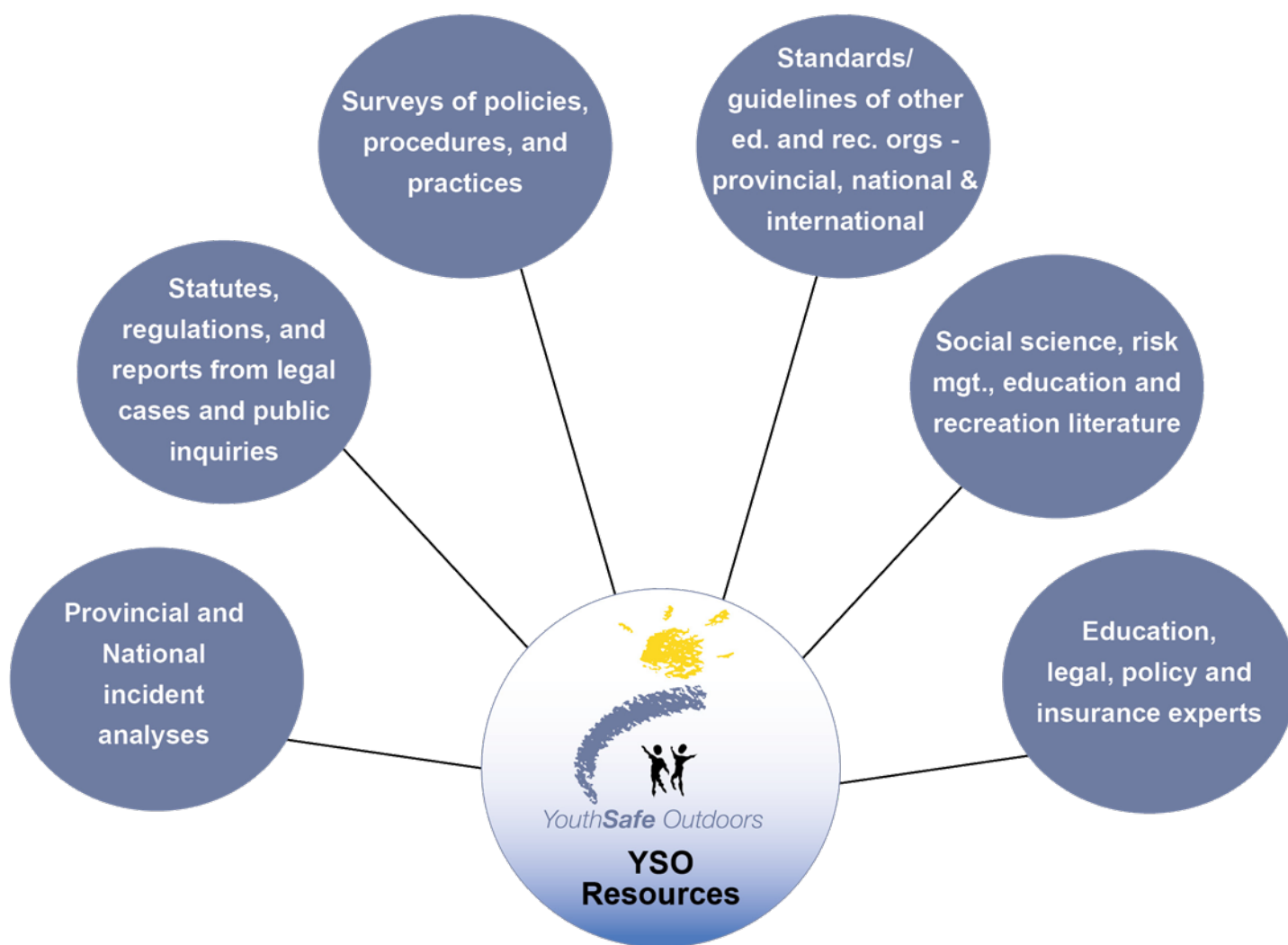
“This is a great resource providing everything teachers and administrative staff need to ensure they have planned appropriately to take student learning outside.”

Terri Hayes, Principal
J.A Laird Elementary, SD 06

“A very comprehensive, detailed, user-friendly resource covering all factors that need to be considered in the planning of field trips for students.”

Paul Skarsgard, Teacher
Point Grey Secondary, SD 39

research and consensus-building process that was federally funded, but made in BC. YouthSafe Outdoors did the legwork, studying and integrating multiple, cross-referenced research sources (see Figure 1).



43 years of ongoing research & practice

Figure 1. YSO's comprehensive, integrated research bases

In addition, the initiative – internationally, the first of its kind – involved a BC Advisory Committee who reviewed drafts and met several times to come to consensus on the final draft. There was broad member representation: from the associations representing BC school trustees, superintendents, principals and vice-principals, teachers, and parents/guardians; as well as from the School Protection Program (the insurer), the School Safety Association, service providers (e.g. the BC Camping Association), BC Provincial Emergency Program, and AdventureSmart. Several other offices, organizations, and individual experts including lawyers, policy analysts, researchers, and curriculum advisors provided valuable input.

This research and consensus-building approach led to the creation of an exceptional resource, unique in the world. All school districts in BC have the right to use the 2005 version in perpetuity. However, in 2016-18, YSO fully updated the resource and placed it online to ensure 24/7 access for licensed districts. Several of the 2005 edition's Advisory Committee members worked to ensure the updates were appropriate, and the platform user-friendly.

Summary data from the more than 2,000 evaluation forms completed by teachers, principals, and vice-principals demonstrates more than 97.8% satisfaction with the resource has been logged. School staff frequently expound on the benefits of YSO, including:

- Healthy, active, self-reliant students
- High capacity to provide safe outings and activities
- Support and clarity of expectations across all levels: trustees, superintendents, principals and vice-principals, and teachers
- Substantial time savings through a “one-stop shop”, and Word/PDF format options
- Confidence that the community and industry standard of care (custom) is being met
- Minimized exposure to legal liability or negative press from preventable incidents

“Excellent, comprehensive resources. Love that the docs come in PDF and Word, so they are editable. Brilliant!”

Lisa Fryer, Vice-Principal,
John Howitt Elementary, SD 70

YouthSafe Outdoors does not replace a district's field trip policy or procedures, but serves as the key resource school staff use to meet district requirements. It supports those planning all types of off-site activities and events: a trip to a local museum, farm, or industry site; sport or arts performance travel; more than 45 different outdoor pursuits/adventure travel outings (from class instruction through extended wilderness tours); and, interprovincial and international travel excursions.

In the Safety First! Guidelines, the mission-critical resource in the package, the user is provided with

the Known Potential Risks of the activity and the Common Risk Mitigation Strategies teachers use to manage these risks. Each guideline meets five key criteria:

Safe	minimizing potential for catastrophic loss while managing other risks
Reasonable	proportional to the risks present; balancing benefits with risks
Attainable	with the human, financial, and equipment resources available
Ethical	supporting informed decision making and appropriate contracting
Sustainable	24/7 access for all school staff to a current user-friendly resource

These guidelines not only help teachers plan field trips effectively and efficiently, but they ensure that principals and vice-principals have access to the information and tools they need to execute their due diligence before allowing the field trip, and so they can help the teacher identify and fill any gaps in their plan as part of a ‘Getting to Yes’ philosophy.

Several supplementary, use-at-will, resources are included in the YSO resource, including:

Legal Liability and Risk Management Primer
basic definitions and concepts

Forms File

form templates for virtually all forms relevant to field trips (district offices may use to update their own forms)

Adventure Leadership Resource

Outdoor Ed. 101, e.g. supervision calculation, first aid capacity, hazards in the environment/terrain, communications technology, and gear lists

Parent/Guardian Resource

to help them in their role supporting their child/ward's safe participation in field trips, whether from home or while serving as a volunteer

Student Instruction Resource

Research-based lesson plans, games, and activities to help students learn to identify, assess, and manage risks for themselves, an important educational objective in BC where outdoor recreation is a much-valued part of life

Given the research and consensus base, and the high number of BC school districts already using YSO, the safety guidelines likely articulate the de facto standard of care that will be expected by the courts if something unfortunate happens. The guidelines have already been reaffirmed by the courts. There are simply no good reasons not to share YSO with school staff to help them do their jobs related to field trips effectively, efficiently, and with peace of mind. While it is hoped that no teacher will again be charged with criminal negligence, injury prevention must remain a high priority. Principals and vice-principals in schools using YouthSafe

Outdoors can operate with confidence, knowing that they have access to the most appropriate guidelines, information, and tools to accomplish this objective.

Action 1: If you are in a YSO licensed district, ensure you have the login information for www.youthsafeoutdoorsschools.ca and share this with your school staff so they have access to the YSO resource. Discuss YSO at a staff meeting and support teachers in using the resource.

Action 2: If you do not know if your district is licensed, check with district staff. If not yet licensed, the district office may secure its license by contacting YSO at info@youthsafeoutdoors.ca.

You may not use or distribute a login from someone in another district and, once licensed, the only requirement is that no one can post YSO content on a publicly accessible website.

“This is a great resource for both experienced and new outdoor educators.”

Grayson Pettigrew, Teacher
G.P. Vanier Secondary
SD 71



by
Scott Robinson
Executive Director, BCPVPA

One Person at a Time

The Power of Human-Centered Leadership

Periodically through my career, I have been asked about my philosophy of leadership. Each time, I have struggled with the feeling that I need to offer a deeply intellectual statement, based in both research and current educational theory. Thirty-four years later, I have come to a place of better understanding and acceptance of who I am as a leader. I am not deep. No one would characterize me as particularly intellectual, and I have rarely had time to engage in educational research. Truly, when it comes to me, what you see is what you get.

I have read a lot of books, participated in professional development, and achieved a master's degree in educational leadership... most of these activities, if I am honest, have not had an enormous impact on my thoughts about leadership. What has influenced me, however, is my life experiences, both within and beyond the workplace.

My conclusion about leadership is quite basic, but it works for me. Leadership is about taking off your formal 'leader' hat whenever you can. It's about

ignoring your positional power and showing people that you are a person, just like they are. It's about hanging up your ego at the door when you arrive at work each day. It's about serving, not being served. Fundamentally, leadership is about being a decent human being to everyone, and most particularly to those who consider us their leader. It sounds simplistic, but there is power behind that simple concept when it is kept at the forefront of our minds as leaders.

My view is that everything that every one of us does every day impacts how our students, our staff, our coworkers, and our community experience us as leaders. Whether you are a school leader or work at the district level, I would argue that, collectively, Principals and Vice-Principals hold enormous power and influence to make things better or worse for people through our actions, our decisions, and our words. One person at a time.

I was raised by two parents who, while quite different from each other, held a fundamental belief in the power of respect. My father, a former secondary school teacher, continues to be highly intellectual at the age of 90. He has always been a critical thinker

who taught his children to question and to argue against those who believe they are the keepers of the 'one right answer'. My father taught me to believe that there is rarely one right answer in any complex situation, and to question anyone who claimed to have that right answer. He counselled that perspective is everything, and that just because I saw things a certain way, it did not mean that others did.

He taught me about the power of listening rather than speaking, of making the effort to truly understand someone's perspective, and of asking people to help me understand rather than focusing on what my next words would be. He taught me the value of choosing my words wisely, of thinking before I speak, and of accepting that everyone has something to contribute if you give them the time, the space, and the respect to make that contribution. One person at a time.

My mother also taught us about the importance of how you treat people. But where my father tended to focus more on respecting how other people think, my mother focused on the heart. She modelled, expected – insisted – that her children would treat others with kindness, empathy, and caring. When we



*Serving members by
supporting effective
leadership in education
through representation,
advocacy and leadership
development*
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Employment Advice & Representation

didn't, we heard about it. She did not believe that one should be kind to others just to receive kindness back, but rather because it is the right thing to do. Whether we liked someone or not was irrelevant to my mother. What was relevant was how other people experienced us, their feeling after an interaction with us, and whether they left feeling better or worse, listened to, or not. One person at a time.

My mother was no fool. Although my father occasionally accused her of being a Pollyanna, she was under no illusion that kindness came easily in some situations, or with some people. She recognized that it could take work to be kind, and that when someone else was unkind, the easiest route was to respond the same way. What my mother clearly understood, though, was the power of using kindness and respect to navigate challenging people and situations. She believed in rising above, and giving the benefit of the doubt. She taught me that anger is often rooted in fear, and that an angry person may respond better to a kind and understanding word than to reciprocal anger.

I believe there is enormous power in how we behave toward those we meet. In our role as school and

district leaders, we encounter people who do not treat us with kindness or with respect. We come across others who believe that they are the keepers of that one right answer, who judge, who refuse to accept other perspectives, or who come from a place of unkindness or disrespect.

I would argue that the Principal and Vice-Principal roles today are more complex, more challenging, and more exposed than ever before to disrespectful or unkind interactions. Our society is stressed and, unfortunately, leaders often bear the brunt of that stress. Rising in the morning and anticipating the challenges of the day ahead can be daunting. It can be tempting to respond to disrespect with disrespect, to unkindness with unkindness, knowing that people should know better. It is imperative, though, that leaders strive to maintain their baseline of kindness and respect, no matter how challenging that may feel. In standing by this core value, we rise above the stress and the chaos, the disrespect and unkindness, and we model grace and understanding. Ultimately, we create an environment where people can bring forth their best selves to each other in order to serve the children and families of our communities. One person at a time.

Professional Development

Connection & Collaboration



