

In response to COVID-19, all was paused – what a rare and unique opportunity to really examine our education system and potentially leapfrog change. With not much time for reflection on the circumstances, the education system quickly moved to transition. It was all hands on deck to figure out a new way of being, while remaining mindful of potential repercussions. The fact that change was not optional gave permission for a reimagining and reshaping of existing structures and systems. What quickly surfaced, as represented in the guiding principles from the BC Ministry of Education, was that human lives and equity were the priority.

Equity became a guiding star for the work in transformation moving forward. What an opportunity to explore the creation of a new learning environment, with inclusion and equity in mind right from the start. As the school year drew to a close, there was a finite window of opportunity to scan for impact. The Delta School District (DSD) had been doing a spiral of inquiry on how to make transitions successful for students, a co-created endeavour involving the three strands of the Learning Services department: Curriculum, Assessment & Instruction, Indigenous Education and Inclusive Learning. Brooke Moore, District Principal of Inquiry and Innovation in the DSD, had shared Tilleczek's concept of transitions as "being, belonging, and becoming" (McGregor, 2019, p. 9). Tilleczek frames transitions as being a period of change, rather than a series of distinct events.

**"Equity became
a guiding star
for the work in
transformation
moving forward."**

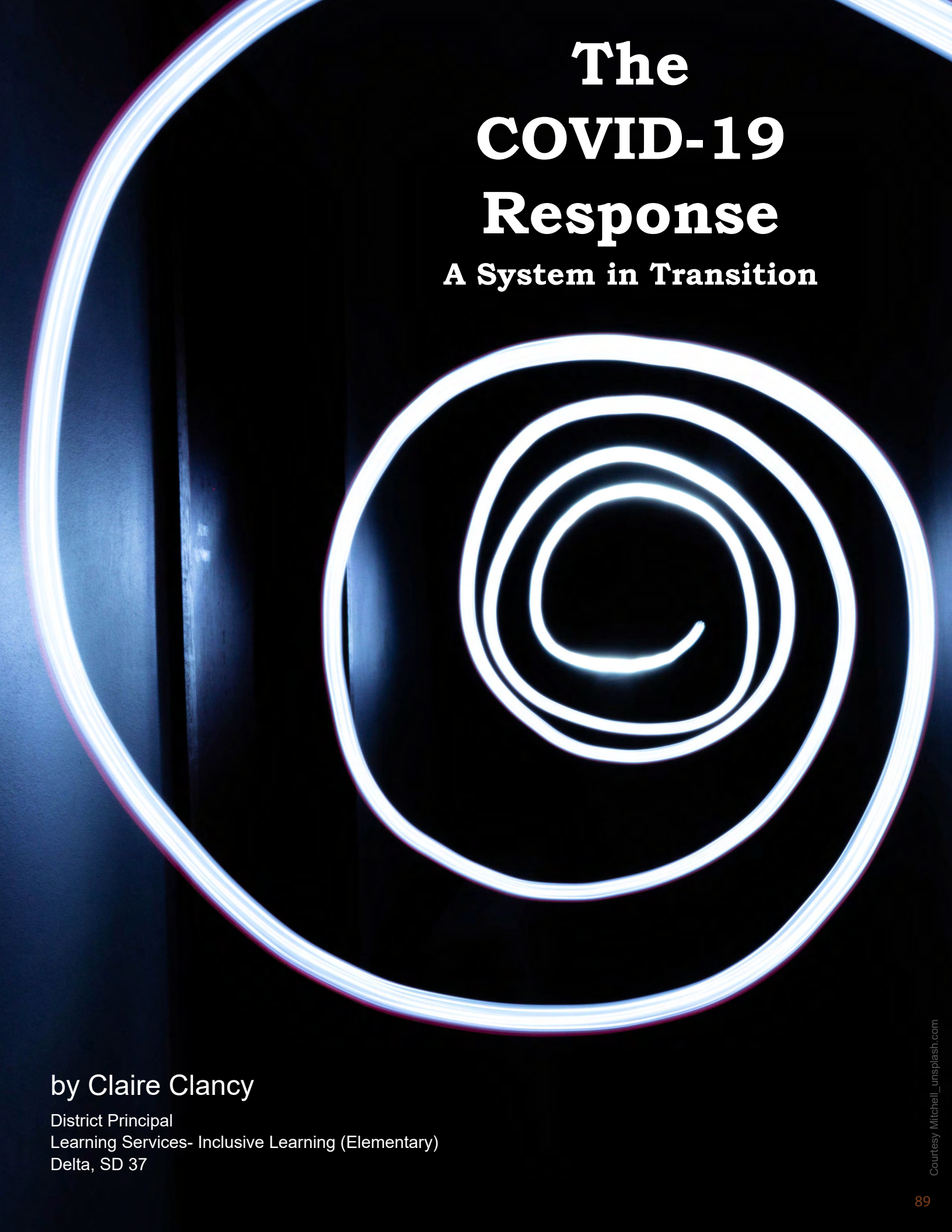
When the district transition spiral group was scanning to gather data on what students need for successful transitions, the first action was to survey. Surveys provide the opportunity to gather large volumes of data from a

diverse range of learners. The difficulty that the transition spiral group found was that while interpreting the data, they were having to fill in gaps with their own assumptions and biases. The transition group had to be cautious that their "... inquiry stance ... was [not] directed toward confirmation rather than disconfirmation of assumptions" (Robinson et al., 2020, pg. 3). In other words, that they were seeking truth, not confirmation of preconceived notions.

A transition spiral sub-group was formed to inquire into their hunch that if they talk to students directly, they could co-create transition plans with students that are more likely to succeed. They decided to interview and dialogue with students directly, and this allowed for the nuance of the narrative to be revealed. As well, through dialogue, each student gained insight into who they are as a learner, and what they need for generative transitions: it was a mutually beneficial process.

As part of the transition spiral, the spiral group did some new learning as it relates to transitions, and discovered that the person collecting the data – or interviewing the student – also impacts the information gathered. The research articles revealed that a connection between student and teacher – or between student and an adult in the building who believes the student will be a success – is critical. Not only did this mean that the dialogue was more authentic, but also that any needs that were revealed could be acted upon because the student and person interviewing had a connection. Through this transition spiral, changes to systems and structures have already begun. One significant system change as a result of the transition spiral work has been a new Grade 7-8 Transition Planning Process. The hope had been to expand this work, and COVID-19 did just that. The transition spiral had revealed that multiple modes, or differentiating data collection, is critical to transition planning success. In particular, listening directly to both students and adults proved significant.

When it came time to scan the impact that the COVID-19 response had on the learning environment, differentiating data collection was again critical, including deep listening to the 'collective voice' of staff, students, parents and community members. The DSD surveyed staff, families and students about 'the COVID-19 experience' but also



The COVID-19 Response

A System in Transition

by Claire Clancy

District Principal
Learning Services- Inclusive Learning (Elementary)
Delta, SD 37

took the time to reach out to have a direct dialogue in order to unearth the true stories. It was important to capture the narratives in multiple modes. As an example, a group Zoom meeting with elementary counsellors was held, and included the opportunity to break out into small groups for discussion about the COVID-19 response. One member of each group recorded highlights from the conversation. The individual counsellors were then offered the opportunity to independently add to a shared document over the next few weeks. It was also imperative to consider which voices may have been missed, and to then create opportunities to reach out in different ways.

The response plans put in place as a result of data collected also need careful examination. A speaker at the 2019 Intersectionalities Conference from Brock University said the 'microspace of equity' is the space between when a [person] speaks and when we answer. There is a moral imperative that leaders responsible for next steps are moving ahead with authentic, unbiased evidence. When examining the data from various sources, are leaders also examining their own beliefs – individually and collectively? Working to build trust is key in building relationships and connections, particularly if a group of leaders will work together to create next steps and solutions.

In the OECD, the Future of Education and Skill: Education 2030 (2018) states that, "In order to help enable agency, educators must not only recognize learners' individuality, but also acknowledge the wider set of relationships – with their teachers, peers, families and communities – that influence their learning. A concept underlying the learning framework is 'co-agency' ... everyone should be considered a learner, not only students but also teachers, [principals], parents and communities" (p. 4). The response to COVID-19 may have moved the system – at a quicker non-linear pace than expected – toward the goals of the OECD 2030 Learning Framework. Perhaps COVID-19 has allowed the system to skip "steps...ending up in a new place altogether" (Winthrop et al., 2018, p. 9).

There is still much work to be done in relation to inclusion and equity in education. As learned through this transition spiral of inquiry, it is through dialogue and deep listening that trust is built. Working to build trust is key in building relationships and connection.

**“As learned through
this transition
spiral of inquiry, it
is through dialogue
and deep listening
that trust is built.”**

As Serra, Spillman, Jackson, Davis, & Bray (2018) observed, taking a high expectations relationships stance versus high expectations as a performance agenda (high expectations related to effort, and achievement) may help create the kind of environment that would allow for critical analysis of current contexts as it relates to inclusion and equity. It's not enough to say, 'inclusion is too difficult'. We can't lower expectations, however, seeing high expectations through a relational lens may leapfrog potential barriers and resistance. High expectation relationships create "robust and dialogic environments with colleagues that are conducive to high expectation pedagogy, and strong relationships with parents and [caregivers] that will optimize support for students' educational efforts and aspirations" (Sarra et al., 2018, p. 2). So far, the impact of COVID-19 has shown potential

Clusters of Innovative Pedagogies



in innovative pedagogies such as those captured in the Learning to Leapfrog: Innovative Pedagogies to Transform Education article (2019). Equity is the lens through which the six clusters of innovative pedagogies, as seen in the graphic, have been vetted. As well, student agency is a critical factor in each. Innovative pedagogies that lead to responsive and adaptive teaching to meet the diverse needs of learners, adults and students, is essential to inclusive and equitable learning environments, and the spiral of inquiry allows time to play and explore innovative practice while at the same time continuing to check for impact.

Dr. Sheila Bennet from Brock University spoke at the Intersectionalities Conference at the University of British Columbia in July of 2019. Dr. Bennet shared her experience as a child being educated in a one-room schoolhouse. Inclusion was a way of being: no ‘calm down rooms’ or ‘special programs’ to go to – just one school, one room. Everyone belonged and everyone cared for each other. Diversity is the norm: there is no typical or average learner, therefore, one size does not fit all. But, certainly, one school, classroom, community – one world – does. Educators have seen students transform from

being ‘challenging students’ to ‘thriving students’. The key is: no single solution – simply a belief that students can be successful and the imagination of a network of curious and adaptive learners and fellow community members who seek to find ways for student success, purpose, and belonging.

“All has not been lost: there has been good that has come from this COVID-19 experience.”

All has not been lost – there has been good that has come from this COVID-19 experience. Collective voice can lead to collective agency, and hopefully closer to the 2030 OECD goal of individual and societal well-being. As Laura Tait, Assistant Superintendent at Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools - School District 68 (2020) shared, as leaders “let us be learners in front of everybody so that others can take risks ... Let’s lead in an Indigenous way with love, respect, kindness and generosity”.

“... let us be learners in front of everybody so that others can take risks ... Let’s lead in an Indigenous way with love, respect, kindness and generosity.” - *Laura Tait, SD 68*

References:

Bennet, S. (2019) Intersectionalities Conference at the University of British Columbia

Hallgarten, J., Hannon, V., & Beresford, T. (2016). Creative Public Leadership: How System Leaders Can Create the Conditions for System-wide Innovation. Qatar: World Innovation Summit for Education.

Istance, D. & Paniagua (2019) Learning-to-Leapfrog-Innovative Pedagogies to Transform Education. Centre for Universal Education at Brookings .pdf

Kaser, L., & Halbert, J., (2017) The Spiral Playbook: Leading With an Inquiry Mindset in School Systems and Schools. C21 Canada- Canadians for 21st Century Learning.

OECD (2018). The Future of Education and Skills – Education 2030. The Future We Want. OECD. Pdf

Robinson, V., Meyer, F., Le Fevre, D. & Sinnema, C. (2020): The Quality of Leaders’ Problem-Solving Conversations: Truth-Seeking or Truth-Claiming? Leadership and Policy in Schools, DOI:10.1080/15700763.2020.1734627

Tait L. (2020). Assistant Superintendent at Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools - School District 68 (TELP 5 presentation, A Case Study of Leadership- Perspectives, Biases and Assumptions, May 30, 2020)

Winthrop, R., McGivney, E., & Barton, A. (2018). Can We Leapfrog? The Potential of Education Innovations to Rapidly Accelerate Progress. Center for Universal Education at Brookings. CAN WE LEAPFROG?