

Principl(ed)

VOL. 4 - ISSUE 1 - November 2022

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Community

Diverse Women in
Leadership

Psychologically Safe
Cultures

A Day in the Life

of an
Elementary
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the less predictable path,
making learning visible, and
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The Journal of the BC Principals'
& Vice-Principals' Association



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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 2600 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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SUPPORTING OUR MEMBERS

Publication deadlines being what they are, I am writing this article during the blistering hot days of summer *before* Labour Day and the school opening for the 2022-2023 school year. You will read this article in the winter – a third of the way through the school year. When you receive our flagship magazine, you will be in the thick of reviewing report cards, tracking student progress, developing plans and strategies for learners who need additional support, deeply immersed in implementing initiatives to support your School Growth Plans, and preparing for the holiday season! From personal experience, I always saved my deep dive into *Principl(ed)* for the winter break.

I have been a passionate advocate for public education throughout my adult life. That passion led me to teaching, and subsequently to school administration. I am passionate about the work we do as Principals and Vice-Principals, and I care about the well-being of our members. It was my passion for the work of Principals and Vice-Principals that led me to a leadership role in my local Chapter and then, ten years ago, to the BCPVPA Board table. It is both an honour and a privilege to now be your president, and to present the voice of the school experience – both successes and challenges – to our sector partners, the Ministry of Education and Child Care, and the wider community. The role of Principals and Vice-Principals in student and school success is often misunderstood, or underestimated – in short, good schools are led by good Principals and Vice-Principals!

So, how will I be supporting the work that the 2,600+ members of the BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association do every day? I ran to be president of our Association on a platform with three key elements:

- 1) Improving overall member well-being**
- 2) Establishing a negotiating framework**
- 3) Building leadership capacity**

Our Board of Directors has incorporated these goals in our 2020-2023 Strategic Plan bit.ly/BCPVPA_SP

Working with our dedicated Executive Director, Kevin Reimer, and our small but mighty senior staff team, we have developed an Operational Plan. The Operational Plan is an internal roadmap that breaks down the objectives – our 'Big Ideas' – and outlines the steps we are taking, or need to take, to achieve those goals.

My role will be to breathe life into our goals and objectives, and to give voice to your experiences when I communicate with our sector partners and stakeholders about the vital work you do to keep schools safe, open, and operating. I will be advancing our objectives through what I call the **AIMS** principle:

A = ADVOCACY

every interaction is an opportunity to educate others about the work of BC's Principals and Vice-Principals

I = INFLUENCE

communicate with decision-makers about what is required for students and schools to be successful, as decisions can directly impact the work of BC's Principals and Vice-Principals

MS = MEMBER SUPPORT

every action, decision, or priority of the Association supports the work of BCPVPA members

British Columbia has one of the highest performing educational jurisdictions in the world; our schools remained open and offered a continuity of learning through most of the pandemic, and this was due, in large part, to the efforts of BC's Principals and Vice-Principals. The work of a school leader is complex and challenging, but it is also invigorating and

"My role will be to breathe life into our goals and objectives, and to give voice to your experiences when I communicate with our sector partners and stakeholders about the vital work you do to keep schools safe, open, and operating."

rewarding – just observe a kindergarten class or attend a graduation ceremony!

We sometimes forget that British Columbia is a massive province: most of western Europe could fit within our borders. However, we may be big in geography, but we are small as a population and spread over a huge area. As I go about my work of supporting members, I ask that you let me know how things are going in *your* part of the world. The best way I can accurately tell your story – whether good or challenging – is to hear from the membership. As

an Association, we have established formal and informal ways to connect with our members. You could email Kevin kevin@bcpvpa.bc.ca or myself bleonard@bcpvpa.bc.ca directly; you could join a Coffee Connections conversation; you could connect with your Chapter President or Chapter Representative; you could apply to join one of our committees; you could let your name stand for election to the Board of Directors; or, you could simply contact the office and speak with any of our staff. I guarantee, we are listening, and we want to hear how you are doing!

When I ran to be president, I had hoped to lead our Association in a post-pandemic world, and that things would be 'back-to-normal'. Upon reflection, I must acknowledge that some concerning aspects of our jobs existed before the pandemic – the pandemic has brought some of those challenges into greater focus. The pandemic also underscored the vital role that Principals and Vice-Principals play in keeping schools and the school system functioning, and functioning well. The pandemic is not yet over, but we have swiftly learned how to be nimble, and how to keep schools running. The BCPVPA has been equally nimble in adjusting how we 'do business' to support our members' needs. We look forward to continuing the evolution of member engagement and support, and welcome your suggestions.

BC public schools, led by the Principals and Vice-Principals of the BCPVPA, are a success story. Can we do better in some areas? *You bet*: continuous improvement is in our DNA. In my work, and using the AIMS principle, I will continue to share the stories of BC's schools and highlight the amazing work that you do every day. Get in touch so that I can help you write those success stories!

Brian Leonard
is the 2022-2024
President of the BCPVPA



@bcpvpapresident



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A by-election was held October 4-6, 2022 for a Director to fill a vacant Board seat to June 2023; the election result was not yet available at press time

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

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

In our tenth installment of the series, we meet Dr. Shannon Behan, Principal of Westview Elementary School in Powell River, School District No. 47.

Dr. Shannon Behan hasn't always taken the predictable path. At 15 years old, Shannon had the opportunity as a Rotary exchange student to spend a year in Northern Lapland living on the edge of the Arctic Circle in Rovaniemi, Finland. It was there that she learned to speak Finnish, attended high school, and made lifelong friendships. Shannon recalls that, "I was 15 when I left and went to Finland. There were no cell phones in those days and I wrote a letter to my parents every two weeks. That was where I met one of my best friends who lives in Iceland, and where my world was broken wide open!"

Shannon has gone on to work in public, private, and international education in British Columbia for the past twenty-five years. She holds a teaching certificate from the University of Victoria, a Masters degree from the University of Calgary, and – most recently – a Doctorate in Education Leadership and Policy Studies from the University of Kansas.

Shannon's inspiration to pursue a career in education was heightened by her experience teaching English in Taiwan, where she, "realized how brilliant the world in the classroom was," but her roots also influenced her direction. She was born into a large Irish Catholic family where there was, "a fundamental and core understanding that education and learning is a lifelong venture, that hard work matters, and that building community is a precious gift."

A Day in the Life

of an
Elementary
School
Principal



Photo courtesy Dr. Shannon

Reflecting on her time teaching in Taoyuan, Taiwan, Shannon says, “I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to work there, as I was able to teach preschool, kindergarten, and middle school, as well as adults who all wanted to improve their language skills. The most profound influence that led me to choose to go into education were the moments when I could see the joy in learning from students. Being in the classroom,

developing relationships with the kids, connecting with teacher colleagues and their families was just brilliant. I recall those days being filled with joy and fun. It isn’t easy work, but it is hugely rewarding!”

Shannon taught in the classroom for 15 years before becoming first a Counsellor, then a Vice-Principal and Principal, all in School District No.47 (SD47).

After a few years, adventure called once again. “Our district was in a state of flux, where many students were heading into our online and distance learning programs. At the high school, we were having difficulty offering all the courses that our senior students needed. As a result, one of the goals of the district was to expand our international program. We had created partnerships with different organizations abroad; one of them was the Sino Bright China, and I was asked if I would take on the role of Principal of our certified BC offshore school in Beijing. I was at a point in my career where I thought that this could be really interesting and exciting – I wasn’t really sure I could do it, but I wanted to try. My son was in grade 11 and I asked him if he wanted to move to Beijing, and he said, ‘okay, I’ll go’. This move was a bit of a leap but it resulted in being a phenomenal opportunity. Our superintendent, Dr. Jay Yule, in addition to being creative and innovative, has always been a tremendous supporter. I am appreciative of the work he has done to develop opportunities for both students and staff, both locally and worldwide. Over the years, our international department team has worked tirelessly together and increased the number of international students five-fold.

“We have more than 150 students from 18 different countries coming to learn in SD47. In addition, as a team, we opened a satellite campus in Vancouver’s historic Gastown neighbourhood, and opened satellite schools in Mainland China.”

While working in various cities in China, Shannon was a driving force behind expanding program offerings for international students in SD47, and the establishment of the Gastown campus was one of these projects. “Opening the satellite campus in Gastown with our partners was a response to what was happening with some international students that were coming to Powell River; some of them were from very large cities, such as Beijing, Seoul, and Hong Kong, and when they arrived in Powell River, they found it to be too quiet and peaceful, and would look to move to the Lower Mainland as soon as possible. The campus in Gastown is a BC school with BC teachers; most

“Our demographic in this community is shifting, particularly after COVID. The new world order has many people leaving the larger centres and moving to smaller communities where they can enjoy a different quality of life while working remotely.”

of the students are from mainland China, and they attend and finish their BC program, then head off to post-secondary.” Now that the infrastructure for the international department has been created, Shannon oversees and supports the international department, and is currently leading Westview Elementary School.

SD47 will also become a Provincial Online Learning (POL) School in 2023, and Shannon sees the importance of opening up the district offerings further into the province. “The reach is greater, and – again – the driving force behind the online learning has been the superintendent Dr. Jay Yule, as well as Don Fairbairn, former Director of Instruction. The development of these offerings speaks to the creativity and ingenuity of leadership that we have in this district. The POL broadens our offerings in that we can continue to be flexible in our educational offerings while maintaining our standards of excellence. POL schools allow for more equitable, and consistent access to the BC curriculum for students from all over the province. At present, we have schools on Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast as well as on Bowen Island, and campuses in the Lower Mainland. SD47 is proud to be chosen as one of the POL, and the team – Ms. Stephanie Hall, Mr. Don Fairbairn, and Mr. Allan Saugstad – are excited to expand the online learning program offerings.”

While welcoming learners to the online opportunities presented by POL, the district – and Shannon’s

Finding Our 'Why'

It was a phenomenal experience to lead an international school, and be part of a system that is so highly regarded on the global stage. It was a peak learning experience, but not without its challenges.

I remember in my second year of this work, I was at a school in Kaifeng (a city about 3 hours by plane from Beijing), and there was some friction with the two co-owners of the school. International education in China is a high-stakes business, and some changes I was working on would have had an impact on tuition and student numbers.

I remember the day clearly: I was chatting with staff when I was asked by the office assistant to meet in the boardroom. I had never actually been to the boardroom, and my immediate instinct was that something was up. Before I knew it, I was sitting on one side of a large table and was being interrogated by a lawyer and two police officers. My time in China had been primarily in Beijing, so the Mandarin that I knew was a different dialect. The lawyer offered some translation, but I had very little input in the conversation. I often refer to this as 'the time I almost became The Third Michael'. I recall taking out my phone underneath the table and, with knees shaking, texting my superintendent to let him know I was being interrogated. I didn't know what else to do; I was hours away from a consulate, and in a city with very

few foreigners. Almost immediately, and with the wit I have always admired, he texted, "Why, what did you do?"

When the two-hour interrogation ended, the officers drove me to the police station where I was told I would need to surrender my passport. In my barely-passing Mandarin, I told them that my passport was in my apartment. They drove me there, and I entered, unescorted. In my room, I threw everything I could into my suitcase, tucked my passport firmly into my bra, ran down the back staircase, hailed a cab, and took the 90-minute ride to the airport.

Within hours – sick with terror and fear, knees still shaking – I landed in Seoul, Korea. I made my way back to BC, and I got on with my job.

Sometime after, I was asked to deliver an 'Ignite' speech, and I chose this experience as the focus. The message of that speech was that, collectively, as we're coming through the pandemic, now is the time to reflect and to make sure we're driven by our big 'why'. Because, here is what is important. It is in the stillness and the quiet moments that follow big life-altering events where we find or make meaning of experiences. It is in the trail time, the mountains climbed, the dark and uncomfortable moments, the seemingly endless duration of this dis-ease where the light comes in.

school in particular – has seen a rise in enrollment. Westview Elementary is located in the central area of the city of Powell River, and has the highest student population of any of the elementary schools in the community. "Our demographic in this community is shifting, particularly after COVID. The new world order has many people leaving the larger centres and moving to smaller communities where they can enjoy a different quality of life while working remotely. Our new families are looking for what we have

here: a small, inviting, welcoming, inclusive, and environmentally-focused community."

Shannon is a passionate advocate for improving literacy skills, embedding and making visible Indigenous learning, and building an inclusive culture in her schools. "At Westview Elementary, we have two reading intervention teachers as part of our Student Services Department. Guided by our current Director of Instruction, Mrs. Kristen Brach,

our reading intervention team has done significant research in approaches to literacy development; one of our reading intervention teachers focuses mostly on primary, and the other reading intervention teacher focuses primarily on upper intermediate. Students complete three standardized assessments throughout the year and, based on the data from the tests, we focus our work on learners who aren't yet reading at grade level.

"We use our results to improve our practice as we believe literacy is a key indicator for student success. In addition to the work that is specific to literacy, we have embedded the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL) into our daily work throughout the school. We believe in making the learning visible and having all languages represented around the school: in the welcome messages on our doors, in our morning greetings, in the project-based work the teachers undertake, and in the resources we purchase for our classrooms. We are pleased with the growth our students display, and we know we still have a lot of good work to do. We have a fantastic team of dynamic and talented staff at our school, and it is a privilege to work with them each and every day."

Shannon is energized by many things and believes that building a strong cohesive and collaborative culture is a core practice. "Being part of the team that works endlessly to improve literacy rates, to build an inclusive and welcoming school, and to celebrate the diversity of learners we have in our school and community has been fantastic."

Shannon has been energized as well through the pursuit of her Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy, led by Dr. Yong Zhao and Dr. Lisa Wolf-Wendel. "It has been so fantastic; originally, we were all meeting together in Vancouver as a cohort group, and I got to meet colleagues from all over the province. Then, when COVID hit, we went completely online. But we've all stayed connected, and our collegial connections have been so rich and rewarding. For example, the focus of my dissertation was on female superintendents who administer public schools in

"We believe in making the learning visible and having all languages represented around the school: in the welcome messages on our doors, in our morning greetings, in the project-based work the teachers undertake, and in the resources we purchase for our classrooms."

Western Canada. One of my good friends, Dr. Paula Gosal in Chilliwack, focused her research on the experiences of female Principals in this province. Our friendship as well as our research aligned, and we found similar patterns in the backgrounds, experiences, and pathways for women in leadership in public education in British Columbia.

"Originally, my intention was to focus my research on BC's world-class education system and the significant work that we do to maintain our excellence on a global stage. But I kept coming back to women in leadership, again and again. Yong could see my interest in exploring BC education on a global stage, but suggested I needed to focus on the topic of women in leadership and, as a result, I changed my focus. The process was rich with many learning opportunities, and the literature review was a very engaging part of the research phase. But as I delved into the writing phase, the struggle increased. I started to doubt that I could complete my Doctorate; I was really struggling, and unsure that I could reach this goal. And, as I was on a run one day, it came to me: it's difficult because I didn't realize that 'we're still here'. I think you'll see what I mean from the summary of my dissertation in this article, including details of the current representation of female superintendents, and findings and recommendations from the research.

"Across North America, research on gender and the superintendency continues to recognize the persistence of disproportionately low representation of women in the position of superintendent. In stark contrast to the number of male superintendents, teaching remains a feminized profession in Canada. According to Census Canada (2016), 2.9% of women who are employed in Canada are employed as elementary school teachers. Although this number could fail to awe, it represents a substantial percentage of the total number of people who work in public education. Elementary school teaching is the fifth most common female profession in the country (Statistics Canada, 2017). This trend is not new — the 2006 Canadian census reported that women made up 73.6% of all fulltime teachers in public elementary and secondary school systems (Statistics Canada, 2015). Despite this predominance of females in the teaching profession, those who serve in top leadership positions are far more likely to be male. In 2013, 21 of the 60 superintendents in British Columbia were female and this was considered an improvement over the thirteen female superintendents five years prior (Steffenhagen, 2013). The number of females serving in the role of superintendent of schools in Western Canada is disproportionately low as compared to the 73.6% female educators who serve as teachers.

The final chapter of the dissertation included recommendations for greater equity in the role of superintendent, and these recommendations include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Finding women currently working as teachers and school-based administrators, counsellors, and district roles that are not on the commonly travelled route to the superintendency who are excellent at relationships and team building, who are willing to take on additional school responsibilities, and show strength in leadership of schools. These individuals should be cultivated and supported through a leadership development program.

2. The role of the Board of Trustees is crucial now more than ever to recognize how their decisions affect policies procedures, and above all, people. The board must be aware of how its decisions impact females and other marginalized populations most severely and systematically disadvantaged by years of discrimination, racism, and prejudice. Board members can be difference-makers in addressing, pushing for, and assuring equity. We are in a time where Trustees are keenly aware that the manner in which they model and guide the equity conversations enriches the learning landscape.

One of the major gaps that was found in this research was that of intentionality on behalf of the individual to pursue the role of superintendent. The question remains as to why virtually none of the females studied intentionally sought the role, and felt they were simply 'in the right place at the right time' to take on the role. Perhaps work needs to be done on a provincial level identifying and outlining the female superintendent pipeline. The population of British Columbia is a rich and diverse population, and this can be reflected in all areas of the sector."

Ground Pounders

"The Principal who was at this school before I arrived, Mr. Jamie Burt, started Ground Pounders. I love to run – that's one of the things I do for fun. When COVID hit, we collectively committed to some actions; we didn't know what this experience ahead would be like, but we were going to stay connected to one another. We were going to limit our news sources and do everything we could to stay healthy, including eating well, and drinking lots of water. And we were all going to move and be physically fit.

So, we kept Ground Pounders going, two days a week. During most of the pandemic, that was

something we were permitted to do as we followed all of the COVID protocols. It was outside, we could maintain distance, there are trail systems around the school, and it allowed us to stay connected to the students and to the parents who would come out. We've maintained that routine, and it has grown. We have about 65 regular attendees. When we finished up for the year in June, we'd run hundreds of kilometres – our group had run the equivalent from here to Winnipeg! It's a really fabulous way to get outside, we start the music, I warm everybody up, and then we all run together and there are different loops. It's a really nice way to start the day."



Photo courtesy Dr. Shannon Behan

"I interviewed a number of female superintendents, and I was in awe and inspired by the female superintendents in this province. They were tremendously kind, and gave generously of their time. They were always willing to speak with me when I needed to follow up with them. It really speaks volumes to who they are, and the very skilled professionals we have in our senior leaders. The challenges are big for any superintendent, because it's such a complex role, and the female superintendents who participated in my research are representative of the talent that we have in this province."

Shannon feels that professional development plays a key role in supporting leaders on their journey, and she recently participated in BCPVPA's Foundations for New School Leaders as a facilitator. "I'm always keen to be part of the organization that I belong to, and the BCPVPA has been a key part of my career development through courses over the years. I've also been the president of our Chapter, and I've been able to attend provincial meetings. All of the superintendents I spoke with had a similar response to my question about how professional development helped them on their pathway. All of them from BC said that their work in connection with BCPVPA and networking with colleagues strengthened them, and the superintendents from other provinces concurred that they were supported by working with the professional association in their province. I think it's really important to be engaged in our organization, because being an administrator can be isolating."

"Being part of the team that works endlessly to improve literacy rates, to build an inclusive and welcoming school, and to celebrate the diversity of learners we have in our school and community has been fantastic."

When Shannon considers her career as a school leader, she feels that it is, "more wonderful and rewarding than I ever could have imagined!" Shannon has shared her thoughts and many stories of her leadership journey on her blog, shannonbehan.squarespace.com. There, she includes the following quote:

"Be around the light bringers, the magic makers, the world shifters, the game shakers. They challenge you, break you open, uplift and expand you. They don't let you play small with your life. These heartbeats are your people. These people are your tribe."

Danielle Doby
Storyteller, Artist, Author

"When I saw that quote, I felt that it captured a bit about who I am, it spoke to my own lived experiences. There's another quotation that I love: 'if you are the smartest person in the room, you're in the wrong room'. I've been privileged to push myself into opportunities that are different, and often I'm not sure if I can do it. I may have a bit of hesitation, but it's in that lack of comfort – the state of being unsure – where you do a lot of growth and learning. I like being around people who challenge your thinking and push your thinking up."

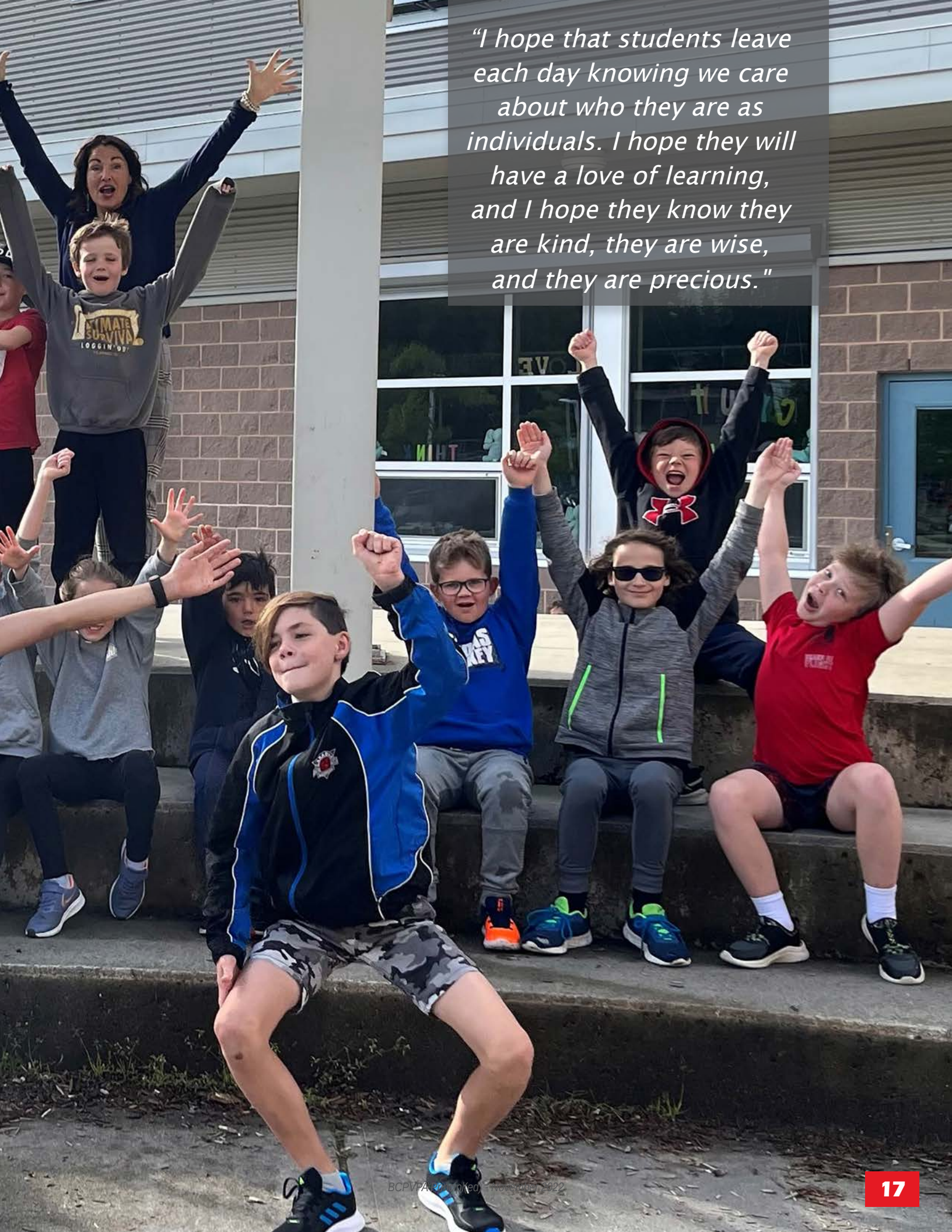
Shannon's wish for her students at the end of each day mirrors that gift of growth and learning. "I hope that students leave each day knowing we care about who they are as individuals. I hope they will have a love of learning, and I hope they know they are kind, they are wise, and they are precious. Each morning, as I get ready, I think to myself, 'whose life might I impact in a wonderful way today?' Isn't that a privilege?"



@svbehan



Photo courtesy Dr. Shannon Behan



"I hope that students leave each day knowing we care about who they are as individuals. I hope they will have a love of learning, and I hope they know they are kind, they are wise, and they are precious."

A Day in the Life of an Elementary Principal

5:00 am	Briefly check morning emails
5:30 am	Run or morning fitness class, depending on the schedule
7:00 am	Arrive at school
7:15 am	Answer emails, check for TTOC coverage and ensure busing is set up for any excursions; get prepared for the day
8:15 am	Ground Pounders Run Club - 2 km run with students
8:30 am	Welcome families for the day, greet students; be outside, accessible, and visible. Quick chat with Vice-Principal in preparation for the day/week
9:00 am	Start the day: announcements ('sprinkle joy wherever you go' is our mantra!); visit each classroom, welcome TTOC and Student Support EAs that have been called in; problem-solve arising issues with student services department lead Michelle Shipley
10:30 am	Recess supervision outside (play either hockey, soccer, baseball or dance with the kiddos!)
10:45 am	Problem-solve playground issues with students, and support students who may be dysregulated, while trying to get some work done

"I arrive each day at 7:00 am, unlock the doors, and tour the outside of the school to ensure that nighttime revellers – which can include both bears and bevvly drinkers – haven't left any evidence of their antics! I then get to work on communications and organizing the day. I typically split my day into four quadrants and work to meet an objective in each of the quadrants; professional development, relationships, improving student learning, and wellness. The activities within these quadrants can happen at different times throughout the day, but I work to make sure that when I reflect on the day, I have hit targets in each of those four key areas. My wellness goal usually starts just after 5:00 am as I love to run down the dark empty streets guided only by the streetlights. That is the time when I solve most of the problems of the world!

The colleagues and team that I work with are so important to me, and to our success as a school.

A Day in the Life of an Elementary Principal

The Vice-Principal, Jennifer Kennedy, and I have a very close, genuine, excellent working relationship. We have been able to bounce ideas off each other and get creative, and we're always focused on what is best for the students and the school. Jen is super-talented as a teacher and administrator. I'm a little bit heartbroken because she's leaving us, to take on the role of Principal at Kelly Creek Elementary. But I'm also pleased that we have a new Vice-Principal, Mr. Raun Rainbow; he worked most recently for the Ministry in Victoria. Raun is originally from Sayward, BC, and he's taken a circuitous route to get to Powell River via Alberta. He will be part of what we're doing to grow the school and its offerings, and he's going to be a really dynamic and wonderful asset. We have a wonderful and dynamic group of professionals we get to work with, and the people I work with are what makes this role rewarding, rich and fulfilling. It is a privilege to work in public education in this district and in this Province."

12:00 pm	Lunch supervision outside
12:40 pm	Depending on the day, it might be in-class support, student support, meeting with families and whatever is needed
3:00 pm	After-school meetings can include: School-Based Team (SBT), Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Admin team, family meetings, staff meetings
4:30 pm	Check emails, tidy up issues, answer phone calls. Communicate home to parents via phone or email about any issues that occurred during the day
5:00 pm	Head out for some fresh air... think and reflect on the day
7:00 pm	Answer emails, phone calls, work to navigate percolating issues, or attend evening PAC meeting
9:30 pm	Feel the exhaustion, and fall asleep trying to read my novel
2:00 am	Wake up enlightened with creative ideas on how to be part of improving our school community (while trying to force myself to go back to sleep!)

And onwards we grow...

Congratulations

UBC Transformative Educational Leadership Program Graduating Class of 2022!

Mark Anderson

Director Educational
Leadership
New South Wales

David Cacchioni

Vice-Principal
Vancouver

Marc Daneault

Vice-Principal
Nanaimo-Ladysmith

Lorn Kennedy

Teacher
Nechako Lakes

Jessica Anjos

Principal
Central Okanagan

Margaret Callander

Vice-Principal
Delta

Monica Doyle

Principal
Kootenay Lake

Jenn Kooznetsoff

Principal
Kootenay Lake

Michael Annandale

Vice-Principal
Delta

Terresa Carlgren

Teacher
China

Krista Ediger

Vice-Principal
Vancouver

Theresa Kraeker

Vice-Principal
Nanaimo-Ladysmith

Shannon Apland

Principal
Nanaimo-Ladysmith

Danielle Carrie

Learning Services
Teacher
Sea to Sky

Brad Griffith

Director Educational
Leadership
New South Wales

Stephen Larre

Director of Instruction
Vancouver Island West

Trisha Armour

Vice-Principal
Nanaimo-Ladysmith

Phillip Clarke

Director of Instruction
Sea to Sky

Cory Hartling

Principal
Sea to Sky

Anna Lautard

Superintendent of
Schools
Boundary

Don Balcombe

Assistant
Superintendent
Nanaimo-Ladysmith

David Coats

Principal
Central Okanagan

Mareva Hope

Vice-Principal
Delta

Tanya Lewis

Director, Curriculum
and Assessment
Yukon

Alain Blais

Principal
Kamloops-Thompson

Shauna Coey

Principal
Nanaimo-Ladysmith

Marne Hopkinson

District Administrator
Delta

Sarah Loat

Principal
Richmond

Jesse Bruce

Principal
Central Okanagan

Sarah Dalzell

Learning Services
Teacher
Sea to Sky

Michael Johnson

Principal
Kamloops-Thompson

Tanya Major

District Administrator
Richmond

Alice Jungclaus

Vice-Principal
Vancouver



Meet the Graduates of the 7th TELP cohort:

telp.educ.ubc.ca/grad-22

Shellie Maloff

Principal
Kootenay Lake

Ryan Mansley

Vice-Principal
Central Okanagan

Joanne Marshall

Director Educational
Leadership
New South Wales

Carmella Mathieu

Vice-Principal
Kamloops-Thompson

Michelle Miller- Gauthier

District Literacy
Support Teacher
Nechako Lakes

Mia (Asa-Maria) Moutray

Teacher
Nechako Lakes

Rodney Perrault

Regional Principal
FNESC

Sandra Pond

Director of Instruction
Prince Rupert

Craig Redfern

Director Educational
Leadership
New South Wales

David Remple

Vice-Principal
Gold Trail

Jane Reynolds

Principal
Nanaimo-Ladysmith

Sherri Roche

District Principal
Central Okanagan

Tanya Rogers

Principal
Kamloops-Thompson

Naomi Ross

District Principal
Kootenay Lake

Steve Roy

Principal
Conseil scolaire
francophone

Andrei Sala

Vice-Principal
Richmond

Jann Schmidt

District Principal
Southeast Kootenay

Carrie Sleep

Principal
Vancouver

Jenny Slinn

Teacher Coordinator
Delta

Derek Snowden

Principal
Nanaimo-Ladysmith

Andrew Stevenson

Director Educational
Leadership
New South Wales

Cindy Stevenson

Vice-Principal
West Vancouver

Carla Street

Principal
Prince Rupert

Laura Tait

Deputy-
Superintendent
Nanaimo-Ladysmith

Jacqueline Taylor

Principal
Vernon

Melaney Tinkess

Principal
Gold Trail

Colleen Topolovec

Principal
Kamloops-Thompson

Roberta Toth

District Numeracy
Support Teacher
Nechako Lakes

Annie Varghese

Principal
Richmond

Kristen Vogel

Principal
Abbotsford

Kirsten Wallace

Principal
Richmond

Heidi Wood

Indigenous Education
Teacher Mentor
Coordinator
Delta

Learning

Our Main Site / Host (Hub) Site streaming model may, in the future, be known as the BC Principals' Streaming Network (BCPSN), which will rival Netflix, Apple TV, and Disney+ streaming networks. *Who can say that we don't think big!*

As you are reading this article in the latter part of 2022, our annual BCPVPA Connecting Leaders Conference will have been successfully mounted, built from the exceptional learnings from our 2021 conference. The 2021 Connecting Leaders Conference (CL 2021) was a remarkable achievement based on many metrics. A critical metric was the number of our members and other colleagues that participated in a remote 'Hub'.

COVID-19 forced all of us to share our learning in a variety of formats. The quick adoption of Teams and Zoom brought us to a new level of networking during the pandemic. While we know there is no replacement for face-to-face in-person interaction and learning, CL 2021 was our first attempt to offer a deep level of blended learning for conference participants. In my former role as a Surrey Academy of Innovative Learning (SAIL) Principal, I stressed the necessity of blended learning to my Distributed Learning (DL) staff, students, and parents. The subject matter needs to find a 'sweet spot' between in-person, face-to-face online, and individuals working online. The technical terms for these modalities are synchronous and asynchronous.

Here is what we are constantly assessing when thinking about how we can best to deliver our BCPVPA Professional Learning and Development Programming: we are striving trying to find the strike zone, or sticky zone:

SYNCHRONOUS

Synchronous is learning delivered in a specific place, at a specific time, to all learners.

The benefit is immediate feedback and interaction.

The drawback is that it is inflexible, and may not address individual learning preferences.

Trying video conferencing (or, streaming broadcasts) and instant messaging, and providing alternatives for those who can't join at a designated time.

This is where our Host (Hub) Sites comes into play.

ASYNCHRONOUS

Asynchronous is learning content provided to learners and accessed when they choose (within reason).

The benefit is self-pacing and choice.

The drawback is that it requires self-discipline, and learners may feel isolated.

Trying discussion boards and modules with options for accessing and interacting with both content and colleagues. Trying to provide opportunities for learners to receive immediate feedback and ask questions.

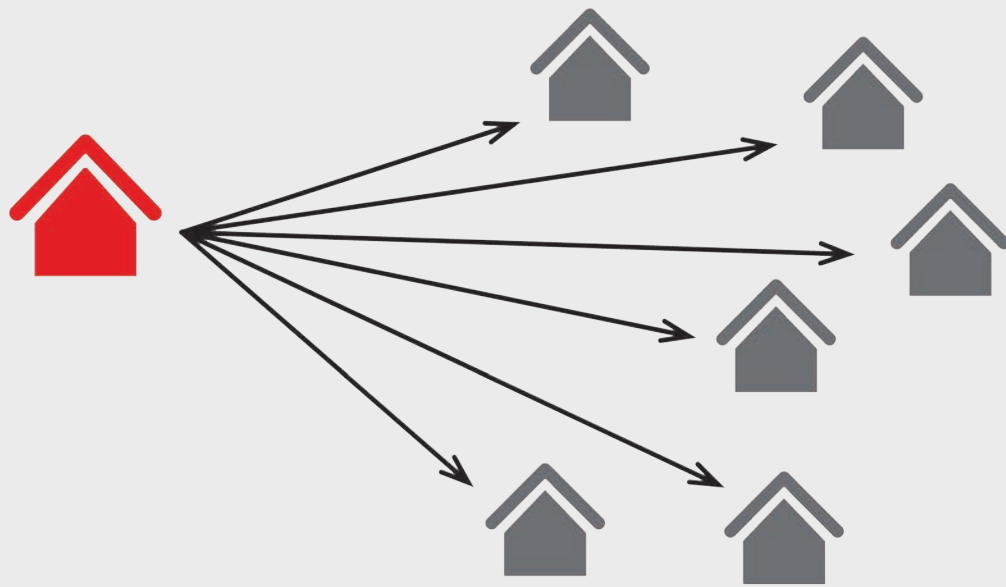
This is where our D2L Brightspace Learning Management System and My BCPVPA Portal come into play.

ONE

TO

MANY

Sharing the Learning



Broadcast (one to many)

by

Peter Johnston

Director of Professional Learning & Development

BCPVPA

What is a Host (Hub) Site?

More than 750 members and other colleagues participated online in CL 2021. We set up a broadcast studio in our BCPVPA office, and streamed the conference to individuals who participated on their laptops from their back deck or living rooms, and to 28 regional Host (Hub) Sites across the province. We had Host (Hub) Sites that were set up in school board offices with six to eight participants, and in golf course meeting rooms with 30 participants. In each case, they had a laptop and a projector to display the program and speakers. When it came time for breakouts, table work, discussions, and reflection, our Host (Hub) Site were ready for live conversations with their local colleagues. We even coordinated the opportunity for the Host sites to 'report back' on a feed that was part of the conference program to all participants.

Each Host (Hub) Site was much more than a laptop and projector. We trained and resourced one or two of the regional Host (Hub) Site participants, and gave them the resources they needed to be a Host (Hub) Site facilitator, to lead the session and conversations, or coordinator, to ensure that the session was set up and smoothly delivered. We outfitted them with signage, learning guides, and swag! We offered them a detailed checklist of things to consider for their session, and even helped with the food costs at the Host (Hub) Site.

The Host (Hub) Site becomes a mini conference centre for those learners. They are able to sit around a table, or on a couch, and to discuss and reflect together in person. All the feedback was extremely positive.

Become a Host (Hub) Site

We feel the word 'Host' is appropriate because that is, in effect, what you are doing for your colleagues: you are hosting them in your region, and supplying a great learning experience. Like any great host, we want to ensure the participants have a fantastic experience.

What are the Benefits of

Becoming a Host (Hub) Site?

- Some Chapters have difficulty affording speakers – access ours!
- Even if you travel as a group for your October provincial Pro-D, you can still access our speakers.
- Your local Chapter PLD costs would be drastically reduced, as only limited travel may be required.
- You can connect with colleagues in a safe learning environment.
- You choose your location to bring your colleagues together.
- You get to learn on *your* land, when on the land learning is taking place.
- You learn alongside colleagues from your region.
- You could consider a standard location in your district with a screen, projector, and other resources and be ready to go.
- BCPVPA does 90% of the work!
- Local Principals learn skills to be trained facilitators.
- BCPVPA supplies basic event signage.
- BCPVPA can help with technological needs.



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Trauma-Informed Leadership

DECEMBER 7, MARCH 15

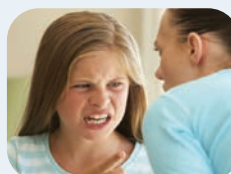
Based on our book, *A Little Book About Trauma-Informed Workplaces*, this workshop explores how to lead with a trauma-informed approach and provides five key principles that trauma-informed workplaces embody.

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Currently we have divided our province into ten regions in which our Professional Learning Development (PLD) Advisors work alongside your local PVPA PLD representatives. The current PLD Regions are below, and hope that each of these regions will consider becoming a Host (Hub) Site as we slowly launch our streaming network:

Metro 1 Region

40 - New Westminster
41 - Burnaby
43 - Coquitlam
44 - North Vancouver
45 - West Vancouver

Metro 2 Region

37 - Delta
38 - Richmond
39E - Vancouver Elementary
39S - Vancouver Secondary
46 - Sunshine Coast
47 - Powell River
48 - Sea to Sky

The North

59 - Peace River South
60 - Peace River North
81 - Fort Nelson
87 - Stikine

The North Coast

49 - Central Coast
50 - Haida Gwaii
52 - Prince Rupert
54 - Bulkley Valley
82 - Coast Mountains
92 - Nisga'a

Okanagan

22 - Vernon
23 - Central Okanagan
53 - Okanagan-Similkameen
58 - Nicola-Similkameen
67 - Okanagan Skaha
73 - Kamloops/Thompson
83 - North Okanagan-Shuswap

Fraser Valley

33 - Chilliwack
34 - Abbotsford
35 - Langley
36 - Surrey
42 - Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows
75 - Mission
93 - Conseil Scolaire Francophone

Central BC/ Fraser Canyon

27 - Cariboo-Chilcotin
28 - Quesnel
57 - Prince George
74 - Gold Trail
78 - Fraser Cascade
91 - Nechako Lakes

East and West Kootenays

5 - Southeast Kootenay
6 - Rocky Mountains
10 - Arrow Lakes
19 - Revelstoke
20 - Kootenay Columbia
51 - Boundary

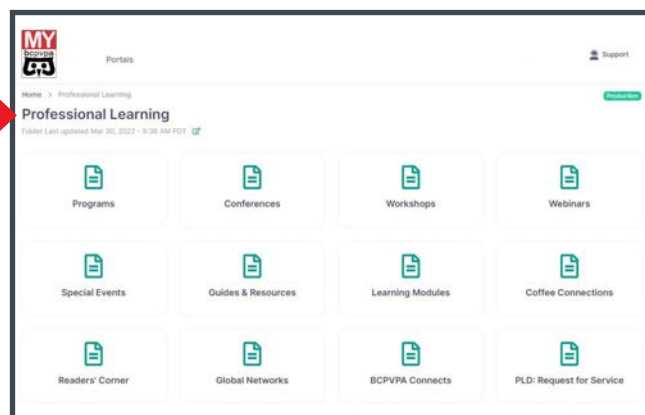
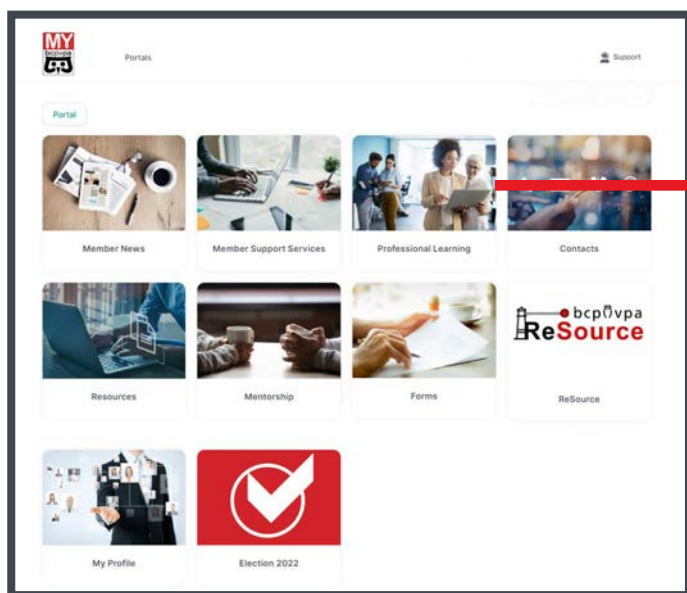
Vancouver Island South

61 - Greater Victoria
62 - Sooke
63 - Saanich
64 - Gulf Islands
79 - Cowichan Valley

Vancouver Island North

68 - Nanaimo-Ladysmith
69 - Qualicum
70 - Pacific Rim
71 - Comox Valley
72 - Campbell River
84 - Vancouver Island West
85 - Vancouver Island North

So... What is My BCPVPA?



The member portal that we launched in August 2021 has been growing steadily with content and resources over the past year. It is *your* BCPVPA portal, which inspired the new name and brand. Every member has access to My BCPVPA, and your own portal view is unique to you.



Our Professional Learning tile in My BCPVPA houses information about all of our program offerings, and your learning through D2L Brightspace – future, past, and present – will all be accessible within My BCPVPA. D2L

Brightspace is the learning management system (LMS) adopted by BC's Ministry of Education and Child Care. Many of your school districts have already started implementing D2L as their LMS, and many of BCPVPA's programs and course offerings will be delivered through D2L.

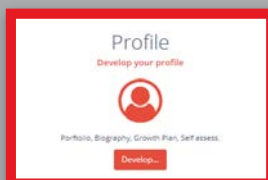
It's yet another way to stream our professional learning from one ... to many!

Please do not hesitate to contact us: pldinfo@bcpvpa.bc.ca

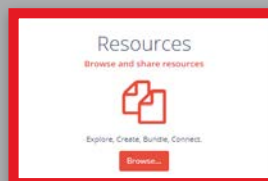


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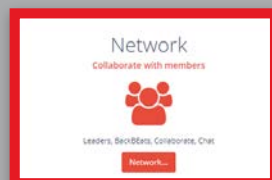
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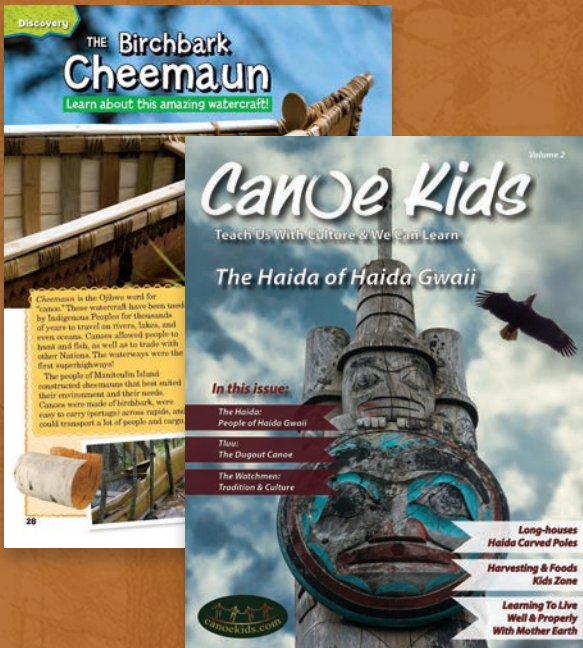


Indigenous-Created Cultural Resources for the Classroom

by
Kevin Milne
Co-Founder & Contributing Editor
4Canoes

A photograph of a forest with tall, moss-covered tree trunks and a dense, mossy forest floor. The image is split horizontally, with the top half showing the upper trunks and canopy, and the bottom half showing the forest floor covered in thick green moss and ferns. A semi-transparent text box is overlaid on the middle of the image.

With six sections of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) 94 calls to action centering on education, there is a growing interest in classroom-focused resources on Indigenous culture and experience. In sharing the TRC report, Justice Murray Sinclair highlighted education as a way to help Indigenous and non-Indigenous people bridge the knowledge gap, especially in the non-Indigenous population. In response to the calls to action, we created 4Canoes and developed a variety of K-12 publications and tools to bring to life the Peoples, stories, cultures, and personalities of Indigenous communities across Canada and around the world.



What's Inside

Every volume of
4Canoes Magazine
and **4Canoes Kids**
includes:

Stories from community members

Photo-centric features

Language of the community
alongside English text

Historical and current information
and perspectives

Artist profiles

Traditional songs and stories

Place-based recipes

Kids' activities

Glossary of Indigenous terms

4Canoes.org

Authentic Indigenous Stories

In Indigenous cultures, canoes were the vehicle that brought all ages together and facilitated meaningful community discussions. The 4Canoes name represents four principles that inform all our work:

1. Cultural Rights
2. Human Rights
3. Environmental Rights
4. Equity

As an organization created and led by Indigenous knowledge keepers, sharing authentic experiences through our publications is a cornerstone of our content development philosophy. We strive to create materials that allow readers to feel like they are in the communities with us. Our 4Canoes Team embeds with the featured People communities for months during the creation of each edition, to keep the project rooted in the culture and the pedagogy of land-based instruction. Cultural advisors from the community are invited as guest editors, led by our co-founder and senior editor Kelly Brownbill, to ensure content accuracy.

Available at No Cost to All BC School Districts

The Ojibwe, the Haida of Haida Gwaii, the Mi'kmaq, the Yavapai, and the Dakelh are the first five volumes of a planned series of more than 25 publications. Available in print and digital form, 4Canoes editions and children's stories are accessible electronically to all BC school districts at no additional cost as part of their Focused Education Resources membership.

"We know educators are looking for authentic Indigenous classroom resources, said Maureen Ciarniello, Director of Education Services for Focused ED. "4Canoes has rich, relevant content and stunning images. The fact that it's Canadian-created is a bonus for our BC schools, and the addition of materials for younger students makes these resources relevant for K-12 students."

4Canoes is building on our original editions as a springboard to develop classroom-focused materials:

- Educator Guides for each volume
- Special Editions with OwlKids:
 - Print and digital guides to accompany each volume. Available now:
 - Edition 1: *The Ojibwe of Great Spirit Island*
 - Edition 2: *The Haida of Haida Gwaii*
 - Student activity book
 - Teacher guides and STEAM-based lesson plans
- Interactive, award-winning digital picture books, such as *Gifts for Dawnis* and *Whispers on the Water*, both awarded Best in Canada awards by the Canadian Children's Book Centre (CCBC)

Up Next: Children's Books, Documentaries & Lecture Series for Teachers

Several types of new educational content are currently in development. In addition to new children's books, we are about to start work on 4Canoes editions featuring The Haudenosaunee and the Maori of New Zealand. This fall, a small team that includes educators will travel to Sable Island, 300 km off the East Coast of Canada, to create a feature-length documentary and educator resource materials from the Mi'kmaq and STEAM perspective.

We heard from many K-12 educators who are eager to incorporate Indigenous content into classroom learning, but had concerns about confirming what is authentic, how to teach land-based education, and how to avoid appropriation. To help teachers share Indigenous content with confidence, 4Canoes has created a pre-recorded five-part mini-lecture series, **Exploring Land-Based Education**.

To learn more about 4Canoes, visit 4Canoes.org.



Access 4Canoes Resources

4Canoes' publications and educator supports are available at no additional cost to all BC school districts as part of their Focused Education Resources membership. These, and other digital resources, are easily accessible by teachers and students from school or home, through focusedresources.ca.

For assistance, contact
info@focusedresources.com

focusedresources.ca

As part of the BCPVPA's governance structure, the BCPVPA Board of Directors has established a number of Standing Committees to advise the Board of Directors on issues of importance to the BCPVPA and its members. The Board's ability to establish a committee is outlined in the BCPVPA's Constitution and Bylaws:

10.1 Formation of Committees

The Board may create such standing and special committees as may from time to time be required. Any such committee will limit its activities to the purpose or purposes for which it is appointed and will have no powers except those specifically conferred by a Board Resolution. Unless specifically designated as a standing committee, any special committee so created must be created for a specified time period only. Upon completion of the earlier of the specified time period or the task for which it was appointed, a special committee will automatically be dissolved.

To date, the Board of Directors has established the following BCPVPA Standing Committees that regularly meet each year. With Standing Committees, the Board has made a financial commitment to assure that committee members' release time and/or travel expenses are covered by the BCPVPA.

Budget Committee

The Budget Committee reviews the budget and associated processes, and may provide advice to the Board on issues and policies.

Contract Advisory Committee (CAC)

The CAC supports contract reps in local Chapters and provides a comprehensive view of information, trends, and issues related to member contracts.

Governance Committee

The Governance Committee is convened to support work related to the Association's bylaws and constitution.



by

Kevin Reimer

Executive Director, BCPVPA

CARING

Indigenous Leadership Advisory Committee (ILAC)

ILAC explores ways to support members as they are introduced to Indigenous ways of learning in their schools and communities.

Professional Learning and Development (PLD) Committee

The PLD Committee conducts needs assessments, and provides feedback and support for the development and delivery of current and new BCPVPA programs.

Workplace Intensification and Well-being Committee (WIWC)

The WIWC advocates for healthy, respectful, and inclusive workplaces, and a shared commitment to member wellness.

Standing Committee members serve for two-year

terms and may serve on a committee for up to three consecutive terms. Each spring, the BCPVPA issues an application form for any members interested in serving on a committee or interested in reapplying to serve on a committee if their two-year term has expired.

The applications are then reviewed by the BCPVPA staff to see if the member's qualifications and experience are a good fit for the work of the committee. The quality and number of applications submitted is always impressive, and it can be quite a challenge to settle on only a few candidates to fill standing committee vacancies.

Following a thorough review, the BCPVPA staff present their recommendations to the BCPVPA President, and successful candidates are notified that their committee membership has been tentatively approved by the President. At the Board of Directors' annual August meeting, the Board reviews the



COMMITTEES

candidates and the recommendations, and formally approves the committee membership.

Each Standing Committee has specific terms of reference that has been developed by the Board of Directors. Each committee's role is to address specific issues and make recommendations, as necessary, for the Board of Directors' consideration.

As priorities for members and the Association evolve over time, the Board has established working groups or ad hoc committees to address specific issues on their behalf. With the increasing concern over member health and well-being, the Board established a working group that was originally referred to as a

'health and well-being working group'. That group operated for several years, and as the health and well-being of our members continued to emerge as a significant and ongoing priority, the Board established a Work Intensification and Well-being Standing Committee to continue the work of the initial working group.

Committee representation is an important function of the BCPVPA. Amongst our members, there is a spectrum of incredible skills, experiences, and training that the Association relies upon to better serve our members and the ongoing work of the BCPVPA. We hope that our members will consider involvement with their colleagues and the Association by applying to one of our committees in the spring.



For more information on BCPVPA
Standing Committees, contact
kevin@bcvpva.bc.ca

Stay on top of your professional health



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

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

BCPVPA EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAM

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

Questions about the EIP?

Visit the FAQ section on the BCPVPA or humanworks websites or contact:

humanworks

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PHONE: 604-734-4130

www.humanworks.ca



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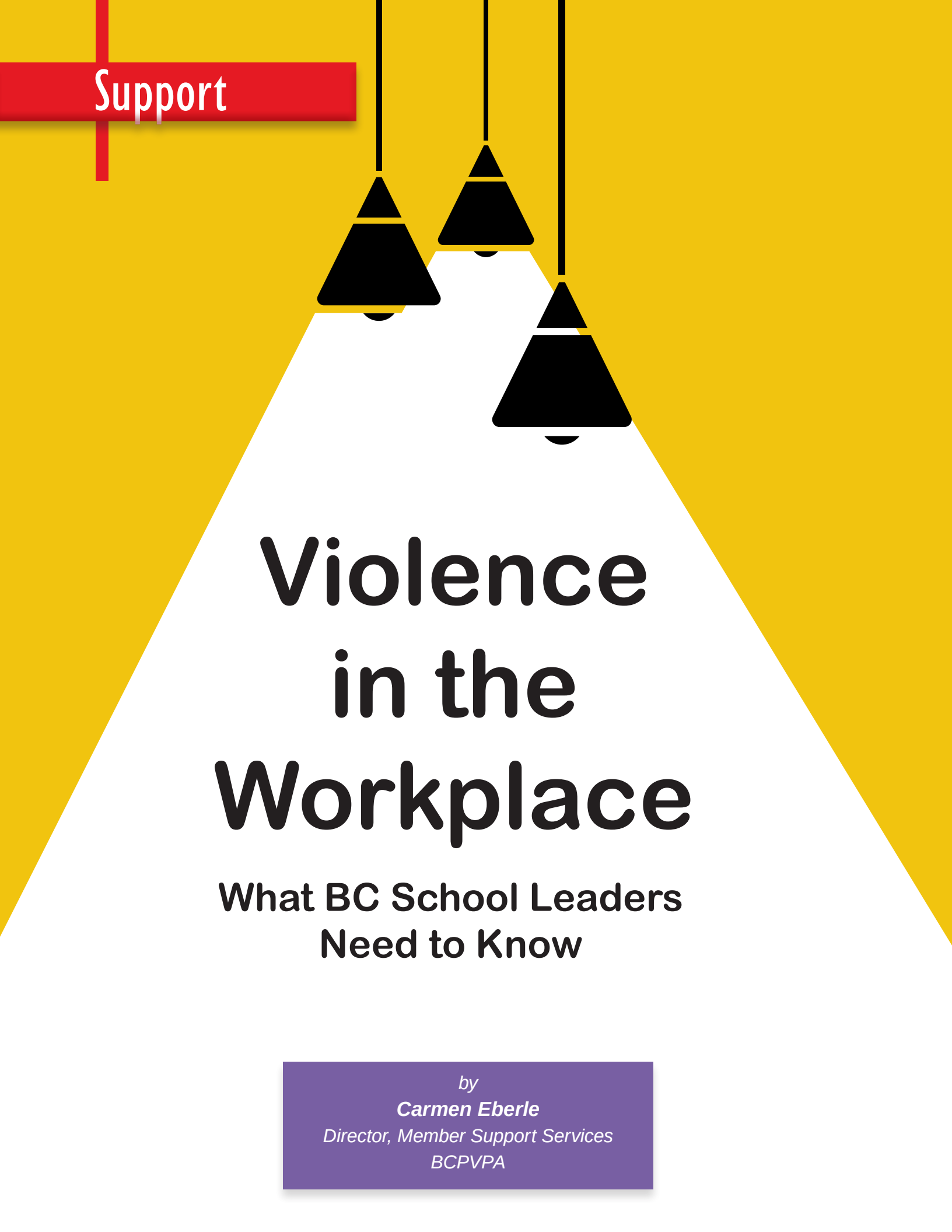
“I have found it valuable to learn from someone
outside my district, in an authentic way.
The real-life experiences of my Mentor
put my theoretical learning into perspective.”

(2020 Mentee)

Mentorship is just one of the professional learning and development
opportunities that the BCPVPA offers to more than 2,600 Principals
and Vice-Principals in BC's public education system.

bcpvpa.org

bcpvpa



Support

Violence in the Workplace

What BC School Leaders
Need to Know

by

Carmen Eberle

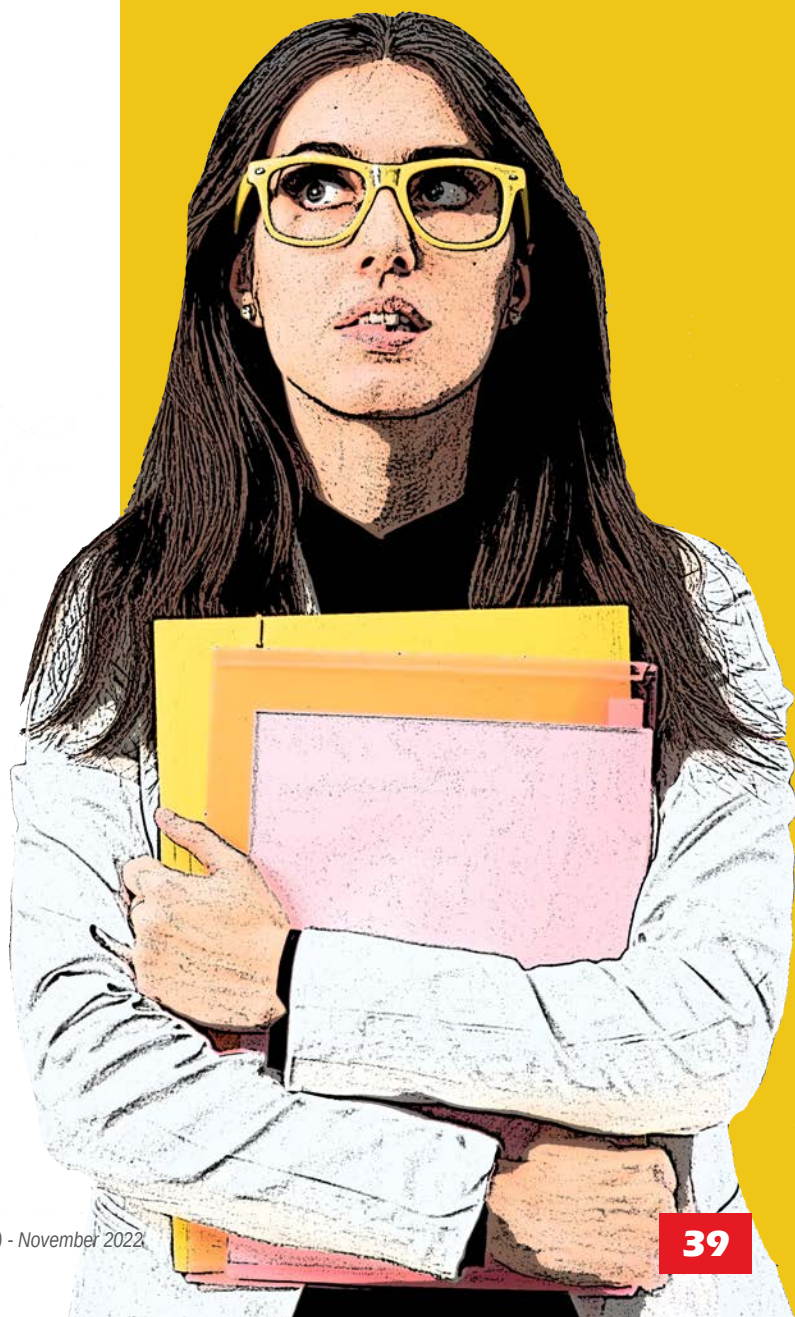
*Director, Member Support Services
BCPVPA*

Over the span of a school-based administrative career, one becomes acutely aware of the potential for violence and the fiduciary responsibilities that come with protecting employees. As each school year unfolds, the accountability required to keep our employees safe from potential threats is clearly drawn alongside.

Our jobs are increasingly complex. Part of what we do involves working directly with individuals who – for various reasons – may act in a physically aggressive manner towards others. Ultimately, school leaders are responsible for ensuring that staff are equipped to create the environmental conditions conducive to learning, while also adhering to legislative requirements intended to mitigate risks. Striking the balance between inclusive education and safety is important. This article examines policy, administrative procedures, risk assessments, reporting procedures, corrective actions, and the necessity of post-incident debriefs. These are core elements of your response to challenging situations as a leader.

Professional Guidance Related to Violence in the Workplace

Before we outline administrators' statutory obligations, it is important to understand that violence in the workplace is defined as *"attempted or actual assaults, or any threatening statement or behavior, towards an employee of your company by any person other than a co-worker, which gives the employee reasonable cause to believe that they are at risk of injury."* (WorkSafeBC). 'Violence' can be a problematic term when used in relation to students who are neurodiverse; however, WorkSafeBC is clear that it is necessary to use this term for their purposes. Equipped with this definition of violence, we can review the regulations that will help mitigate risks and increase understanding of requirements related to violence in the workplace.



The information below is adapted from WorkSafeBC (Workers Compensation Board) "Take Care", June 2012.

District Policy and Administrative Procedures

The increase in WorkSafeBC claims for employees in schools can often be attributed to mental injury that may result from repeated exposure to violent acts that can occur when working with dysregulated students. In these scenarios, there can be a fear to report: employees may feel it is part of the job, worry about the repercussions of reporting, feel external pressure to not report, have a fear of damaging relationships, or even have a sense that reporting may not lead to effective change. Fortunately, all school districts have local policies to keep staff safe. Policies and procedures are important to our role as they govern what we do and relate to the administration of program, property, student, staff, and Board matters. Each district has health and safety guidelines that fall under policy and, in some cases, administrative procedures. Guidelines related to violence in the workplace may be centered around maintaining reports and record keeping. In advance of the school year, administrators are expected to prepare themselves to meet the statutory obligations in relation to WorkSafeBC by:

- Reviewing all district policies and administrative procedures related to violence prevention, and asking for clarification where required
- Establishing a Joint Health and Safety Committee as per district guidelines and WCB regulations
- Regularly reviewing, revising, updating, and monitoring Employee Safety Plans at the start of the year
- Including violence prevention materials in the staff handbook or Emergency Preparedness plan, and reviewing in detail at the first staff meeting

- Placing violence prevention policy and procedures in the Employee handbook

Some useful workplace violence prevention resources for the K-12 education workplace can be found on the WCB website bit.ly/WSBCPrevent, including supplementary videos, posters, prevention strategies, and reporting and risk assessment templates.

Importance of Adhering to Risk Assessment Protocols

Because of the wide range of potential situations where educators can be exposed to violent or aggressive behaviours, it is important to respond in a way that will prevent and reduce the risks towards staff and others. Factors to consider when assessing the risk are the context for the behaviour, the level of risk towards others, and the intensity and frequency of behaviors. With respect to the individual needs of students, the school environment, and the capacity or experience of staff working with students who have potential for violence must also be considered. Where students present a known challenging behaviour, completing a risk assessment helps everyone to better understand the degree of risk involved, who may be at risk and to what degree, and allows for sensitive management of the incidents.

Reporting as a Means of Prevention

Reporting violent incidents is crucial to prevention, and can protect you and your staff from future incidents. It is important to report the intensity and frequency of violent incidents – as well as near misses – so that districts can assist and respond in a timely manner. Reporting student violence can sometimes lead to additional supports or resources in the form of protective equipment, specialized training, or a potential increase of external and internal specialist support. The involvement of specialists can assist

schools to identify corrective measures that will reduce employee exposure to violent incidents. This may help school staff to identify trends and plan for specific times of the year, days of the week, or common operational situations where violence and aggression towards members of staff are more likely to occur. It is extremely important to:

- Instruct all staff to report any incidents of violence, physical or verbal threats
- Investigate all incidents of reportable behavior and identify the steps needed to avoid reoccurrence
- Initiate corrective action without delay and as reasonably possible
- Follow all district procedures on reporting incidents, including investigation notes, corrective actions, documentation of physician advice provided, and confirmation if treatment is sought
- Advise staff who report injuries or symptoms to consult a doctor

Surprisingly, many incidents of violence go unreported. Talking about the importance of reporting raises awareness. The more aware we are, the more likely it is that remedy and healthy working conditions can be achieved.

Corrective Actions

Corrective actions are focused on the identified issue and root cause. An example of violence that would require corrective action is when a community member verbally abuses a staff member. In this scenario, there is an obvious observed safety risk that requires timely corrective measures. Examples of immediate corrective measures could include initiating a de-escalating discussion, verbally requesting that the person remove themselves from



the situation, redirecting the person to a private space to express concerns away from staff members, and possibly establishing healthy boundaries for future respectful correspondence. In extreme cases, immediate corrective measures may involve a peace officer, and issuance of Section 177 of the School Act which *“prohibits the disturbance or interruption of school proceedings or official school functions, and authorizes principals and other school administrators to direct individuals to leave school property and to call for assistance from a peace officer if necessary.”* This action is rare, and applied only in extreme circumstances where school board approval may be necessary. An example of an extreme case is when an adult enters the school environment unannounced and proceeds to intimidate, verbally threaten, or act aggressively towards employees. In this example, police may also be notified to help identify the individual, and to recommend corrective actions up to and including criminal charges. Any time risks are identified, you as a supervisor – or the district as your employer – must take the necessary steps to minimize, if not eliminate, the risks. Some considerations include:

- Identifying workplace layout, lighting, triggers, egress routes, communication plans, proximity, training, equipment, and any identified concerns as reported in the risk assessment
- Informing new employees of hazards related to their employment; ensuring they have access to, and understanding of, any preventative procedures
- If the identified risk is a known individual, informing any staff likely to encounter the individual of the identity of the individual, nature of the risk, preventative procedures, and reporting protocols
- Directly addressing and setting behavioural expectations of any individual: staff, student, parent, guardian, or community member

- Reviewing policies, regulations, acts, OHS, and WCB guidelines
- Involving the employer or 911 as required

School leaders can reach out to the district Health and Safety Manager to assist with identifying issues and root causes to prevent reoccurrence.

Training and Safety Equipment Needs

Training and the use of personal protective equipment protects staff from physical harm that cannot be eliminated due to the nature of the work assigned. Appropriate equipment and training can keep you from being liable for your own and other staff members' injuries, because you are ensuring your duty to protect. An example of protective gear may include Kevlar sleeves to prevent injury from biting and scratching, or shin pads to prevent injury from kicking. To access protective intervention training for your school, seek assistance from the OHS Officer for your district. Some additional reminders:

- Regularly update Employee Safety Plans, and other identifiable resources
- Adequately train staff to carry out activities without posing a risk to themselves or others
- Work closely with the OHS Teams and, if relevant, the district Student Services Team to ensure support plans and risk management plans are implemented effectively
- Ensure all staff working directly with students who have the potential for violence are made aware of the Employee Safety Plan, and are provided with safety equipment and training relevant to their role in working with the student

Staff may require training and safety equipment support from specialist staff, district staff, or external

experts who can deliver appropriate trauma-informed, Violence Risk Threat Assessment, and non-violence crisis training relevant to prevention and intervention.

Cautionary Use of Restraints

At times, school leaders are involved in situations where they are asked to step in and calm a dysregulated student. In situations like these, pending a risk assessment, you may be required to have a Positive Behaviour Plan and/or Employee Safety Plan in place to clarify the different roles and responsibilities assigned. Often, Principals and Vice-Principals come in as a 'last resort' after staff have exhausted all other options. They may step into a situation that has been developing over time, and are now tasked with making difficult decisions regarding next steps. School leaders take varying approaches to calm the student, peers, and staff. If the use of restraints is being considered, District Policy must be followed. The use of restraints is a rare occurrence, and considered a last-resort, late-stage intervention whereby all other options for de-escalation have been exhausted, and imminent danger to cause serious harm to selves or others is evident. In very rare circumstances, one of the approaches that may be outlined in the safety plan is the use of restraints. Complaints may arise from observers, staff, and parents when a restraint is used. Typical complaints include undue force, lack of communication, and failure to follow safety plan guidelines; therefore, when entering an escalated situation, be mindful to:

- Have adequate training and safety equipment available to you and your staff
- Follow and review district's Policy and Administrative Procedures correctly and often
- Remain calm and act as a judicial parent would
- Do not 'interfere' when there are no signs of imminent danger to self or others



- Exhaust all possible strategies before engaging physically with a child
- Debrief incident in a timely manner with parent, appropriate district and school staff

In attending unknown, elevated situations, Principals are expected to make split-second decisions based on what they observe in the moment. All the while, the Principal is also considering the escalated student's well-being, the movement of students around them in the school, the history of the student, and the student's ability to co-regulate. Each situation is unique and can be highly emotional for everyone involved, including the Principal who is expected to remain calm and focused. It is not an easy task, even for Principals who have significant training and experience in this area.

To ensure you are prepared to deal with violence in the moment, school leaders need to take the time to read and understand the district's expectations for these situations. All districts are required by the Ministry of Education and Child Care to have a current restraint policy; administrators need to review this policy, and ask clarifying questions. Where a procedure is in place, it is crucial to be familiar with the guidelines around the use of restraints in schools. Districts are expected to provide information, training, and safety equipment as required.

Working Alone

All districts have specific working alone procedures. Educators have access to school sites, and many work early, on weekends, over breaks, and during the evening. Where there is risk of violence for employees working alone, employers must:

- Ensure that check-ins are made at reasonable intervals
- Identify employee location and method of check-in

- Establish reasonable length of time employee can work alone
- Determine if it is reasonable to allow employee to work alone, given the situation or location

Guidelines vary from location to location, so be sure to review procedures with staff so that they can make an informed choice. Working in isolation increases the risk for confrontations, and reduced access to supports if an injury or emergency occur, particularly if staff are working in the late evening. Be consistent in establishing procedures, and remember: these guidelines apply to you as well!

Post-Incident Debrief

Post-incident debrief discussions are intended to put a critical event into perspective. Although employees do not have to engage in a debrief following an incident, one should immediately be offered and proactive steps taken towards prevention. In some circumstances, a post-incident debrief may take place with the support of your critical event response team. Violence can have a significant impact on the physical and psychological health and safety of employees, and the debrief allows time for staff to process and receive access to support.

Next Steps....

School leaders have tremendous responsibility when it comes to preventing violence in the workplace, and we encourage you to reflect on the next steps that are needed to effectively implement district-wide and WSCB expectations. If you feel that there is a gap in systems or policies in your district, decide how you can use your voice and influence to provide the feedback that can contribute to everyone's safety. Challenge yourself as a leader to converse with curiosity, observe with purpose, and be responsive to the needs of your school and community.

In closing, all students have a right to equitable access to learning opportunities. Given the layers of complexity, it is important to navigate carefully and ensure that legal obligations are met and human rights are not violated in the process. If you don't know where to start or what to do next, ask for help. Approach someone in your district office, or at the BCPVPA office, for professional guidance. Your role is busy and complex, and being proactive can help you in potentially challenging situations.

**“Awareness means understanding
that workplace violence
can impact anyone, in any
setting, and across all
levels of employment.”**

Stephen J. Romano et al.

There are areas of the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations and sections of the Workers Compensation Act (WCA) that pertain to violence in the workplace and dealing with employer, employee, and supervisory responsibilities. The references provided in this article are intended to help readers understand the importance of some of the health and safety requirements related to violence. Please refer to the specific sections of the OHS regulations, Workers Compensation Act, School Act, district policies, and administrative procedures to ensure that you are fully meeting your health and safety obligations.

Acts, Regulations and Policies are subject to change from the date this article was written and subsequently published.



KNOW YOUR PENSION

Frequently-Asked Questions



by

Magdalena Kassis & Ellen Roberts

Directors, Member Support Services

BCPVPA

BCPVPA members are members of the Teachers Pension Plan (TPP), along with our educator colleagues in public sector education: Teachers, Directors of Instruction, Assistant/Associate Superintendents, and Superintendents.

We strongly encourage BCPVPA members to be engaged in their pension plan, regardless of their age or where they are in their career journey. At the BCPVPA office, we often field questions about retirement and pension. Here are some answers to frequently-asked questions.

Am I able to retire before age 65? If so, what are the implications for my pension?

You are eligible to retire at the age of 55, but with a reduced pension. Every year before attaining the age of 61, or 35 years of pensionable service, you will incur a 4.5% penalty per year on your pension and bridge benefit. Your annual pension statement will indicate the earliest date of retirement with a reduced pension, as well as the earliest day you can retire with an unreduced pension. You must begin taking your pension at the age of 71 even if you are still working.

What is the bridge benefit?

The bridge benefit is a temporary monthly payment made to retirees until they attain the age of 65. It was designed to augment pensions until members were eligible to receive their Canada Pension Plan (CPP) pension benefit.

The bridge benefit was discontinued in 2018, so members who paid into the TPP prior to 2018 will note that their bridge amount has not changed since 2018; members new to the profession in BC since 2018 do not have a bridge benefit.

What are the pension options I can choose from?

Single life

You can choose this option if you are single, OR if your spouse has waived their right to the minimum 60% joint pension. If you are single, it is the only option you can choose.

With the Single Life option, you can choose a lifetime

monthly pension payment with no 'guarantee', or with a 'guarantee' period of either 5, 10, or 15 years.

Single life without a guarantee:

This option provides the largest amount of pension available. However, no income or protection is provided to anyone other than you. Payments would cease once you die.

Single life with a guarantee:

This option allows you to name a beneficiary for a designated period after your death.

Joint life:

This option is available to you if you have a spouse. It guarantees a monthly pension for both your lifetime and your spouse's lifetime. If you die before your spouse, they would receive your monthly pension – or a portion of your monthly pension – for the remainder of their life. You must choose at least 60% for your spouse unless they waive this legal requirement.

Joint Life Options

100% joint life:

Your full lifetime monthly pension payment will continue to your spouse for their lifetime.

A joint life of less than 100%

- You can choose any percentage that you wish. Your statement will show the options of a few specific percentages, but you can choose any percentage to 99%. The percentage you choose is the percentage of your pension that your spouse will receive for the remainder of their life if you die before them.
- A 'guarantee' option is also available with a joint life option of less than 100%.

What does it mean to name a 'guarantee' on my pension?

You may choose a 5, 10, or 15-year guarantee on your pension that you assign to one or more beneficiaries. This ensures that if you pass away during that specified time, the beneficiary will receive your full pension. For example, if you choose a 10-year guarantee and pass away after four years, your beneficiary will receive your full pension for the six remaining years of the guarantee period. A guarantee can be combined with either a single or joint life pension.

I have grand plans for the first years of my retirement. Is there a way to receive more money up front to help pay for those expenses?

Many people plan to pay off existing expenses or travel in their first years of retirement, and may wish for a higher monthly income from their pension to help with those costs. You can purchase a 'temporary annuity' which can be added to either a single life or joint life pension. You are basically front-end loading your pension, whereby you will receive a larger benefit payment each month until the age of 65, and a smaller monthly payment from age 65 onward. On the TPP online pension calculator, you can see how purchasing a temporary annuity will affect your lifetime pension.



How much notice do I need to give my district prior to retiring?

It is recommended that you read your employment agreement carefully to see what is specified regarding notice of retirement. It is commonly 90 days / 3 months. Once you have committed to retire, your school district will alert the TPP of your intention, and you then complete your application for your pension online no more than 90 days prior to – and no later than 30 days before – your targeted retirement date. You can alternately submit a paper application 90 days in advance. For more information about the application process, visit tpp.pensionsbc.ca/an-overview-of-the-pension-application-process.

What if I choose a pension option, but realize it was not the right choice?

It is always best to take time to carefully consider which options will work best for you, but after you receive your letter of acceptance from the TPP, you have 30 days to make a change to your pension option. You are eligible to make changes to your designation of beneficiaries after 30 days, but cannot make changes to the kind of pension you have chosen or the guarantees or annuities.

Am I able to name more than one beneficiary?

Yes, you may name more than one beneficiary. You may only name your spouse as the beneficiary of a joint life pension, but you may name more than one person as the beneficiary of a guarantee. Please read the helpful section on the TPP website about naming beneficiaries: tpp.pensionsbc.ca/beneficiaries

I am currently on Long-Term Disability. How does that impact my pension?

As our Long-Term Disability (LTD) plan is recognized by the TPP, members on LTD continue to accumulate pensionable and contributory service in the pension plan just as when you were working. Neither you nor your district will make financial contributions to your plan while you are on LTD. Some members retire out of LTD if they are unable to return to work. Please refer to this link for further information on LTD and your pension: tpp.pensionsbc.ca/long-term-disability-benefits-and-your-pension

When I retire, will my current benefits with PBC continue?

TPP has brokered an extended medical and dental plan for TPP members with Green Shield, but members may sign up for any plan they choose. One important thing is that you have continuous coverage prior to starting a plan after retirement. Having a break in coverage can potentially result in higher-than-expected premiums in retirement. tpp.pensionsbc.ca/retirement-health-coverage

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*through membership in Focused Education Resources

What is the difference between Contributory Service and Pensionable Service?

Pensionable Service: This is your actual working time – how many full-time equivalent (FTE) years you spend working and contributing as a member of the TPP. If you took a leave of absence during your employment, it will be reflected in your pensionable service. This is the number used to calculate your pension.

Contributory Service: This is the number of years you (and/or your employer) have made contributions to the TPP. It started the day you were first employed and contributing, and ends with retirement, including time you were on approved leaves such as maternity leave.

I was previously married. What right does my ex-spouse have to my pension?

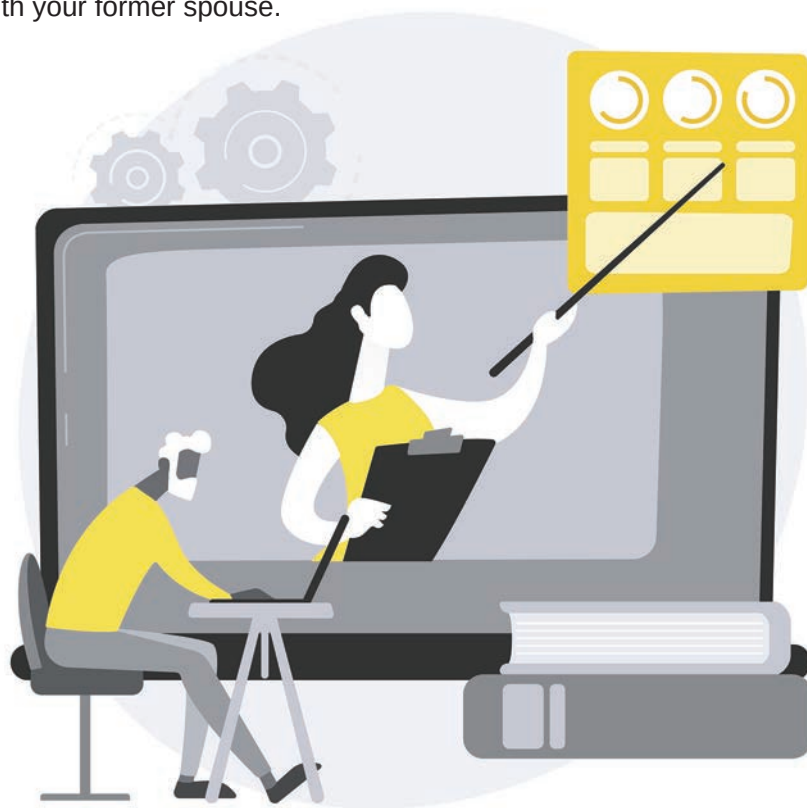
Unless you have legal documentation stating that your previous spouse has relinquished their claim to your pension, they are entitled to 50% of the pension you earned while you were together. Anything you accrued after your documented separation does not have to be split with your former spouse.

Can I work again after I retire?

Yes, *but...*

You cannot work for a TPP employer (for example, a school district) for at least the first 30 days of retirement (or until you receive your first pension payment). If you do, you will not be considered retired by the TPP, and this would impact your eligibility for pension payments.

If you return to teaching or administration at a later date, ensure that your employer knows you are retired so that they do not accidentally deduct pension contributions from your pay. You are not able to start paying into the pension plan once you have started collecting your pension.



Am I allowed to have a second pension plan?

If you take on a non-administrative or teaching job after retirement, and your new employer offers a pension plan different from the TPP, you may be eligible to contribute to that plan. It does sometimes happen that a retired member takes on work with another employer, and is later able to also collect from a second pension plan (for example, a Municipal Pension Plan).

I'm young and years away from retirement. What should I consider?

You will want to consider ensuring that you are maximizing your pension. There are some options that might be helpful.

Buying back service: Members who have been on a leave of absence may be eligible to buy back pensionable service, provided they apply to buy-back within five years of the leave of absence. It can also be possible to pay for this in installments rather than in one lump sum. Buying back service can increase your pension payments in retirement.

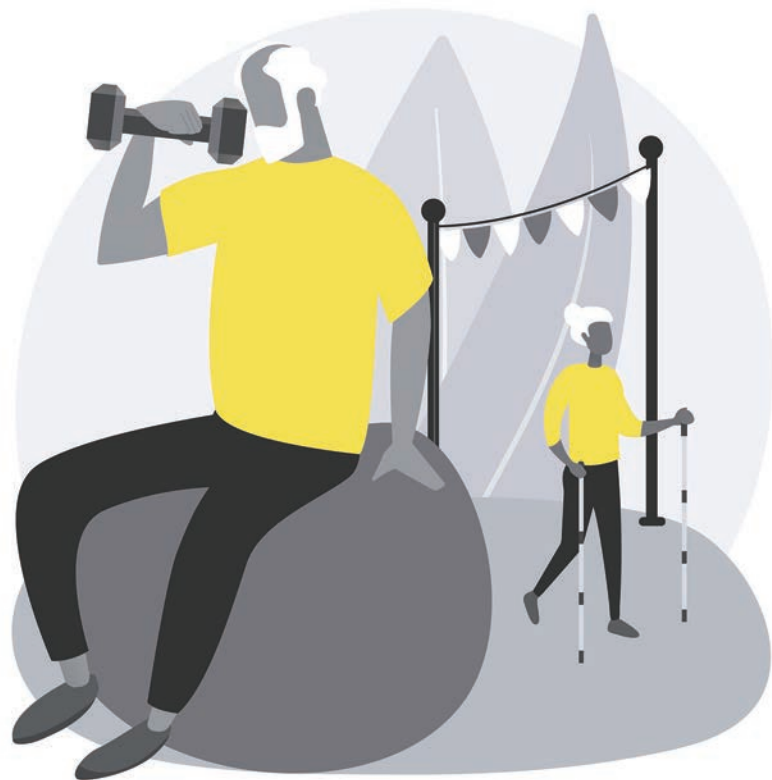
tpp.pensionsbc.ca/submit-a-form-to-buy-service

Child Rearing Credit: Members may be eligible for the Child Rearing Credit if they took time off work to raise a child under the age of seven.

tpp.pensionsbc.ca/submit-a-form-to-claim-a-child-rearing-credit

I still have questions. Where should I go?

- The TPP website is an excellent resource and has very a good online search tool. We always recommend that members search for information directly from the TPP when possible. tpp.pensionsbc.ca
- The BCPVPA Member Support Services team offers workshops on retirement and pension throughout the year. Information is posted in the weekly e-news and on the BCPVPA website. We encourage you to attend!
- We encourage you to log in to the 'My Account' section of the TPP website. From there, you can access your personalized statements and estimates for various pension options and retirement dates.
- For specific questions about your personal pension account, contact the TPP through their online messaging system or phone 1-800-665-6770



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bcpvpa.org

Member Support Services/ Pension & Retirement

The Heart of the Community

by

Andrea McComb, BCPVPA

sharing the voices of

Dan Duncan and Becky Puterbough

SD 58 (Nicola-Similkameen)

Dan Duncan and Becky
Puterbough are Principals
in Merritt, BC, and on
November 15, 2021,
they awoke to a
city-wide evacuation order.

They tell two stories of
leading through a natural
disaster in the midst
of a pandemic.
They are stories of believing
in the good in people, and
how schools are the heart
of the community.

For Dan, with Merritt Central Elementary's proximity to the river, flooding seemed imminent. As information was issued over the radio, people were waking up and trying to figure out what to do. For many, the first phone call was to the school. All through the day, people were reaching out for help in navigating the decisions before them. Dan realized how significant a role he would be taking; he would not be a bystander.

The news did not hit Diamond Vale Elementary in the same way. The school was not so close to the river, so when the news came that schools were being closed, Becky thought they would be back in class in a day. So, even returning several months later, there is still a message on the board from that morning saying that Diamond Vale has closed for the day. Becky arrived just to make sure that no students turned up for school, and one did. It was lucky that she was there. Even then, it never crossed her mind that the school would flood that day.

The whole town was put on evacuation order; it was real. The sewage plant was overflowing, and the river was rising. It was a couple of days later when Becky heard that the water had reached her school.

School district meetings began immediately. People were scattered across multiple communities. Staff reached out to all of the families. Once they knew everyone was safe, they began to offer other supports. Care and support took many forms: meeting people where they were, providing gas cards, groceries, and basic items, and offering transportation. The people who were lucky enough to have a vehicle helped get people to shopping areas, to pick up medicines, and to get loved ones to medical appointments.

The surrounding school districts were amazing, and they were a big part of keeping the school connection. Some districts quickly accepted students. They offered space, and they had clothing, toy, and book drives; a donation centre was formed very quickly. Schools organized gym nights and craft times so

students and families had an opportunity to see each other and connect with some of their teachers. This created a sense of normalcy, even though they were not at home. These schools became the source of connection for our displaced communities.

After nine days, the first people were allowed to come back. The transition back to their homes and town happened in five phases. The district supported the setup of a food bank and a huge donation center. There was a lot of planning, and there were many meetings. The leadership team was meeting on a daily basis to think about what things would look like as the different phases returned, and how they could continue with a very soft form of education until they were back in their school buildings.

If you were given a day to salvage what you could from your school, and you did not know exactly where you were setting up a school or for how long, what would you take? The three older classes in Dan's school were relocated to old middle school that held the district's discarded furniture. Between Christmas and Spring Break, the other seven classes were set up in two churches in town, Crossroads and Evangelical Free. After Spring Break, Dan's school was finally reunited. Becky's school was split

between three sites. The logistics were worked out for busing. Becky knew they were all – one day – returning to Diamond Vale Elementary, and so they needed to keep the feel of being part of the community of Diamond Vale while joining the communities of Merritt Bench Elementary, Nicola Canford Elementary, and École Elementaire Colletville. Once Dan's school was together, teachers worked to create a welcoming learning environment with makeshift desks from odds and ends of discarded furniture in the old middle school.

Then the time came to welcome the kids. Dan shares that, "After six weeks of missed school, there were a lot of happy people, a lot of gratitude and hugs, and a lot of amazement. One parent said, 'I can't believe you've made this work. Just, thank you, this is amazing.' So many people reached out, and the gratitude made it worth it. It felt like Merritt was coming together. There was a recognition that, despite some of the obstacles, kids were at school, and they were where they needed to be."



A kindergarten teacher set up a mini school in her house for 7-8 primary students that live out her way.

*If you were given a day
to salvage what you could
from your school, and you
did not know exactly where
you were setting up a
school or for how long,
what would you take?*

The Type of People in the Education System

Dan and Becky shared their respect and gratitude for so many in the education system, starting with the District Office. “They took care of people first, and they would work out the details later. They responded so quickly to families and staff; the question was always, ‘What do you need?’ They sorted out so many logistics, all while being displaced themselves and working out of an old bakery.”

They spoke of the generous hearts and work ethic of school staffs. If people were able, they were contributing, supervising a gym drop-in, helping people shovel out their homes, driving people to medical appointments.

They spoke of how the families are so appreciative of all of the work schools were doing to stay connected. And, they are grateful to the communities that wrapped Merrittonians with care and supports while they were displaced.

Dan said that, “If these amazing people weren’t in the gym playing indoor soccer with kids, they were at other people’s homes throughout town shoveling out mud, freezing, getting cold, and getting dirty. People were extremely quick to help, which is no surprise in the education system. That’s what we do. The glue and giving that comes from the education system, that is why the story is so important.”

The Role of Connection to Support Mental Health

Connection created a sense of normalcy. Craft time, gym time, Bingo nights, Strongstart, pop-up neighborhood schools, and multiple phone calls and texts were the ways people found to come together.

Diamond Vale Strongstart at the Thompson Hotel in Kamloops



Ewa Olguin is the Strongstart Coordinator at Diamond Vale Elementary, and she evacuated to Kamloops. In the Thompson Hotel she noticed many families from Merritt, so she started a meeting time with students each day in the lobby to colour and connect. The hotel could see the importance of the kids connecting, and offered them space in the Conference Centre. Ewa sourced donations from the Salvation Army, United Way, and Merritt’s White Bear Daycare for snacks, juice, and craft supplies.

From the Merritt Herald (December 7, 2021), the article “Web of Kindness” brings Merritt kids together in Kamloops.



7 staff, including Becky and Dan, help community member on left to muck out her basement on November 28, 2021. The community member was then made a Vice-Principal of Central Elementary on December 1, and instantly begin looking after others!



Pictured left to right:

Taylor Morrison, Dan Duncan, Alison Kuzio, Merrill Livesey, Natasha Omori, Natasha's Dad JC, Becky Puterbough, Lindsay de Visser, Jamie Van Haaster, Natasha's Mom Bonnie



A grade 6/7 teacher in town took in six or seven Intermediate students who live in her neighborhood and ran a mini school. (The lady in the Santa hat is a District counsellor who stopped by the house for a visit)

There was a recognition that, despite some of the obstacles, kids were at school, and they were where they needed to be.

There was an understanding that not all staff were in the same place, some staff had lost their homes, and were not going to be home for months, and many of them are still not home. Right now, schools are here for mental health support.

District level mental health counsellors were brought in to work with people who were impacted the most. At the school level, district counsellors organized a sharing circle for staff to have the opportunity for everybody to talk about their experience. It was really powerful to hear how it impacted people differently.

Becky added, "It's knowing that kids are going through a hard time, that staff are going through a hard time, and being gentle and trying to understand that we all did experience a similar event, but that the levels at which we experienced it are very, very different. And the length of time that we experienced it for was also very different."

The BCPVPA is deeply grateful to Dan Duncan and Becky Puterbough for sharing their remembrances of this experience that was extremely difficult, but which left in its wake the inspirational sense of community that keeps us together.

"It's knowing that kids are going through a hard time, that staff are going through a hard time, and being gentle and trying to understand that we all did experience a similar event, but that the levels at which we experienced it are very, very different"

BECKY PUTERBOUGH

"People were extremely quick to help, which is no surprise in the education system. That's what we do. The glue and giving that comes from the education system, that is why the story is so important."

DAN DUNCAN

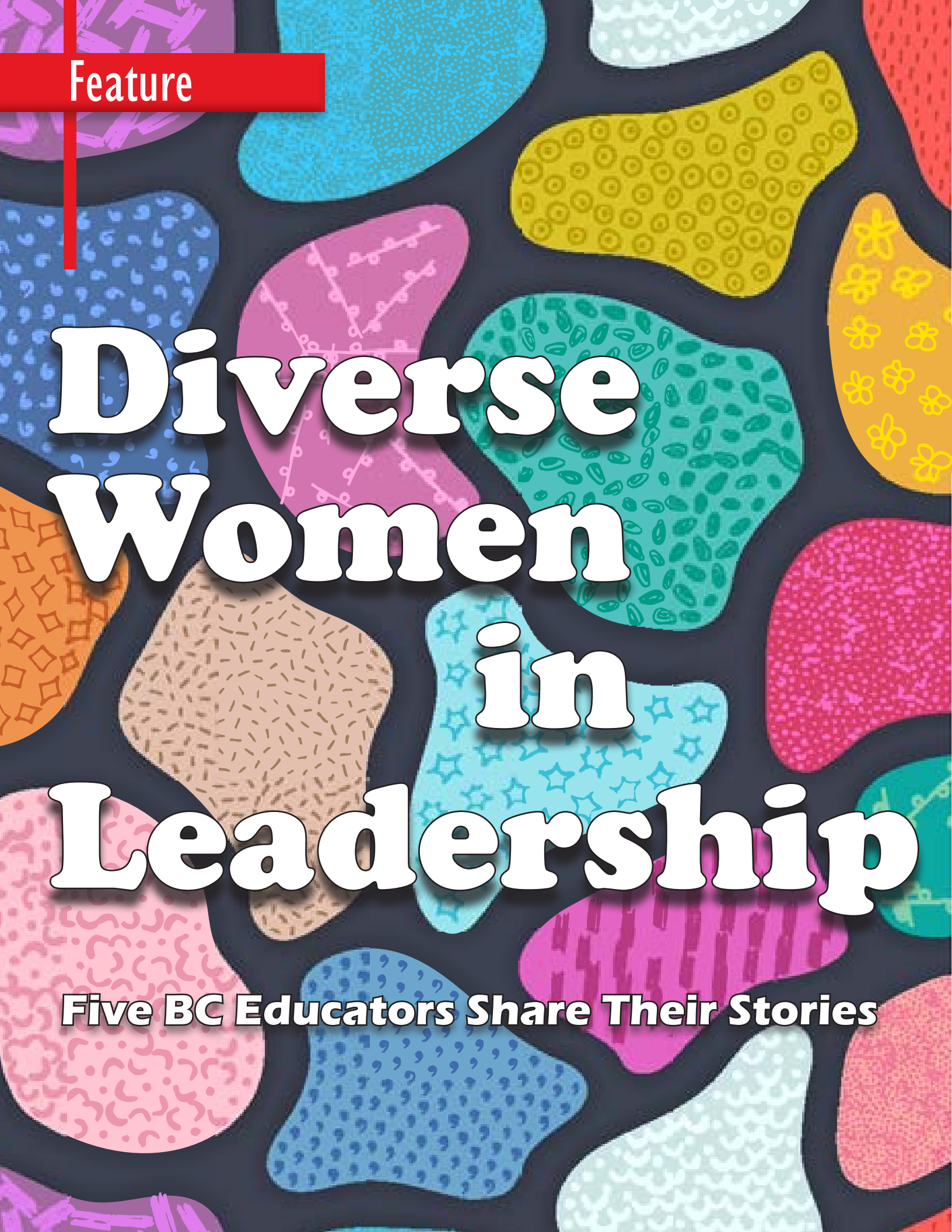


Junior Boys Volleyball: The Panthers

"When Merritt citizens were evacuated, members of the community went to areas they felt were best for their families. This included the members of the volleyball team, and some of these boys were in Kamloops, Kelowna, Salmon Arm, and Prince George, to name a few areas. We began to receive numerous calls from multiple districts in the Okanagan offering us their gyms, fields and whatever else we needed to ensure that teams could still practice. With help from the parents and a coach who was committed to their success, the team was able to compete in the Junior Boys Provincials in Revelstoke. The boys placed third — a feat no boys' volleyball team at MSS has ever accomplished!

For the boys who played, it was to have fun, and for the fans, it was celebrating the strength and resiliency of their community."

Gian Cavaliere
Vice-Principal/Athletic Director
Merritt Secondary School

The background is a dark navy blue with numerous overlapping organic, blob-like shapes in various colors including purple, blue, yellow, orange, pink, and teal. Each shape contains a different pattern: some have small dots, some have larger circles, some have stars, some have wavy lines, and some have floral motifs. A red horizontal bar is positioned at the top left, partially overlapping the purple shapes.

Feature

Diverse Women in Leadership

Five BC Educators Share Their Stories

The BCPVPA's most recent comprehensive member survey revealed that more than 65% of our members identify as women.¹ This figure has demonstrated an upward trend, and is nearer to reflecting the gender representation in BC's teacher population, which is close to 75% ², but still outdistances the representation of women in senior leadership, 25% as noted by Principal Shannon Behan in her comments regarding her recent doctoral research in this issue's "Day in the Life" article.

More and more BC teachers have pulled back the curtain to learn about the school leader role. The BCPVPA's **Explorations for Aspiring School Leaders** program has offered that critical introduction of the role to curious educators seeking new challenges, and women have been represented strongly in registration both for this course, and for the **Foundations for New School Leaders** program. Women are stepping up, stepping in, and bringing their whole selves to the role, balancing responsibilities to children, families, and aging parents, and avidly continuing their learning once they are actively leading in schools and district offices.

Among the women who have attained the key educational leadership role of Principal or Vice-Principal are women from diverse cultural backgrounds who were not typically represented as school administrators in previous decades. Their paths to leadership, and their experiences, have been as varied as they are. The very visible and very public role of a Principal or Vice-Principal is open to scrutiny from peers, senior leaders, staff, students, families, school communities, and sector players.

With everything that they have achieved so far in their careers, and the sometimes-winding road they have followed, what is it like for women of diverse cultural backgrounds to lead in BC schools? Five school leaders generously offer their stories, and we hope these accounts can spark a conversation, within our membership and beyond.

1 BCPVPA Member Survey, 2019

2 <https://bcpsea.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/19-20-All-Groups-Headcount-by-Gender.pdf>



Ranjit Bains is the Principal of
Windermere Secondary School
in the Vancouver School District (SD 39)

Ranjit

had attended college in India and worked as an airplane mechanic. When he moved to Canada, his Indian education was not recognized, and he worked in sawmills for the rest of his life. My mom was not permitted to attend school past the first grade. We saw in our parents two very intelligent, resourceful, and hard-working people. I had a responsibility to respect my parents' sacrifices and honour my opportunity and privilege. I was the first in my family born in Canada, and the first to attend university. I have always had an appetite for learning and used to say if someone would pay me to be a student for life, I would do it. Being an educator is exactly that: I continue to learn and grow, stay young by working with youth, and get paid for it!

Though I didn't enter the education profession with the goal of becoming a leader, the journey to leadership was a natural one for me. Growing up, I watched my dad and his involvement in various leadership roles both within our community and at our local Sikh temple. He truly embodied the concept of a servant leader; he believed his role was to serve and support others so the whole community thrived. He was an empathic listener and a collaborative decision maker. At the dinner table, he would share stories about his role on the temple council. These conversations were foundational to my own learning about relationships, service, and leadership. My dad passed away a few years ago and I remember his life and leadership lessons every day. I know he was proud that his sacrifices for our family and his profound influence led to my becoming the first female South Asian secondary school Principal in Vancouver in 2017.

The inspiration to join the education profession was my family. One of my uncles was a respected teacher in India, and he had a profound influence on those he taught. When he moved to Canada in the 1980s, he would often stay with us and modelled what it meant to be a lifelong learner and educator. He read voraciously, learned to drive a car when he was in his 60s, and taught my siblings and me how to read Punjabi and play soccer. His love for teaching and learning was foundational in my own journey.

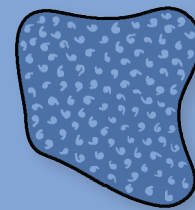
On a day-to-day basis, my parents encouraged my siblings and me to obtain a higher education and find careers which served others and brought us joy. My parents immigrated from India to Canada in the 1970s to provide better opportunities for the family. My dad

One of the biggest challenges I've faced is the microaggressions and assumptions people make about me and my leadership role. My first year as a Vice-Principal, I was placed in the school in which I had taught for over 12 years. I was elated and proud that my involvement and hard work was recognized, and that I had the opportunity to continue serving in the school I considered home. I was quickly deflated when one of my colleagues, who I had known for years, made a comment: "Well, we all know why you got the job. You check all the right boxes." I can't remember how I responded. I would like to think it was something witty that put them in their place. However I responded, the comments affected me deeply and I realized that it was quite possible that others shared this perspective. It was discouraging to think that people were going to see my ethnicity, gender, and age and believe that I obtained my position through 'equal opportunity' initiatives rather than from my hard work. Since then, I have felt that I have to work ten times harder than everyone else to prove that I am in the role because of my competence, not due to checking the right boxes.

Unfortunately, during my ten years as an Administrator, I have come up against these types of biases and microaggressions too often. I work to overcome by leading from a place of integrity, honesty, empathy, and compassion. When I have a chance to use my voice and position to advocate for and elevate others, I do. I let my work speak for itself and don't concern myself with the assumptions others may make. The greatest reward for my efforts is when I know I have deconstructed a person's initial assumptions about me, and demonstrated that I am in my role for a reason.

My advice to others would be to be confident and authentic. You have valuable insights and an essential voice to bring to the decision-making table. Don't be afraid to let your culture and background influence your leadership style, it is who you are, and you don't have to change to be an effective leader. Share this

context and your philosophies with the people you work with and lead. It will help them understand diverse voices and perspectives and hopefully – ultimately – better understand the diversity of our students. There is no better way to use your leadership platform than to allow your authentic self to inform and improve the experiences of our diverse learners.



“Don't be afraid
to let your culture
and background
influence your
leadership style,
it is who you are,
and you don't have
to change to be an
effective leader.”

Ranjit Bains



Wendy Yu is the Principal of
Gleneagle Secondary School
in the Coquitlam School District (SD 43)

Wendy

wand. Looking back, I should have known that I was meant to be a teacher.

My hard-working immigrant parents had the hopes that many immigrant parents have for their children. I was going to go to school, earn good grades, and become a doctor. That was a respected career that would be a good income earner. While I could have rebelled, it wasn't in my nature. I went to school, earned those good grades, and headed straight to university after high school.

As a teacher, I enjoyed trying different things. I taught at the elementary level, middle level, and secondary level. I took on various roles at the school, chaired committees and was a department head. After teaching for about 10 years, the next logical thing that I thought I should try was a more formal leadership role.

Honestly, through all of it, I never really felt marginalized at all. I didn't realize how my differences played into situations. As I think about it now, there were definitely obstacles.

As a new Principal, parents often commented "Oh, but you're so young," or "I never had such a pretty Principal as a kid". I took it as a compliment at the time, and laughed it off. Now I wonder if my male colleagues received such comments. Was there more to those comments? Was it a compliment? Would this be considered a microaggression? I didn't give it much thought. But I noticed it.

On the flip side, there were also positive experiences.

My parents always called me a banana – yellow on the outside and white on the inside. I identified with my Canadian upbringing, and I struggled because I was never Chinese enough to my family but certainly didn't look 'white' to the rest of the world.

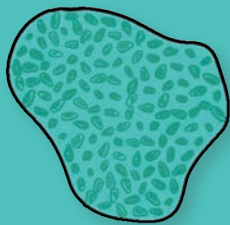
As a child, I played 'school' with my sister all the time. I was the teacher, of course, and I leaned the small chalkboard against the wall in the living room and taught my younger sister how to multiply and divide. I gave her spelling tests, and I made her do book reports (my favourite being the book report on *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*). I read *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* so many times I had it memorized, and for a treat I would play the 45 RPM record of *Sleeping Beauty*, and have my sister follow along and turn the pages when she heard the magic

One was when I came to secondary school, and I was asked to introduce a Women in Business event. The students indicated that they were so happy to see a woman as a Principal in a secondary school. I'm grateful to them for opening my eyes a bit wider. At the time I didn't notice, but now I do.

It's not until the past couple of years that the idea of equity and awareness of cultural competence has been on my radar. I'm noticing things more and more.

Now, I am so proud to be a Chinese woman. It's a realization that took time, and really had me examining my identity and values; I think I had to wait until I felt more secure and confident about myself.

If you are a woman from a diverse background, I encourage you to pursue a leadership role. Your voice needs to be heard. In order to see things differently, and appreciate many perspectives, it is important to have different people sitting at the table. Even though you may not realize that you bring something different, know that you do. Look around, and you will start to notice it too.



“... through all of it, I never really felt marginalized at all. I didn't realize how my differences played into situations. As I think about it now, there were **definitely obstacles.**”

Wendy Yu

Iram

I knew from early on that I wanted to be a teacher because I loved being at school and I had an insatiable thirst for learning. I spent a lot of time in the library, listening to the things that were happening in other students' lives while reading about stories of people from around the world. In class, I'd finish my work quickly then creep towards my teachers' desks, drawing them into conversations about anything. I learned a lot through listening.

Through all my elementary and secondary school years, I came across only one racialized teacher when I was in grade 4. She taught grade 6 and she was Indian. I was fascinated by her and I wanted to be like her. She was elegant, confident, and 'modern'. She fit in despite her skin colour. I remember how surprised I was when teachers transformed our library to host a beautiful traditional, 'white' bridal shower for her, even though she was Indian. I never had her as a teacher and I don't remember ever having a conversation with her, but just her presence as a teacher at my school was enough to show me that someone who looked like me could be a teacher.

As a teacher, there were many women who supported and encouraged me to share my knowledge and to take on leadership roles. I taught in urban schools, and there was diversity all around me. I still look to some of these teachers for guidance and support. When I first became a school administrator 14 years ago, I entered a work space that was quite different. Most of the administrators at the time were men, and there were only a few administrators who were visibly diverse.



Iram Khan is the Principal of David Brankin Elementary School in the Surrey School District (SD 36)

Being a school administrator can be an isolating experience. Being a racialized woman school administrator adds more complexity to the role. When you are a leader of the school, you are constantly under a lot of scrutiny. Members of my school communities have not hesitated to let me know that they preferred to speak to a male colleague, and for years I tolerated racist comments and microaggressions that included:

“You speak very good English”

“Where do you come from?”

“You are lucky to have a year round tan.”

“Do we have a brown Principal because we have

so many brown students. Why didn't we get a white Principal?”

“You won't suspend the other kid because he's like you.”

“My son is being bullied, there is reverse discrimination going on here.”

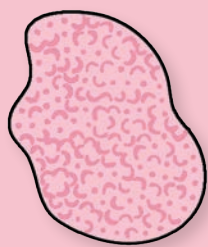
However, at the same time, I have had positive experiences as a result of being a racialized woman. Many racialized women and students have been more comfortable sharing personal stories with me, particularly related to domestic abuse, childhood trauma, and cultural conflicts. In my first year, I had a mother tell me, “Thank God, finally I can understand how my son is doing in school,” because we spoke the same language. She was so happy, even though my Urdu is terrible!

Every time I go to a gathering of school leaders, I do a quick scan to see if the group is diverse. Often, I am disappointed, and a feeling of isolation and panic swells up in me. I know I am going to need to work harder to make myself heard, be a good representative of diversity, and be open to answer questions about ‘my culture’. The pressure to be the one to speak up for diversity, and to question decisions made from one dominant lens, is mentally exhausting.

We have a big problem. Our communities are diverse, yet we do not see that diversity represented in our school leaders, or reflected in the way our school systems operate. As a leader with the privileges that come with the title of ‘school administrator’, we have the responsibility to create leaders who come from diverse backgrounds in our staff, students, and parent community. This is the only way the systems in place that guide education can be changed to reflect the values and needs of our diverse communities.

We need more racialized women leaders in education, and we need to remove the barriers that prevent them from advancing to leadership roles. I have

found creating and joining different affinity network groups to be very helpful. They create a sense of belonging, and ignite confidence. Affinity groups share the load in tackling workplace discrimination, microaggressions, and systemic racism. They create spaces for people to share their struggles, support one another, and heal from systemic trauma. As a result of the support of these courageous spaces, stories of identity, intersectionality, adversity, and success can be shared with the wider community. Stories draw people together, push us to reflect and allow us to better understand why changes need to be made.



“As a teacher,
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Iram Khan

Ji-Ai

I have always valued education. From early on, in Korea, my mother encouraged me to read and learn anything and everything. After immigrating to Canada as a young child, I had a difficult time adjusting to my new life – my parents divorced, my mom left behind, new step-mom and step-siblings, emotional abuse – and the new language and culture. However, whenever I had problems, I could always count on my teachers to encourage and support me in getting through; even though they may not have been aware of my issues, I appreciated that I could always count on them to be on my side. In high school, I connected closely with the science teachers, especially Mr. Moore who was my biology teacher. I spent time at school hanging out in the science lab, rather than going home. I fell in love with the world of biology – the jars of preserved specimen, microscope slides, taxidermy (strange, I know!) and this helped me decide to go into the field of biology at UBC. There, in third year, I transferred to the Education department. I had always loved children, and I thought that there would be nothing more wonderful than to share my love and knowledge of science with them. Looking back, I think that I wanted to be there for children who may have gone through traumatic experiences, in the way that my own teachers were there for me.

After 21 years of classroom teaching in a high school, I was looking for my next challenge. I was also interested in working with NGOs in developing countries, with teacher professional development, and I needed administrative experience for that. So, I tried my hand at school-based leadership as a department head and as a Vice-Principal, and I found



Ji-Ai Cho is a recently retired Principal living in Squamish, BC (SD 48)

that I enjoyed being able to contribute to the school in a deeper way. I enjoyed connecting with the students, staff, and families in a way that was beyond the scope of a classroom teacher. Subsequently, I joined the NGO, Education Beyond Borders (EBB) and have been working in East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda) as a teacher professional development facilitator since 2010. After retirement, I would like to continue to work with the educators in East Africa. My doctorate work that is in progress examines the collaboration process among the Canadian and Kenyan teachers who worked together with EBB.

Most of the time, I am not conscious of being a diverse woman in leadership. Sometimes, though, I am reminded of my difference in abrupt and often unpleasant ways. Sometimes, the racism has been out in the open, such as being called names face-to-face, during phone conversations, through graffiti in the washrooms, by colleagues, students, and families. More often, the racism and the microaggressions are very subtle, and I am puzzled by the interactions until I can put my finger on the reason. Whenever I have encountered racist behaviours, I have confronted the people involved and reminded them that they are being inappropriate. This process has not been easy, and there have been varying degrees of success. But I recognize that when I identify the behaviour, the person knows not to behave this way toward me again. Sometimes, the racism is ingrained, and the negative behavior is repeated; for these circumstances, I had to go to my union or a third party to resolve the issue, or to at least end the bad behaviour.

When I first started my career in the Fraser Valley, I was the only young, female, atheist, Asian science teacher in my school. The school was in for a shock with my different ways of thinking. I had to take one of my colleagues to the teachers' union because he would refer to me as the 'oriental express' whenever he talked to his students about me. I asked him to stop, but he thought that it was 'funny', and that it was okay. It was not okay. My strategy in dealing with



racism and microaggression is to call it out, every time, and this can become very tiring. However, being grounded in my own culture and values, I am sure of myself and this helps me to deal with injustices.

Another aspect of leadership as a woman is that, sometimes, I have had to deal with sexism. Whether it's the district staff, school staff, or parents, I question if they would have talked to me in a particular way if I was a man. Condescending and dismissive attitudes and behaviours have at times gotten in the way of dealing with the real issues. I would sometimes have to be very direct and say to the person, "you are being very condescending to me right now", and ask them to instead tell me about the actual issue at hand. Gender and race often get mixed up in issues, and we can easily get lost. Being honest and forthright has helped me navigate the difficult times.

I highly recommend that women from diverse backgrounds pursue a leadership role at the school and district levels and beyond. My own career path has been very interesting and satisfying. We need more role models for children, as well as for our staff. When districts talk of equity, diversity, and inclusion, they need to walk the talk. It shows in their hiring practices.

We need diverse women in various leadership roles. For me, the road to leadership has not been easy. I have faced additional roadblocks and struggles because I am a woman, and I am not white. Being comfortable and accepting of your own identity really helps when navigating conflicts. I know who I am, and I am glad to share parts of my culture and beliefs with people who are curious and want to know more. Because race and gender issues can be enmeshed with the problems leaders deal with, it can be difficult to tease out the real issues. With more women of diverse backgrounds in positions of power and influence, I think that there could be positive changes to equity, diversity, and inclusion in the school system going forward.



“Most of the time, I am not conscious of being a diverse woman in leadership.

Sometimes, though, I am reminded of my difference in abrupt and often unpleasant ways.”

Ji-Ai Cho



Navshina Savory is District Principal
of Equity and Inclusion
in Richmond, BC (SD 38)
and a BCPVPA Board Director

Navshina

we engaged in all of our extracurricular sports and club activities, and most of our social experiences. As adolescents, school was a very positive place for all of us. Becoming an educator was easy, and my positive experiences in school helped me to imagine creating that same safe space for others in my care. I must also have a genetic predisposition to teaching: my mom was a teacher in our country of origin – Tanzania, Africa – and both of my siblings are also administrators.

Early in my teaching career, it felt natural for me to pursue leadership opportunities. This is probably in part due to my personality, and in part due to my desire to have an impact. I recognized early in my classroom teaching days that school-based leaders have an incredible opportunity to create cultures that have a significant influence on the lives of both staff and kids. Seeing this in the work of excellent educational leaders, and in seeking their mentorship, I was drawn to leadership. Back in the late 1990s, I was also acutely aware of the lack of representation of women and – specifically – women of colour in secondary administration. This did not seem right to me, as I knew I could do the job. I wanted the opportunity to have a positive influence beyond those students in my classroom, at a systemic level that would impact students directly and globally. This is when my path in educational leadership began. I obtained a master's degree in Educational Leadership, and actively pursued a formal position as a school-based administrator; I have never looked back. In 1999, unknowingly and not deliberately, I become the first South Asian secondary administrator in the Surrey School District. I have always been proud that I was a 'trailblazer' in my career. Thankfully, we have come

Growing up, I loved school. It wasn't so much for the 'academics', but more for the extracurricular opportunities that were offered, and the friendships I made at school both as a new settler and an adolescent. During my formal schooling years, school was – for the most part – a place where I felt truly happy. I had very kind teachers who were extremely encouraging and supportive. This provided me with a sense of belonging and a feeling that schools are safe, inviting, and fun places where I could learn new things. My immigrant family did not have extra money or the wherewithal to enroll my siblings and me in afterschool activities. Therefore, our schools were not only traditional learning places, but the places where

a long way, and the trail is now much clearer for other women of colour at all levels of public education.

I am grateful that, throughout my career, I have not faced significant challenges that were apparent to me at the time. We all face challenges, but rather than being held back – and, possibly subconsciously, as a survival strategy – I have focused on my own inherent privilege. This includes access to education, the ability to navigate the English language and, most importantly, the presence of a solid family that provides love and support in every circumstance, most especially during those times that required resilience. Rather than putting a focus on the challenges, this outlook has allowed me to leverage those privileges to achieve my own goals. Having said this, perhaps the biggest challenge I have faced is my own internal challenge of having ‘Imposter Syndrome’. You see, people that look like me should not be secondary school Principals. Growing up, I had no role models, no examples, and nothing to represent how the job of leading a school is done by someone with my skin colour, intersecting with my gender. In my reflection on this self-doubt, and through a lack of models to follow, I believe that I have been driven to work harder and to work with humility, allowing me to focus on students and what is best for them. This focus has never failed me; it has, in fact, provided much-needed clarity in navigating the complexity of leadership.

If I were to give advice to women of diverse backgrounds who are interested in pursuing a leadership role, I would say... “Just do it”. There is nothing more joyful, hopeful, and significantly impactful for our young future leaders than the empowerment that school leadership can provide. As examples and connections to students, school leaders have a profound ability to change the lives and trajectories of young people’s futures. As you pursue your leadership in education, always lead with the values to which you have a deep commitment. Do this with humility, integrity, and authenticity, and

these values will provide balance and calm in an otherwise hectic career. Every decision – and there will be a lot of decisions you will make as an educational leader — becomes so much clearer when the intention is in the best interest of students. Be kind, show respect to everyone, work hard, and always focus on relationships; the rest is simply background noise. Finally, remember that you are an example and a role model for many equity-seeking groups. Your ‘minority status’ holds great value in creating a more equitable society and school system. This is your privilege: use it to make things better for those in your care.

We are immensely grateful to the authors of this article, and humbled by their candour and generosity in sharing their stories.



“I simply wanted the opportunity to have **a positive influence** at a systemic level that would impact students directly and more globally, not just those students in my classroom. This is when my path in educational leadership began.”

Navshina Savory

INTENTIONALLY GROWING LEADERS

two perspectives

by
**Leanne Kemp &
Craig Mah**
SD 43 (Coquitlam)



How many of you keep a pair of rainboots in your office?

And if you do keep a pair of rainboots, which policy manual or administrative procedure suggested this? Did your graduate program prepare you for recess supervision? Probably not.

The Coquitlam School District created a leadership framework to support its strategic plan, Directions 2025. Specifically, Strategic Goal #3 which focuses on Organizational Capacity to ensure that human, financial, and physical resources are sustainable. The leadership framework had four dimensions: Ethical Leaders, Relationship Builders, System Leaders, and Leaders for Learning. Our district wanted to support leadership development and sustainability through an in-house professional learning series that would be complemented by the support provided by the Coquitlam Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association and the BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association. The district leadership team created a **Mindful Leadership** program that had two series, one to support teacher leaders called **Building Leadership Capacity**, and the second to support practicing Principals and Vice-Principals called **Intentionally Growing Leaders (IGL)**. We were asked to support the IGL series with six virtual meetings that supported fourteen administrators new to their role.

Before we go further, let us introduce the facilitators for this IGL series. Craig Mah started his administrative career in 2004, and Leanne Kemp started in 2019. Both Leanne and Craig worked at two different schools. In 2007-2010, we worked together at Coquitlam River Elementary. Craig was Principal, and Leanne was the department head. In 2018, we worked together at Walton Elementary as an administrative team when Leanne joined as Vice-Principal. How could our different years of experience help shape a mentorship program that

would be meaningful to the participants?

What topics should we cover? We considered broad ideas – such as building positive relationships – but also more pragmatic elements of leadership that are not found in any educational leadership program or district procedure. We considered practices that could only be learned through experience. The question of what items we kept in our office to support our daily work was part of one IGL session. We also uncovered other topics that future mentorship programs should consider. We reminded ourselves to always connect our topics with the leadership framework.

Our first planning meeting went something like this:

*Craig: So, what topics should we cover?
Definitely positive relationships.*

Leanne: Yeah, relationships.

Craig: Ok. What else?

Leanne: For me, where do I find stuff?

Craig: Like paper?

Leanne: No, I don't mean paper. I just think back to when I started, I didn't know how to find stuff. Like who do I call in Finance? How do I put a work order in? It's finding all that stuff that takes up time.

Craig: Good point. Let's cover that.

We agreed on two books that would serve as an anchor for our conversation with the group. *Transforming School Cultures* by Anthony Muhammad and *Learning by Doing* (Canadian Edition) by Rick Dufour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, Thomas Many, and Mike Mattos. Both books offered big ideas, but also practical approaches to working with staff to build a learning culture.

“WHAT TOPICS SHOULD WE COVER FOR NEW ADMINISTRATORS?”

Leanne's Perspective

Relationships, relationships, relationships. Craig and I talked a lot about this when I first started in administration. Craig had recommended Anthony Muhammad's book, and I quickly read it cover to cover. This is such an important topic and the two books we chose provided an interesting perspective on looking at how a staff functions together, and how the different personalities mesh. Another question I had when I started was how do I help staff to grow and move forward? *Learning by Doing* fit well with Anthony's book, as it delves into how to move a staff forward. In our role as administrators, having difficult conversations was another topic I knew was important but I did not have a lot of experience with, or training in, this area. This topic was covered in both books in different ways, and I felt it was very useful to include in one of our sessions.

But then, what else? One topic that was important for me was to look at the things that I had no idea were so important to keep in my office. This includes having a screwdriver to fix things, boots and gloves for those days when the snow starts to

fall and you need to quickly help shovel and salt, or the importance of always having an extra pair of shoes. No one told me about these little items that made life a lot easier when I had them in my office.

Alongside difficult conversations, leading staff through growth, and building relationships, I also felt that understanding a budget was important. Where do I find the information on this, and how do I know how to keep things on track as the year progresses?

There are so many things that you learn on the fly, but so many of these things could be shared with new administrators; that was the hope with these sessions. How do we give them information to help build their capacity as efficient leaders in the day-to-day, while also learning and growing into the leadership style that works for them?

This is where the idea of a survey came from. We felt this would help determine the most useful areas of focus for the participants.

Craig's Perspective

Prior to the start of the IGL series, Leanne sent a survey to the group to ask for their content ideas. We had a variety of participants from different levels, and with different experiences. The results of the survey let us know that we were on the right track with our planning, and enabled us to schedule sessions and guest speakers in the areas that had the most interest.

I wanted to touch on topics that may not be as apparent to school leaders, but still have relevance to their daily work. We also recognized that there is no instruction manual or guidebook on how to run a learning community. It was important to provide resources for the participants to help support their work with their schools and build a collaborative learning community.

SESSION 1:

Relationships, Hopes and Fears, Gratitude

Our introductory session was focused on developing positive relationships with all staff members. We reviewed the big ideas in *Transforming School Cultures* and then asked the participants to describe the cultural landscape at their schools. Our guiding questions were:

What are your observations of the relationships at your school?

Can you make connections with Muhammad's ideas?

How do you envision yourself developing relationships with the school community?

At the end of the session, we asked the participants to share gratitude for an idea they heard that resonated with them.



SESSION 2:

Difficult Conversations, Managing Conflict, and School Growth Plans

Leanne and I shared difficult conversations that we had in the past, and referenced a difficult conversation that was shared in the book. The participants went into smaller breakout rooms to share stories of how they navigated conversations. We then asked the participants to describe how they are leading the school growth plans. What has been the process of figuring out your school plan? How are staff involved in developing school plans? What might you do to help move your school forward? How are you making your plans authentic for your staff, students, and parents?

SESSION 3:

Where to Find Stuff: Finance

We invited the Finance department to present the best practices that all Principals should be following when managing their school budgets. We planned a 20-minute presentation, but the follow-up questions from the participants took us into overtime.

SESSION 4:

Where to Find Stuff: Rainboots

Our fourth session was dedicated to the practical parts of school administration. We surveyed twenty elementary Principals about the items they keep in their offices to support their daily work. We used their responses to play a game of Family Feud.



SESSION 5:

Parent Advisory Councils

In this session, we focused on working with parents and families in the community and working with the Parent Advisory Council (PAC). We asked our District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) president to share with us the PAC's top five recommendations for working together. This was very valuable information for our participants, as many had not yet worked with a PAC in this capacity.

SESSION 6:

Celebration

Our final session was a celebration of the learning in IGL, but also the end of the school year. We asked the participants to contribute images over the course of the year that best captured their growth as a school leader, and presented a final slideshow highlighting all of the participants. We finished our session by playing a game of IGL Jeopardy with questions based on the experiences we collectively shared.

learning

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

(BCPVPA Program Attendee)

NEW LEARNINGS: IS THE PROGRAM MAKING AN IMPACT ON THE NEW ADMINISTRATORS?

Leanne's Perspective

Building relationships is a key factor in what I have learned from Craig. Each session incorporated time for participants to share with each other their response to a focused question, and tying in how things are going in their buildings. The conversations ended up being what many of the participants (and I!) really enjoyed. At a time where in-person gatherings were still not happening, it gave members a time to share and learn from one another. As evidenced by the slide show at the end, everyone came away learning something new from someone else. These sessions weren't about Craig and I sharing expertise (which Craig has, and I am still learning!) but about facilitating discussion and learning together. Participants are continuing to connect although the sessions have ended, and they have even started their own book club! The slides that each participant made demonstrated their takeaways, and the key pieces of information that stood out for them.

Craig's Perspective

I was pleasantly surprised at the positive response we received from the participants. One of the telling indicators was the participants' desire to continue networking after our session had ended, leaving me to recognize the value of developing a trustworthy network for new administrators. It was also important to root the sessions with the leadership framework, as it aligns not only with the district strategic plan but also supports the development of their professional growth plans.

It was also critical to include Leanne in the design of the sessions. Her perspective on the types of supports a new administrator needs helped to shape sessions that were relevant for the participants. I also felt that our two perspectives and levels of experience brought a balanced approach to supporting the group. Even with eighteen years of administrative experience, I recognized that I would have blind spots when developing this mentorship series.

CONCLUSION

Mentorship is important to nurture a new leader. Mentorship is also critical to support and retain leaders in a challenging and complex profession. The **Intentionally Growing Leaders** series also connected the work we do with the district's leadership framework and strategic plan. This framework gave participants the opportunity to hear different perspectives and learn from one another. The benefit was planning these sessions with the lens of different levels of experience. Leanne has a few years of experience ahead of most of the participants, and was able to provide a perspective that identified things that may be taken for granted by someone like Craig, who has many years of experience. The importance of creating a thoughtful network not only supports the development of new administrators, but also creates conditions that help retain leaders.

REFLECTIVE STATEMENTS FROM THE IGL PARTICIPANTS

Once we completed the six sessions, we asked the participants for some feedback about the format and the topics covered. This is some of the feedback we received.

"Providing a format to dig into these things in a safe community (à la Family Feud) was so helpful!"

"The networking, connecting, and sharing of on-the-ground learning was great, and the most important part."

"I would hope we could join a second year... It is good to hear all this information more than once, and it is also nice to connect with people."

"One thing that stood out to me was how well we were supported without putting a lot of pressure on us. It felt like it was a fun and welcoming space, with a fantastic group of new hires and of course led by two VERY welcoming leaders :) I really looked forward to our time together, knowing that I would always leave with a learning or reflection takeaway, and a feeling of being more connected to the group."

Leanne Kemp is Vice-Principal at Scott Creek Middle School.

Craig Mah is currently District Principal of School Services and Special Projects.

Both Craig and Leanne work in the Coquitlam School District (SD 43).

support

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

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

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

bcpvpa.org

bcpvpa

We are now well into the flow of the school year, and most of us have overcome the initial challenges of the annual start-up. This is a great time to reassess what you are doing to maintain your wellness, and what you might want to tweak on the fly. Here are three ideas that could help you better succeed with this process as we work towards the holiday break.

Review

What is Working?

For many of us, we go into the school year with a plan to help us maintain some semblance of balance and well-being while managing the rigors of our dynamic work lives. There is a reason many of you are successful at maintaining your work and overcoming workload stress and dynamics. You are a strong group of resilient leaders that are 'battle-tested'. Given this reality, our individual approaches to being well are embedded with some successful strategies. Take stock of what is working for you, and continue to replicate those good behaviours. They are obviously serving you well.

by

Jack MacNeill

MEd (Coun.Psych.),

RCC, CVRP, RRP

President, humanworks

Revise

What Sticks Out?

Through reviewing what is working well, we often discover what might be lacking or missing in how we approach our wellness. It is important when we do take stock that we don't overcompensate for what we feel might be shortcomings, as this can create excessive stress along with unrealistic goals and expectations. Unless you are facing a more serious health crisis, micro-adjustments are likely to be both more lasting and more effective in addressing any wellness concerns that you feel are lacking. Be pragmatic, and set a maximum of one or two new micro goals you can easily replicate, and can deliver consistently.

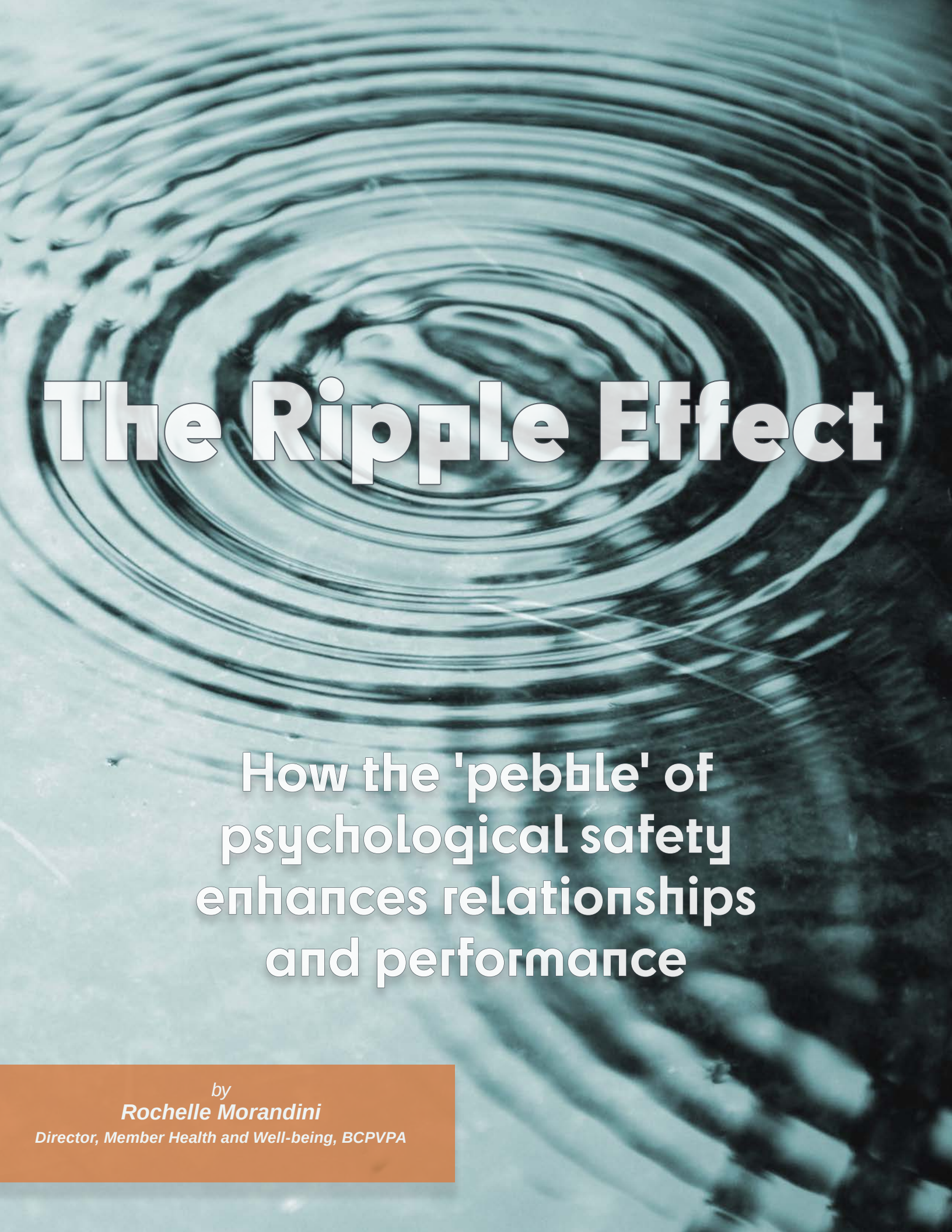
Renew

Wellness as a Core Professional Intention

This concept is no longer an oxymoron in public education. Professional educators can make their health and wellness a priority, and still be seen and experienced as effective leaders, committed educational stewards, and good employees. The wind is changing with varying degrees of strength throughout the province as professional wellness becomes better understood and valued. Making your wellness a clear daily intention and practice not only serves you well, but it serves the system well. The concept of 'working well' or 'retiring well' is the new trend. And, it's predicated on the commitment of each one of us to make it a priority. This year, let's continue our positive forward momentum towards this concept becoming a natural part of a public school educator's professional identity.

You are the future.
We are the system.



The background of the entire slide is a close-up, high-contrast photograph of concentric ripples on a body of water. The ripples are dark and light blue/grey, creating a sense of depth and movement. The center of the ripples is slightly off-center towards the top left.

The Ripple Effect

How the 'pebble' of
psychological safety
enhances relationships
and performance

by

Rochelle Morandini

Director, Member Health and Well-being, BCPVPA

Students, staff, Principals, and Vice-Principals who work and learn in psychologically safe environments enjoy many benefits. They experience enhanced productivity, growth, connections, creativity, confidence, well-being, and much more. How safe we feel, as leaders, contributes to the climates in our schools. Subsequently, taking intentional steps to create a psychologically safe culture for staff not only elevates their work day, but ripples down to positively influence the learning experience of students.

A Recap of Psychological Health and Safety

We first discussed the concept of Principals' and Vice-Principals' psychological health and safety at length one year ago in the November 2021 *Principl(ed)* magazine, where we released the findings from the BCPVPA's **Thriving in Education** survey.

In the article, we referred to the National Standards of Psychological Health and Safety in Canada, and the thirteen workplace risk factors. We outlined the four workplace risk factors that the survey identified as having the greatest influence on a Principal's or Vice-Principal's ability to either thrive or succumb to burnout.

The November 2021 article explored the Demand/Control model, published by Karasek and Theorell in 1996, which concluded that workplace stress is highest in roles where the psychological demands are high (as is prevalent in the roles of school leaders), yet the individual's ability to control decisions and the environment is low. We continued to explore this topic in the March 2022 issue of *Principl(ed)*, when we looked at the four most influential workplace factors that impact a Principal's or Vice-Principal's ability to thrive, in the applied context of Steven Covey's concept of Circles of Concern, Influence, and Control. We described how school leaders can enhance their ability to expand their level of control and influence, and thereby reduce – and then accept – those things that remain within their Circle of Concern.

And, in our most recent efforts to support members in protecting their psychological safety at work, we

provided insight and instructions for identifying and reporting psychological safety risks in the August 2022 volume of BCPVPA's digital magazine, *Leading: Back to School*. In this article, we emphasized the importance of reporting trauma and violence, along with bullying and harassment situations. Reporting is important, as districts then need to take the recommended steps to prevent or mitigate harm, and to ensure that members receive quick access to support and resources including through WorkSafe BC where applicable. These three archived articles are all available on the BCPVPA website.

We now turn our attention to your role as a leader, and the creation of a psychologically safe culture within your school and/or working team. Creating a safe environment not only enhances relationships and performance amongst the adults, but cascades to significantly improve the learning conditions for students.

High Performing, Psychologically Safe Teams

Dr. Amy Edmondson of Harvard University is known for her research on high-performing teams and, in particular, the fact that high-performing teams feel psychologically safe. She defines psychologically safe teams as having:

“Shared belief by members of the team that they are safe for interpersonal risk taking”

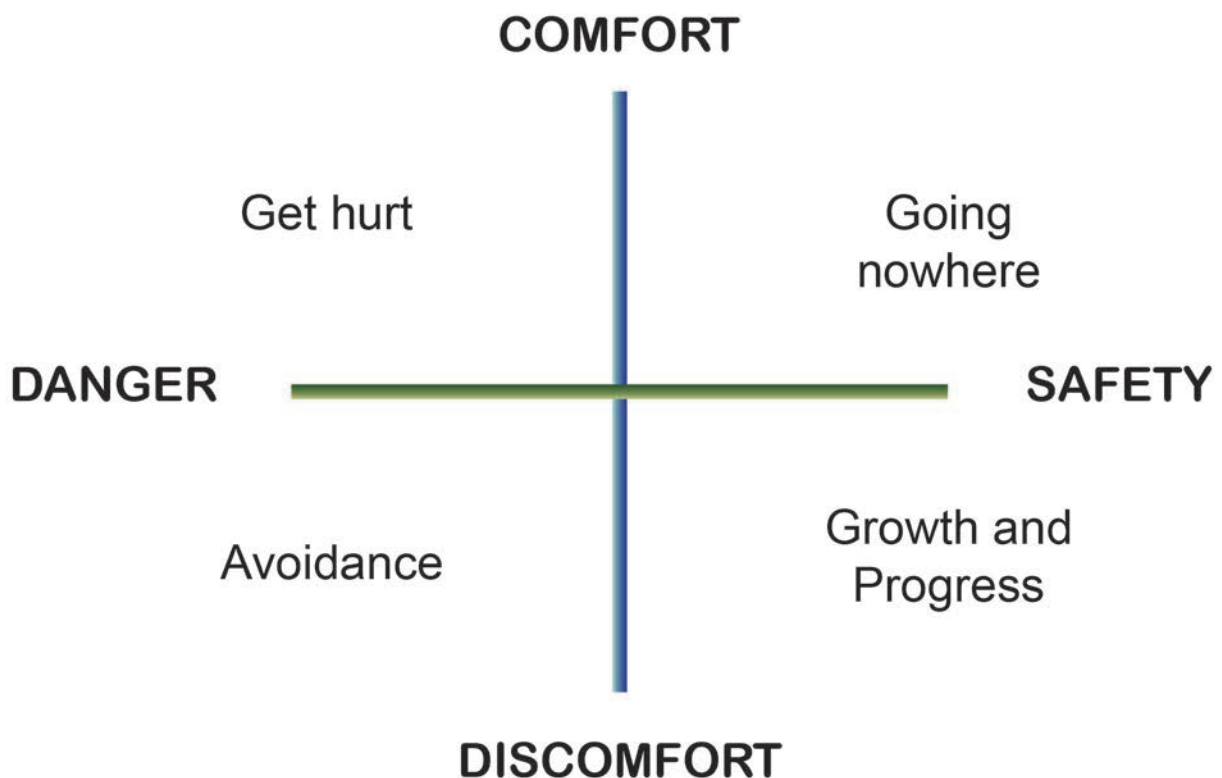
Encouraging psychological safety on your team means that:

- There is an absence of interpersonal fear, and an ability to speak up with work-relevant content
- All input, questions, and viewpoints are welcome
- Mistakes are okay, there is no embarrassment or punishment
- Teams are interested in learning, excellence, and in genuinely connecting to succeed as a group

- There is professional respect amongst the team
- Candor is required
- Creativity is enhanced
- Ideally, these conditions set everyone up for success

Candor is an important yet often fleeting concept. Being on a psychologically safe team where candor is encouraged does not mean that safety always equates to comfort.

Consider this diagram:



Courtesy Shane Snow bit.ly/SafetyVSComfort

View the diagram as it applies to a gym workout. If your workout is safe, but comfortable, you are likely not going to progress in your fitness levels. However, if your workout is safe, but you are feeling a little discomfort, that usually means that you are pushing boundaries in a safe way to help strengthen and improve. This same context applies to teams. If your team feels safe (a good thing), but always comfortable (no one pushes the boundaries or brings up concerns), the team stagnates and goes nowhere with respect to learning and advancing. However, where candor exists, and people speak up in a safe environment, this added pressure helps move a team forward in growth and progress.

Candor does require a sense of trust within a team. Admittedly, this takes time. As a leader, you have the ability to control as well as influence actions that promote trust. A key component to building safety and trust is to *be precise with information, expectations and commitments*. Team members are more likely to trust you and your word when you are mindful both about the information you share, and the expectations and commitments you set. Be accurate. Be realistic. Be thoughtful. Setting clear expectations and adhering to

your commitments will help employees trust you and be more open with you.

The open comments provided in our Spring 2021 **Thriving in Education** survey spoke to the environments where Principals and Vice-Principals were feeling safe, and the environments where they were not feeling safe. As you can see, our members' experiences align with the lessons shared by Dr. Edmundson about high performing teams.

Environments high in psychological safety:

- Input and contribution is encouraged from all team members
- Respect and appreciation
- Active listening and learning from each other is valued
- Freedom from chronic hostility and anger
- Members can speak candidly with ideas, questions, concerns, even mistakes
- No retaliation for speaking up
- Leverages the benefits of diversity, belonging

Environments low in psychological safety:

- Members fear to speak up or question
- Favourites and/or regular 'go-tos' for ideas and information
- Dismissiveness or exclusion
- Discrimination or unconscious bias
- Leaders who 'know it all' and do not acknowledge gaps
- Passivity or aggression
- Not feeling valued

Leading a Psychologically Safe Team

When you feel psychologically safe, your team will be best served in your ability to create a safe environment in which they can thrive. Always put your own mask on first! Take care of yourself, and be proactive in addressing psychological risks that may impact your well-being.

In your leadership role, and even in the most challenging environments, you can start to create a psychologically safe space for your team. It may take time. It may take a lot of time, depending on the history of your relationships, team members, even those who occupied the role before you. But consistency and sincerity will pay off, even if it is just one team member at a time.

Here are some leadership tips:

Demonstrate concern for team members as individuals:

Employ a regular practice of checking in with staff, and demonstrating your concern and interest in them as people. This simple action may help staff feel more comfortable speaking up because you appreciate them as an individual, not just for their work efforts.

Show your team you are engaged:

Be present in conversations and meetings. Actively listen – this is one of the most critical skills! Do not be distracted in meetings, or attend in 'physical body' only!

Encourage all staff to provide their input, ideas, and feedback:

Regardless of role, or length of service, provide all

team members equal access to the 'floor' in sharing their contribution. Be inclusive in asking for everyone's thoughts and ideas. Be self-aware, and do not seek to single out folks as your regular 'go tos'.

When your team arrives at a decision, pause to ask questions, and explore different viewpoints and considerations that may not have been voiced. Those who process internally may need more time to formulate their thoughts before voicing them, so practice pausing and encouraging input.

In consideration of team members who may not readily share their ideas in a meeting, offer multiple ways for staff to share thoughts. Encourage team members to share feedback via email, or through online collaboration tools such as Google Teams.

Ask questions, be curious, and show appreciation for ideas:

Seek to learn and understand more. Unpack and honour the perspectives of others. You may not always agree, but give space for them to safely share their thoughts.

Employees will openly share their thoughts when you establish an environment where they feel that all ideas are welcome. As you brainstorm, suspend judgement. Remember, you do not need to act on every idea; however, thanking people for their contributions and showing appreciation for their insights will go a long way in establishing psychological safety.

Let your team see that you understand:

Active listening is strengthened by the confirmation that you have understood your team members' points of view, their understanding of facts, and how they have applied this information to their conclusions and decisions. This removes any assumptions on the leader's part, and builds respect and trust.

There should also be an expectation of active listening on the part of your staff to further enhance understanding and respect.

It is okay to make a mistake:

This is a critical component of feeling psychologically

safe in a team. It needs to be okay to admit to a mistake – either as a leader, or as a team member – without the fear of punishment or retribution. When errors happen, the focus should not be on blame. Use collaborative language from a team perspective: “How can we make sure this goes smoothly next time?” or “What do we need to consider going forward”. Do not fall victim to continuous analysis of what went wrong, but be solution-focused. This is not to suggest that individuals do not have responsibilities, but instead to demonstrate how we learn and progress forward as a team when difficult situations arise.

Promote positive dialogue and discussion:

Encourage team members to use positive language to inspire honest conversations. Affirmative language actually motivates you to succeed. Simple word changes like using “have not yet” in place of “can’t”, or “opportunity” instead of “challenge”, can help your team members employ a positive mindset that empowers them to speak up without fear.

Be self-aware and expect the same from your staff:

When you are aware of how you think and behave, you can uncover biases that may impact your team's willingness to share their view. Self-awareness empowers you to understand how you typically respond to changes or challenges, and enables you to adjust your emotional response and learn to react in a way that opens discussion. Start demonstrating this ability and encourage – and progressively expect – the same from your staff.

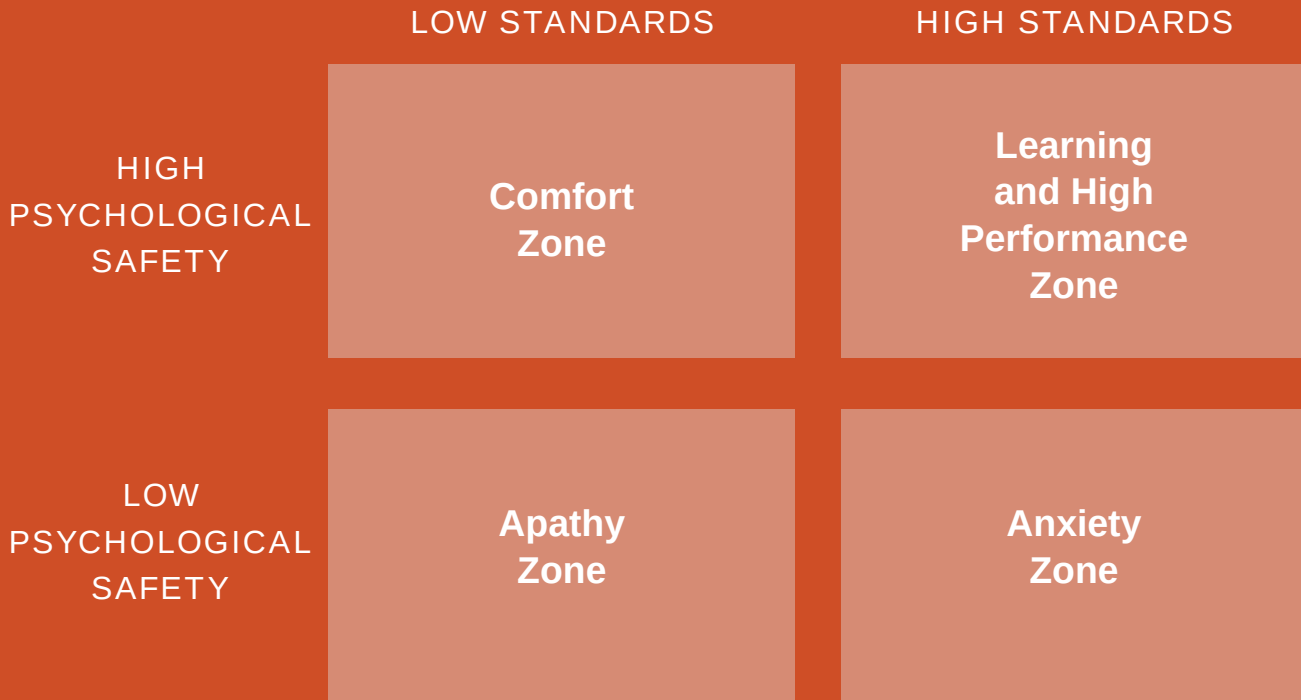
Include your team in decision making:

Your team needs to know that you are confident in your responsibility, but that you're flexible in your approach and open to their ideas and feedback. This will promote their involvement and influence (important for their psychological health) by helping them feel included in the decision-making process and, ultimately, will lead to better outcomes.

Be open to feedback:

When your staff feel psychologically safe, they will feel empowered to give feedback: up, down, and across. Invite your team to challenge your perspective and

WHERE DO YOU WANT YOUR TEAM?



From *The Fearless Organization*, Dr. Amy Edmonson

respectfully push back. Encourage candor. This may be uncomfortable at first, but healthy conflict will lead to better decisions and greater accountability.

Be a champion for your team:

Finally, it's important to support and represent your team. Be sure to share the team's work with senior leadership to increase visibility into what your team is doing, and give credit to staff when due.

And, importantly....

NIP NEGATIVITY IN THE BUD!

If you have a staff member who speaks negatively about peers, talk to them about it. Be clear in stating that staff are a team, and that negativity will not be tolerated. Letting negativity stand without comment can become a contagion. People start to think that others are talking about them. These behaviours are psychological safety killers.

Remember, it is okay, and encouraged, for leaders to show vulnerability. When you show vulnerability,

your team will feel more comfortable in being vulnerable with you. This lessens the pressure of always having the answers, and enables you to admit when you have challenges. You cannot do it all, and asking your team for help is a sign of strength rather than weakness.

You are invited to pause, access your growth mindset, then think about your current leadership style and consider the following questions:

What strengths do you bring to lead a psychologically safe team?

What skills and strengths should you apply more?

What actions should you do less?

What new behaviours do you need to learn and practice?

Who can help you?

A well functioning, psychologically safe team will:

- Give and receive feedback
- Ask difficult questions
- Raise issues and concerns
- Ask for help
- Disagree at times
- Offer solutions to problems
- Ask for clarification
- Admit errors

**In Conclusion:
The Flow of Safety
that Emanates from You!**

When your direct supervisor feels psychologically safe, they are more likely to create a psychologically safe climate for you at work.

Likewise, when you make efforts to enhance your own psychological safety, you are better equipped to provide this environment for your staff.

When your staff feels psychologically safe and valued, this positivity flows to students.

Students who feel psychologically safe are better able to access their brains' frontal cortex that promotes executive function, empathy, and connectiveness. This in turn results in:

- A learning versus closed mindset
- A growth perspective and progressive attitude to risk and failure
- A tendency to enhance active listening
- A willingness to ask questions and participate in open conversations
- A willingness to help others
- A shared sense of identity
- An increase in inclusiveness and welcoming of diversity

It may take many small pebbles of effort to set in motion the waves of psychological safety. Remember that the impact each pebble makes will touch many in the school community and, best of all, students will ride the swells!

Other Sources

<https://www.predictiveindex.com/blog/psychological-safety-in-the-workplace/>

<https://www.quantumworkplace.com/future-of-work/create-psychological-safety-in-the-workplace>

<https://symondsresearch.com/psychological-safety/>

connection

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

(Member Event Feedback)



BCPVPA offers BC Principals and Vice-Principals opportunities to learn, but also to network and collaborate with colleagues from across the province. Those shared experiences bring our 2,600 members closer together and help to strengthen BC's K-12 public education system.

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Community



by
Erin Hughes
Communications Assistant,
BCPVPA

FOUNDATIONS FOR LITERACY



An Interview with Write to Read BC representatives Robert Blacker, Project Leader and Shirley-Pat Chamberlain, Project Co-Leader, as well as Louise Ormerod, Education Manager and Principal at the Gitsegukla Elementary School.

In 2007, two men drove together on the Sea-to-Sky Highway to Whistler: Robert Blacker, a former police officer, and the Honourable Steven Point, a former Provincial Court judge and the 28th Lieutenant Governor of BC – the first Indigenous person to hold this position. As they chatted on the drive, Point asked a simple question that would launch the Write to Read BC initiative. Point knew that Blacker was part of the Rotary Club, and asked, “What is Rotary doing in your backyard?”

Blacker realized that although Rotary excelled in supporting global efforts, they had no projects in British Columbia. They were sending books overseas, but there were many communities much closer to home that also needed books and literacy resources.

After visiting many remote Indigenous communities as Lieutenant Governor, and seeing that they lacked literacy resources, Point had a vision to bring books and supplies to these communities. With the help of Blacker, Rotary, Indigenous leaders, and committed

community members, something very special began. Blacker says the process of starting Write to Read BC was like, “the creator guided us on this path: it was a river, and we went with the flow. We had a lot of twists and turns, but the bottom line was that we both agreed to see how we can make it happen.”

Blacker oversaw organizing Rotarians, and Point consulted with Indigenous leaders and chiefs – both groups were excited by the possibilities. The excitement culminated in an evening hosted by Government House, which provided an event space for Rotarians to meet the Honourable Steven Point, and hear about the proposed idea to bring books and supplies to the most remote Indigenous communities in BC.

On this evening, many things came together to seed the success of the organization. Blacker met a ‘newbie’ Rotarian, Shirley-Pat Chamberlain, who has gone on to be the Co-Lead of Write to Read BC and an integral part of the team. Other Rotarians that were inspired by Point’s vision wanted to lend a hand, and this group

“the creator guided us on this path: it was a river, and we went with the flow. We had a lot of twists and turns, but the bottom line was that we both agreed to see how we can make it happen.”

of committed individuals began supporting BC communities that needed it the most.

Now, after many years, Write to Read BC is a well-established organization that includes volunteers with career experience as librarians, architects, builders, educators, and engineers. They have executed 23 literacy centres across the province, each of which looks different because every community is unique and requires a centre catered to their specific needs. Blacker explains, “To be very honest, we don’t have a strategic plan because our communities are our strategic plans – they’re the ones that will tell us where we are going.” Write to Read BC works in equal partnership with Indigenous communities. The

community guides them and tells them what they need, and the volunteers ensure that it happens.

Throughout the years, Write to Read BC has connected with communities in many different ways. However, it is common for Blacker to receive an email that asks, “Are you still doing libraries, Write to Read?” This is exactly how he connected with Louise Ormerod. Blacker recounts, “We clicked: I knew what we needed to do. I had been to the Gitsegukla community two years previously, and I knew the challenges that the community was facing, but we never had a strong champion there. And that’s the real magic elixir, that champion – Louise was our champion.”



Louise Ormerod's Story About Write to Read in Gitsegukla

Photo courtesy of Google Maps

In Northern BC, nestled in the sweeping landscapes of the Skeena Valley where the Kitseguecla River joins the Skeena River, is the community of Gitsegukla. The Nation is made up of about 500 community members, with a Health Centre, Administration Office, and Elementary School. The Gitsegukla Elementary School is the centre of the story told by Louise Ormerod, the Education Manager for the Gitsegukla Nation.

Just a few years ago, Ormerod retired from the Coast Mountain School District No. 82 and moved to a place close to her heart – Princess Lake. Her retirement lasted seven days before she received a call from the Gitsegukla Nation asking her to join the Elementary School as the Principal and Education Manager.

Ormerod visited the school, and could feel that the school had a strong cultural connection to the community but was struggling due to a lack of stability: in the last three years, there had been five different Principals, and the position had been vacant for a year and a half. To add to the tension, there was an impending Independent School assessment. It was here that Ormerod jumped in. The assessment identified 21 violations, but she was determined to mitigate these, and to improve literacy scores.

Ormerod recalls, “We had 21 violations before us, and we needed to get through these as a team. There were so many violations, and our reading level had plummeted before I arrived. There were students exiting the school to go to a different school – they were losing their student population.”

Ormerod had to address this issue, and through her connections at the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) she got in touch with Robert Blacker from Write to Read BC. “I contacted Bob,

Building New Opportunities

The new library also became a community resource. Louise hired someone to open the library to the entire community from five to seven o'clock. Youth can go in with their family or adults and elders can find resources specifically for them or to use the computers. There were a lot of people that were coming into the Elementary School's little library. The demand for resources was significant enough that this past January an old learning centre, that had been vacant the past six to eight years, was secured to be revitalized to house the adult learning resources. They were able to increase the number of adult resources they had, procure more tables and computers for the new adult learning centre.



Photos courtesy of Write to Read BC



and it just took off from there. We had a couple of hiccups along the way because of COVID-19. We were supposed to work on the library resource center in the spring of 2020, and of course COVID-19 restrictions hit in March, so we had to postpone. There was a small window in August that year where everyone was feeling comfortable, so Bob and his team quickly got up to Gitsegukla and unloaded the books.

"We got shelves, we got a TV, we got computers, we got a big, beautiful board table – the whole library was redone. I had some people from the community and teachers help. It went really smoothly."

That first semester in fall 2020, Ormerod and her team worked hard on reading with the students. There was a push to get grades and reading levels up again for the Independent School assessment. The new library came at the perfect time to promote both reading and the school. In January 2021, three BC government employees came to do the assessment and, upon completion, told Ormerod that the school had zero violations, and that reading levels were up 400%.

Ormerod said, "That was the biggest indicator of success to us, that what we had been doing with the library and the resources – with the support of Write to Read BC – supported those improved reading levels for our students."



Shirley-Pat Chamberlain, agrees that the ‘magic-elixer’ to installing a new literacy centre is a community champion. “Like Louise, they help steer the project, but also help to continue and sustain it. Write to Read BC can help with maintenance, but it is truly a community effort to keep the centre running.” Chamberlain adds that the literacy centres, “are community-based, and are meant to be intergenerational spaces and places of healing. They include not just books; some of them include cultural artifacts and cultural resources as well.”

"the literacy centres are community-based, and are meant to be intergenerational spaces and places of healing. They include not just books; some of them include cultural artifacts and cultural resources as well."

Write to Read BC literacy centres are where community and school come together; they may be built in schools and open at certain times to the public, or they may be in community-accessed spaces that can be used by local schools. In one case, a Write to Read BC centre was turned into a high school so that students could have reliable access to the internet while studying remotely during the COVID-19 lockdown. People living in cities may not realize that BC is one of the least connected places on the planet, and the opportunity to have a space with consistent internet access was crucial for students during the pandemic. Chamberlain explains that the literacy centres can also connect people to post-secondary education opportunities. “The library, or literacy centre, has become the key community space in many places. I’ve seen the young ladies who helped us set up the library doing their own upgrading with university courses via the technology and the interactive television that is provided.”

Many of the libraries established by Write to Read BC have become an important, vibrant part of the community, providing a place to learn and connect. Centres hosting book clubs are becoming very popular, and with partnerships like Good Minds Books and Supporting Indigenous Libraries Trust, communities can obtain multiple copies of books and eliminate the need for participants to purchase copies, making activities accessible to everyone. These programs help to embed the centre in the community, weaving it into

the cultural fabric of the place. Chamberlain notes that Write to Read BC is, “not adding to or stressing the capacity of the communities.” Write to Read BC might first go into an existing space like a school or band office, and from there they ask the community to decide where the literacy centre would be most helpful, creating a successful cultural and community connection with the literacy centres.

The team at Write to Read BC have three literacy centres in the planning stages, and recently received a request from a community in the Yukon. They make it easy for the communities involved by taking on the brunt of the logistics, construction, and implementation, and they are ready to set up more centres. As Blacker puts it, “Our team has always said we will never say no – we will always say yes.”

To connect with Write to Read BC, visit their website: writetoreadbc.com

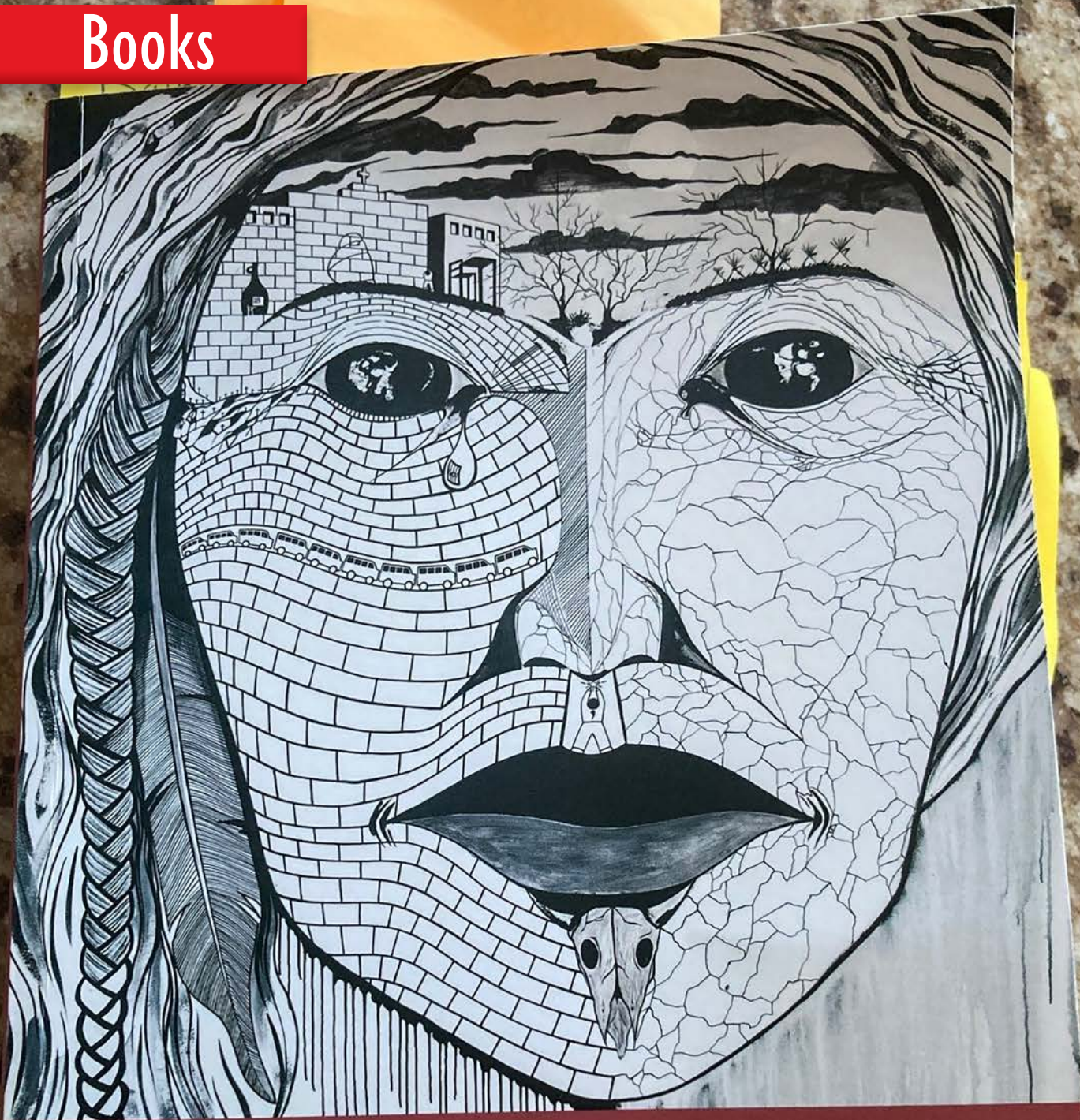
**The catharsis of songwriting.
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Troubling Truth and Reconciliation in Canadian Education

Critical Perspectives

Carolyn's well-loved and
annotated copy of the book

Troubling Truth and Reconciliation in Canadian Education: Critical Perspectives

Edited by Sandra D. Styres and Arlo Kempf

Published by University of Alberta Press, May 2022

Reviewed by
Carolyn Roberts

**Faculty Lecturer and Indigenous Pedagogies
Teaching Fellow, SFU Department of Education**

I cannot put this book down! It is a must-read for anyone in education and – I would argue – anyone living today in this place now known as Canada. The book is a collection of scholarly work that gives the reader a critical perspective of what reconciliation looks like today in education, following the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Since this report in 2015, there have been many policies, procedures, and mandates put in place that are gestures towards reconciliation. As an Indigenous educator within the system, I can speak from the experience of what it is like to do this work. This quote from the opening chapter speaks directly to the work I do.

"Reconciliation in education is a complex and challenging endeavour that necessitates first identifying the effects of settler colonialism on education practices, and then finding ways to decolonize those practices. It is also fraught to consider (or conceive of) these undertakings in the contexts of ongoing colonialism – like trying to dry off while you were still in the shower with the water running."

(p. xviii Kemp, Styres, Brechbill & El-Sherif)

As someone who is immersed in this work on a daily basis, I am in full agreement with the authors. Trying to change the system from within sometimes feels like a battle in quicksand. This collection of articles from Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars speaks to the challenges of procedures and mandates of decolonial educational practices within higher education and the K-12 system. From the outside looking in, you may not fully understand how these procedures and mandates harm the process; by reading this book, you will see in the writing a critical lens on the challenges that many who do this work face on a daily basis. The book not only shows the harms, it discusses the absence of the work being done even though it is mandated work in many systems. The chapters challenge the mainstream understanding of what the work of reconciliation is, and how we can support the work if true change is the goal.

***"Trying to change the system
from within sometimes feels
like a battle in quicksand."***

As educators within the system today, I cannot encourage you enough to take the time to read through these pages. There is so much within this collection that will help support your understandings, and your development of a critical lens on this work in education. The chapter that I have read and re-read is Chapter 3 by Dawn Zinga, "Uncomfortable Realities". Her work speaks directly to me as an educator. Her chapter talks about the challenges of how the work is being done in educational spaces. When we step into this work for change, one of the very first things we need to do is speak the truth. Zinga uses the lawn care metaphor to help us understand why this needs to happen:

"Consider a lawn care metaphor: if you continue to mow your lawn and use that mowing to address the weeds, then your lawn will continue to have weeds. If instead you go and remove the weed by the root, you will eventually eliminate the weeds. Similarly, if we continue to see our responsibility as simply engaging in conversation about what is happening without examining the root of the issue – and if we fail to engage in ethical space to examine and trouble our biases and ways of knowing to see how they contribute to the root causes – then we will continue to gloss over the issues and fail in attempts at reconciliation."

(Zinga p.55)

What I appreciate about Zinga's metaphor is that if we never address the roots of racism, oppression, and colonization, then true change is not possible. Within my journey in education, I see this as the core of our work as educators. When we teach the truth about this place now known as Canada, the truth about how this land and systems are built upon the colonial system and racism, then we will have the opportunity to dig up some roots, and change maybe possible.

"When we step into this work for change, one of the very first things we need to do is speak the truth."

This is just one of the 14 chapters in this book. The scholars that have contributed to this book come from a wide range of backgrounds and knowledge. Each chapter invites you into the work, with various approaches and context, as the authors share with the reader the troubling challenges of decolonizing the education system. The book tells some hard truths we must all hear in order for educational change to happen.

I encourage all educators to pick up this book, sit with the words, and engage with the ideas shared. I am reminded of the words shared by Chief Harley Chappell from Semiahmoo Nation this past school year at Surrey Schools Indigenous education professional development day. He reminds us that we should listen with our ears, take the words in, and chew on them for a while as we try to digest them. We can then come back to the work with a deeper understanding and knowledge. This work is challenging, and if we take the time to really look and educate ourselves, then I believe that change can happen. So read, sit, chew, and repeat.



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Walking on Eggshells? A Practical Guide to Resolving Stressful Conflict at Work and Home

by Marli Rusen

June 2022



**Reviewed by
Carmen Eberle**

**Director, Member Support Services
BCPVPA**

One of my favorite authors, Marli Rusen, recently released her new title *Walking on Eggshells? A Practical Guide to Resolving Conflict at Work and Home*. In this book, Marli applies her knowledge of the law, and her background in education and mediation, to write an in-depth guide on how to effectively navigate challenging conversations. She masterfully covers topics such as the importance of self-reflection, types of dysfunction, and aspects of successful conversations.

There is emphasis throughout the book on how to communicate more respectfully to resolve issues.

Marli empowers her readers to identify their own triggers in order to distill the issue, and address the root cause of the dysfunction. She doesn't shy away from acknowledging that compromise is not always possible, and that help from senior staff, human resource professionals, or even legal counsel may be required to clarify views that are best aligned with acceptable standards of practice.

An aspect of the book that I enjoyed was her use of case studies, checklists, and evidence-based techniques. One of my favourite quotes states that unless the situation is urgent – and before having an emotionally charged conversation – you can, “push the pause button, remove yourself... take time to calm down and/or recharge.” This strategy is an important step in giving yourself time to reflect, and to prepare for a follow-up conversation if necessary. When leaving is not possible, Marli reminds readers to breathe and respectfully change the direction or tone of the conversation. Overall, this is an excellent professional and personal resource to have in your collection.

You can learn more about Marli by checking out her website for other titles and upcoming webinars: www.themirrormethod.com.

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The Last Word



As an elementary school Principal, I would spend some **time during the first week of school** taking photos of new students and staff members.

I would post the photos on a bulletin board outside of the office so that current students and staff members knew who the newest members of our community were, and could make sure that they felt welcome during the first few weeks of the school year.

If I was new to a school, I would also post a photo of myself with my name underneath the photo. But, the thing is, I never actually used my own photo. I would copy a photo of Mr. Incredible, from the movie *The Incredibles* and put my name underneath it to both the delight and eyerolls of the students in the school. I could identify with an aging, out-of-shape superhero with thinning hair, so why not present myself as Mr. Incredible?



Super-Heroic Tendencies

Over the years I became a little more obsessive. On school photo day, I would often secretly slip into a superhero costume to have my school photo taken. This became so routine that Don Emerson, the Lifetouch photographer with whom I worked for many years, would adjust the school photography schedule so that I would have time to change into my costume for my own personal photo shoot. I would try to have my photo taken when others were not around so that my photo was only revealed when it went up on the hallway wall as part of the staff composite photo.

For many years, when the photos arrived at school, I would clip one out and mail it to my mother who still liked to receive school photos of my kids, my wife, and me. The superhero photo theme seemed to wear a little thin over the years for my mother, as she sometimes wondered aloud whether a school Principal should dress up in a costume. On my visits to her house, I noticed over time that while our family school photos were still displayed on her refrigerator, my own photo had migrated to less of a prominent position. It was often partially tucked behind an electrical bill, or obscured by a shopping list under

a decorative magnet. I think that my mother grew a little more reluctant to share the photo of a middle-aged son in a ridiculous costume. And, of course, this only encouraged me more.

Was there a motive behind my desire to portray myself as a superhero in the eyes of the school community? I will admit that it was likely fueled by both my ego and a respectful tip of the hat to the nerd culture that I love so much. When I had trouble connecting with kids, we could often talk about Marvel or Star Wars movies as a point of connection.

Overtime, I began to realize that there was something more behind presenting that persona to the school community. When I ran for the Board of Directors of the BCPVPA, during my three-minute speech to the Chapter Council representatives, I shared with them my habit of dressing in superhero costumes at school. What I also shared with Chapter Council – something that I never shared with my school community – was that the increasing demands on Principals and Vice-Principals was placing superheroic pressures on all of them.



The hypocrisy is not lost on me, as I externally presented myself and my role as being super-heroic while, at the same time, processing internally the super-heroic expectations and demands of the position. In my Director speech to Chapter Council, I tried to reconcile two contradictory things, and – spoiler alert – I did it poorly.

1. students should feel that their Principal or Vice-Principal is a superhero
2. the increasing demands of our roles should not require a Principal or Vice-Principal to be a superhero

To this day, I am still surprised that I received enough votes in that election, given the confusing nature of my speech. The Chapter Council representatives were likely politely pondering if my theme was that they need to be *like* a superhero, or *not* like a superhero. Ugh.

But perhaps the duality of those seemingly contradictory stances is the nature of what we do. Principals and Vice-Principals help students to do their best, provide supports to students and families, hold themselves to high ethical standards, and put the needs of those in their care first. Principals and Vice-Principals strive to serve the underserved and understand most importantly that greater power bows to lesser power. I could add the iconic line from Peter Parker's Uncle Ben in the *Spiderman* comics that, "with great power comes great responsibility".

If you stripped away the superpowers of any superhero, you would be left with those super-heroic ideals. Maybe the cape and costume are unnecessary. Maybe, it is more about striving to meet super-heroic ideals in the service of our school communities. And maybe, just maybe, my Mom was right after all.

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

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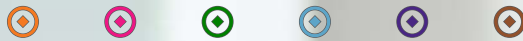
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