

Andrea McComb SD #43

**Who Do We Choose to Be?
Facing Reality Claiming Leadership Restoring Sanity**
by Margaret J. Wheatley (2017)

Margaret Wheatley is my
grounding author.

Wheatley is a speaker, teacher, consultant, and advisor who believes, "leaders must invoke people's inherent generosity, creativity, and need for community", (cover). For those days when I sat at my desk with my head in my hands deliberating about thoughtful action, I would open one of her books to any page. Within her pages, I often became reacquainted with my values – my 'why'. And in every solution, she asks us to summon up the courage and bring people together: our answers lie in our connection to one another.

"I know joy to be the experience of connection, communion, presence, grace, as it is." (p. 234)

In this book Wheatley talks about what shifted since her earlier books. The state of our world is calling us to action, action to create islands of sanity among the chaos. She sets out to answer three questions:



Facing Reality:

Where are we and how did we get here?

Claiming Leadership:

What is the role of leaders now?

Restoring Sanity:

How do we create islands of sanity that sustain our best human qualities? (p.18)

Wheatley has woven together essays, stories, commentaries, and quotes to bring focus to the qualities of leadership that are necessary for this time. She deems the essential leadership skills as compassion, discernment, and presence. Beautiful photographs are

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interspersed throughout the book to provide space for contemplation.

This book situates us in the arrow of time (everything having a beginning, middle and end) with a grounding in the Science of Living Systems and the Patterns of Complex Civilizations. These lenses paint a picture of where we are situated politically, culturally, and humanely. Facing 'what is' calls us to choose who we want – and need – to be to lead and to be more human. Her guiding image is the Warrior of the Human Spirit.

"A Warrior of the Human Spirit is a decent human being who aspires to be of service in an indecent, inhumane time." (p. 255)

"The Warriors are armed with only two weapons: compassion and insight. They are peaceful warriors, vowing to never use aggression or fear to accomplish their ends." (p. 252)

This book was written prior to 2020 but could not be more relevant in this time of extremes. Leadership matters in this time as we see new patterns of interacting and creating community emerge, as we challenge our systems to become equitable, and as we give up personal freedoms to keep each other safe during a pandemic.

Andrea is in her 34th year of education and 23rd year as a school leader. She has worked in the Comox Valley and Coquitlam School Districts, and also taught for a year in Abu Dhabi. Presently, Andrea is the Principal of Learning Services in Coquitlam. She is the mother of four grown children and one dog, and Nana to two children and four dogs. Her husband is an understanding Retired Principal.

Holly Zurak
SD #27

A Walking Curriculum Evoking Wonder and Developing Sense of Place

by Gillian Judson (2018)

M-Kuwetem-kt – "We walk"

This September has been like no other. Like many other BC schools, we began with the plan to spend more time learning outside. Students and staff at our school were used to doing a daily morning walk as an entire school. We have long recognized that the benefits of walking daily with students are numerous. And, like seemingly everything else this Fall, it was a routine that required some reimagination to be COVID-protocol friendly. At École Nesika Elementary, we kicked off our Walking Challenge with this intent.

We will walk with intention and imagination every day for thirty days. That's where "A Walking Curriculum" (Judson) comes in. In the summer of 2019, I was fortunate to be sent by my school district to the Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education (NOIIE) symposium at UBC, where Gillian Judson was a guest speaker. When Gillian began speaking about her passion for imaginative structures and ecological education, something powerful started happening in my heart and I thought, "Wow: I need to have this book". At the time, I was the Principal of a very small rural school with thirty students, and it was like the missing



piece of curriculum I was seeking. I thought, “We can do this. We are this”.

At Big Lake Elementary, in September 2019, we began to walk. Our walks ranged from a five-minute walk all the way up to an hour-long walk. One of the intentions of doing the curriculum as a challenge was to do it in partnership with other schools taking up this initiative from across BC and around the world. We shared on our social media accounts with other schools, and felt connected around the province.

The Walking Curriculum is a teaching resource for K-12 educators. It is designed for the educator who is passionate about supporting student learning and dedicated to growing in their practice, but who may not have considered moving outside the school walls in these pursuits. All educators can afford their students the opportunity to connect with the wildness in the world, whether in urban, suburban, or rural settings.

The sixty walks provided in the resource reflect a variety of themes, perspectives, and motivations. For example, students may be asked to find things (shapes, spaces or lines, evidence of growth or change, the 'best' hiding places), to change perspectives (imagine being a beetle, a detective, or a visitor from outer space), to encounter the world differently (with an emphasis on one sense over another, or moving through space differently), or to seek evidence of human-nature relationships. In all activities, the aim is to deepen awareness of the particularities and meaning of place.

Now in the Fall of 2020 – and a September like no other – we handed out 16 copies of the book to all of our division teachers. Educators using the Walking Curriculum at École Nesika Elementary, with 300 downtown students, say they are experimenting, collaborating and discussing these ideas in ways that can support their professional growth. We are finding the Walking Curriculum to be a powerful bridge, connecting traditional, ‘placeless’ ways of teaching with an Indigenous worldview that acknowledges that human beings learn from the relationships they experience within their human, other-than-human, and more-than-human communities. Our Shuswap language teacher, Floyd Dick, has been walking with his language and culture classes and has adapted some of the walks to incorporate Secwepemctsin words and place names.

They are noticing the positive impact that the walks have on the students’ mental well-being, and their ability to regulate their emotions. He calls the program **M-Kuwetem-kt** (in Secwepemctsin: ‘We walk’).

Holly lives and works in Williams Lake, Cariboo-Chilcotin (SD27). She has worked and walked as Principal in three small rural schools, and is now Vice-Principal at École Nesika Elementary where she is laughing and learning every day. She is a wife and mom of two daughters who keep her appreciating the little things.



iLLUMinating conversations

Vi Hughes is a retired Principal who worked in the Vancouver School District #39. Through the years, Vi has gathered anecdotes about the qualities of an effective school leader, and is sharing just a few of these gems in this edition of Principi(ed).

See from Different Perspectives

Overheard at recess as the kindergarten students were getting ready to head out to the playground ...

“You’ve got your boots on the wrong feet,” the teacher pointed out to one of the children. The student looked down, studied her feet and said, “But these are the only feet I’ve got.”