

The Voices of BC: Leadership Modules

Module 1: Contextual Literacy

Video Introduction (12:10): Listen to our colleagues from across BC talk about the difference between leadership at the school level and at the district level. In this close captioned video, you will hear the approaches leaders take to support those who are new to leadership at the district level. Those who listen are encouraged to use this accompanying guide to support professional learning in your context.

Contextual Literacy: New to Role 

Contextual literacy is about how leaders, at all levels, “read” the lay of the land and the context in which the work as individuals, with teams, and as a system unfolds. Every context is unique and includes cultures, traditions, historical practices, and the complexity of relationships. In this module, leaders are asked to consider not only their own practices, but how those practices and relationships unfold in context.

Contextual Literacy

System leaders must develop high levels of contextual literacy with respect both to external and internal systems. Internally, leaders need to be effective in their work with employee groups, the school board, the many overlapping service areas and departments, and the schools themselves. Externally, leaders need to be effective in their work with employee unions, provincial government, local government, other districts and educational organizations locally, nationally, and globally. In both cases, leaders need to speak the language of the systems with which they interact, understand how those systems work and change, and ensure the district’s priorities are supported through these complex interactions.

Questions to consider as you read the Big Idea of Contextual Literacy:

- How have you worked with systems both internally and externally?
- What relationships do you foster with all employee groups and other service providers?
- How do you work to understand not only your local context, but the broader provincial context?
- How do you ensure that the overall broader mandate of education is shaped to fit for your schools and your communities?

Indigenous Perspectives and Considerations

- Honour the local Indigenous language, protocols and understandings in relation to a systems approach.
- Reflect and respect local community, place, and history in communications. Communicate in ways that build relationships and understandings.
- Use language that reflects Indigenous worldviews to de-colonize thinking, actions, and processes.

Questions to consider on Indigenous Perspectives:

- How do you continually foster respectful and reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities and rightsholders?
- How have you and those around you worked to understand and honour language, protocols and cultural practices?
- In what ways are communications tailored to build relationships, understanding, and an awareness of the context of Indigenous communities and priorities?
- What specific practices are individuals and groups working to de-colonize thinking, actions and processes?

The Voices of BC: Video Module

In this video, several themes emerge and are presented below. Following up on those themes, and while listening to the video, please consider the suggested questions to explore. Not all questions need to be considered, choose the questions that best fit the context in which the work unfolds.

1. Collaboration and Involvement

- Encourage collaboration between district and school-level personnel.
- Involve school-based personnel in programming decisions to bridge the "us vs. them" divide.

Questions to Consider

- How can we foster a stronger sense of collaboration between district and school-level personnel in our district?
- What specific steps can we take to ensure school-based personnel are more involved in district-level decisions?

2. School Visits and Informal Interactions

- Schedule regular visits to schools to foster informal interactions and maintain a connection with the school environment.
- These visits are essential for building relationships and understanding the needs of the schools.

Questions to Consider

- What are some effective ways for district leaders to maintain a visible and supportive presence in schools?
- How can informal interactions between district leaders and school staff be encouraged and structured?

3. Skill Development

- Reflect on and develop foundational skills necessary for district-level roles.
- Anticipate having multiple portfolios and the need for self-sufficiency, as mentoring and on-the-job training may be limited.

Questions to Consider:

- What skills do you believe are essential for district-level leadership, and how can current school leaders begin developing these skills now?
- How can we create opportunities for aspiring district leaders to gain experience in multiple portfolios?

4. Listening and Asking the Right Questions

- Listen to everyone, including those you will be serving, not just superiors.
- Ask deeper questions to understand the culture and needs of the district.

Questions to Consider:

- What strategies can district leaders use to ensure they are listening to the right voices and asking meaningful questions?
- How can we create a culture where everyone feels heard and valued in decision-making processes?

5. Servant Leadership

- Adopt a servant leadership approach, focusing on meeting the needs of those being served.
- Build authentic relationships to avoid isolation and enhance leadership effectiveness.

Questions to Consider:

- In what ways can district leaders embody the principles of servant leadership in their daily interactions and decisions?
- How can we measure whether district leaders are effectively meeting the needs of those they serve?

6. Data Utilization



- Ground leadership decisions in data to understand the context and guide actions.
- Use data to inform conversations and ensure changes are well-researched and justified.

Questions to Consider:

- How can district leaders effectively use data to inform their decisions without being overwhelmed by it?
- What are some best practices for communicating data insights to different stakeholders within the district?

7. Managing Distractions

- Stay focused on the core mission of supporting children's learning amidst various distractions and administrative tasks.
- Prioritize tasks that directly impact student outcomes.

Questions to Consider:

- What are some common distractions that district leaders face, and how can they prioritize their focus on student learning?
- How can district leaders balance administrative tasks with their core mission of supporting students and schools?

8. Continuous Learning

- Embrace continuous learning and personal growth, acknowledging that leadership is an ongoing journey.
- Leverage personal strengths and seek support for areas needing development.

Questions to Consider:

- How can we create a culture of continuous learning and professional growth for district leaders?
- What support systems can be put in place to help district leaders identify and address their development needs?

9. Maintaining Connections

- Recognize the interconnectedness of school and district roles.
- Make deliberate efforts to stay connected to the core purpose of serving students, even when not physically present in schools.

Questions to Consider:

- What strategies can district leaders use to stay connected to the schools and the students they serve, even when they are not physically present?
- How can we ensure that the district office remains aligned with the daily realities of school life?

10. Advocacy for All

- Shift from representing a single school community to advocating for the entire district.
- Advocate for all children and families, including those you may not personally know.

Questions to Consider:

- How can district leaders effectively advocate for all students and families, particularly those they may not personally know?
- What mechanisms can we establish to ensure that every child and family feels represented and supported at the district level?

These themes and the subsequent questions are intended to engage participants in a meaningful discussion about these leadership topics all under the umbrella of Contextual Literacy. The intention is to use the materials as a means of reflecting on how to apply these insights to improve leadership practices in districts.

There are many possible uses for the BCSSA Modules. Suggested uses include:

- Personally, for development of your own professional learning;
- Locally in district with either district/senior teams or principals and vice-principals;
- In Chapter meetings to facilitate table conversations and introductions to professional learning;
- In District to reflect upon the structures, strategies and practices that leadership teams should be considering; and
- Both in Chapters and locally to consider how you are structuring your district leadership opportunities to create both alignment and coherence.

We hope that you enjoy these materials, and we also welcome your feedback for other leadership modules to be considered, or for additional uses and explorations. For more information, please contact us through the BCSSA where our Leadership Competency Advisory Group will continue to refine and create additional learning opportunities and materials.