Foundations for New School Leaders

the next generation of
BCPVPA
Short Course I

Those who have been in educational leadership in British Columbia for a number of years will have heard the name **BCPVPA Short Course** in conversations about new school leaders learning the ropes. Short Course began more than 40 years ago in partnership with the University of British Columbia; over that time, thousands of school leaders and facilitators have come together in the spirit of learning and leadership development.

The program has evolved through the years to reflect and align with changes in educational practice. And, for the two years of the global pandemic, we were grateful to continue the tradition and deliver the program virtually to ensure that we could meet the needs of new leaders. But there is nothing like meeting in person. In July 2022, we burst out of the gate with a return to this live learning event under a new name: **Foundations for New School Leaders**. More than 156 attendees, 22 facilitators, BCPVPA staff, and expert session leaders from the sector and beyond gathered at UBC for a week of intensive and unparalleled learning and connection.

Shortly after the conclusion of the 2022 Foundations sessions, we invited participants to share their thoughts about their learning, about what inspired them that week, and about the deeper dive it might have sparked or reinforced. As we approach the next Foundations session in July 2023, we wanted to illustrate what this learning opportunity means to both new and seasoned leaders. What better way to do that, than through their own words.

We are grateful to Dr. Rishi Singh, Claudio Bortolussi, Morgen MacDonald, and Dr. Shannon Behan for sharing their personal impressions of the 2022 Foundations for New School Leaders.

DR. RISHI SINGH

Principal, Gobind Sarvar School
2022 Foundations Attendee

This leadership course was an amazing learning experience and fusion of wisdom!

The day began early with the recognition of the Musqueam people. It is on their blessed land that all the Principals and Vice-Principals convened to become learners. The plenary session – about decolonizing educators' approach to leadership – engaged with various issues, concerns and solutions faced by a school's leadership. Emphasis was laid on moral courage to uphold the values, vision, and mission of the school.

It did not take long before all of us began to feel like a family at Table 21. Lynette (Power, SD34), our facilitator, made us feel as relaxed as one is at home and as alert as one is at school. It was wonderful to listen to everyone's experiences, challenges, and opinions about the similar tasks that we all encounter in our work every day. The challenges brought us closer, with the realization that a lot more must be done to better our system, improve our approaches to solutions, and to ensure that students' future is at the centre of it all.

From July 4 – 8, 2022, a number of pertinent topics were shared and discussed, including

- Leading through a legal lens
- Restorative decision-making
- Student-centered leadership
- An introduction to compassionate systems leadership
- Unconscious bias
- The legal side of leadership
- BCPVPA Connects
- Structures and processes to support inclusion
- Cultivating trust and powered leadership health and wellness
- Understanding teacher evaluations
- Promoting a psychologically safe culture for students, staff, and you
- Learning through the Indigenous Art Walk
- Knowledge about personal services contracts
- Wellness at the intersection of leading learning and living
- Professional learning and development

No other topics could have been more vital for the leaders in the room!

My presence at the course led to a feeling of deep gratitude that will stay with me for as long as I am the Principal of the Gobind Sarvar School. What I learned at the course was derived from the experiences of thousands of hours of school leadership. It was an excellent synthetic interpretation of critical knowledge for all Vice-Principals and Principals.

CLAUDIO BORTOLUSSI
Principal, SD41 – Burnaby
2022 Foundations Facilitator

Building your Culture and Learning Community Through Belonging

Another year is underway, and schools are preparing to bring students, teachers, and parents together into buildings with the hope of creating optimal environments for learning to occur. The element at the heart of the work that is done in schools is relationships. Schools work to build them up, and nurture the spaces and places for everyone to connect.

My impetus here is not about connecting; rather, it's about belonging. You see, belonging is at the heart of learning. Without that acceptance, we can connect all we want, but we will not create the authentic trust that is required.

> **Connection:** happens when people are seen, heard, and understood for who they are (and for who they are not)
>
> **Belonging:** is when people are accepted for who they are
>
> **Trust:** is when people can express who they are (and who they are not) with an assurance of being included, and uplifted in the process

What we need to know is that the feeling of belonging is innate in all of us. We each crave that acceptance for what we are, and how we fit into a group. The values we feel are common, the history we feel is close, the relationships we develop are reciprocal. We all want to belong!

So: how do you create belonging? Can you fabricate it? Can you instill it in people? The answer is yes. And with our roles in schools, we are about to go on journey that will show you how, and help you understand the human emotion that will allow learning to take the lead in the work leaders do.

The key is that each organization is unique, and requires different nurturing strategies. Giving people what they need is different than giving people what they want. Leading – and creating efficiencies in – what organizations want, and need, is different for each one. Understanding the values and culture of your organization will allow a good leader to shift and move the organization in a positive and efficient way, so that everyone takes ownership of cultural growth and organization develops values that everyone understands and nurtures, fostering capacity building.

Leaders need to understand that empowerment in an organization is the most important thing one can do. By creating belonging with trust, your organization can grow internally by creating lateral capacity, instead of operating with siloed experts. Your organization will be much more engaged if people within the organization have the ability – the capacity – to take on other roles to fulfill growth opportunities both for the organization and for themselves (ownership, trust & belonging). One way is to float the idea of 'How', and to start digging a little deeper by asking pointed questions that are specific to your organization until you get traction and encourage dialogue within the group. You job then becomes to create opportunity, and invite facilitation, listen, and shift the group values within the ones that exist in the organization.

With each organization, the culture is different. Leaders need to facilitate an understanding of the culture, and manage change within the culture that is not just a change for the sake of change, but a purposeful 'shift'. Your employees are smart enough to know and understand what your onboarding is all about. If the organization does not allow them to be an integral part of the growth required to create ownership, trust, and belonging, then you are delaying and prolonging the 'shift' and efficiency you are trying to attain.

Here are a few examples of how you can facilitate connection, belonging, and trust within your own organization.

Where does your name come from? Ask people to share where their name came from, how their parents came up with the name; the story behind their thinking as they were preparing to bring a child into the world; and the connection and belonging they had in mind for you.

Give and take ideas: Create a process of learning and sharing by giving employees opportunities and resources, and yourself the opportunity to gain more from the employees in your organization. This process helps you build, gratitude, relationships and trust within your organization. www.giveandtakeinc.com/givitas

Finally, I would like to challenge people to take the time to look at the organization they are connected to, and ask themselves:

What is it that I would like to change about the culture of our group?

How would I go about doing that?

Small changes – 'shifts' – can lead to greater group engagement efficiency than a large-scale change. This is due to the inclusive nature of the 'shift', the ownership that is developed, the trust that you encourage, and the communication you facilitate with your group.

Appendix: My research and consultation work with these topics have led to some amazing conversations with and about organizations and their Social Emotional Leadership, and capacity-building with their leaders. I would love to share my finding with you! Find out more: csbortolussi@shaw.ca or csbortolussi@gmail.com

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MORGEN MACDONALD

Vice-Principal, SD83 – North Okanagan-Shushwap
2022 Foundations Attendee

From across the province we gathered – arriving by car, bus, commercial airline, and float plane – from the many districts of this beautiful land. New Principals and Vice-Principals descended on the UBC campus located on the traditional unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Itineraries had been emailed, the Yapp app was downloaded, and table groups assigned. Welcome to your new family!

Under the caring, thoughtful, and encouraging guidance of our table facilitators, we got to know table members as more then colleagues; they quickly became our friends. Each morning started with a group reflection, skillfully designed to prepare us for the day's learning. From this connected starting point, presenters helped us explore the four leadership standards of the BCPVPA framework. When challenged to take a critical and reflective look at our own personal values and biases, facilitators and family groups allowed us the space and freedom to express ourselves, and to be authentic and vulnerable. The "Goose-Chase" around the UBC campus offered groups a chance to have some fun and step outside our comfort zones to complete several challenges around the school. This break allowed for some much-needed laughter, and a look at how group members interact and work together in a fun-filled situation. During breakout groups, we met new people and heard new voices as participants listened to presenters talk about being instructional leaders.

Groups explored Indigenous perspectives and the relational aspect of leadership. We heard from many speakers who highlighted the importance of relationship in the leadership role. Following a break, we headed out on a guided art walk of the UBC campus, which highlighted the work being done towards reconciliation by honouring and remembering the people who were on this land before the campus existed. This was a moving tour that highlighted story and memory. The day ended with an information session about circle, and then some circle work. The challenge of the day was to consider how you, moving forward, could incorporate Indigenous culture into your school or classroom; circle was presented as an option in a skillful and welcoming way.

The nuts and bolts of leadership – the organizational lens – was covered during an intense day of learning that included case studies with new mixed table groups. These put our learning of the week to the test, and helped us navigate some real-life school-based situations. New groupings and partnerships, where the comfort and familiarity of our table group didn't exist, challenged us to be able to work with others in difficult situations. Table facilitators helped us to think critically about our answers, and challenged us to consider our biases, the thoughts of teaching staff and the school community, and encouraged us to explain our thinking.

The week ended with a warm breakfast and a wrap-up of our learning. We gained awareness of resources, courses, and networks that we can access through the BCPVPA. During this time, we were surprised and privileged to be a part of a blanketing ceremony for retired BCPVPA Directors of Professional Learning and Development, Jessica Antosz and Elizabeth Bell, performed by members of the Squamish Nation. This highlighted not only the amazing work of the BCPVPA, but also the efforts of the North Vancouver School District in working with Indigenous Peoples; it was not only a privilege to witness, but also inspiring to see these communities working together so closely.

Throughout it all, we gained exponential amounts of knowledge: by the end of each day, table group consensus was always that our brains were full, and that we were feeling inspired. When asked, “what stood out?” the answer is the friendships, networks, and increased sense of being supported. When asked, “what will you take away for the week?” the answer is to be yourself, be brave, be kind, be humble, and be reflective. Table Ten really did grow to become my friends and collegial family. I left the campus with a richer knowledge of my new role, but more importantly with an increased sense of self, and a level of confidence and feeling that if I need someone there are seven people from around the province that I can reach out to for support. Memories of this conference will serve as moments of laughter, reminders of reflection and self-care, and feelings of confidence in my knowledge and capabilities as a future leader.

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DR. SHANNON BEHAN

Principal, SD 47 – Powell River
2022 Foundations Facilitator

British Columbia's education system is often referred to on a global stage as a 'world-class' or 'high-performing' system. Research from the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) tells us that the criteria for a high-performing system include the commonly held belief that education is worth the investment. There is a collective belief in developing talent in humans rather than sorting human talent, that a diversity of learners are welcomed and celebrated, that ambitious goals are set, and that teachers are encouraged to be innovative, creative, dynamic and to pursue professional development that will ultimately improve their own practise. The best performing school systems provide high-quality education across their entire system, and student success is not defined merely by a postal code. Investment in the leadership in high-performing systems is key to student success.

Each year, throughout BC, school and district leadership candidates are interviewed and hired into their respective districts. For some, the idea of going into administration has been an aspiration since the day they graduated from university. For others, the idea is one that came with encouragement from a mentor. However each person comes to the role, one of the first steps for many is to attend BCPVPA's Foundations for New School Leaders. This is a one week, intensive, and thought-provoking course where colleagues are provided essential nuggets that will help them to thrive – rather than simply survive – early administrative work.

I was fortunate to attend the program, previously named 'Short Course', as a new administrator. Over the years, I have also attended as a facilitator. Essentially, as the year wraps up, and before you can even really clean off your desk, one needs to quickly pack for a week away to live in the infamous Gage Towers, and to be on and focused from 8:00 am to when the wee hours of the evening begin to wane. One might wonder why you would ever sign up for this week after initially attending as a newbie: here's why.

As a new administrator, we often look for the tangibles that will help us get through the day-to-day minutiae

of running a school: how to set staff meeting agendas, how to organize regular assemblies or assign lockers, or how to inform parents of the 'stop, drop, and roll' parking expectations. Often, signing a personal services contract is confusing and intimidating. New administrators are getting their feet on the ground, excited and filled with the vigour of being a new school leader, and eager to get rolling.

What happens for a facilitator, however, is that the invaluable years of experience and insight become the scaffolding and guideposts for new colleagues. The years we spent navigating difficult conversations, the frameworks we use for ethical decision making, the breadth of our work including the successes and challenges, are the foundational elements that are shared with new administrators. We connect with those who are privileged to be in the role and help mentor them throughout this week, and often for years into their career. It is both a privilege and an honour to connect closely with the amazing talent we have in this province, and to encourage them as they begin this amazing journey!

In the summer of 2022, Foundations was again held as a live program during the first week of July. Well over 200 participants – both facilitators and newbies – descended on the UBC Point Grey campus which sits on the traditional ancestral unceded territory of the xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam) People. Looking through the lens of equity, and guided by the phenom Dr. Mark Edwards and his team alongside the professional development team at BCPVPA, the week included opportunities to navigate topics such as relational, instructional, organizational, and ethical leadership as outlined in the BCPVPA Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals in British Columbia. It was also a time to make friends, reflect on our own practise, and connect with colleagues all over the province. It is an exhausting week, and one that I hope you might one day have a chance to attend!

FOUNDATIONS

for New School Leaders

bcpvpa

July 3 - 7, 2023 UBC Campus

Foundations is essential learning for leaders new to the role of Vice-Principal or Principal. Presented in collaboration with the UBC Faculty of Education, Foundations is guided by the *BCPVPA Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals in BC*, and explores what new school leaders need in their roles.

bcpvpa.org/professional-learning/registration