

Reflections on a Leadership Journey



by

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When I first took on the role of Vice-Principal in the Comox Valley School District in 1999, it was with a blend of trepidation and enthusiasm. A newcomer to the community, I was brimming with anticipation but also, I must confess, a case of imposter syndrome. In those early days, the weight of the responsibility occasionally prompted me to question my decision to uproot my young family and move to an unfamiliar community. Change, as we all know, often comes bearing the gift of discomfort. In this case, that discomfort was tangible. As time went on, my initial feelings of being an imposter gradually faded, replaced by a growing sense of purpose and belonging.

In retrospect, I can see that this early challenge was instrumental in shaping my approach to leadership. It strengthened my resolve and sharpened my focus on the power of community, collaboration, and resilience. This served to deepen my appreciation of – and commitment to – the BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association (BCPVPA). In this reflection, I'll share some of my thoughts about the remarkable journey that I was fortunate enough to experience. After all, in our profession, it is our shared experiences and our collective wisdom that truly makes us stronger.

In 2016, I stepped into a role that was, in equal parts, intimidating and exciting: President of the BCPVPA. It was a responsibility that I undertook with a sense of anticipation, a little apprehension, but – above all – a steadfast resolve to serve our members to the best of my abilities. One of the most enriching aspects of my role was the opportunity to visit and engage with members across the province. It was in these interactions that I was truly able to 'breathe their air', appreciate the depth of their commitment, and witness firsthand the difference their schools were making in students' lives.

Every visit was a unique narrative, and a testament to the passion and dedication of our members. From the coastal communities of Vancouver Island to the mountain-framed schools in the Kootenays, from bustling urban hubs to tranquil rural settings, each school had a unique flavour, and its own distinct energy. Yet, in each of them, I saw a common thread: a deep-rooted commitment to creating transformative learning environments for students.

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Being able to engage directly with our members, to share in their daily experiences, their triumphs, and their challenges, was an enlightening journey. I had the privilege of hearing stories that moved me, stories of students overcoming adversity, of communities coming together to support their schools, of members going above and beyond to ensure their students not only learned but thrived.

The pride our members take in their work is profound. You can see it in the way their eyes light up when they speak about a student's progress, in the energy with which they discuss new projects or initiatives, and in the deep sense of fulfillment they derive from

their work. Their dedication isn't just about improving academic outcomes; it is about positively influencing the life trajectories of their students.

In 2018, I transitioned from the role of President to Executive Director, a move that brought with it a whole new set of challenges and opportunities. From the start, I focused on elevating our collective impact, hoping to ensure that the BCPVPA was not just an association, but a catalyst for change and improvement in education. A crucial aspect of my role involved strengthening our provincial advocacy efforts, reaching out to people and organizations with influence over the day-to-day work of our members, and fostering a stronger collaborative culture.

That first summer, I met with a BC Ministry of Education official, known for his data analytics prowess, who posed an intriguing question: What accounted for BC students' exceptional performance when viewed in an international context? We explored different educational elements and research findings, including John Hattie's work on student achievement influences. Throughout, I listened more than I spoke, absorbing his strong data-centric perspective. The next summer, when I met with the official again, he was still grappling with the same question. His exhaustive data analysis hadn't yet cracked the code on BC students' success.

When he first posed the question in 2018, I felt I already knew the answer. Systemic success isn't pinned to a unique curriculum or numerical analysis. It's about the commitment and capacity of the people who work in the system, and the collaborative quality of their working relationships. These seemingly unquantifiable elements significantly shape our students' learning experiences. It is a people-focused explanation – it's not just numbers, but the humans behind the numbers.

Since the beginning, I viewed one of the important aspects of my work as telling the stories of our members. I held steadfast to the principle that our association is not just for BC's Principals and Vice-Principals, but of BC's Principals and Vice-Principals.

The BCPVPA's work is to uphold and honour the ideas of our members, the stories of their leadership context, their shifting concerns, and their successes as they lead one of the highest performing systems in the world.

As I reflect on my transition to Executive Director at that time, I am filled with gratitude for the trust placed in me by our members and staff. The role challenged me, helped me to grow, and deepened my understanding of the complex, multifaceted world of educational leadership. It has been a rich and impassioned journey of learning.

As my tenure unfolded, I found myself frequently referencing a concept I fondly termed as 'BCPVPA 2.0', something that helped me to frame my personal perspective on the work ahead. Surprisingly, amidst all the ongoing conversations and developments, no one ever directly asked me what I meant by BCPVPA 2.0. The concept wasn't just a catchy phrase, or a reference to a tech upgrade. To me, it represented the vision of enhancing our collective voice and professional growth as school leaders.

At the heart of my vision of BCPVPA 2.0 was the creation of a robust online learning platform. This platform would be accessible to BC Principals and Vice-Principals and, importantly, to educational leaders across the globe. Through this platform, we could foster connections that extended beyond our geographical boundaries, facilitating shared learning and collaboration on a global scale.

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Yet, BCPVPA 2.0 was not solely focused on learning and connectivity. A critical component of this vision involved enhancement of our advocacy work. With an increasingly interconnected membership, we could better identify the common contractual items that affect our members across the province, and look towards a collective negotiation that could yield stronger outcomes and support for our members.

Moreover, BCPVPA 2.0 embodied an increased emphasis on provincial advocacy. We could amplify our influence with key stakeholders, organizations, and decision-makers who shape the day-to-day work of Principals and Vice-Principals. By strengthening our voice and extending our reach, we could better represent the interests of our members and effect positive changes in our educational landscape.

BCPVPA 2.0 represented a vision for a forward-thinking and progressive association. We have made significant strides towards achieving this vision – from implementing BCPVPA Connects *powered by BetterEducate* and the WelTel initiative, to advocating for fairness and equity in contractual items on behalf of our members. However, I am mindful that this journey continues.

Unfinished work cannot be considered incomplete; rather, it represents the winding path of our collective voyage. Education is a dynamic field; its demands and opportunities are continuously evolving, and so too must our Association. We must continue to adapt, learn, and innovate. Our unfinished work is a testament to our commitment to staying relevant, responsive, and resilient in a changing educational landscape.

As I look to the future, I am optimistic. There is more work to be done, but the journey ahead promises growth and innovation. Throughout my time with the BCPVPA, I've had the privilege of encountering and working alongside some of the most dedicated, passionate, and inspiring individuals. Every interaction, every shared story, every gesture of support has instilled in me a deep sense of gratitude. I am thankful for the trust that members placed in



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May 2023

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me, for their willingness to share their experiences, and for their invaluable contributions to our shared vision.

Reflecting on my time with the BCPVPA, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to serve, to learn, and to contribute to the incredible work of our members. I am thankful for the kindness and

generosity of the people I've had the privilege of working with, for the lessons I've learned, and for the friendships I've made. Along the way, I've learned countless lessons, about leadership, about education, and about the power of community. I've learned that every voice matters, that collaboration is key to success, and that the heart of education lies in the relationships we build. All of these experiences have shaped my perspective, deepened my understanding, and left an indelible mark on my heart, making my tenure not just a professional journey, but a profoundly personal one as well.

Kevin Reimer announced his retirement from the BCPVPA on March 31, 2023. We are grateful for his passion for serving the Association, our members, and BC's public education sector.

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