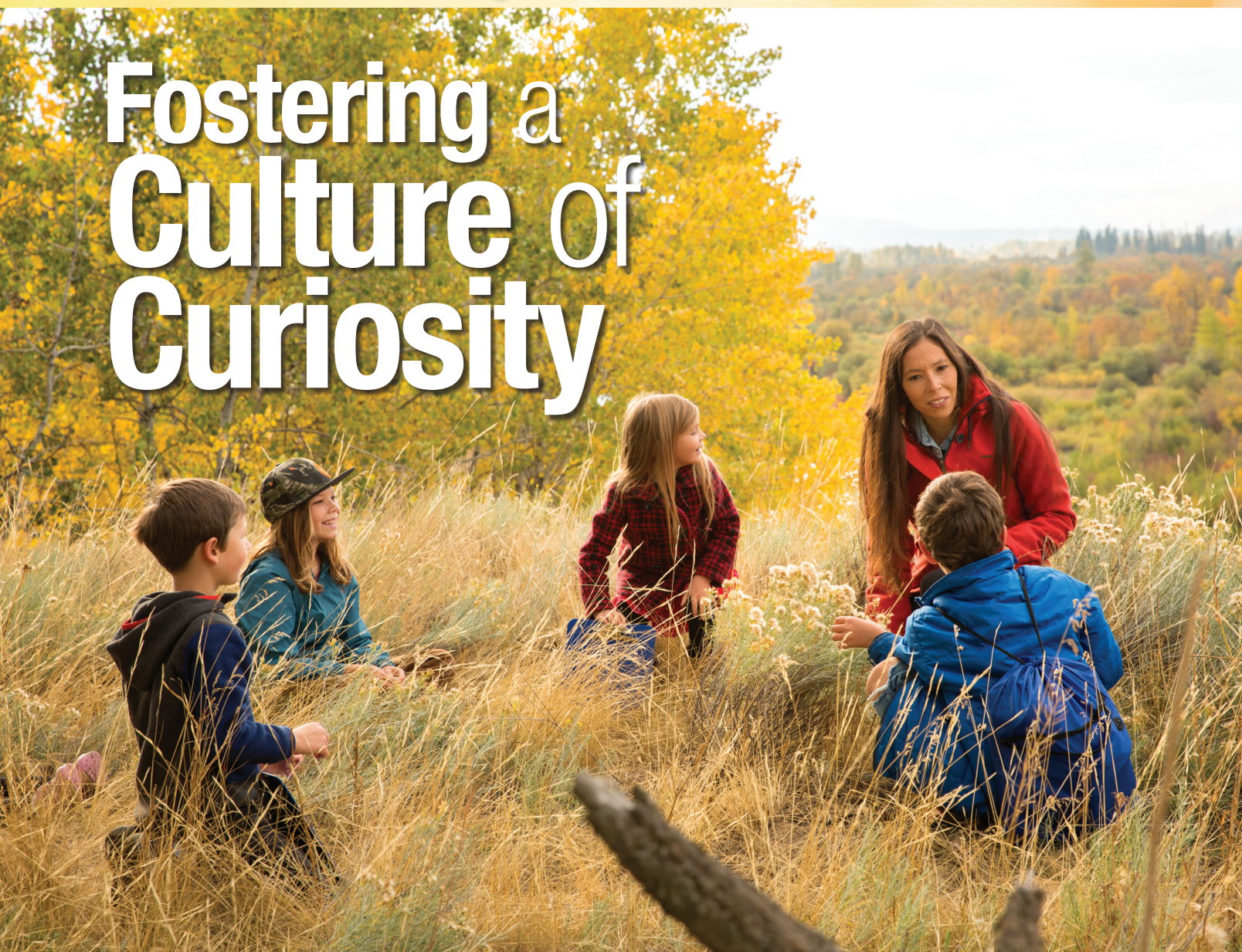


Fall 2023

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### Published For:

The British Columbia School Superintendents Association

#208 - 1118 Homer Street,  
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 6L5  
Phone: (604) 687-0590 / Fax: (604) 687-8118  
gbondi@bcssa.org  
www.bcssa.org

### Published By:

Matrix Group Publishing Inc.

Return all undeliverable addresses to:  
309 Youville Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2H 2S9  
Toll-Free Phone: (866) 999-1299  
Toll-Free Fax: (866) 244-2544  
sales@matrixgroupinc.net  
www.matrixgroupinc.net  
Canada Post Mail Publications Agreement Number: 40609661

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### On the cover:

BCSSA's The Spirit of Leadership document says, "A culture of inquiry is curious, transparent, and active. It encourages all members of a community to ask questions, develop plans, and to link inquiry with better life chances for the students we serve." This issue builds on this important topic. Cover photo courtesy of The Learning Partnership.







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## A Message from the BCSSA President, Teresa Downs



I hope this message finds you well. I appreciate the opportunity to share a few words with you as we continue our journey to further enhance The Spirit of Leadership within our Association, the districts we serve and, within British Columbia's public education system.

The theme for this edition of *InspirED* is Fostering a Culture of Curiosity, and I believe this theme reflects the heart of what we stand for as educational leaders. A culture of curiosity is not merely a set of words; it's a mindset, an ethos that permeates every facet of our work. It is curious, transparent, and active, encouraging all members of our educational community to ask questions, develop innovative plans, and most importantly, link inquiry to creating better life chances for the students we are privileged to serve.

This culture of curiosity isn't confined to theory; it's alive in the daily practices of each of us. It's in the way we engage with our students, colleagues, and communities. It's in our unwavering commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and our dedication to providing the best possible education for each student.

Furthermore, this culture extends beyond individuals; it is woven into the very fabric of our educational systems. It thrives in collaborative and shared systemic inquiry, where we pool our collective wisdom and expertise to drive positive change.

As leaders in British Columbia's public education system, it is our responsibility to champion this culture, nurturing curiosity at every turn. Our commitment to fostering a culture of curiosity is evidence to our dedication to ongoing growth, development, and improvement, to students and to the future of public education in our province.

Within this edition, you will be reading stories from Fort Nelson, Nisga'a, Sea to Sky, and Rocky Mountain. You will also read about the new provincial association British Columbia Black Educational Leaders Association (BCBELA). Thank you to those colleagues who took the time to capture their stories, because of you we have the opportunity to learn and grow from your experiences.

It has been an honour to serve you in the role of President of BC School Superintendents Association, thank you for this opportunity.

### Teresa Downs

President, British Columbia School Superintendents Association  
Superintendent, SD74 (Gold Trail)

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If you would like to write for BCSSA's magazine, please send a short abstract (25-50 words) to CEO Gino Bondi at [gbondi@bcssa.org](mailto:gbondi@bcssa.org). The abstract should include author information and an overview of what you'd like to cover. Note that contributions cannot be product or company promotional, and must have a BCSSA member involved in the content creation.





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## A Message from the Minister of Education and Child Care



**Rachna Singh**  
Minister of Education and Child Care

Thank you all for being leaders in this regard, encouraging your educators to make time for professional development opportunities that support this learning, and continuing to strengthen your districts' relationships with local First Nations.

Fall is a special time of year for those of us in education, and I know that a lot has already gone into the beginning of the school year for you, as you reunite with students, families, staff, and administrators throughout the province. As a parent myself, as well as the Minister of Education and Child Care, I feel with you the busyness and excitement and demands that come with this time of year.

Since I began in this role, I have visited many school communities and had the opportunity to have important and meaningful open discussions about our education system. I look forward to meeting many more of you over this next school year as we build and grow our school system together.

I want to acknowledge those of you in wildfire-affected and adjacent areas who have worked tirelessly to support your communities through this ordeal over the past months. Your cooperation and partnership have been an example to us all of true leadership and the real strength to be found in community between neighbouring districts.

I know that global inflation and escalating prices have put extra pressure on families throughout B.C. To help alleviate some of that cost burden, last year our government put \$60 million into the Student and Family Affordability Fund. I want to thank you for the priority you and your teams gave to recognizing and supporting students and families in need of extra assistance.

I also want to thank you for working with us to expand your existing school meal programs, or build new ones where needed. Our government's Feeding Futures program is a historic investment in B.C. school foods, and the partnership with you, your boards of education, and your staff and community partners is essential to ensure that all students are well fed and ready to learn.

Our government is also helping with the cost of before-and after-school child care. We know child care costs do not stop when children start school, which is why we have introduced a made-in-B.C. solution. As of September 1, 2023, families with children in eligible child care programs will automatically save up to \$145 per child per month.

The challenge to recruit staff in key roles throughout the public sector is a barrier many employers are facing, and the current teacher shortage is being felt nationally and globally, as well as here in British Columbia. In response, our government is investing \$12.5 million in funding from the StrongerBC Future Ready Action Plan to boost the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural and northern districts, and to support the recruitment and retention of Indigenous teachers. Some of this funding went towards hiring incentives this past summer to ensure districts with some of the biggest hiring challenges could find staff for this school year. We continue to work with our education partners on an overarching K-12 workforce strategy to alleviate staffing pressures over the long term.

As we continue to work together towards ending systemic racism, we are proud to implement a new Indigenous-Focused Graduation Requirement beginning this school year. Thank you all for being leaders in this regard, encouraging your educators to make time for professional development opportunities that support this learning, and continuing to strengthen your districts' relationships with local First Nations. Having a broader knowledge of Indigenous worldviews, histories, and cultures will help to build a generation of students who have a better understanding of and respect for Indigenous Peoples.

Together, we are continuing our work to create an education system where everyone feels included, represented, respected, and hopeful about their future.

Thank you for the excellent leadership you demonstrate in your communities as we work to provide B.C. students with the resources they need and deserve to thrive during their school years and beyond.

**Rachna Singh**  
Minister of Education and Child Care



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## A Message from the BCSSA CEO



**Gino Bondi**

*CEO*

*British Columbia School Superintendents Association*

Just as your own district strategic plans inform your respective operational plans which are manifested in your school plans, I hope to model a strategic process that increases horizontal alignment between our committees, coalesces our key performance indicators, and builds consensus on organizational strategic themes that inform future budget decisions.

The landscape of K-12 education is always evolving and because of this, strong and effective leadership will always matter. The British Columbia School Superintendents Association's (BCSSA) position as the collective and unified public voice of educational leadership in the province is one of great influence in terms of impacting provincial policy development and decision making. Over the last three years as the Board Treasurer and Secretary, I've come to appreciate the importance of this role, the power of the diverse and unique voices within the Association, and how the interplay of regional representation positively impacts the Board's discourse and positioning.

As your CEO, I am excited about continuing and amplifying the great work of the Association. The theory of action that guides me is threefold and is grounded in a culture of inquiry that is curious, transparent, and active. First, student learning and adult learning are symmetrical. That is, there is a parallelism between the work that we do as system leaders and the work in which we expect our students to engage. Second, leadership accelerates emergence. While transformative pedagogical shifts should be led and owned by practitioners, they need leaders to forge shared purpose, create resources, and offer guidance and facilitation for this new work. And third, inequity is structural. An understanding of the structural dimension of inequities and a vision for more equitable, inclusive, and diverse learning must be the undercurrent for all our design and improvement efforts.

One of our Association's foci is the creation of a new four-year strategic plan. As we embark on this collective journey, I appreciate the importance of implementing a plan that continues to create multiple opportunities for an everchanging membership to grow professionally. However, what I am also drawn to is the ideal of facilitating a process that creates and holds space for divergent thought, space which allows all our members to ask questions, develop plans (self, team, system), and space that helps us link strategic inquiry with better life chances for the students we serve. My hope is that through this process, we can nurture an Association-wide culture of curiosity that supports both behavioural change and cultural change through the co-construction of strategic priorities, actions, and outcomes.

Curiosity will always flourish within a well-defined inquiry. I believe that strategic planning is an inquiry-based learning process, a collective exercise that ensures differentiation, personalization, individual ownership, and an understanding of self within the context of our Association. I also believe that to "take life" a strategic plan needs whole family adoption. What I mean is that each of us should be able to share our strategic vision statement clearly and succinctly; you should be able to see how it guides the leadership stances in your own districts.

Just as your own district strategic plans inform your respective operational plans which are manifested in your school plans, I hope to model a strategic process that increases horizontal alignment between our committees, coalesces our key performance indicators, and builds consensus on organizational strategic themes that inform future budget decisions.

In amplifying this system alignment, in connecting the dots without placing anything more on your already full plates, my goal (borrowing Jeff Kluger's term) is to engage in the process of simplicity: making the complex simple in terms of understanding and coherence. As your CEO,

*continued on page 12*



## A MESSAGE FROM THE BCSSA CEO

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I will try to do this by continuously measuring the work I do relative to the key actions in our strategic plan. And, as all inquiries are based on solid open-ended questions, I will keep five in mind as I engage in this work with all of you:

- How do we create system coherence to drive the Association forward?
- How do we ensure a high level of system alignment (both vertical and horizontal)?

- How might we best design, develop and successfully implement our key objectives?
- What could be the indicators of progress that demonstrate movement towards our strategic goals?
- How can we ensure long term sustainability of our efforts?

As we embark on our strategic planning journey, I am inspired by our belief that a

Curiosity will always flourish within a well-defined inquiry. I believe that strategic planning is an inquiry-based learning process, a collective exercise that ensures differentiation, personalization, individual ownership, and an understanding of self within the context of our Association.

culture of curiosity and inquiry is lived both through the daily practices of individual persons and through the systems that support shared and collaborative systemic inquiry. And in building these systems, the most curious of open-ended questions, one with a symmetrical link to our desire of bettering the life chances of our students, brings all our strategic aspirations into focus: "How should a person's life change for the better when they encounter and engage with the BCSSA?"

**Gino Bondi**

CEO

British Columbia School Superintendents Association

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# Build Your Professional Learning Community



## **BCSSA: We inspire, develop, and support senior leadership in public education!**

The key work of the BC School Superintendents Association is to enable our members to be visionary leaders of public education by supporting their individual professional learning and by representing their collective wisdom and interests.

To support them in fulfilling their leadership roles, we create professional learning events to address emerging

issues, the changing needs of school district administrators and the development and effective use of advanced educational and administrative approaches and technologies. These events not only help our members enhance their leadership skills, but also present opportunities for them to network with colleagues throughout the province who share similar job responsibilities and interests.

## **Programs of interest:**

### **Learning Partners Program – Expanded**

In response to our members' requests, we are now extending (on a trial basis) our Learning Partners Program – Mentorship. In the past, we have limited our program to newly appointed members and superintendents, but in the past few years there has been a growing request for the Learning Partners Program to be available to other members who may have been with the Association for some time and/or members who have recently changed positions either within or outside of their current district.

If you are interested in participating in this program, we would ask that you contact our Membership Consultant, Shannon Derinzy, at [shannon.derinzy@gmail.com](mailto:shannon.derinzy@gmail.com).

### **New Members – Group Meetings**

This is open to any new BCSSA member who is in their first or second year of BCSSA membership in any position. We hold three sessions attached to our Summer, Fall, and Spring events where new members meet, work with mentors, participate in workshops, hear guest speakers, and form a professional learning community that connects people across districts for years to come. These sessions are free of charge to any new member, but registration is required.

### **New Superintendents Program**

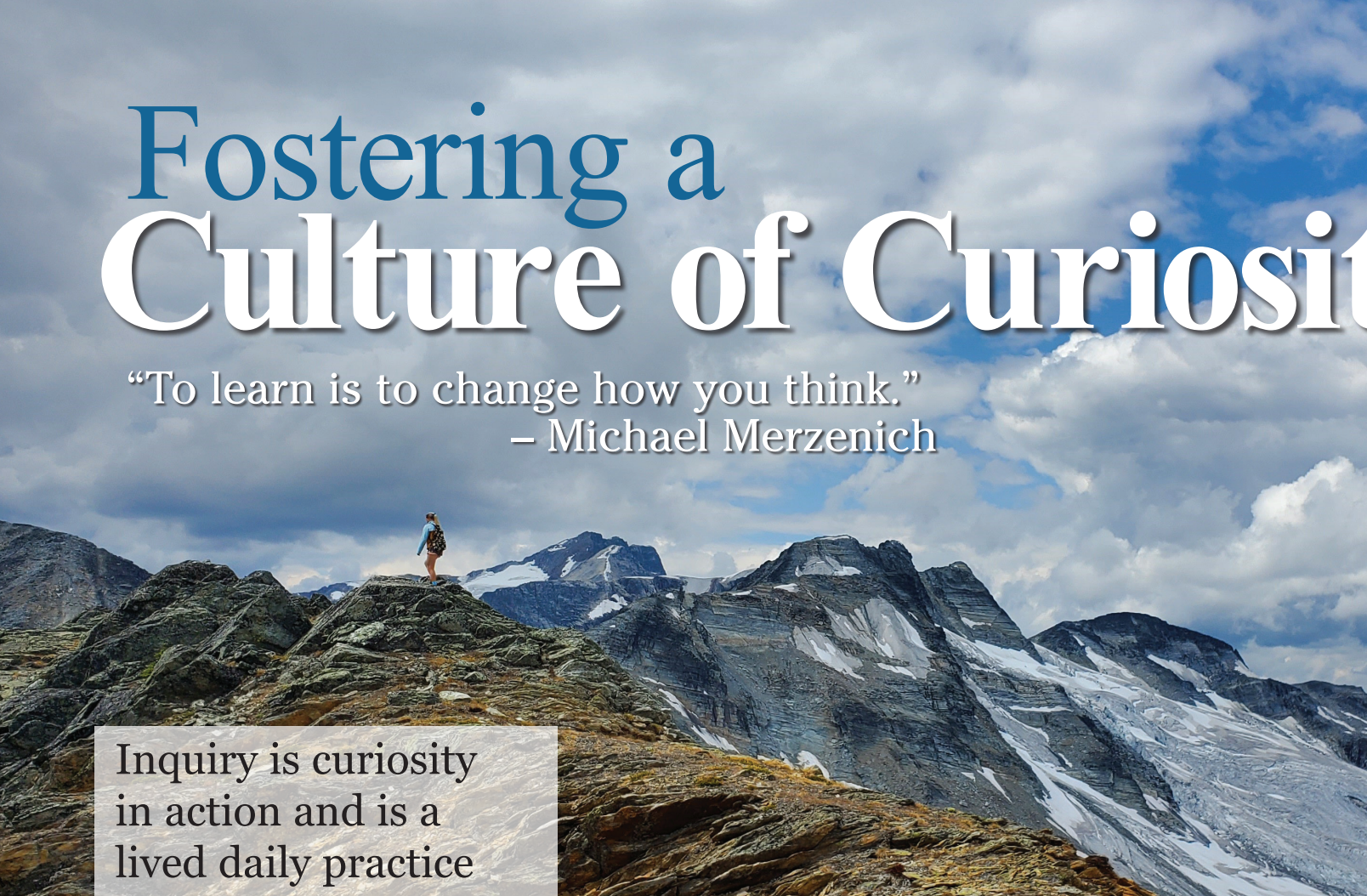
This is a one-year program that meets a few times a year to support superintendents, who – while they may not be new to BCSSA, they are new to the role. Individual mentoring is also offered to this group for those who wish to participate.

**Become a member – join today!**  
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# Fostering a Culture of Curiosity

“To learn is to change how you think.”  
– Michael Merzenich



Inquiry is curiosity in action and is a lived daily practice

and mindset. The ongoing development of collaborative processes that focus on designing engaging learning environments and participating in reflective practice are at the heart of our work. Inquiry is about demonstrating honesty in reflection and unearthing truth about what we know.

**By Jill Jensen, Superintendent, SD92 (Nisga'a)**

Children enter school filled with curiosity and wonder, anxious to learn about the world they have inherited and are a part of, yet somehow, and all too often, that curiosity fades and students become disenchanted with school. How might we create systems that imbue curiosity as a “lived daily practice and mindset?” How might we lean on the core competencies of creative and critical thinking that naturally promote a sense of curiosity, questioning, and wonder? How might we revitalize and re-enliven curiosity in children and adults?

As system leaders, fostering a culture of curiosity is central to creating equitable and inclusive schools that honour and celebrate diversity. “Our schools are fractals of the larger forces in society’s design – forces that relentlessly shape how they work and how adults and kids alike behave in them.”<sup>1</sup> Fostering a culture of curiosity means having the courage to honestly and thoughtfully examine the structures, practices, policies, mindsets, and metrics that uphold a system we know does not meet the needs of all students.

Our system was “invented to manage human nature and designed to serve the interests of society – as interpreted and directed by people in positions of power (namely, White people, mostly male, here in the West) with deep self-interest in retaining and expanding that power...”<sup>1</sup> Being curious about how the dominant narrative of society is reflected in our school system allows us to delve honestly into hard truths about the system we are leading. It also allows us to create more space to welcome a diversity of voices, particularly voices that may be marginalized.





*The Asulkan Ridge. Enjoying the wonders of our natural world fosters a sense of curiosity and allows us to recognize how intimately we are interconnected with all of nature. All photos courtesy of Jill Jensen, Nadine Hale, and Rosetta Doolan.*



*Elementary students demonstrating sustained curiosity and a sense of wonder about the world (science curricular competency) as they explore the beach in Gingolx at low tide. What they discovered led to further questioning, wondering, and inquiry.*

Our school system generally does not encourage us to be curious about our values, beliefs, and actions, querying why we do what we do, and recognizing the ways the dominant knowledge and culture determine how our schools operate. We have been conditioned (colonized) to believe that the ways things are is the way they ought to be. We are so busy with daily operational tasks that we have little time for practices that develop a mindset of curiosity.

We have all inherited “a completely self-reinforcing, relentlessly self-repeating closed system.”<sup>1</sup> We continue to review the same evidence, hear the same voices, follow the same patterns and processes, and organize learning in the same ways we have done for over 150 years.

### Working towards change

Our district, in working with Compassionate Systems Awareness,<sup>2</sup> has embedded several systems thinking tools into our practice. We have learned to slow down and to use the tools to engage in inquiry, to be curious about why we do what we do, and to better understand the roots of our actions.

The more we explore our mindsets, the more we recognize how much there is to “unlearn.” Marie Battiste, author and educator working as a professor at the University of Saskatchewan in the Department of Educational Foundations, identifies, “it is about every educator making a commitment to both learn and unlearn – to unlearn the racism and superiority so evident in our society and to learn new ways of knowing, valuing others, accepting diversity, and making equity and inclusion foundational for all learners.”<sup>3</sup>

Unlearning patterns of behaviour that we have all been conditioned to accept requires a willingness to be open, honest, and truthful. Our staff has found that systems thinking tools let us frame our inquiry in ways that are non-threatening and where there is no shame or blame – only curiosity about the forces, practices, policies, language, and mindsets that permeate our thinking and our actions.

The tools that have been most consistently used by our staff include the systems thinking iceberg,<sup>4</sup> the ladder of inference,<sup>5</sup> and the ladder of connectedness.<sup>6</sup> These tools, along with greater attention to social generative fields,

*continued on page 17*



*Crossing the suspension bridge in Gitwinksihlkw. For many years, children crossed the bridge and walked to the highway to catch the school bus. Fostering and sustaining curiosity involves learning the truth about history, questioning what is, understanding our local context, listening, and making efforts to imagine the world from perspectives other than our own.*



## Celebrating Innovation at B.C.'s Newest Schools & Additions

At Station One Architects, we're celebrating some exciting school projects across the province that will expand learning opportunities this school year and long into the future. Below, we've highlighted a few of the innovative features that make these school buildings unique.

### **Coast Salish Elementary: Into the Mountainside**

Coast Salish Elementary opened its doors this September on a Coquitlam mountainside. With a 25m grade change across the site, we took advantage of the challenging space by incorporating play areas with slides and other structures into the slopes. We also added solar photovoltaics to the large south-facing gym roof that should generate enough energy to power all of the lights in the school.

### **Quesnel Junior: LEED Gold Meets 21<sup>st</sup> Century Design**

Inspired by Quesnel's location at the confluence of the Quesnel and Fraser Rivers, the flowing design aesthetic incorporates innovation to achieve its LEED Gold status. The entire south-facing wall of the gym is equipped with solar panels to help power the school. 21<sup>st</sup>-century design elements enhance learning opportunities throughout the building. Overhead garage doors and operable walls between learning studios improve flow and maximize cross-curricular connections. Quesnel Junior School is celebrating its grand opening this fall.

### **Gudangaay Tlaats'gaa Naay Secondary: Canada's First Tsunami Tower**

Featuring renovations, a seismic upgrade and Canada's

first tsunami tower, this Haida Gwaii project is loaded with innovation. Gudangaay Tlaats'gaa Naay School will amalgamate two existing schools in the remote community of Masset. Because of the potential for earthquake and tsunami activity in the region, and rescue resources being some distance away, the upgraded school will include a stand-alone tsunami tower – a vital innovation for improving staff and student safety.

### **Gitwinksihlkw Elementary Gymnasium: Welcoming Community**

This Nisga'a school in Northwestern B.C.'s Nass Valley has a new, accessible gym that also creates space for the wider community. Various groups can access the gym, which includes an entrance lobby and change rooms, outside of school hours for community activities and events.

### **École Élémentaire James Whiteside Elementary Seismic Upgrade: Safe & Accessible**

This Richmond school was built in the 1950s and required significant renovations including seismic upgrades and other building improvements to make the school safe and accessible. New features include gender neutral and accessible washrooms.

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*continued from page 15*

have created space for us to examine, reflect on, and shift personal and collective practice. Taking time to develop our contemplative practice and setting time at the start of each gathering to check in has strengthened relationships, created self-awareness, and opened space for the honest dialogue needed to transform how we do things.

“Developing shared meanings involves revealing thinking and this can be difficult because we often struggle to surface long held assumptions that have become buried in our subconscious.<sup>7</sup> The systems thinking tools and practices allow our staff to develop shared meanings, to become curious about the evidence available to us, to encourage and elevate the voices we seldom hear, to begin to question the narratives we treasure and the assumptions we make, and to become more reflective about the language we use,

where it came from and how it influences our thinking.

Systems thinking tools support fostering a culture of curiosity and inquiry as we seek to transform life opportunities for all learners, and willingly dive into the complexity of our system, regularly questioning why we do what we do and the ways we do it. “Without a robust culture of curiosity, imagination is rendered impotent, and all we’re doing is surviving the day, administering transactions, on autopilot, surrendering our agency, and perpetuating an ineffective status quo. We become managers of the end state of a problem-solution continuum. Our roles become reduced to administrators of predetermined solutions rather than interrogators of the unknown. Consuming the choices that others have made for us, relinquishing our right to be the author of our own story. We assert agency over our future only when we challenge what is known.”<sup>8</sup>

As we embrace curiosity and challenge what we have long accepted, our district team has noticed increased personal awareness and well-being, as well as a greater sense of belonging and connection to each other.

### Asking questions and forging ahead

During our 2023 BCSSA Summer Leadership Gathering, we considered the conditions for deep learning with education thought-leader and author, Will Richardson. We compared those conditions to some of the practices we cannot seem to let go of, such as sorting children by age, scheduling “learning” into timed, subject/discipline-specific blocks, using bells, etc. We persist in upholding these practices even when we know they may inhibit deep learning. Why? What mental models do we need to shift to change practice? Will did a great job

*continued on page 18*

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## QUEST FOR THE MOON

BY OLIVIA WHEELER

STARRING BRAYDEN LORD & SUSANNAH REBAR

**Quest for the Moon** tells the story of a young fox and his friend, the moon. Having never ventured far from his home in the woods, the fox is enamoured with the moon’s stories about far off places that she has seen on her path across the sky. When the moon goes missing, the fox must leave his home and journey across the wilderness in a search to find her. On his journey, he travels through meadows, oceans, and mountains: dazzling, vast, and intimidating. This whimsically told, charming shadow play is performed by two puppeteers. It features an original story and original music/sound design, as well as several puppets of theatre magic.

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SPECIALTY SECTION: SCHOOL DESTINATIONS



## FOSTERING A CULTURE OF CURIOSITY

continued from page 17

of sparking our curiosity and getting us to reflect.

"When we engage in reflective practice, we are intentionally working to understand thinking, behaviours, and events from a variety of perspectives. We have opportunities to reformulate our thinking, clarify, explore, and evaluate our thoughts, governing values, and actions; and possibly

reframe thoughts, feelings and actions; as well as test and reconceptualize our assumptions."<sup>9</sup> Systems thinking allows our staff to be more intentional about our reflective practice.

Another way our district fosters curiosity is by encouraging place-based outdoor learning experiences for our learners (adult and children). When we are on the land, we can observe and experience, connect with,

and know ourselves, each other, and the world in new and novel ways. We begin to understand that *learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).*<sup>10</sup>

We have found that when we move outside of the four walls of the classroom and put the First Peoples Principles of Learning at the centre, as the lens through which we understand what it means to learn and grow as respectful citizens, we are able to challenge closed, self-reinforcing systems.

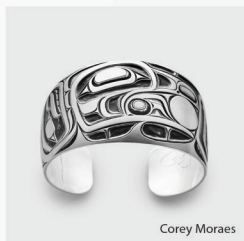
Systems thinking tools support fostering a culture of curiosity and inquiry as we seek to transform life opportunities for all learners, and willingly dive into the complexity of our system, regularly questioning why we do what we do and the ways we do it.

The use of systems thinking tools, contemplative practices, and living the First Peoples Principles of Learning, have allowed our district to begin to foster a culture of curiosity and inquiry. There is still much we need to learn and many practices we need to cultivate. However, I believe that if we engage in our personal and collective learning with an open mind and heart, with deep curiosity, we will be able to demonstrate honest reflection and a willingness to accept the truths we unearth.

A culture of curiosity may be key in making our classrooms, schools, and districts equitable and inclusive, and in honouring and celebrating student agency, voice, and diversity. 🌈

*Jill Jensen is a mother, grandmother, and teacher. She is currently Superintendent of Schools for Nisga'a School District No. 92 and is endlessly curious.*

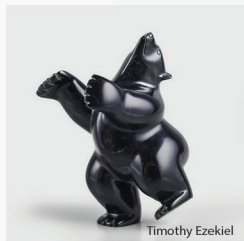
# Experience...



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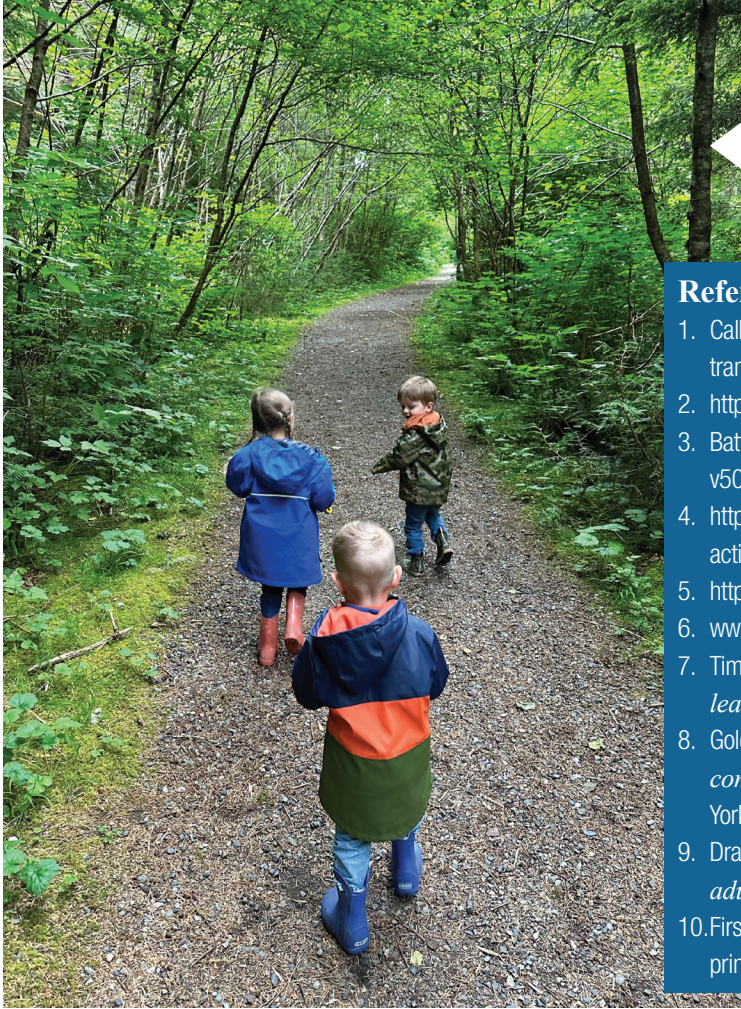


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Nature walks encourage all manner of questions and foster a sense of curiosity about our world. These pre-schoolers are exploring the shapes, colours, sizes, and patterns we discover in nature as they develop their literacy, numeracy, mental well-being, identity, and communication skills.

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# Living Inquiry

By Heather Androsoff, SD48 (Sea to Sky)

I joined Sea to Sky School District in August of 2022 in a new role designed to build capacity in early learning and child care. *What does it mean to build capacity?* From my perspective, building capacity and fostering a culture of curiosity are interrelated. This is how we engage educators in reflection, dialogue, research, and collaboration.

Inquiry is “a lived daily practice and mindset.”<sup>1</sup> Curiosity, “the fuel of transformative leadership and value creation,”<sup>2</sup> drives learning and growth forward. *How can system leaders foster a culture of curiosity and inquiry?* In *From Teaching to Thinking: A Pedagogy for Reimagining our Work*, authors Ann Pelo and Margie Carter recommend organizational leaders practice pedagogical leadership, “supporting educators’ *thinking* rather than their *teaching*, and their embrace of *inquiry* rather than *instruction*.”<sup>3</sup> This reframing helped me envision my work and form my inquiry question as a pedagogical

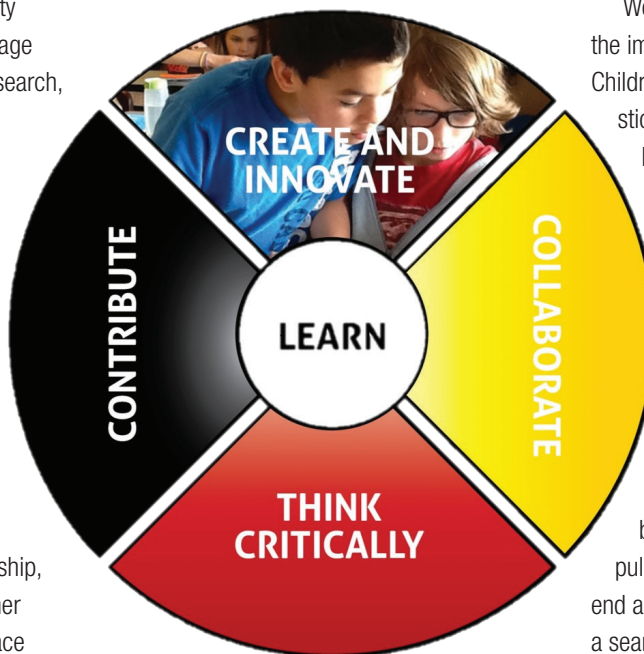
leader: *how do I create a culture of trust, innovation, and curiosity to build capacity in early learning and child care?*

Experience has taught me that this work is relational. Thus, last year I spent much

of September and October visiting school and community sites to learn the context and build rapport. I met a primary teacher during one of these visits and she invited me to accompany her class to a nearby forested area.

We stood beside each other, “rooted in the immediacy”<sup>4</sup> as the students explored. Children climbed boulders, collected sticks, and searched for bugs. A few became engrossed with two giant perpendicular logs. The children sat on opposite ends of the top log as it teetered back and forth and they jumped on and off as it moved up and down. More children gathered and curiosity grew. The children expressed a desire to balance the log. Some children focused on how many bodies should be on each end. Others pushed and pulled. A child placed a large rock on one end and the resulting movement prompted a search for weighted props.

The teacher and I turned to each other, pleased to be witnessing such magic together. While she was observing



*School District 48's Medicine Wheel helps guide educators as they work to create safe, purposeful, and powerful learning environments.*



her students at work, I was observing her as a developing educator. This shared experience offered me a window into her early learning pedagogy and practice. From my observations, I could see that she had an appreciation for and interest in nature and wanted to share this with her students. She understood that children experience joy during play, and that play is how children learn. She afforded her students opportunities to take risks and learn through exploration. She saw children as capable and provided students with autonomy and agency.

After a while, she turned to me and asked, “how do I assess learning outdoors?” I paused for a moment, recognizing this as a potential opportunity for reflection and inquiry. Her question was worth investigating. I thought she might be wondering how to authentically embed reflective and assessment practices that honour children’s playful curiosity. I figured she would benefit from a deeper understanding of how her work aligned with B.C.’s Early Learning Framework, our district’s Education Plan, and the B.C. Curriculum.

For the time being, I suggested she take photos of the children as they explored. In November, I approached the teacher about working collaboratively on an inquiry question. She was enrolled in Simon Fraser University’s Field Study Program and wanted to focus on that. I told her I understood and wished her luck in completing her program.

A few months later, the seed that was planted emerged. The teacher emailed me expressing a desire to validate her work and grow her confidence. She wanted to discuss the possibility of us working together. I thought she might be seeking a critical friend, someone who “acts as a provocateur, offering challenge alongside support.”<sup>5</sup>

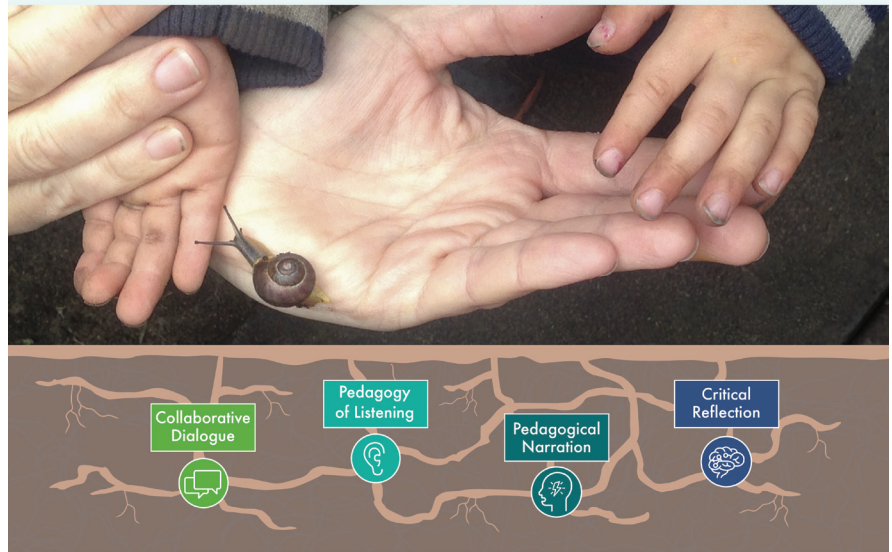
I wanted to connect her to an inquiry network, since “pedagogical practice is born in dialogue.”<sup>6</sup> She accepted the invitation



Students at Garibaldi Highlands Elementary school explore possibilities on a log during an outdoor investigation.

## B.C. Early Learning Framework

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The B.C. Early Learning Framework establishes a vision for respectfully living and learning together. Learn more here: [www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning/teach/early-learning-framework](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning/teach/early-learning-framework)

to join Changing Possibilities for Young Children (B.C. Ministry of Education) and learned four key practices: Collaborative Dialogue, Pedagogy of Listening, Pedagogical Narration, and Critical Reflection.<sup>7</sup>

She also participated in an inquiry group focused specifically on pedagogical

narration, “the process of noticing and collecting moments from daily practice and sharing these with colleagues, children, and families.”<sup>8</sup> She soon developed the following inquiry questions: *How can exploring the process of pedagogical narration guide my outdoor learning*

*continued on page 22*



Having gained some knowledge about documenting children's thinking and learning, she listened closely and wrote down comments and questions that emerged from the students as they interacted with the bugs and each other.

## LIVING INQUIRY IN ACTION

*continued from page 21*

*experiences with my students? How do I invite others to engage in dialogue and reflection to consider multiple perspectives and grow as a professional? Who are the pedagogical matches that will support me in my learning?* She found parallels between her work and her Field Study Program and captured this learning in her working portfolio.

One day, her students uncovered some wood bugs outside. Having gained some knowledge about documenting children's thinking and learning, she listened closely and wrote down comments and questions that emerged from the students as they interacted with the bugs and each other. She also took photos and videos.

When I returned for a visit, "living inquiries"<sup>9</sup> containing documentation of children's learning filled her classroom walls. I witnessed her students participating in project-based, multimodal learning. I circulated as one group made a wood bug habitat out of paper mache, a second group created a wood bug model using cardboard, a third group researched facts about wood bugs on iPads to publish non-fiction resources, and a fourth group developed a story drama and designed wood bug costumes for the characters. I stayed attuned to her development and worked to support her along her journey.

When she questioned her intuition, we found grounding in the Big Idea, "curiosity and wonder lead us to new discoveries about ourselves and the world around us"<sup>10</sup> As her confidence grew, we looked at the student competencies on our district's Education Plan and she thought about what skills her students were already demonstrating and what skills they were ready to learn and develop.

We brainstormed ways to move students' learning forward and then we shifted our focus to student self-reflection. We looked at our competency goals once again and considered which area most authentically related to the work she was doing with her students. The goal collaborate, which is also a pedagogical pathway in our Education Plan, spoke to her as an important component of her work. She chose a statement within that competency and formulated a question to pose to her students to support them in thinking about their learning. A few weeks later, she proudly showed me some student self-reflections from the wood bug inquiry



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project in response to her question, *how do I use the ideas of others to get new ideas and to solve problems?* We discussed the next steps.

As time progressed, I considered ways to contribute to our district in my current role. I realized that visiting multiple sites afforded me the chance to build capacity by creating opportunities for educators to share their thinking and learning district wide. Stories connect us to ourselves and each other. They humanize professional development creating the conditions necessary for learning, change, and growth.

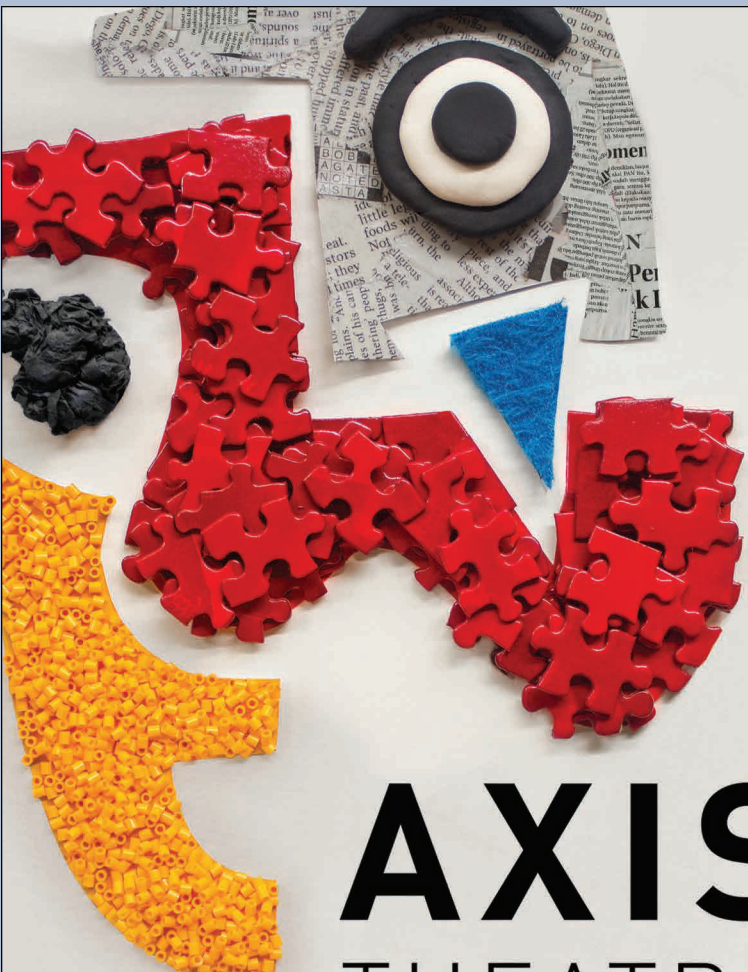
When Changing Possibilities for Young Children came to a close, it seemed the perfect opportunity for the teacher who I had been working with to share her learning. We engaged in storytelling together because after all, inquiry is “a shared construction of knowledge and understanding.”<sup>11</sup> Her learning story about one of her students brought some of us to tears because it was so impactful.

There are days I wonder, *how am I contributing? Am I achieving what I set out to do? Am I making an impact?* The other day I received a text message from an administrator in our district who attached a photo she took at the beach with the caption, “thought of you when I took this. What a great *what do you think could be happening here?* photo!” Examples such as this help me see how I am making an impact in our district. This grass roots approach to pedagogical leadership takes patience to grow, but what a joy it is living inquiry. 🌈

*Heather Androsoff is District Vice Principal of Early Learning and Child Care in School District 48 (Sea to Sky). She is also a member of the Instructional Leadership Team. Heather previously worked in Burnaby School District and the University of British Columbia's Teacher Education Program. She is the author of Scout and Kit Become Friends and Social Stories 4 Kids.*

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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 depot.

By participating in BC's **FREE Return-It School program**, you get access to our online Teacher's Dashboard with exclusive educational resources and fundraising tips, our online activity book as well as free recycling bins for your school. Your school keeps all the deposit refunds from recycling, so you can use the program to supplement your school's fundraising efforts. We want to help students learn how to do their part to help keep the planet green by recycling their beverage containers and more.



### Free Program

Offered FREE to all schools in BC by Return-It, the not-for-profit product steward for beverage container recycling in British Columbia.



### Free Recycling Bins

Get up to 3 free Return-It bins to help your school's recycling program. Plus, discover the best collection & bottle drive methods for your school, from Return-It Express to pick-up services (where available).



### \$5,000 Grand Prize Story Contest

Share your school's interesting, creative and impactful recycling story with us and you could win a Grand Prize of \$5,000 or the 2nd place prize of \$2500 (two Elementary School winners and two High School winners every year!)



### Tools & Tips

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### Return-It School Video Presentation Kit

Teachers can request a free Presentation Kit via mail with a fun & educational video about recycling, lesson tips, and special goodies for their students.



### Return-It School Online Activity Book

Our Activity Book is available online to registered schools through the teacher's dashboard, and includes recycling-themed games, comics, fun recycling facts and more.

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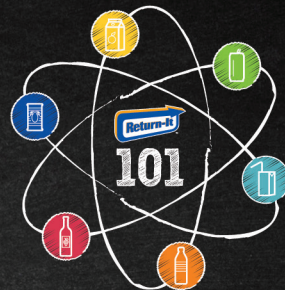


### Bottle Drives with Express

Return-It Express makes it easier for schools to hold their bottle drives. No sorting and easy drop offs! For more information, visit [return-it.ca/programs/bottledrives/](https://return-it.ca/programs/bottledrives/).

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## STORY CONTEST WINNERS FROM 2022/2023

### Elementary \$5,000 Grand Prize Winner: Eastview Elementary

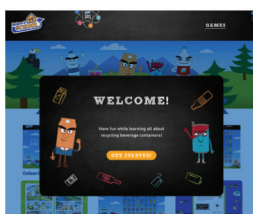
Eastview Elementary's beverage recycling program goal was to raise funds for a physical literacy outdoor space at their school. To promote the program, they sent students home with educational materials, newsletters and instructions about the Return-It program, shared information on their school's social media pages, and put up posters around the school. A contest was held over winter break where students were sent home with pre-labelled clear bags to fill up with as many beverage containers as they could, resulting in 195 additional bags. In total, the school raised \$1,417 by returning 14,170 containers.

### High School \$5,000 Grand Prize Winner: Burnaby Youth Hub

After group discussions on the importance of taking action to combat the effects of climate change and energy use, a group of six students at Burnaby Youth Hub realized they could make a difference by recycling beverage containers. They planned a campaign called "Return-It to Earn It", which involved reaching out to their school and a neighbouring one to join forces in collecting and recycling beverage containers. The students create comic-style handouts to distribute information with their campaign's mascot, "Garbeth," inspired by Return-It Gang characters. In just a few months, students collected 3,001 containers and made \$289.75 in deposit refunds.

Read the full stories at [returnitschool.ca/schoolnews/](https://returnitschool.ca/schoolnews/).

## RETURN-IT SCHOOL ACTIVITY BOOK: RECYCLING FACTS, GAMES AND MORE



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## HOW FUNDRAISING WITH EXPRESS WORKS:



Sign up for a free Express account for your school at [Return-It.ca/Express](https://Return-It.ca/Express).



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 depot. To find an Express depot near you, visit [Return-It.ca/Locations/Express](https://Return-It.ca/Locations/Express).



Log in at the Express label stand at the depot 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 depot.



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

\* Some depots may have per-visit bag limits. Contact your local Express depot directly for more information.



# From Inquiry to Action: Courageously Building the Inclusive World We Seek



**By Beth Applewhite  
and Barbara White,  
British Columbia Black  
Educational Leaders  
Association**

Some may suggest that it is impossible to create spaces “free of racism and discrimination” because human beings are self-focused, flawed, unpredictable, struggle to change, and will make mistakes. However, we also know that it is possible for human beings to change, engage in deep inquiry, and take risks.

After the racial reckoning of 2020, several senior management teams in British Columbia have felt compelled to actively demonstrate that they are diverse, inclusive, and supportive of racial equity. With the increased awareness of systemic racism within B.C. education, many school districts have begun the difficult work of breaking down systemic and attitudinal barriers to inclusion. However, unless districts begin to innovate and remain curious about solving issues impacting racialized people in their organizations, the current anti-racism movement in B.C. education will become stagnant.

We have heard the call of racialized and other marginalized staff demanding more equitable treatment. Most want to work for districts that are not just paying lip service to racial equity progress or rushing to showcase their care for Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour (IBPOC)

members of their community. They want legitimate inclusion that sustains a culture of compassionate understanding and acceptance. They require a hopeful and encouraging culture that will endure and continue to feed and protect their spirits.

Educational leaders often seek swift solutions as we do not want to perpetuate harm. But in our earnest determination to heal, we must resist the temptation to create a quick “fix.” Some districts have done the challenging, often painful work of uncovering the harm caused by discrimination and unchecked biases. The trauma and suffering of staff, students, and families provoke us to take immediate action. This has included increasing diverse hires to help our racialized members see themselves within faculty and district leadership. However, we must first accurately understand the harmful underlying conditions within our organizations that make racialized people feel unwelcome and unable to stay.





To effectively address racism in school districts and create a culture that will retain racialized hires, it is important to first build consensus around there being a problem and where it comes from. If there is a lack of understanding of systemic racism and how it causes oppressive inequities and upholds barriers to opportunities, then equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives will be perceived as the problem, not the solution. To be effective, districts need to move beyond raising awareness and increasing understanding to developing genuine concern and focusing on sustainable corrective measures. We must also envision moving from “problem-fixing to possibility-creating.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Lead and nurture system-wide inquiries**

“Embed opportunities for innovation across the organization which demonstrate and foster trust and transparency.”<sup>2</sup>

How will we create leadership capacity opportunities that attract and empower racialized candidates? How will we measure the impact with transparency?

How will we support affinity spaces at all levels of our system?

What will we create to empower racialized district and school staff to better navigate the “invisible currents” of systemic racism that we all swim in? How will we listen to gain understanding and build trust?

How will we invite racialized and other marginalized people to district tables? How will we ensure their experiences at the table are encouraging and empowering? How will we know?

District leaders may not be able to change the world, but they can certainly change their world. We are hopeful that this continued movement for change will encourage school district leaders to come up with innovative solutions that will make meaningful improvements that will truly make a difference for racialized people. Such improvements will make schools and district offices more diverse, inclusive, and safe, and will support the mental health and well-being of all staff and students.

District leaders need to challenge themselves to remain curious about how to best create legitimate inclusion within their organization. To do so requires much humility and risk taking. This also requires the courage to model supportive, thoughtful risk taking as school and district leaders will need to see their colleagues and supervisors venturing into action before they, themselves, will feel safe and supported enough to be vulnerable and ask truly transformative questions.

The most crucial question we must ask ourselves is not “what can we do?” but rather “do we truly have the will to do it consistently?” This requires ample time to thoughtfully unpack. If we subjectively pick and choose when to do the challenging work of equity and anti-racism, and if we have not unpacked ourselves to determine

whether we personally have the will to remain fully committed, we will cause harm.

Being curious is not simply a matter of becoming more aware, more enlightened about our own biases and prejudice; we need to also attend to the hard, sometimes painful, question of when and how do our own daily lived experiences as leaders help reproduce the status quo? As author, theorist, educator, and social critic, bell hooks teaches us, “The heart of justice is truth telling, seeing ourselves and the world the way it is rather than the way we want it to be.”<sup>3</sup> Note, bell hooks was born Gloria Jean Watkins. She chose her great-grandmother’s name as her pseudonym, spelling it in lower case to focus the attention on her message rather than herself.<sup>4</sup>

Can cultural safety provide a pathway for curiosity, transparency, questioning, and action to create “better life chances” for all staff across school districts? Irihapeti Ramsden, a Māori nurse from New Zealand, proposed a cultural safety model for the nursing education curriculum to improve healthcare outcomes for Māori people.<sup>5</sup> This model has been modified around the world and here in B.C. the First Nations Health Authority describes cultural safety as “an outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the health care system. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe when receiving health care.”<sup>6</sup>

Is cultural safety possible in education and if it is, how would it change the lives of staff and students who identify as members of the IBPOC community? What would it take for superintendents to collaboratively create school environments where all staff and students feel safe? Some may suggest that it is impossible to create spaces “free of racism and discrimination” because human beings are self-focused, flawed, unpredictable, struggle to change, and will

*continued on page 28*



## BUILDING THE WORLD WE SEEK

continued from page 27

make mistakes. However, we also know that it is possible for human beings to change, engage in deep inquiry, and take risks.

We suggest that one approach to creating “better life chances” for racialized staff and students is to advocate for vulnerability in our leadership. What signals are present in district offices and schools to let IBPOC staff and students know that they are welcomed, they belong, and

that they are accepted as whole persons and not just as their stereotyped tropes? How do administrators lead their schools in courageous conversations about bias, racism, privilege, and respecting the voices of racialized youth?

Researcher and storyteller Brené Brown observes in her book *Dare to Lead* that, “The true underlying obstacle to brave leadership is how we respond to our fear. The real barrier to daring leadership is

our armour – the thoughts, emotions, and behaviours that we use to protect ourselves when we aren’t willing and able to rumble with vulnerability.”<sup>7</sup> It is possible to enter into high-level decision-making spaces with openness, empathy, and courage, to listen unguarded and hold our feelings of discomfort gently with kindness and curiosity.

### Stay open and connect to internal experiences

District and school leaders have a great deal of power to change our learning environments. What are some of the personal fears that arise when working to increase equity and accountability across districts?

I can’t take on the risk of engaging teachers and staff in examining privilege; I am not even sure that I know the answers for myself.

I may have to admit that I fear giving up privilege. What does that say about me and my values?

I could be seen as inauthentic, someone who cannot live their values, and that would be too much exposure, too much pressure. I don’t know how to do any of this.

The chances of being wrong, rejected as racist, and losing respect and collegial connections are too great.

All these concerns are real and valid, and we argue that the “Spirit of Leadership” invites leaders to act courageously while being with their fears and leaning into discomfort. Brown reminds us that, “Courage is contagious. To scale daring leadership and build courage in teams and organizations, we have to cultivate a culture in which brave work, tough conversations, and whole hearts are the expectation, and armor is not necessary or rewarded.”<sup>8</sup>

Racialized leaders, staff, and students navigate the world everyday trying to bare up under the prodigious weight of society’s racist constructs in their lives, wondering if they can find respite in the awakened



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heart of a colleague, mentor, teacher, or administrator.

## Where BCBELA began

The British Columbia Black Educational Leaders Association (BCBELA) emerged from courageous and vulnerable curiosity. A number of Black educators in B.C. began to ask, what if we created a new space where we could find community, see ourselves and feel seen, and share experiences and be believed, validated, and supported. We innovated and took the risk of creating a space where Black educational leaders can be our authentic professional selves and advocate for more inclusion, representation, and opportunities.

Our purpose is to empower and inspire educators who self-identify as Black or of Black African descent to build thriving learning communities by uplifting Black voices and dismantling anti-Black racism and all forms of oppression. Our goal is to provide meaningful professional

development that focuses on sustaining the use of equity and anti-racism lenses. We are committed to supporting and walking alongside educational partners to create a more equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist education system in British Columbia.

*District leaders need to challenge themselves to remain curious about how to best create legitimate inclusion within their organization. To do so requires much humility and risk taking.*

Being together in community has brought us closer to the values of our ancestors and grounds us in hope. Because we hold space for each other, we feel a strong sense of belonging, and we feel safe enough to be our true selves. Additionally, we bring much love, joy, and compassion to our work together and remain curious

about the possibilities of further innovating anti-racism and inclusion work.

## Asking questions to help build a better tomorrow

What if districts became places where IBPOC leaders, staff, and students could take the risk of “truly being seen” instead of being just another space where their identity, ideas, stories, lived experiences, and voices are minimized or discarded altogether? What questions would need to change, what new connections made, what ideas challenged, relationships built, and actions taken for us to provide such a life-changing refuge for our district and school staff?

Can we open ourselves to defenseless listening without interruption, judgment, or reframing in the boardroom, district meeting spaces, staffrooms, professional development events, classrooms, hallways, and playgrounds across the

*continued on page 31*



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district? Without question, these will be uncomfortable conversations that will instinctively cause us to respond with the desire to escape. If we deploy our courage and stay curious, a space of trust can open and create opportunities for transparent, transformative relationship building.

Many superintendents in B.C. do not know what it feels like for a racialized leader, staff member, or student to walk into a school or classroom as the only or maybe one of two; the sense of loneliness and isolation are overwhelming. Is it safe to show up as our authentic selves? Do we dare believe that it is possible for us to be included, seen, heard, valued, and treated with openness, understanding, and compassion?

What if school districts became a reprieve for racialized district and school staff from the constant surveillance of society's entrenched stereotypes? Oh, the joy, freedom, and lightheartedness that would bring! Oh the mental space that could open up to focus on intellectual tasks with a reduction in the chronic stress of monitoring the working environment for unpredictable racist behaviours and systemic barriers that can be traumatizing!

We spend critical years of our lives in the K-12 system searching for identity, acceptance, and a place to belong. What will it take for districts to undertake the courageous work in the "Spirit of Leadership" to change the culture in schools across our province and fulfill the promise of creating "better life chances" for students.

Researcher and teacher, Dr. Bruce Perry reminds us that, "To be excluded or dehumanized in an organization, community, or society you are part of results in prolonged uncontrollable stress that is sensitizing. Marginalization is a fundamental trauma. This is why [he believes] that a truly trauma-informed system is an anti-racist system."<sup>9</sup> Our consistent, daily practices of equity, diversity, and inclusion

in local districts are not only conscious anti-racist behaviours, but they also provide opportunities to expand connectedness and relational well-being, which is central in reducing the intense stress that racialized staff and students carry.

*If we deploy our courage and stay curious, a space of trust can open and create opportunities for transparent, transformative relationship building.*


### Hope for the future

Although this work is challenging, it is absolutely doable. We must continue to recognize the love and joy within racial equity and inclusion work. While being hopeful is important, actualizing the love and joy is vital: "Bringing love into the work environment can create the necessary transformation that can make any job we do, no matter how menial, a place where workers can express the best of themselves. When we work with love we renew the spirit; that renewal is an act of self-love, it nurtures our growth."<sup>10</sup>

True racial equity and inclusion work in school districts must look unlike anything we have seen in the past, because we have yet to successfully confront racial inequity at its deepest roots. We can, however, start today by bringing our fullest, most authentic selves to district spaces while intentionally holding space for racialized people to participate.

District leaders must continue to ask critically reflective questions and empower those around them to do the same. Yet we cannot rest in curiosity – we must move beyond inquiry to action. We cannot wait for the "luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that [inaction] will choke us."<sup>11</sup> (Lorde, 44).

Do we have the courage to intentionally ground our curiosity in love and compassion? Will we emerge from our siloed identities and recognize the hope within our collective humanity? If so, we will

"find ourselves in the other"<sup>12</sup> and create an education system that will best serve all British Columbians. 

*Beth Applewhite is the Inaugural President of the British Columbia Black Educational Leaders Association (BCBELA). She is also the District Principal of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Reconciliation (EDI&R) for the Burnaby School District.*

*Barbara White is the Secretary of BCBELA. She is also the Principal and Acting Education Director of Seabird Island Community School.*

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# Getting Curious About the Data in SD81

By Sarah Attrill, SD81 (Fort Nelson)

Do you remember presenting a final project or piece of work, feeling proud, and thinking to yourself “this is it! This is the absolute best!” only to have feedback seemingly focused only on areas to improve? Sharing data in district meetings with rightsholders and stakeholders can sometimes feel this way. As educators, we are celebrators of success, and we at times focus only on that work, but we also need to be open to difficult questions that lead to better understandings and, hopefully, innovation.

I think as educators, we have always focused on the positive.

When our data fits the bell curve, we are doing well, aren't we? We focus on the centre, and for the extra feel-good moments, we look at the high end of the bell curve – wow! Look at those high achievers. Everything is coming up gumdrops.

The other end of the bell is explained away by issues of attendance, illness, lack of engagement, and so forth. Issues that are not necessarily a reflection of our practices or systems. We name our high achievers, but we leave nameless those who are struggling. However, when you work in a district with less than a thousand students and only five schools, it is impossible to not put names and stories to each data point.

To become leaders who promote and create cultures of trust, where ongoing inquiry and reflection drive our practices forward, we need to get comfortable being uncomfortable. We need to get curious about the data. The difficult data.

Small districts have small teams. In SD81 (For Nelson), our senior team includes me, district principal, and our superintendent and secretary treasurer. All of us are new to these roles, so when we presented the literacy and numeracy data to our Indigenous Education Council (IEC) we were feeling optimistic. Our data supports our understanding that SD81 is providing a great education for the learners.

However, our perspective and reflection on the data was perceived differently by our rightsholders and stakeholders. The IEC reviewed the information from a lens different than our own and began to ask questions. They brought to us the lived experiences and understandings we had not considered that changed our data into a story with individuals at the centre.

When there is trust and a deep understanding of our purpose, we can hear the stories of our struggling learners, which sparks a

*continued on page 35*







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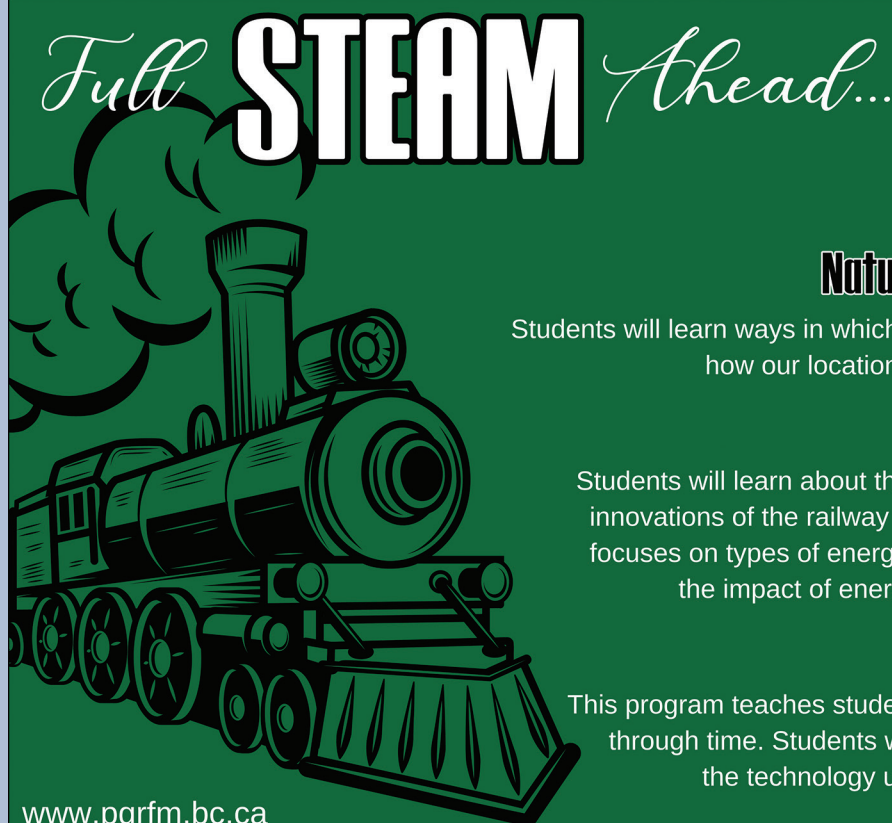
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\*These programs include worksheets, hands on activities, and a tour of the relevant equipment that was utilized in Northern BC.



*continued from page 33*

deep commitment to fostering curiosity and innovation in our practices.

While we continue to do well overall, we now have a starting place for inquiry in literacy. Our IEC members examined the data and started asking deeper questions:

“What is the story behind the few Indigenous students who didn’t write the assessment? Were they absent that day? Were they given another opportunity to write?” and “what is the district doing to support those students who are not yet on track?” This last question led us to examine current practices. You see, we have an agreement in place to provide Indigenous students additional supports in literacy until they are one grade level above expectations. Knowing this, the team asked, “how are we responding to students who are ‘emerging’ in grade four and still ‘emerging’ in grade seven?”

These data driven conversations promote inquiry and drive innovation in our district, which has many programs that teachers use to support student learning in literacy. What we have overlooked is what to do when things are not working. Are more and different programs that address literacy really what we need? Or is there a better way?


This is where the work begins. We are now in the process of examining our current practices to figure out what we can do differently to support literacy. We are asking ourselves what we can do to create a richer literacy experience for the learners in SD81. For example, instead of pulling students to work on literacy in a 1:1 or small group environment, will we see greater gains if we allow students time to learn about their own interests and use these interests to strengthen their literacy skills?

Conversations that expose vulnerabilities cannot happen without a foundation of trust and a shared sense of responsibility to provide the best education to all the students we serve. We are a team. Each of us join these discussions with a unique perspective that helps the team dig deeper into the data,

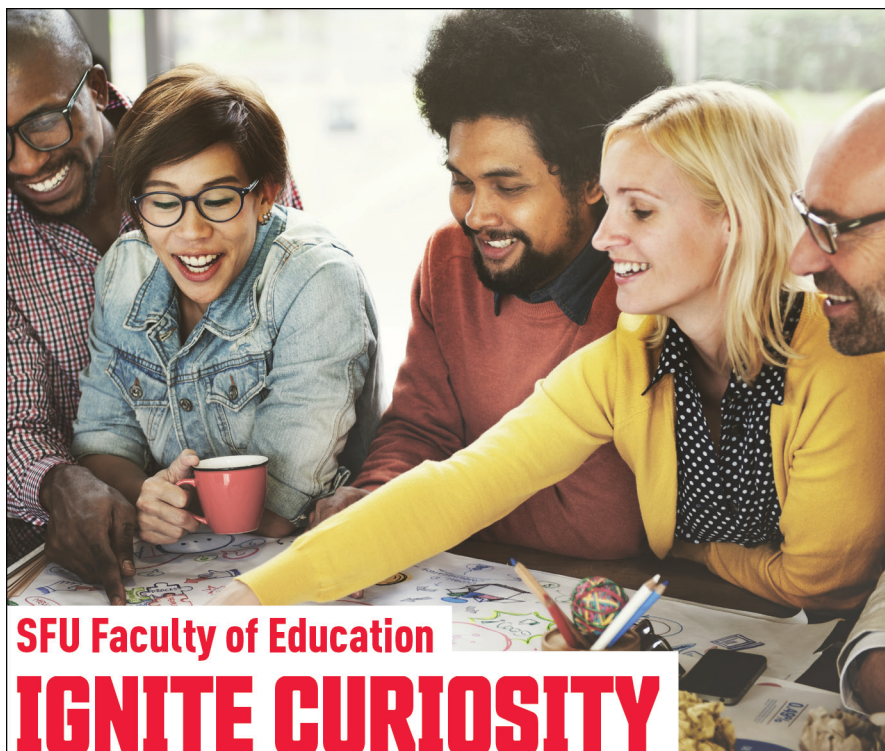
asking the difficult questions, and being open to the possibilities of trying something different.

Through relationships we build the trust needed to be curious. These conversations lead us into a process of inquiry which is essential to innovation.

Demonstrating these processes at the district level and sharing what we experience and learn with our teams at the school level makes the practice normative

and opens the door for all levels of our organization to take risks and get curious. I was once told by an elder in Nunavut that we learn by watching. So, lead by example, take risks, get uncomfortable, ask the hard questions and share these experiences broadly with your teams, so they too can get curious. 

*Sarah Jane Attrill is the District Principal in SD81 (Fort Nelson).*



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**Craig Wisehart,**  
Executive Director, Western Canada



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The Return-It Electronics program operates on behalf of the Electronics Products Recycling Association (EPRA), a national not-for-profit dedicated to collecting and recycling end-of-life electronics in a safe and environmentally responsible manner. For more than a decade we've been working together to make it easier and more convenient for people to drop off their old devices for recycling. The program has grown from only a few depots, in 2007, to now more than 300 authorized collection sites found in communities spread all across BC.

The number of categories of eligible devices that are accepted has grown since the program inception. A decade ago we could only accept computers and monitors, printers, fax machines and televisions, but today British Columbians can recycle 17 different categories of electronic devices including cell phones, video games, home entertainment devices, medical devices, musical instruments and more.

Once they've been collected at a Return-It Electronics depot or an authorized collection site, devices are sorted and sent to local EPRA approved recycling facilities for processing, where their component materials are then separated to recover metals, plastics, glass, and other natural resources that are then used to make new products. In addition to saving these materials from ending up in landfills, this process also keeps them from being illegally exported out of Canada.

92% of British Columbians are aware that they can safely and responsibly recycle their old electronics in British Columbia through drop off locations like their local Return-It Electronics depots, regular electronics drop-off events in communities across the province.

We're also working hard to spread the word about other responsible uses for old electronics, by connecting businesses that would prefer to have their reusable electronics refurbished—rather than recycled—through organizations like the BC Technology for Learning Society. This helps give new life to old electronics by supporting the Computers for Schools program in BC, and by helping British Columbians to give away electronics items to a BC-based refurbisher qualified under the comprehensive standards of the Electronics Reuse & Refurbishing Program.

Return-It Electronics and EPRA British Columbia are not-for-profit organizations dedicated to protecting BC's environment and our shared future. The program is funded through the Environmental Handling Fees (EHF) which are applied to the sale of all new electronics products in BC. Neither a tax nor a refundable deposit, the EHF on each new device is used for the costs of the collection, transportation and responsible recycling of the device once it reaches the end of its life.

In addition to protecting the environment through the programs listed above, Return-It Electronics is also dedicated to helping protect the privacy and data of British Columbians, by providing easy, practical advice on safely and securely wiping devices and memory cards before getting rid of them. Information-and-more is available online at the [Return-It.ca](http://Return-It.ca) website.

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Written with expertise from Jenna Jasek, SD6 (Rocky Mountain); and Duncan Whittick and Jade Berrill, Columbia Basin Environmental Education Network (CBEEN)

# Begin (Continue!) Your Personal Learning Journey Towards Truth and Reconciliation

Thousands of educators have accepted the invitation to join in a personal learning journey towards Truth and Reconciliation this school year. The 4 Seasons of Indigenous Learning initiative invites educators of all types to deepen their understanding of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives while strengthening connections with the local land.

This learning initiative was co-created by Jenna Jasek, District Vice-Principal of Indigenous Learning and Equity in Rocky Mountain School District No. 6, and Duncan Whittick, Executive Director of The Outdoor Learning Partnership – a B.C.-based charitable social enterprise, where 100 per cent of proceeds go back to supporting outdoor learning non-profit initiatives.

It started as, “We wanted to do our part in Truth and Reconciliation and felt the urgency, as the 215 children from the Kamloops Residential School had

*continued on page 41*



Jenna Jasek (second from right) and Duncan Whittick co-founded the Every Child Matters Year-long Challenge in October 2021, the day after Canada's first official Truth and Reconciliation Day. All images courtesy of The Learning Partnership.



*The land provides a safe space to ask questions and learn.*





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## JOURNEY TOWARDS TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

*continued from page 39*

just been found the previous month,” said Jasek. “As we delivered Every Child Matters flags to different organizations, we felt the need to expand our message of Truth and Reconciliation. Duncan came up with the challenge, and we worked together and brainstormed how to do this, what it would look like, and why it was necessary.”

Jasek and Whittick co-founded the Every Child Matters Year-long Challenge in October 2021, the day after Canada’s first official Truth and Reconciliation Day. That pilot project was the catalyst for the 4 Seasons of Indigenous Learning opportunity, which is open to educators across Turtle Island (North America), but content is most applicable to Canadian educators. This pilot initiative grew in partnership with Reconciliation Education, The First Nations University of Canada, Rocky Mountain School District, and Outdoor Learning Partners.

*continued on page 42*



*The Learning Store, a charitable social enterprise that gives 100 per cent of its proceeds back to outdoor learning non-profit initiatives, believes that the land is an amazing teacher.*

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## JOURNEY TOWARDS TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

*continued from page 41*

"I was scared to ask questions or say or do the wrong thing, but I had questions that I felt I needed to know the answers to before I could move forward in my educating practice. This course is to help people find those questions for themselves, offer a safe space to ask them, and offer, or share advice on where to find information or answers for the future."

— Jade Berrill, The Outdoor  
Learning Store

Now offered with the partnership of over 40 other non-profit organizations from across Turtle Island, this learning opportunity acknowledges that authentically undertaking a personal learning journey towards Truth and Reconciliation takes more than just a day or month each year, but should be across all four seasons.

Each month features an online module with curated mixed media (written, video, and slideshow) short and powerful lessons, finishing with simple quizzes to test knowledge and understanding that helps embed the learning. The live gatherings offer a personal, connective moment to hear from Indigenous speakers themselves on the module topics covered.

The last iteration Season 1 — Foundations of Knowledge ran from October 2022 to June 2023, building from 1,000 participants in the 2021 pilot to 4,800 registrants for 2022. The 10 online

learning modules (one to two hours per month) and 10 Indigenous speakers, in the monthly live gatherings, shared their perspectives around their Truth and what real reconciliation means to them.

In addition, course participants co-created and collaborated in building a community resource sharing space where they could offer their thoughts on educator resources, language revitalization, organizations to engage with, books, podcasts, or documentaries, how to connect to and build territorial relationships, and thoughts on cultural appropriation.

Participants included both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous participants. The gatherings and community became a safe space for question asking (each gathering offers a facilitated Q&A of participant questions) discussion and often sharing of personal stories or connections to the speaker's presentation. With a space to cultivate curiosity, dispel fear



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around appropriation, or other barriers to integrating Indigenous perspectives, these moments together exemplified the community building and relationship development that reconciliation can bring.

This foundational Season 1 is available again for the coming school year for people beginning their learning journey. It delivers the same great virtual multi-media online modules and the opportunity to join the live gatherings with the 10 incredible Indigenous Leaders, Educators, Elders, and/or Knowledge Holders arranged to speak.

The second season – ‘Learning from the Land – begins October 2023 and runs until June 2023.

“Learning from the land is so important, I believe it is our greatest teacher,” said Jasek. “It’s so important that we learn where we are from and about our surroundings because the eco-systems are here for a reason, they take care of the land so that we can live here in a good way. Non-Indigenous and Indigenous educators – we all need to take steps to understand Truth and Reconciliation so that we can engage in Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in a reciprocal way.”

Season 2 is all about deepening and building on the knowledge created in the first season while supporting educators in building stronger connections to their local land. The online modules encourage participants to take their activities outside and deepen their personal relationship with the land as a step towards reconciliation with the people of the land where they are, and provide the basis for lifelong learning, respect, and reciprocity for their area, school, home, and surroundings.

The course development team has grown to include The Outdoor Learning Store, Natural Curiosity and Reconciliation Education, and includes resource support from Strong Nations (an Indigenous owned and operated publishing house), and Take Me Outside. This next season aims to help educators in overcoming many of the barriers to this work that have been identified through the Season 1 reflection and question sharing.

Jade Berrill, Director of Learning for The Outdoor Store, shares, “As a new Immigrant, or settler to Canada seven years ago, I didn’t know about the Indigenous history, ongoing struggles *and successes*, languages, or perspectives of the Indigenous communities where I had settled permanently. I was scared to ask questions or say or do the wrong thing, but I had questions that I felt I needed to know the answers to before I could move forward in my educating practice. This course is to help people find those questions for themselves, offer a safe space to ask them, and offer, or share advice on where to find information or answers for the future.”

Jasek desires to “grow more opportunities to learn about Indigenous ways of knowing and being.” With the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) First Peoples Principles of Learning now integrated into the B.C. Curriculum, we have to

understand that, “We all have our own stories, and they all need to be honoured and respected,” Jasek said.

Berrill continues, “As I’ve read, built relationships and friendships, and found mentors, the heart of why learning about Indigenous perspectives is so important has become apparent to me. We are all connected. Land, living things, non-living things, academic success, physical health, mental wellbeing – it is all connected to the land; the place we are and how that connects to all other places on this planet. As a scientist I knew science could explain this in some ways, and Indigenous teachings remind us of this too, repeatedly, while offering a more holistic approach that restores balance, hope, and generosity.”

“In order to learn what matters here, in the past, present, and future, for the benefit and well-being of our communities, family, and schools, the Indigenous teachings and this course content have reawakened the parts of myself that see and *feel* these connections,” adds Berrill. “I feel like I have so much more knowledge and more diverse ways of thinking, and ways of expressing it now, and I can pass that curiosity onto my students.”

This second season encourages reflection and innovative ways to link this professional development to cross-curricular connections with literacy, the arts, social studies, science, physical education, and more as educators are offered opportunities to

*continued on page 44*

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND PERSPECTIVES ARE FOUNDATIONAL TO OUTDOOR LEARNING

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## JOURNEY TOWARDS TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

*continued from page 43*

With a space to cultivate curiosity, dispel fear around appropriation, or other barriers to integrating Indigenous perspectives, these moments together exemplified the community building and relationship development that reconciliation can bring.

engage in relationship building activities with their classes with activities designed and shared by Indigenous educators. If you are not actively teaching, there are adaptations for family, or personal reflection only. Administrators looking for support in integrating this work and outdoor learning generally in their educational space can reach out to the authors (emails in byline), who contribute to a working group of Canadian experts dedicated to this.

With over 5,000 participants signed up for Season 1 – Foundations of Knowledge and around 1,000 and growing for Season 2 – Learning with the Land, this idea for local knowledge sharing to offer year-round Truth and Reconciliation has grown into

a movement that educates, inspires, and gives both non-Indigenous and Indigenous people the opportunity to build trust in their communities, education practice, and relationships.

Season 1 offers foundational skills in language use, terminology, and vocabulary, the truth of Indigenous history in Canada, and the ongoing challenges we still face to deliver real reconciliation. This work and learning are vital for the health and well-being of our communities and ecosystems. The online modules and quizzes ensure educators are accessing reputable knowledge and the live gatherings offer personal expressions of presenters and their lived experience. This course is intended to share diverse perspectives and look at these important topics through different lenses.

Jasek shares that, "Hearing Indigenous People's voices and personal experiences is hugely impactful and validates the urgency of Truth and Reconciliation and putting the 94 Calls of Action into action."

Let's take this opportunity to take action and ensure that the truth of what happened, still happens, and what can happen in the future – for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities – is shared




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and top of mind. Let us be curious about innovative ways to build trust in ourselves, our communities, and educational institutions reconciling the past, to ensure the well-being of the land, and thus, ourselves.

This work and learning are vital for the health and well-being of our communities and ecosystems.

We are excited to announce a partnership with the ʔkamin'istik Children's Truth and Reconciliation Society to build a Season 3 and Season 4, which will focus on building reciprocal relationships and working together towards a lasting peace. We hope to see you there alongside us in this journey towards real Truth and Reconciliation. Learn more at <https://outdoorlearningstore.com/4-seasons>. 

*Jenna Jasek is a BCSSA member, and the District Vice-Principal of Indigenous Learning and Equity in Rocky Mountain School District No. 6, which operates on the unceded territories of her ancestors, the Secwepemc and Ktunaxa people.*

*Jade Berrill is Director of Learning for the charitable non-profit, The Outdoor Learning Store. She is an educator and program writer of 15 years and has spent time learning with and from Indigenous populations in Australia, Norway, New Zealand, and now Turtle Island over the past decade. Reach out by emailing [jade@outdoorlearningstore.com](mailto:jade@outdoorlearningstore.com).*

*Duncan Whittick is the Executive Director/ CEO (Connector Extraordinaire Outdoors!) of The Learning Store. He enjoys connecting the dots between people and organizations, looking for pathways to positive systemic change, and finding ways we can all work better, together.*



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