

Support

Carmen Eberle

Director, Member Support Services
BCPVPA

Successful workplaces are built on teams that feel empowered to lead, take initiative, and challenge the status quo. Inclusive leadership not only builds the capacity of self and others, but it also cultivates cultures that thrive on creativity and innovation allowing for new ideas to surface naturally. I believe any leader can achieve this notion of inclusive leadership through open communication, active listening, and authentic feedback. High performing teams tend to flourish in cultures where they can express themselves freely, share perspectives, and take risks without fear of judgement or reprisal.

To create space that is conducive to inclusive leadership, I have encouraged colleagues to reflect upon their own practice and apply strategies designed to strengthen their intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of their practice. As educational leaders, we are in a privileged position that allows for the extension of opportunities where all employees have the chance to reach their full potential. Encouraging collaboration and modelling inclusive leadership has a positive effect and impact on staff and can create greater connection, well-being, and overall success within an individual's leadership abilities.

"I approach inclusive leadership by trying to frame all of my words and actions with the intentionality of giving all members of our school community opportunities to provide input and realize personal growth."

Laird Ruehlen – Secondary Principal SD No. 72

Authentic Feedback and Reflection

In leadership, authentic feedback and reflection in leadership builds the capacity of self. A climate of mutual respect begins with leaders who genuinely listen and are open to feedback, no matter how difficult it is

Inclusive Leadership that Builds Capacity of Self and Others



to hear. How you show up in the workplace is critical for building trust, creating space to give and receive information allowing others to feel safe in your presence. One method to foster authentic feedback and reflection is to schedule uninterrupted individual meetings with each staff member where you can ask questions and encourage dialogue. This approach can lead to stronger relationships and increased staff engagement. Examples of questions I have used in my practice include:

- What do you feel we are doing well as a team?
 - *Invites positive reflection and signals genuine curiosity.*
- If you could contribute one thing to the team that supports the school community, what would it be?
 - *Welcomes team members to think about their own strengths, challenges, and contributions on the team.*
- What am I doing that is helpful to your work, and is there anything I can do differently to support you or the team?
 - *Shows openness to hear from staff, while inviting honest feedback without pressure.*
- When you think about a good day at work, what is happening for you? What makes those days feel good?
 - *Encourages insight into motivation and well-being.*
- Everyone likes to be recognized in different ways: when it comes to feeling appreciated and valued at work, what is meaningful for you?
 - *Shows respect for individual differences and promotes inclusion by ensuring that everyone's contributions are acknowledged in ways that truly resonate.*

"Inclusive leadership in my school looks like: ensuring every voice is heard and valued, empowering students to challenge racism and advocate for equity, and creating opportunities where every learner feels safe, supported, and inspired to thrive."

Nadine Thibert – Secondary Principal (Acting) SD No. 58

When staff have an avenue to speak freely about their needs, the information provided — opinions, feelings, attributes — can help to identify gaps in the system. Takeaways from these conversations can help inform next steps or actionable items that benefit teams. Productive two-way dialogue also strengthens trust. When leaders allow time to give and receive information without judgment, that action alone invites authentic and honest conversations.

"Inclusive leadership in our school means sharing leadership and empowering others. We create opportunities for staff to lead learning in ways that honour their strengths, invite participation, and build collective teacher efficacy."

Tammy Mountain – Elementary Principal SD No. 74

Demonstrate Genuine Care for Others

Have you heard the saying, "The more people you like, the more others like you"? The "reciprocity of liking" rule suggests that people tend to like those who like them. Research on this phenomenon shows that when individuals become aware that someone likes them, there is an assumption that, based on a balance of probability, the individual will like them in return. Being genuine and self-accepting can have a positive impact on interpersonal relationships.

Educational leaders who consider the varied needs of different team members tend to understand that not everyone needs to be treated the same way: the key is to recognize the unique needs of each employee. Developing an understanding requires time to get to know your staff. This can be done by cultivating bona fide opportunities to show a real interest in the personal and professional lives of others, responding to others with empathy and sincerity, allowing for different perspectives to be shared, and learning about the experiences, education, or backgrounds that have shaped your colleagues.

Educational leaders can practice these skills intentionally by:

- Creating moments to listen with presence, without an agenda. This could be stopping by and asking, “How are things going?” or “What is taking shape this week?” or “Is there anything you are working on where I can be of support?”

- *By taking a genuine interest in team members’ lives, and work place priorities, leaders can deepen their emotional connection and bridge trust.*

- Celebrating and recognizing people’s efforts and acknowledge even the small wins. This can be done through simple gestures such as taking the time to write a thank you note, or acknowledging efforts in a staff meeting, newsletter, or staff bulletin.

- *By recognizing people’s efforts, they are more likely to feel seen, heard, and valued, which may result in higher productivity and sense of belonging.*

- Modelling authenticity by sharing personal learning and challenges. This can be done by learning alongside your staff and expressing gratitude for the expertise others may have to offer the team.

- *Modelling authenticity builds relational and social capital; both are essential for nurturing inclusive, compassionate educational communities.*

- Involve others in decision-making. This demonstrates cultural awareness, empathy, and a grounding in humility and responsibility. Ways to demonstrate this in your own practice include:

- Listening without defensiveness.
 - Acknowledging misunderstanding when it occurs.
 - Co-creating solutions that reflect community voices.
 - Valuing Indigenous knowledge as foundational, rather than supplemental.
 - Recognizing the values, histories, and worldviews of others.
 - Building trust through reciprocal and sustained relationships.

School leaders are stewards of the future. They must genuinely value everyone for who they are. Showing genuine care and concern for others does not always come naturally and is an important skill that can be developed or refined. Human interactions that show genuine care for others make staff feel valued and can help leaders to build trust, deepen connections, and leave team members feeling a strong sense of belonging.

“I approach inclusive leadership by focusing on belonging. To me, inclusion means finding ways to welcome people into existing structures, while belonging is about creating structures and pathways that reflect the needs of the people we serve. One approach places system at the center; the other places humans at the center.”

Riley McMitchell (he/him) – Elementary Principal SD No. 39

Model Collaborative Inquiry

Every employee comes with different lived experiences, offering the richness of diverse perspectives and abilities. Accessing the knowledge of others empowers them to capitalize on their strengths, which invites delegation of leadership opportunities. Not every project or responsibility needs to fall on one person. Taking a distributed leadership or collaborative inquiry approach allows leaders to nurture talent within their team. This approach opens doors to creating a better collective response than what could be achieved independently. Positioning yourself as a collaborative leader makes others feel included in decision-making and, with this, others feel part of something bigger than themselves. When the team succeeds it is a shared celebration, and when the team stumbles it becomes an opportunity to learn and grow.

An example of collaborative inquiry in practice is to openly admit when one does not have all the answers, or when one places themselves in the position of a lead learner. Collaborative thought sessions or shared brainstorming are ways to approach not having all the answers. These techniques allow for the gathering of alternative perspectives and, if applied constructively, this can help



to mitigate confirmation bias so that informed decision-making can unfold. Working alongside staff in this way has the potential to create an everlasting synergy where critical thinking supersedes one's own ego or the need to be seen as the only expert.

In an educational setting, collaborative inquiry could involve asking individuals to be an expert on a team or to lead a specific project that taps into their talents. Distributed leadership is conducive to a Flat Army¹ structure where collaborative leadership is supported over a hierarchical or tiered model of support. A Flat Army approach eliminates the need for control, while helping to break down barriers, such as silos or unhealthy competition that can often come with the latter approach. Collaboration evokes a sense of shared ownership that encourages innovation and inspires mutual learning.

1 Flat Army: Creating a Connected and Engaged Organization, Dan Pontefract, March 2013, Wiley

"Inclusive leadership in my school means interacting with students and staff with care, curiosity, and genuine connection. It also means creating a culture where families are true partners. Inclusion helps us build capacity, strengthen relationships, and ensure everyone feels they belong and can shape our direction."

Cathryn Blanco (she/her) – Secondary Principal, SD No. 42

Encourage Professional Support Networks

Whose shoulders do you stand on? Leaders can find themselves struggling to answer this question, especially when they are faced with adversity, and juggling multiple glass balls in the air. For some, it might look like connecting with others in a similar role in the same or another district, joining an affinity group, or engaging in an informal or formal mentorship program. For your staff, it could be coordinating release time to attend professional development opportunities, arranging meetings with trusted colleagues in a similar role, or orchestrating formal professional learning communities where school-based groups have time to collaborate on important aspects of learning. All these different structures inspire shared learning, collaborative problem-solving, deep and meaningful inquiry, and reflection opportunities. When implemented successfully, a culture of well-being unfolds, and an environment based on continuous learning and shared leadership become naturally embedded into practices.

Building networks for yourself and others not only builds relationships but builds mutual capacity. Discussing challenges with trusted peers increases knowledge through purposeful sharing, while reducing feelings of isolation or vulnerability to stressors that could have an adverse effect on well-being. When leaders show they

also need support, it establishes a culture whereby self-care is encouraged, and others are supported to engage in similar well-being practices.

In all my years of being an educator, inclusion has been a key component of my practice. Through curiosity, we can provoke deep and meaningful conversations whereby perspective-taking becomes the norm, and disagreement is an invitation for further dialogue, empathy, and understanding. Leading in this way takes courage, requires humility, and involves the sheer willingness to challenge the status quo in a confident and effective manner.

Ultimately, there are many ways to reach the same goal, and leading through inclusive practices while keeping

an open mindset will afford you and your team time to discover new perspectives, innovative solutions, and valuable growth opportunities. When we lead with inclusion at the heart of our practice, we open the door to possibilities we never imagined.

"I practice inclusive leadership by understanding each student's story. Through strong relationships with students and their families, we work collaboratively to set goals that best support every learner's needs."

Cathy Gracie – District Principal Learning Support Services
SD No. 35

**Friday
October 23, 2026**

**9:00 am - 3:00 pm
Sutton Place Hotel,
Vancouver**

**Registration
bcpvpa.org**

bcpvpa



CONNECTING LEADERS

Everyday Resiliency
**How to Master
Working and
Living Well**

**Dr Robyne
Hanley-Dafoe**