

Fall 2022

InspiredED

The official journal of the
British Columbia School
Superintendents Association



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The Spirit of Leadership

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CONTENTS



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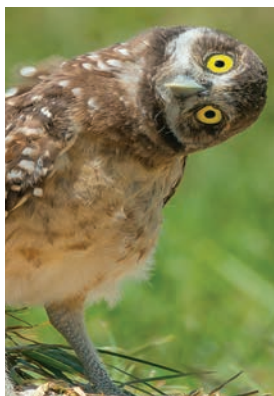
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GREETINGS

- 7 A Message from the BCSSA President
- 8 A Message from the Superintendent of Indigenous Education for the Ministry of Education and Childcare
- 9 A Message from the BCSSA Executive Director



FEATURES

- 12 Telling our Story: The Journey of *The Spirit of Leadership*
- 14 Helping Kids and Communities: Stewardship for the Future of all Children
- 19 An Openness to Seeing the World from Other Perspectives: Contextual Literacy
- 21 Deepening Understanding and Enhancing Learning: Aligning Structures with Vision for Learning
- 26 Creating a Passion for Learning: Fostering a Culture of Curiosity and Inquiry
- 28 Growing the Capacity of Self and Others: Student-Led Experiences Bring Community and School Together
- 30 Index to Advertisers

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On the cover:

This issue's cover features artwork from Rain Pierre, a member of the Katzie First Nation and the artist who brought BCSSA's *The Spirit of Leadership* document visually alive. Throughout this issue of *Inspired* you'll learn from Rain how each animal shown on the various paddles connects with the five competencies included in *The Spirit of Leadership*. He explains, "Each competency has a paddle dedicated to it, but it can also be viewed as a feather. The intention of the paddles / feathers is to resemble flight. We must be prepared to take flight and spread our wings to see the world from a new angle. We must be able to see the whole picture in order to make systematic change for our people and build better relationships." **You can connect with Rain on his website www.rainawakens.com, or through social media (@rainawakens on TikTok and Instagram).**



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A Message from the BCSSA President

Thomas King says, "The truth about stories is that that's all we are." The British Columbia School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) has existed for over 100 years, and our association has a lengthy story. The narrative of the association would include a long list of characters, plots, twists, and likely a few run on sentences.

The release of *The Spirit of Leadership* marks a new chapter in the story of BCSSA. Each of you will write the pages of this chapter, individually and collectively, as we seek to explore and deepen our leadership competencies to benefit our students, their families, and the communities we serve.

If Thomas King was right and stories are all we are, then I am grateful that the current membership of BCSSA will leave such a positive mark on the story of this association.

I hope that *The Spirit of Leadership* positively influences your story as a leader.

Yours truly,

Teresa Downs

President, British Columbia School Superintendents Association
Superintendent, SD 74 (Gold Trail)

Join BCSSA in 2023!



Spring 2023 - Westin Bayshore Vancouver, April 21

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Fall 2023 – Westin Bayshore Vancouver, November 16 - 17

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A Message from the Superintendent of Indigenous Education for the Ministry of Education and Childcare



Denise Augustine
Superintendent of Indigenous
Education for the Ministry of
Education and Childcare

We used to think it was enough to help Indigenous children and youth fit into the education system. Now we know that it is our job to evolve the system to fit Indigenous learners.

One of the many, many practices of the Indigenous Peoples of British Columbia that I love, is that of expressing gratitude. Thanks is given at the beginning and end of each day, before – in the middle – at the end of ceremony, to the people, the ancestors, the land, and the animals. We don't need to turn to eastern philosophies to learn that fostering gratitude is a way to foster mental well-being. Local Indigenous peoples carry the knowledge of this wise practice.

As the days grow shorter, and we prepare for the winter, there is so much to be grateful for; fish for canning and smoking, fruit for jam, summer holiday memories of time with family and friends, and the purpose and meaning we find in the work we do. We are fortunate to be part of one of the very best education systems in the world, to be leaders in the work, to demonstrate courage while navigating an ever-changing environment (COVID-19, floods, fires, teacher shortages), and to have the opportunity for deep listening to parents, teachers, school support staff, operations folks, trustees, ministry. We are working hard to achieve respect for all.

Uy'skweyul Siem nu Siyeyu. Good day my respected friends. Enthu Swee'alt. My hul'q'umi'num name is Swee'alt. It is the name of my grandmother's sister (Irene Griffiths) and my great grandmother (Alice Alec). I am the daughter of Kwatileematt (Jane Marston) and David Marston. My paternal grandparents were Bernice Brummit and Maynard Marston. I am the daughter of a welder and nurse, granddaughter of fishermen and women, loggers, Cowichan knitters – people who lived in close relationship with the land. I have lived my life in the Cowichan Valley, hul'q'umi'num lands that have not been surrendered. I have been an educator for over 25 years and currently serve as the Superintendent of Indigenous Education for the Ministry of Education and Childcare.

This introduction is another Indigenous practice that I love. As said by Jo Chrona in *Wayi Wah! Indigenous Pedagogies*, "Acknowledging the relationality of who we are, who we are connected to, and where we are, models Indigenous values of kinship ties, connections to land, our position

in history and our roles in present relations. It also recognizes and reaffirms the land-based connections of Indigenous Peoples. It asks us to think about not only the land and place we are on, but also the role of colonization in claiming that place, and implications for identity and belonging for all of us."

As we learn more, we are called to do better, to do different. We used to think that it was enough to read a book with images of First Nation tools or regalia. Now we know that we need to find books written by Indigenous authors accurately depicting the diversity of Indigenous Peoples in the province. We used to think it was enough to learn *about* Indigenous peoples. Now we know that we need to learn *from* Indigenous peoples. We used to think it was enough to help Indigenous children and youth fit into the education system. Now we know that it is our job to evolve the system to fit Indigenous learners. We used to think Indigenous Peoples were just another special interest group. Now we know that Indigenous Peoples must have a say over the education of their children and that First Nations of British Columbia are governments and we must respect them as such. We used to think our education system was fair and equitable. Now we know that we still have more work to do to MAKE our system fair and equitable for ALL.

Another powerful practice of Indigenous Peoples in British Columbia is that of recognizing the gifts in ourselves and each other and using those gifts to create a world fit for inheritance by those who will follow. Thank you for sharing your experience, skills, and knowledge as an educational leader. Thank you for standing up and providing guidance and wise council, for asking the questions that need to be asked, and for bravely leading change on behalf of those who have been marginalized for too long, for navigating an ever-changing landscape (COVID-19, floods, fires, teacher shortages, and the list goes on). Thank you for your active role in raising our children.

The actions you are taking today will impact generations to come. Huy tseep q'u siem nu siyeyu.

Denise Augustine

Superintendent of Indigenous Education for the
Ministry of Education and Childcare

A Message from the BCSSA Executive Director



Claire Guy
Executive Director
British Columbia School
Superintendents Association

The strategic plan for the British Columbia School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) focuses on four key areas: leadership, voice, equity, and support, and I would argue that all four of these are essential to the stewardship for the future of all children.

One of the challenges I find in writing these articles, is that publication deadlines require us to compose our thoughts much in advance of the actual release of each magazine. This requires a forward-thinking approach – one that we, as system leaders, do each day in our districts to best provide *Stewardship for the Future of all Children* – which is one of BCSSA's Leadership Competencies. As I reflect upon the theme for this edition, *The Spirit of Leadership*, nothing could be truer than this moral purpose that drives us. As per this competency, “our eternal purpose is to embrace the challenges ahead, and to have the courage to create a future that is inclusive, just, and sustainable.”

While none of us have the ‘crystal ball’ that would be so useful to predict the future, our students count on us to see a future vision that is for them, not us, and it is incumbent upon us to focus our decision making, actions, and professional learning to supporting their futures. The strategic plan for the British Columbia School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) focuses on four key areas: leadership, voice, equity, and support, and I would argue that all four of these are essential to the stewardship for the future of all children. Leaders ARE visionaries – and as such, you as leaders see a future that doesn't yet exist and put plans in place to allow your students to flourish.

At our August Summer Leadership Academy in Whistler, the leaders who graciously wrote the articles for this journal, courageously shared their thoughts about what each competency means to them. I am grateful for their dedication in sharing

their time with you in this magazine and for their work on bringing the competencies to life. I am hoping you will be inspired by their descriptions and find meaning and connections for your work in your own districts.

As I write this, I am still euphoric from the energy that comes from all of us finally being together. What was especially meaningful for me was the collaborative leadership highlighted throughout every part of the three-day event. Our Summer Leadership Academy has traditionally been described as “by us, for us,” and this was certainly true for this event. From welcoming new members, celebrating retirees, learning from Indigenous teachings, meeting our mentors, sharing with Chapter colleagues, dancing with Island friends, listening to Teresa's “What If . . .” speech, and being challenged by critical friends, it was the collective work of all of us that made the conference such a success. That is the strength of our BCSSA, as it continues to evolve. To me, this encapsulates the true “spirit” of leadership, and I am humbled to be among and serve such dedicated and supportive leaders.

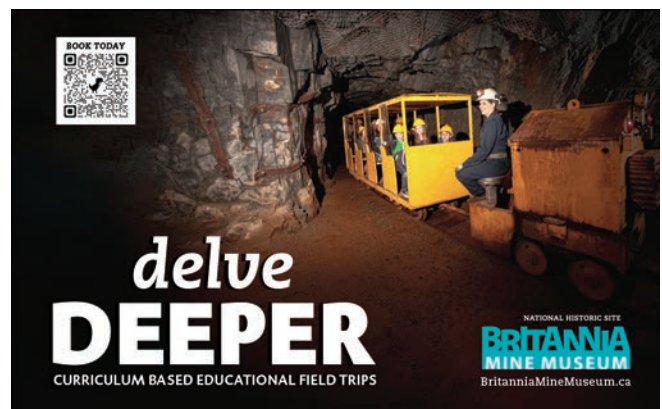
As we now turn our heads at this Fall Conference to “Celebrating Learning in BC,” I hope we continue to build on this collaborative spirit as we action the leadership competencies to meet the diverse needs of your contexts and communities. I look forward to hearing of your “spirit of leadership.” Until next time!

Claire Guy
Executive Director
British Columbia School Superintendents Association

BCSSA RETIREES

Please join us in recognizing the retirement of these esteemed colleagues:

- SD19 – Superintendent, Mike Hooker
- SD27 – Director of Instruction - Education, Dean Coder
- SD23 – Director of Instruction, Peter Molloy
- SD35 – Assistant Superintendent, Barry Bunyan
- SD37 – Assistant Superintendent, Nancy Gordon
- SD39 – Director – Labour Relations, Joann Horsley-Holwill
- SD62 – Associate Superintendent, Stephanie Hedley-Smith
- SD79 – Assistant Superintendent, Tom Longridge
- Northwest Territories – Superintendent, Dr. Curtis Brown





RETURN-IT SCHOOL PROGRAM 2022/2023 IS BACK! REGISTER TODAY AT [RETURNITSCHOOL.CA](https://returnitschool.ca)

Return-It School is the free beverage container recycling program offered by Return-It. Return-It is the not-for-profit product steward that makes recycling in BC easier for everyone. The Return-It System diverts used beverage containers from the landfill and makes sure they are properly recycled. You probably know us best through your local Return-It location.

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Elementary \$5,000 Grand Prize Winner: Forest Grove Elementary

Over the past few years, donations and the school's capacity to collect, sort and transport recyclable containers have increased. From July 2021 to February 2022, the recycling program collected a total of 173,540 beverage containers. Recently, their program has switched to using canvas mega-bags for their three main beverage container sorting bins, each holding 1,650-2,880 containers, thereby reducing plastic bag use. The school also invested in reusable totes and recycled cardboard for transporting glass. The students' inspiring hard work has earned them first place for the second time in a row and a cash prize of \$5,000.

High School \$5,000 Grand Prize Winner: Holy Cross Regional High School

Holy Cross Regional High School's Marketing and Promotion 11 class had the objective of revamping the school's recycling program, HCGoesGreen. The class kicked-off the year by rebranding the program to HCGoesGreener and started increasing awareness through Instagram engagement campaigns. During their school's weekly news announcements, the group produced a news segment called "Simply Green." Through their initiatives, the class raised \$1,062 from returning 10,624 containers, which was just 10% shy of their total goal. The money raised was redistributed to various school initiatives, such as providing scholarship funds to Grade 12 students and buying eco-friendly merchandise.

[Read the full stories at return-it.ca/blog/riscontest-2022/](https://return-it.ca/blog/riscontest-2022/)

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it easy for people to contribute to the school's bottle drive. Students, teachers, parents and the community can simply bring their refundable drink containers to an Express location and return them tagged with the school's account number. The Express location will sort and count the containers and credit the refunds to your Express account within 10 business days.

HOW FUNDRAISING WITH EXPRESS WORKS:



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Share your school's Express account number within your school (and your community if you wish). A phone number or any memorable 10-digit number is valid.



Bring your unsorted containers in transparent plastic bags* to an Express location. To find an Express location near you, visit Return-It.ca/Locations/Express



Log in at the Express label stand at the location using your school's account number. Anyone with the account number can contribute to your bottle drive.



Print off the number of labels you need, stick one on each bag, and leave them at the location.



The location will sort and count the containers for you and credit your Express account.

** Some locations may have per-visit bag limits. Contact your local Express location directly for more information.*



Telling our Story:

The Journey of The Spirit of Leadership

By Jordan Tinney, Leadership Consultant, and Claire Guy,
British Columbia School Superintendents Association

Those in leadership may say that leadership is both art and science. There is the 'what' of leadership tasks, the 'how' as leadership unfolds as action in any context, and there is the 'why' that gets at the values and beliefs of what leaders do every day in service of children. Describing and explaining the nuances of system leadership is no small task. Originally modelled after Professional Standards for the Superintendency of the American Association of School Administrators in late 1990, the *Dimensions of Practice* has been the British Columbia School Superintendents Association's (BCSSA) guiding document of leadership standards. Since that time, our concepts of leadership, inclusion, and Truth and Reconciliation have changed dramatically.


During the pandemic, the time seemed right to re-examine the Dimensions and to update them for our changing and complex times. The leadership required for the future needed a set of competencies that adequately capture the complexity and nuances of system leadership as well as the rapidly changing demographics of our province.

In the fall of 2020, supported by the BCSSA Board, an Advisory Group was formed to help review and revise the Dimensions of Practice. Two representatives were sought from each of the six Chapters across our province and with the President and Executive Director along with one retired member, the first group of was 15 people. The intention was to create an inclusive process that engaged our members and created ownership of the

final product. In the initial meetings, it was decided that a literature review was an important starting point and Dr. David Burns from Kwantlen Polytechnic undertook and delivered the review in January 2021.

What immediately became clear was the importance of updating Dimensions. Considering how far we have come with inclusion, that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission completed its work in 2015, and the global impact of the pandemic and the climate crisis, our context for leadership has changed. More is being asked of schools – and school and system leaders – than ever before. It is important that our declared set of competencies mirror the leadership we need for the future.

There were three important contextual pieces that emerged through the literature review. First, that in jurisdictions around the



globe, there was enormous overlap in the competencies that we reviewed. Everyone seemed to describe leadership, and in particular system leadership, in somewhat similar ways. Next, it was clear that a revision would be insufficient, we would likely have to rewrite Dimensions to capture our changing world. Finally, we needed to have a way to authentically include an Indigenous lens in our writing if we truly were to demonstrate a commitment to Truth and Reconciliation.

Two important steps emerged after the literature review. The first was the outreach and liaison with the BCSSA Indigenous Leaders' Group to ask for their direct involvement and support in the development of competencies. We asked for their willingness to help author a document with an Indigenous lens on leadership that reflected the west coast and the enormous diversity of Indigenous peoples. The second was a decision to make an international outreach to educational leaders from around the globe to help us in our writing and processes.

The Advisory Committee had committed to the BCSSA Board that by June 2021, one competency would be completed. With the extensive help of David Burns and Louise Stoll, *Fostering a Culture of Curiosity and Inquiry* was delivered. This competency would lay the foundation for the others to follow with a decision that the format of the document should mirror BC's progressive curriculum with Big Ideas and Core Competencies.

An important part of the process was that BCSSA Chapters were regularly updated on the progress of the work. Several Progress Reports were authored and presented to the Board of Directors for dissemination to Chapters as a resource. There were many calls for additional resources to support conversations at the Chapter level. Interviews were conducted of our international partners and these interviews were broken down into guiding conversation starters for Chapters to

use locally and to provide feedback to the committee. The first of these resources was an interview with Louise Stoll and several others would follow.


The work with the Indigenous Leaders' group focused on the importance of having art that captured the essence of the work and the diversity of Indigenous peoples. Once the concepts that the art would capture were known, a request for proposal from BCSSA was shared with the Indigenous Leaders' group and then distributed throughout the province, asking for interested artists to step forward. One artist, Rain Pierre, met with the Indigenous Leaders' Group and was supported as the successful artist. The task given to Rain was to develop a graphic that captured each of the emerging five competencies as well as the overall theme of the document.

As the final document was coming to completion, all that was missing was a title. The term 'Spirit' had emerged in several different conversations; some within the Indigenous Leaders' Group, some from Michael Fullan and other international partners as we discussed what we were trying to capture with our document. The title *The Spirit of Leadership* was proposed to the Advisory Committee and was supported. It was seen as bold and different, embodying what we were trying to accomplish with a forward-thinking document for leaders of all levels.

The Spirit of Leadership is intended to be a watermark for the BCSSA's work. The graphics represent the journey that we are all on toward a better future for all children. The transformation of education is captured by the paddles, which can also be viewed as feathers allowing us to take flight. The work of leaders is not a checklist of technical tasks to be completed. Leadership is based on relationships, values, respect, and courage. These personal qualities and attributes are equally important to all the tasks that are required as part of the daily work.

The Spirit of Leadership also provides a pathway for BCSSA. The work of the

Professional Learning Committee, the Member Services Committee, and our Strategic Plan can all be guided and informed by our aspirations for leadership across BC. In addition, the Leadership Competency Advisory Committee is now a standing committee to ensure that *The Spirit of Leadership* remains a living document. The most important part of the document is that it is intended to be the first revision. As chapters across British Columbia begin their work, and as they reflect on the competencies and how they unfold in our very diverse contexts, there will be suggestions for updates, changes, and internal reflections.

BCSSA looks forward to this feedback and work, and we hope that *The Spirit of Leadership* provides an important guide for reflection in your own leadership journey. 

Jordan Tinney was Chair of the Leadership Competency Advisory Committee and is a Leadership Consultant and Executive Coach. You can reach him at jordantinney@shaw.ca. Claire Guy is the Executive Director of BCSSA. You can reach her at cguy@bcssa.org.

Notes from artist Rain Pierre:

"The design has been created to captivate emotion and curiosity. The canoe represents that we are all on this journey together; we are moving forward to see a better tomorrow. There is a moon on the tip of the canoe to represent change.

The canoe has 7 stripes on the side of it to represent the 7 sacred teachings of reconciliation. There are 4 people in the canoe. They have been designed to appear as a man, woman or both to amplify acceptance and that we are together as one. There are 4 of them to represent the 4 directions of which we all come from. They have their hands up to give thanks to the Creator for us to be here today.

They are all wearing cedar headbands to signify culture and our traditions and the beam of light on the end of the canoe represents our ancestors guiding us as we go through these changing times. We must always be mindful of what we have been taught in order to teach the next generation."

Helping Kids and Communities: Stewardship for the Future of all Children

By Allen Beckingham, Shaune Gowe, and Todd Manuel, SD67 (Okanagan Skaha)

“System leaders have a responsibility for a quality education for all children and for the future that education empowers. A quality education, and educational systems that nurture powerful learning, must foster a future in which children feel confident and secure not only in their identity, but in their relationships with others and with the environment. The district should, in other words, both teach about and help enact a more just and sustainable society.”

– British Columbia School
Superintendents Association
(BCSSA) *Leadership
Standards*, 2021

Since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, a recurring theme for system leaders has been adaptive leadership. Educational leaders have worked diligently to ensure we are responsive to the needs of our learning communities. Careful decision making, with staff and student wellness as the guiding compass, shifted from being a foundational aspect to the main focal point of our organizations. As

system leaders adjusted to the new normal, it became clear that our work had changed and creating environments where all students thrived meant reenergizing our teams to be courageously innovative.

Another theme that is an essential process for successful system leaders is the need to ensure alignment between Ministry direction, District Strategic Plans, and the goals and work happening in our schools. With this in mind, the redesign of the BCSSA *Leadership Standards* could not be coming at a better time. Senior level managers are tasked to reflect regularly on their own professional growth and model active learning to the teams that they lead. The new competencies clearly present a lens through which to view our individual and collective work.

In School District 67, Okanagan Skaha, we have initiated a reinvigorated journey following the pandemic to lead and empower positive change in our schools. Referring specifically to the leadership competency *Stewardship for the Future of all Children*, our team consciously began two initiatives aimed at embracing a community level conversation around anti-racism as well as starting two land-based learning programs. The overarching purpose behind the land-based learning opportunities is to ensure we are embracing student voice, emphasizing student engagement, and honouring tradition, ceremonies, and Indigenous Ways of Knowing.



Following a racist graffiti incident, a large mural was painted on the side of one middle school to represent the beauty of diversity.

Under the umbrella of Leading Organizations, it is expected that system leaders sustain healthy communities in which diverse personal identities are respected and cherished. Following a disheartening racist community graffiti incident, our school district partnered with community to confront the situation on multiple fronts. The first was to honour and support the impacted family that was targeted by encouraging their voice to be heard on a larger scale, while also partnering with community to create a large mural on the side of a middle school that represents the beauty of diversity.

Following this powerful initiative, and in conjunction with our district-wide Equity Scan, our Superintendent, and our Vice Principal of Indigenous Education established an Anti-Racism network. This network was well received and included a community partnership with the South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services organization (SOICS). School District staff were invited to join a yearlong learning series where the participants shared and reflected on personal experiences. This included collectively reviewing a book by Ijeoma Oluo called “So You Want to Talk About Race?” and discussed ways in which allyship can be nurtured in our schools and community.

These sessions took place with the collective understanding that everyone must be committed to honesty, respectful dialogue, and an open mind. Participants were asked to consider the perspective of their students, who place trust in their schools to be safe for everyone.

In alignment with this powerful work, our district also adopted a new administrative procedure called Diversity and Anti-Racism. This document clearly outlines our commitment to equity through actionable leadership. Racism and equity have long since been global issues that require education to mend the fences of time and to create sustainable change. Leading this work should be part of every educator's personal mandate if we are to authentically uphold the spirit of diversity and teach our students to embrace their identities.

Another aspect of the competency *Stewardship for the Future of all Children* includes ensuring that each child is a steward of the natural environment. While our senior team and administrators continue to engage in authentic reflection of our quantitative data, we have purposely shifted to a deeper emphasis on student voice and ensuring we are innovatively adapting from the collective experiences of our staff, students, and community.

Supported by research, it is now clear that learning outdoors directly impacts student wellbeing and increases school connectedness. As such, one of the initiatives we have implemented includes Land Based Learning programs. One is a dual campus program at Skaha Lake Middle School and Princess Margaret Secondary, and it is available to students in Grade 7, 8, and 9. The other is hosted at Penticton Secondary school and includes students in Grade 9 and 10. The pillars of these opportunities include the First Peoples Principles of Learning, student engagement and student voice, acceptance of each other's differences, and a structure that reduces transitions and allows for differentiation of learning across the curriculum.

Moving forward into year two of each program, we continue to learn and adjust. We continue to focus on providing students with time on the land while connecting to local indigenous culture and ways of knowing. Student and parent voice remain active aspects of decision making, and team support includes senior and school level management and school-based teams. We also always ensure we are receiving feedback, direction, and input from Indigenous Rightsholders.

Change and innovation are never easy but already we have seen an increase in student ownership, well-being, and attendance from many of the participants. Parent feedback and support has been overwhelmingly positive, which correlates to a welcomed partnership. It is our hope that with continued refinement in the spirit of innovation, we will continue to spark continued student engagement and a renewed trust in the education community.

A note from artist Rain Pierre: The purple butterfly paddle represents the Stewardship for the Future of All Children competency. The butterfly represents the final form of transformation. It has beauty and grace as it flies and spreads its beauty into the world. It embraces a sense of belonging and care not only for self and others, but the land and the environment.



As system leaders in the 21st Century, following a pandemic that essentially created a paradigm shift in thinking, we are tasked with leading change. Modelling and teaching the management of one's well-being while working in complex roles can be challenging, but it is fundamental for our staff and our students. Embracing diversity and inclusion as a philosophical foundation, while leading the charge for social justice, can also be challenging but invigorating. This includes being stewards for the environment and setting the bar high around sustainability. Each of these aspects of leadership are not new, but with recent events have become elevated in priority.

Now is the time for system leaders to make thinking outside the box a regular part of their daily conversations and actions. For us, the anti-racism work and the land-based learning programs are just the beginning. With the current curriculum and a collective understanding around shared leadership amongst our partner groups, school districts are stepping out of the stormy pandemic into an exciting time in education and we, as system leaders, are charged with leading this monumental shift. 🌈

Allen Beckingham is the Director of Instruction – Teaching and Learning, for School District 67, Okanagan. Shaune Gowe is the Director of Instruction – Inclusive Education, SD67. Todd Manuel is the Superintendent of SD67.



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An Openness to Seeing the World from Other Perspectives: Contextual Literacy

W

By Jill Jensen, SD 92 (Nisga'a)

e are shaped by, and we in turn shape the systems and relationships that surround us. Leaders **respect** and acknowledge the power of culture and context and **balance** the needs and knowledge presented by internal and external systems and partners. Leaders 'read the land' of the organization within and nurture healthy, transparent, and inclusive cultures.

The competency *Contextual Literacy* involves understanding the landscape in which we work, the systems and relationships that weave together to create our environment. As the competency states, there are internal and external systems with which we need to learn to effectively engage. We shape these systems, and they shape us, or as Winston Churchill said, "We shape our buildings, thereafter they shape us."

Contextual literacy is more than having knowledge of how internal and external entities work (or struggle to work) with one another. This technical knowledge allows us to understand on an intellectual level how different groups, partners, or stakeholders who play a role in an organization interact

with one another, but it provides only a cursory understanding or knowledge of the landscape within which the system operates.

Contextual literacy is deeply relational and requires a much deeper understanding of how systems are nested, interconnected, and complex. Contextual literacy, at least for me, is holistic, requiring an enlarged, more all-encompassing kind of knowing that balances heart, spirit, body, and mind.

As one of the First Peoples Principles of Learning states: **Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).**

We each bring our own lived experiences and perspectives to our work, and because my standpoint is unique to me, as yours is to you, the merging of these standpoints (or stories), is never simple. There is a complexity to the intersection of our diverse stories that makes contextual literacy something that can never be understood in only cognitive ways.

Unfortunately, our schooling systems have engrained in us the idea that if we study something thoroughly enough, we

A note from artist Rain Pierre:

The green heron paddle represents the Contextual Literacy competency. The heron is a bird that has a massive wingspan that swoops the wind to gain flight. It has perfect balance while walking in the pond. Sometimes it can be so still that there isn't even a ripple in the water, and other times it can shake up the water to make the creatures in the water move.



will find an answer. Our research and our thinking brains have been privileged in schools over the heart, spirit, and body. The 'grammar of schooling' persists in heralding the same message (more or less) that it did 150 years ago – academic success is key to success in life. Success is available to those who are 'smart' and work hard.

For the most part, 'success' has been more readily available to those of us entering the system from a place of privilege. The system is doing what it was created to do and understanding this creates space for us to dismantle some of the walls that uphold the grammar of schooling.

continued on page 20

AN OPENNESS TO SEEING THE WORLD FROM OTHER PERSPECTIVES

continued from page 19

We know our schooling system perpetuates privilege and thus inequity and even as we strive valiantly to combat these inequities, they persist, and this landscape endures. Perhaps though, if we strengthen and deepen our contextual literacy, questioning and exploring the language, policy, procedures, practices, etc., that have come to form the foundation of our school system landscape, we might be able to experience structural and sustainable transformation. We might be able to do what we talk about... transform education.

We have been conditioned to see systems of education as systems over which we have some measure of control, believing that if we find the right tools, methods, or strategies, we will be able to transform the system to address issues like Truth and Reconciliation, inequity, and racism. We have been conditioned to believe that systems are separate from us and that we need to look for 'answers' to systems change somewhere beyond our selves.

If we are the system though, then the first and most important system for us to know and understand is our personal system – who we are as human beings and how who we are affects the interconnected

systems in which we exist. Our modern colonized world has conditioned us to believe that we are individuals, separate and discrete from each other and from the world we call home, separate from the animals, plants, waters, and air that nourishes us, separate from the 'systems' around us, separate from our landscape. We have also been conditioned to believe that we (humans) are privileged occupants of our planet with some enjoying far more privilege than most.

This, of course, is *my* standpoint, my experience, my reading of the landscape, my understanding of the breadth and depth required for contextual literacy. It seems to me, contextual literacy is about who we choose to be and how we choose to show up in the world amongst the multiple, diverse, and interconnected systems with which we collide. I believe that the only system over which I have any control is my own system – myself.

Again, one of the First Peoples Principles of Learning reminds us that: **Learning requires exploration of one's identity.**

In this sense, contextual literacy has a direct correlation to the Core Competencies of personal and social awareness – our identity in the world, as individuals and

as members of society – as part of webs of intersecting relationships and complex systems. We are shaped by... and in turn shape the systems around us.

WE are the system, and the system is us. If we want the system to change... WE need to change.

This is the setting out.

The leaving of everything behind.

Leaving the social milieu. The preconceptions. The definitions. The language. The narrowed field of vision. The expectations.

No longer expecting relationships, memories, words, or letters to mean what they used to mean. To be, in a word: Open.

– Rabbi Lawrence Kushner

Artists and poets tend to have well developed contextual literacy, often startling us from our complacency and shocking us to awareness. Growing contextual literacy then starts with openness to seeing the world from other perspectives and standpoints, openness to listening with curiosity and courage, openness to knowing who you are and how your personal system contributes to, or disrupts, the systems around you.

Growing contextual literacy requires openness to knowledge that comes not only from the mind, but from heart, spirit, and body. It is knowing how you fit in the space you occupy, how you use your voice, your privilege, and your power, how you listen to the many voices around you, how you seek the silent and marginalized voices and create space to hear them.

When we listen openly, are aware and attentive – contextually literate – we create space for people to appear and when we appear to each other, hearts and spirits connect, we hear truth and we create generative, loving, compassionate, and joyful spaces where people thrive and flourish. 🌈

Jill Jensen is a mother, grandmother, and educator. She is currently Superintendent of Schools for SD 92 (Nisga'a).



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Deepening Understanding and Enhancing Learning: Aligning Structures with Vision for Learning



By Kevin Kaardal and Jon Rever, Central Okanagan Public Schools

The British Columbia School Superintendent Association's (BCSSA) *Spirit of Leadership* guide offers system leaders the following guidance for *Aligning Structures with Vision for Learning*: Systems and structures have inherent knowledge, practice, and capabilities. Leaders have the wisdom to identify, connect, and alter systems and structures to focus efforts and resources where it is most needed. Keen observers, careful communicators, and leaders are points of connection and active constructors of systems that align and support.

In this article, we focus on the competency *Aligning Structures with Vision for Learning* as a fundamental strategy to

deepen understanding and coherence of the pedagogical core¹ to enhance learning for **each** child throughout the school district.

The Central Okanagan Public Schools Leadership Team believes that our core purpose is to lead teaching and learning so that students will benefit and thrive in our global society as educated citizens. To ensure that happens not only do we need to be experts in designing learning and assessment, we need to ensure that the systems and structures we develop are aligned with a shared, co-created vision for learning.

Public school districts are complex organizations whether they are big or small. They are made up of thousands – if not tens of thousands – of people who have unique goals, hopes, values and perspectives. There are many important agendas that the government and communities hope public schools will address that go beyond the development of foundational literacies in language arts, science, math, physical education, health, the practical arts, and the performing arts education. These include significant shifts in our society, such as Truth and Reconciliation, Equity in Action, anti-racism

education, and social and economic inequities.

Organizing a district so that there is alignment and coherence from the classroom through to the District's Strategic Plan is a complex and adaptive process. It is like connecting a 1,500-piece puzzle where all the pieces look the same. You need a strategy to make sure the result is a coherent whole, aligned with a shared and co-created goal and vision.

Complex and interconnected global, national, and provincial challenges require profound changes in traditional pedagogies, culture, infrastructure, and systems to ensure that all British Columbian students can flourish at school and in their future lives. Many inequities and opportunities emerged during the pandemic that have caused many in the province to rethink education for a post-pandemic world.

The Central Okanagan Public School District story is one of a systemic approach to creating a learning organization in which educators immersed in a culture of inquiry focus on improving the pedagogical core and the intentional design of learning so that students can thrive in a global community. We believe that it is through

continued on page 22

A note from artist Rain Pierre: The orange eagle paddle represents the Aligning Structures with Vision for Learning competency. The eagle is a bird of power and resilience. It circles above to look at the full picture of what is below. They are the wisest of birds and most respected in the animal kingdom. I felt this one had to be the eagle for its vision.



continued from page 21

the ongoing coherence and system alignment to deepen understanding of the pedagogical core and the design of learning that we will achieve learning environments that achieve equity and excellence for all students.

Harnessing Collective Input to Build a Shared, Co-created Strategic Vision Focussed on Transforming the Pedagogical Core

During the 2020-2021 school year, the Central Okanagan Public Schools Board of Education approved a comprehensive strategic planning engagement process that revised the vision for learning and overarching goal for our learners to develop foundational skills and core curricular competencies so that they can be empowered to follow their passions and strengths and thrive holistically as resilient and engaged global citizens.

To develop coherence and alignment, and guide the actions of district and school leaders, four strategic areas of focus were identified: Equity and Excellence in Learning, Transformative Leadership, Family and Community Engagement, and System Wellbeing.

Modelling the Values of the Vision for Learning

In his book *And What do You Mean by Learning?*, Seymour Sarason² poses the crucial question for all educators: "What do YOU mean by learning?" Learning is the word most used in educational literature and yet educators have great difficulty in defining it. Sarason demonstrates that the lack of clarity about the concept of learning is at the root of the disappointments of educational transformation.

In response to Sarason's research about the critical importance of a common and shared understanding of learning, we began our work to empower a culture of inquiry,

curiosity, and innovation guided by the Spirals of Inquiry³ (Drs Kaser and Halbert) as a system-wide inquiry process to focus on the learning needs of all students. In collaboration with partner groups, we used the Spirals of Inquiry to focus our system on three critical questions: What is going on for our learners? How do we know? Why does it matter? The process of answering these questions has deepened our understanding of what is going on for our students and what we might do to improve learning outcomes and life chances for each student.

Effectively Aligning Systems and Structures

To enhance system alignment and build collective efficacy, the district was restructured into five kindergarten to Grade 12 families of schools led by an Assistant Superintendent, whose primary responsibility was to improve the learning experience and outcomes of our students. A Deputy Superintendent was also appointed to lead

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the journey towards Truth and Reconciliation and equity within the district, beginning with Indigenous Education and followed by amplifying best practices in assessment across the district.

The Senior Leadership Work Plan (Operational Plan) was re-organized to reflect the priorities outlined in the newly revised strategic plan. The budget process was re-aligned to support the overarching goal and the priorities of the Board of Education through the four strategic directions.

The process of system alignment to deepen coherence about the vision for learning even goes as far as including educators, students, and community members in the design of new schools. As a growing district, we have been fortunate to be awarded two middle schools and a secondary school. The architectural design teams work closely with members of the educational community so that the learning environments will enhance teaching and learning, and help our students collaborate, inquire, explore, connect with community, and pursue their passions.


Effectively Lead and Encouraging Future Oriented Consideration of Strategic Priorities

The vision for Central Okanagan Public Schools is 'Together We Learn.' This cultural norm drives our focus on learning for all members of the school district as a way of being and thinking about system transformation. We believe in an ever-changing world, transformative leadership is a powerful catalyst for continuous improvement and growth that positively impacts our system, each school community, and ultimately each learner. We have come to realize that developing leadership competencies at all levels of the system is fundamental to addressing complex, interconnected challenges and achieving excellence and equity for each learner.

We have re-structured and aligned our monthly leadership team meetings to develop coherence around powerful transformative leadership. We design learning to create shared understanding around powerful teaching and learning focussed on innovative, equitable, and sustainable learning environments. We use evidence and research to guide decisions, routines, and practices that support all learners. We embed indigenous ways of learning and knowing as we continue to pursue the calls to action for Truth and Reconciliation.

Ongoing learning for principals, vice-principals, and senior leaders is supported through a variety of system-wide structures and learning opportunities that model the concept of learner agency. These structures are inquiry based and designed to connect leaders to reflective professional learning that responds to the needs of their communities. To deepen our collective understanding of how our values and beliefs impact our mindsets, routines, and practices as leaders, we leverage the learning power of collaborative leadership learning networks both internally and externally to develop our leadership competencies. This includes partnering with post-secondary institutions that offer formal leadership development

programs specific to transforming school systems and improving student learning.

We look forward to using the BCSSA *The Spirit of Leadership* document (a 'made-in-BC' leadership development framework) to support our fundamental strategy to deepen understanding and coherence of the pedagogical core to enhance learning for each child in every learning environment throughout the school district. 

Kevin Kaardal is the Superintendent of Schools/CEO of the Central Okanagan Public Schools. Jon Rever is an Assistant Superintendent for Central Okanagan Public Schools.

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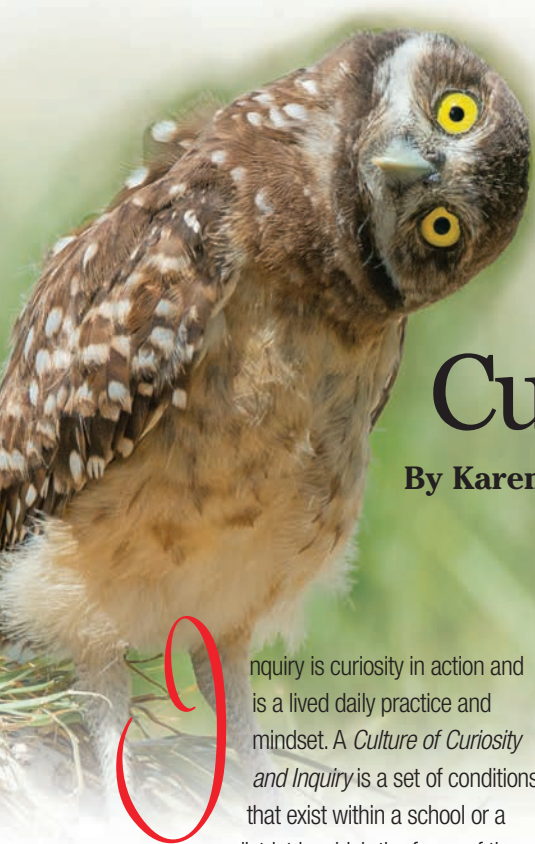
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Creating a Passion Fostering a Culture of Curiosity and Inquiry

By Karen Shipka, SD6 (Rocky Mountain School District)

Inquiry is curiosity in action and is a lived daily practice and mindset. A *Culture of Curiosity and Inquiry* is a set of conditions that exist within a school or a district in which the focus of the learning for students and adults is on exploring important and compelling questions. The ongoing development of collaborative processes that focus on designing engaging learning environments and participating in reflective practice are at the heart of this work. Inquiry is about demonstrating honesty in reflection and unearthing what we know to further understand the world in which we learn and work.

Curiosity and inquiry questions broaden thinking. Alison Wood Brooks and Leslie K. John, professors at Harvard Business School, agree. They write in *The Surprising Power of Questions*¹ that, "Questioning is a uniquely powerful tool for unlocking value in organizations: It spurs learning and the exchange of ideas, it fuels innovation and performance improvement, it builds rapport and trust among team members."

Fostering a culture of curiosity and inquiry can begin at any level of the organization; however, it needs to permeate all levels of the organization from system administration right through to the classroom. School District 6, Rocky Mountain, takes a systems approach by ensuring that all levels of the organization utilize an inquiry approach to continuous improvement.

District

A culture of inquiry is an organizational culture and environment where there is a zeal for questioning and learning; a quest to understand and constantly improve the status quo.²

Fueled by a purposeful strategic plan that consists of the district's strategic priorities, goals, and strategies, the continuous improvement cycle uses an inquiry approach to improve student learning outcomes. The priorities and data-driven approach ensure coherent action designed to improve the learning experiences for each student, including achieving excellence in student learning and well-being, strengthening relationships, developing a culture of shared leadership and responsibility, and providing a student-centred learning environment. This shared and well-communicated plan aligns a vision for success and provides a clear direction regarding the work to be achieved at all levels of the system.

School

At the school level, a culture of inquiry promotes purposeful collaboration, instead of siloed practice. Teachers and leaders seek answers to important and relevant questions about their practice using student data in a cycle of inquiry to inform their work. It is a powerful model of authentic learning for both students and adults.

Fostering a culture of curiosity and inquiry for the school leader lies in challenging teachers to reflect upon their practice. This is done by establishing trust, creating

conversations, and facilitating a learning environment that supports risk taking, and ongoing professional dialogue – something that can even lead to healthy debate as implicit practices are raised to the level of awareness.

Using a version of *Instructional Rounds in Education, a Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning* (City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teittel), principals lead small teams of teachers in learning observations. The process examines the learning task, the environment, and focuses strictly on what the observer hears and sees. With all judgement removed, the principal is left with a body of evidence from which generative questions are formed. These questions are used to begin an inquiry conversation that promotes teacher reflection and facilitates a generative dialogue.

Curiosity about learning environment and engaging teachers in professional conversation builds strong trusting relationships and fosters a climate of growth and joyful learning. The heart of a generative dialogue process is disarming simplicity and builds on the notion that learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational.

Effective questions are not so much about getting the 'answer,' as about creating opportunities for deepened or higher order thinking, construction of new meanings, and application of related learning.

Classroom

In the classroom, a culture of inquiry is fostered by maximizing the flexibility of the curriculum and learning design as driven by

ion for Learning:

student questions rather than content to be covered. Teaching and learning are co-constructed by both students and teachers, and is motivated by genuine authenticity and questions that both kids and adults want to explore.

Students are at the centre of all learning activities and have the ability to connect their passions with their learning. Learning tasks are self-driven and individually designed to connect with students' personal passions and interests, but are assessed against performance tasks – a rubric that is common across all students working towards demonstration of mastery of core competencies. It is important to note that in a culture of inquiry, students are still held to the established standards or competencies; pursuing those learning outcomes through an inquiry-based process provides a strong framework for understanding and retaining new knowledge.

In School District 6, Rocky Mountain, using an inquiry approach in all learning opportunities builds a strong foundation for practice and an environment that promotes risk taking. It leads to rich professional conversations focused on improving learning in all areas of the organization.

While inherently present in all of us, curiosity is something that must be cultivated so that learners at all levels discover how to formulate effective questions that lead to answers, solutions, and perhaps more questions.


When system leaders are genuinely curious about innovative approaches that lead to overall system improvement, it enables a collaborative inquiry-based approach to test-drive new approaches to improve the student learning experience. The cycle of inquiry promotes regular conversation among team members and check-ins to determine success and promote ideation when needed.

School leaders inspire the curiosity of staff and students by creating the conditions that encourage teachers to maximize the scope of the curriculum and to learn alongside the students. The artful conversations planned with teachers about the learning promote professional relationships and normalize reflective practice.

Students are inherently curious. Teachers cultivate student curiosity, purposefully designing the learning experience so that students raise questions leading to deeper learning. Empowering students by giving them voice and choice in what and how they learn will help them to be intrinsically motivated learners.

A culture of curiosity and inquiry that is fostered at all levels of the organization promotes a cohesive and collaborative approach to continuous improvement where all members of the organization work together. Curiosity sparks the shared commitment to challenge the status quo and disrupt the system to the point where all students are achieving their maximum potential.

A note from artist Rain Pierre: The red owl paddle represents the Fostering a Culture of Curiosity and Inquiry competency. The owl is a creature of the night. It is the only bird on this list that hunts during the night. It sees the world for what it is and adapts to change.

Each member of the organization needs to model curiosity and a passion for learning by sharing aloud their wonders, their questions, and their excitement to be a lifelong learner. 

Karen Shipka is Superintendent of SD6 (Rocky Mountain School District).

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Growing the Capacity of Self and Others:

Student-Led Experiences Bring Community and School Together

By Brian Gross, Matsqui-Abbotsford Impact Society,
and Nathan Ngieng, Abbotsford School District

The competency *Growing the Capacity of Self and Others* is focused on how leaders can demonstrate integrity and humility as they continually work to act selflessly in service of others. This article demonstrates that competency in action.

As a non-profit organization, Matsqui-Abbotsford Impact Society (Impact) has been supporting youth and adults (separately and increasingly cross-generationally) with a vision to create “a community that recognizes and responds to substance use needs as a complex issue best addressed through conditions that allow for resiliency.” Through counselling, youth advocacy, and street community support using trauma-informed approaches, resiliency factors, and motivational dialogue, Impact has been working to create communities of care for youth.

Since 2014, Impact, based in Abbotsford, British Columbia, has been experimenting with work informed by research on factors that allow people to be resilient (to bounce back and even learn and grow from challenges). The research paper by Brown, Jean Marie, & Beck (2010) summarizes these factors:

- Caring, connected relationships in which there are opportunities to participate and contribute; and
- Leading to developing higher expectations of how you’ll perform when faced with challenges.

Impact’s youth projects have been progressively more youth-led, starting with “youth-adult partnership,” moving to “power-sharing,” to “youth-led, adult-supported,” and now with what the youth call a “youth-trusting” approach.

In Impact’s first three-year Health Canada-funded project, not many schools were ready to get involved. But the project led to the region’s first completely youth-developed conferences, which staff from

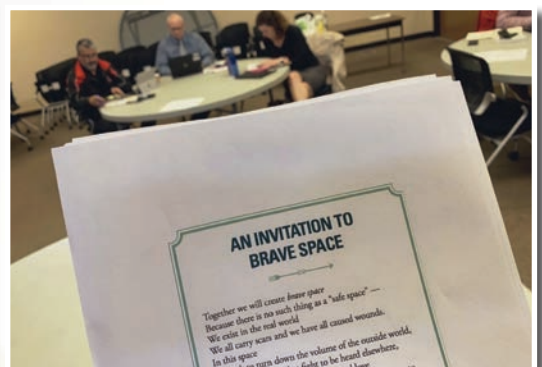
local school districts did attend. People left these conferences thinking differently about the roles young people can play in their communities. Some attending school staff moved into administrative roles, where their experiences with this work challenged them to try to do things differently.

During Impact’s next project, the Abbotsford School District agreed to provide a building to host a much-evolved youth-led conference. This conference focused on topics not often discussed at *any* community conference, let alone one where youth were facilitating workshops based on their lived expertise of issues like domestic violence, self-harm, substance use-related harm reduction, borderline personality disorder, Indigenous healing modalities, gender fluidity, etc.

Since 2019, the Abbotsford School District’s direction, accelerated by their participation in the Deeper Learning Dozen Project (Mehta et al., 2018), has been to commit to understanding and challenging ideas about how learning occurs in the



Outcomes from the youth-led meeting for the NoW project at Impact in March 2022. Photo courtesy of Mai Berger.



Working with our school leaders to engage them in listening to the voices of students in October 2020. Photo courtesy of Nathan Ngieng.

classroom. Together, the readiness of the school district and the commitment and resolve of the youth involved in Impact has led to a positive, caring relationship, focused on creating opportunities for dialogue and change around schooling and the student experience.

As the relationship drew closer, youth started asking questions like, “Is the school district going to just be involved when it’s easy, or are they really committed?” After admitting that big systems like school districts often change slowly, and that, technically, power rests with an elected Board of Trustees, the answers from the school district kept coming back with full commitment (likely only possible due to the accumulation of trust from taking chances on each other over many years).

Stepping into Uncertainty

At the end of 2019, when Impact started a new project called Nation of Wellness (NoW), funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada, these spoken commitments got their first test. The Abbotsford School District invited Impact to support them in addressing the sensitive school issue of vaping on campus with a youth-led approach.

Principals and vice principals from across the district’s six high schools were instructed to bring students who were not their “leadership” students, but what might be called their “opinionated” students, to a first meeting.

The Experience from the Perspective of Matsqui-Abbotsford Impact Society

Honestly, we at Impact had not had much time to work out all the details (school districts can go hardly anywhere... very quickly and on a very tight schedule), but by the time we arrived for the first meeting, our youth employees had decided that to make the experience authentic and safe, we must initially break up the young

people / students from the adults / school authorities.

To say that the administrators were excited about this surprise requirement would be to go too far. But they quickly figured out that they were either in or out. They decided to be in... by going out... to have their own meeting with one of our adult staff. The youth met, facilitated by Impact’s youth staff, with no district supervision (though Impact’s adult executive director was in the meeting).

After the adults and youth had their own meetings, we brought the two groups together to debrief and dialogue. There were three meetings on this topic (before COVID-19), and both student and school staff attendees noted that each meeting became more honest and open. They even reached a level of candor (including some open disagreement and strong expressions) that attendees labelled “growing trust.” Everyone agreed it was unlike anything they had experienced in a school setting between staff and students.

The Experience from the Perspective of the Abbotsford School District

Staff, students, parents, and the health authority were alarmed about the increasing vaping occurring on campus in our secondary schools. Approaching the issue through restrictions and punishment was damaging relationships between staff and the very youth about whom they were most concerned. We were looking for new ideas.

We decided to reach out to Impact to see if they would be willing to facilitate an experience, bringing together youth from multiple schools with school administrators. We weren’t sure what this would look like, but building on our trusting relationship, decided we were willing to step into the discomfort of uncertainty.

The process was one of shifting roles, where we moved to a truer sense of partnership and acknowledgement of the contributions that youth can make

A note from artist Rain Pierre: The blue hummingbird paddle represents the Growing the Capacity of Self and Others competency. The hummingbird is always exploring its capacity. As it is the smallest bird, it has more work to do in order to survive. It is unique as it is the only bird in the world that can fly backwards. It is a leader on its own because of its resilience.



toward a school / community issue. It was uncomfortable (or down right anxiety producing) to be separated from the youth – shifting our understanding of what a caring adult can do to support youth. We ‘survived’ the experience, growing to appreciate the resilience of the youth and to understand how our perspective and even just our presence can restrict or enhance the authenticity and autonomy of our youth.

In the end, we discovered we had more in common than in conflict with the opinions of the youth around vaping on campus and developed a new appreciation for the process Impact Society provided.

What NoW?

The disruptions of COVID-19 sucked the meaning out of the ‘vaping on campus’ topic, but the pandemic made everyone wonder if there might be opportunities within its threats. Efforts were made to examine the cracks in the system we might exploit, both together and apart.

In phase 1 of NoW (2019-2022), the school district offered youth unprecedented opportunities to participate in and contribute to decisions that the district had traditionally made without meaningful input from students. The youth saw the school district consider, question, and then ultimately run with their advice... even when it ruffled some feathers and went against long-standing tradition.

continued on page 30


continued from page 29

These experiences taught both the youth and adults that system change (like most individual change) is not an event but a process. And as a process, it will have its ups and downs, and therefore will rely on everyone's resilience (and the resiliency factors identified earlier).

In phase 2 of NoW (2022-2024), we would like to see NoW youth contributors and community partners (including the school district) more intentionally helping each other understand these three aspects of system change:

1. Why and how the changes we're trying to make are challenging;
2. The resiliency that committing to challenging changes requires; and
3. The role that caring, connected relationships and opportunities to participate and contribute can play in supporting this resiliency.

It is easy to get stuck on (and frustrated with) WHAT needs to change. We want to put an equal emphasis on understanding HOW change must be supported.

To see and learn more about this collaborative work, go to: www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvTYd3pg4gw 

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Index to Advertisers

COMBINATION PADLOCKS

D.G. MacLachlan Ltd.27

EDUCATION

Ocean Wise6

EDUCATION PARTNERS

BC Principals' & Vice Principals' Association3

EDUCATION PUBLISHING

Solution Treeinside back cover

FARMS

Maplewood Farms.....7

GENESKOOL

Genome BC4

GYMNASIUM EQUIPMENT AND BLEACHERS

Royal Stewart Ltd.....20

HAND HYGIENE AND COMMERCIAL RESTROOM PRODUCTS

Dobbin Sales (Sloan)..... outside back cover

LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Desire 2 Learn (D2L)inside front cover

MUSEUMS

Britannia Mine Museum9
MONOVA Museum of North Vancouver7

NATURAL AND HUMAN HISTORY MUSEUM

Royal BC Museum22

RECYCLING

Encorp Pacific Canada 10, 11

ROOFING CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION

Roofing Contractors Association of BC.....23

S.T.E.M.

Science World24, 25

STUDENT GROUP TRAVEL IN MANITOBA

Tourism Winnipeg..... 16, 17

TEXTBOOK AND WORKBOOK SUPPLIER

Western Campus Resources.....30

UNIVERSITIES

Queen's University..... 18

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