Building Relationships
students & teachers • learning communities • reaching goals
Over the past few months, I have had the opportunity to attend several conferences and forums on a variety of topics: the Summer Leadership Conference, the Moral Literacy and Educational Leadership Conference, The Rural Schools Conference, the School Completion and Beyond Forum, the Action for a Just Society Forum and Odyssey 2008: Innovative Instructional Leadership: Making the Connections. The message was clear in each and every one of these conferences and forums: Positive relationships in schools are the single most powerful factor in student success. Whether we are talking about best assessment practices or human rights, success and well-being hinge on how well students, staff, and parents relate to each other.

When my son was in kindergarten many years ago, about two months into the school year, he told me that his teacher did not like little boys. I asked him if his teacher had told him that. He said no, but he just knew that she didn’t really like him or some of the other boys in his class. Meetings with his teacher confirmed that she was feeling frustrated with her class, particularly the busy and challenging boys. Despite our best efforts to help our son, his kindergarten year was not a happy one for him. In grade one, we met early with his teacher to try and prevent another difficult year. Before we had a chance to say anything, his teacher said, “I just love your son! He is so energetic and interested in so many things. It’s a pleasure to have him in my class. It’s going to be a great year!” And it was. Students need to feel cared about and respected for them to be engaged learners. The work of school leaders is to promote positive relationships at all levels.

At the Moral Literacy Conference, Professor Charles Burford of the Australian Catholic University spoke about leading for moral purpose. He said that leading for learning is about three factors: relationships, moral purpose (which is designed through dialogue), and mobilization. What he meant by mobilization was collegial support and partnerships, such as professional learning communities. All of these factors are highly interactive. Schools are communities in which every member needs to feel valued and empowered. This is only possible in a caring and collaborative setting, with a focus on
individual student success. Dialogues that are happening more and more in schools today are focusing on questions like: What do we have to learn or do differently to meet the needs of our students? I liked this quote: “If you teach them today the way you taught them yesterday, you rob them of tomorrow.” Teachers are talking about changing their practices. Professional learning communities (PLC) allow for job-embedded learning, or learning in context, with a common focus on meeting the diverse and changing needs of our students. This is a shared moral purpose. One of the teacher presenters at the conference described how his middle school’s participation in professional learning communities moved teachers’ attitudes from “these are my kids and these are your kids” to “these are our kids and we all have a responsibility for their success.” Through the PLC there was a moral purpose to what they were doing. How powerful!

Professor Russell Bishop of New Zealand, one of the keynote speakers at the Rural Schools Conference, spoke about educational reform and a study they did on Maori student success. They surveyed 500 Maori students, their families and school staff. They asked: “What are the major influences on (your) education?” Three sets of influences were found: the home, the system and relationships. For students, parents and principals, relationships between students and their teachers was by far the most significant influence. What does this study tell us? It emphasizes the importance of relationships, and shows us that teachers can and do make a tremendous difference. We can’t blame the home and we can’t change the home, we can only work at improving our relationships with our students. We need to know and understand our students and this can only happen in a caring and respectful environment where positive relationships are promoted and valued above all else. Professor Bishop left us with some good advice: The pedagogy of relationships in schools needs to be the focus of pre-service and in-service instruction for all staffs at all schools.

My son is now a successful student in the trades program at our local college. He had many positive learning experiences in the public school system, particularly with teachers, support staff, principals and vice-principals who took the time to get to know him, show him that they cared and make him feel valued. It’s all about relationships.
As each new school year begins, it is important to remember that relational trust is the foundation of community building and the social cement of a school. Every school, every year experiences some turnover — principal or vice-principal, teachers, and staff, as well as students at the classroom — and these changes, at both the school and district levels, demand our continual attendance to building and maintaining relational trust whether as a continual process (Greenberg, 2007) or as a discipline (Covey, 2006). Relational trust affects not only our individual and collective performance at school and our chances for reform (Bryk & Schneider, 2002 & 2003; Bolam et al., 2005; Covey, 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006) but also our personal and collective physical safety (Feldman & Johnson, 1998; Greenberg, 2007). As Covey (2006) describes it, low levels of trust act as a “tax” on performance — decreasing positive interactions and productivity while increasing timelines and costs. People are more likely to assume malintent even when communication is painstakingly crafted. However, when you have a high level of trust in an organization, it acts as a performance multiplier increasing positive interactions and productivity while decreasing timelines and costs. People are more likely to assume good intent even when communication might be poorly phrased (Covey, 2006). This is supported by the work of Hargreaves & Fink (2006) as well as Bryk & Schneider (2002, 2003). Trust is the social lubricant in any organization — schools included.

Bryk & Schneider (2002, 2003) stress the importance of interpersonal relations and personal regard in building trust. Personal regard includes care among individuals not only on a professional level but also on a personal level as well as a willingness to extend ourselves on behalf of others. Kochanek (2005) refers to one category of trust building exchanges as “low-risk exchanges that promote positive discern-
The activities proposed in this article fall into two types of Kochanek’s (2005) trust building actions: “setting the stage for trust and creating opportunities for low-risk interactions” (p. 80). Kochanek (2005) says, “Setting the stage for positive interactions involves putting people in a position where the development of trust is possible … [using] mechanisms that ease the sense of vulnerability teachers and parents may have so that they will enter into low-risk exchanges” (p. 19). Extending this concept, I believe that it is critical to extend the use of trust building mechanisms to ease the sense of vulnerability that students have as well — especially when you factor in the power dynamics of the student-teacher or student-administrator relationships.

Kochanek (2005) goes on to say that after setting the stage, opportunities for low-risk interactions should be created “to promote the exchange of respect and personal regard” (p. 22). According to Kochanek (2005), “Bringing people together in fun activities … is an easy way to encourage positive interactions in which they [people] will treat one another with respect and personal regard” (p. 26). Bryk & Schneider (2003) conclude that “Even simple interactions, if successful, can enhance collective capacities for more complex [and higher risk] subsequent actions” (p. 43).

This article proposes a fun method to both set the stage and provide opportunity for low-risk exchanges as the eventual basis for higher-risk, more complex interactions. It provides a means for individuals to share bits of personal information that establish them as people beyond their roles — i.e. principal, custodian, teacher, secretary, etc.— thereby laying the foundations for relational trust. We build trust so that we as educational professionals may build a community that collectively achieves more for and with our students while also making our schools intellectually, emotionally, and physically safe.

Trust building exchanges, such as those proposed here may have significant safety implications for a school. In 2007, Greenberg advised campus security to build trusting relationships with students because “A trust-based relationship becomes the catalyst for the most effective [violence] prevention measures, and is the foundation of prevention and interdiction” (p. S58). Greenberg (2007) goes on to state that campus security needs to, “… Recognize the need to continuously maintain and cultivate critical relationships and communications strategies due to turnover among officials, faculty, students, and law enforcement. Building trust requires more than simple information sharing. Repeated sessions with students, high visibility by key administrators, faculty involvement, student relationship with police and security personnel, and the involvement of special interest groups are paramount to building trust.” (p. S58)

It might be possible that in personalizing each other, in sharing low-risk information beyond our professional role — while still maintaining acceptable borders between professionals and students that are, in the terminology of the British Columbia College of Teachers (BCCT), neither “blurred
nor ambiguous” (Readers weigh in on Facebook, 2008, p. 20) — we can further develop an atmosphere of humanity in our school communities that reduces the chances of violence among members while extending their capacities. Building relational trust with and among our students, our staff, our faculty and other educational stakeholders might be one way for us to accomplish this.

The activities that follow in this article are proposed as concrete steps that might help you, your school and/or district build some bonds of relational trust. Thanks to the support and suggestions of my colleagues, Professors George Kelly and Paige Fisher, I was able to successfully include this activity as part of our Faculty of Education student orientation at Vancouver Island University in September 2008. It was well received. I hope it works for you.

Introducing the activity to principals, vice-principals, teachers and staff

If your learning community is unfamiliar with the concept of relational trust, prior to sharing this concept with others, prepare by providing them with some quick background reading on relational trust (e.g. excerpts from the preceding section of this article, my October 2007 Adminfo article, “Assessing Trust”, or Bryk & Schneider’s 2003 article “Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for School Reform” in Educational Leadership, 60(6)). If, after the introduction of “relational trust”, this activity is accepted in concept, it is important to have all people participate in an informed and voluntary manner. A group should assume responsibility for organizing this activity.

The Concept: A quiz game show

The activity proposed is a fun quiz game “show” where individuals match a series of personal statements with the respective principals, vice-principals, teachers and staff who submitted them. This game allows individuals to share select, appropriate pieces of personal information that support the development of relational trust among school stakeholders. This type of sharing also personalizes the individuals with regard to students and other participants while still maintaining the professional boundaries as currently defined by the BCCT. When done properly, this activity provides a foundation for more challenging interactions and could have significant effects for building bonds between adults and students (especially those who feel most vulnerable), as well as among adults connected in the school context.

Pre-game organization

To get the most from this activity, the scheduled game day and time should be one when the school is most likely to have everyone in attendance (a day with minimal field trips, away games, etc.). The organizing group also needs to establish basic game rules. For example, is the game played individually or in teams? If school or district personnel are absent on the day of the activity, how will their data be handled? Do you want to reveal them at the outset, give their items as “freebies” or play them out just like the rest? Do you want to run the activity in one assembly or split it between a morning and afternoon assembly? Do you want to give prizes (and what are the criteria for awarding prizes)? Who will host? To reach out to the larger community, administration (with approval from the local school board where appropriate) might think about enlisting the local media to do a feature article on this activity as a way for the community to get to know the school staff.

After the school or district has settled on the when, where and how of the game, all staff, faculty and administrators should be provided time to draft an appropriate phrase for themselves — which I call a “personal factoid.” The organizing group should provide some examples and specific guidelines as to what types of information would be deemed appropriate. These factoids might resemble something like:

- Father of 6 boys;
Before game day

For anything that depends on technology, I always stress the importance of a dry-run or rehearsal. At least one day prior to actually running the game, set up the digital projector and the computer you will use on the day the game will run. The game “host” — and any other presenters — should make sure that everything is projecting well and moves along smoothly. Try to limit exposure of the quiz game content to the minimum number of people to keep the questions and answers fresh for game day. Adjust the hardware, process, and/or content as necessary. Don’t forget to run off enough quiz game sheets for all participants — unless you’re using clickers. Also, if you are planning to give out prizes, make sure you have them “in-hand” and ready.

Playing the game

On the scheduled day and time, students and personnel assemble in one area. Each student — and/or individual — is given a quiz game sheet to mark their entries. (If you’re more technically advanced, you might use clickers instead.) School or district personnel are introduced to the assembled group in the predetermined order (e.g. alphabetical, by role, by department, etc.) with some description of what s/he does in the school. The game host begins the presentation — first describing why the activity is being run, and how the game works — before launching into the actual quiz game. After showing the Master Question Slide (a slide with all game show questions but no answers), participants are permitted sufficient time to complete the quiz. Once that time has elapsed, the host begins to reveal each question and the person associated with it. At the end of the game, the host determines who had the most correct matches.

For example with a list of 30 items, the host might start with “Who had more than 3 correct?”; “Who had more than 5?” etc. The activity concludes with some school-wide discussion of:

- the importance of feeling “known by” and connected to one or more adults at the school;
- relational trust;
- the school or district’s commitment to relational trust as a factor in everyone’s success and safety;
- the school or district’s commitment to student success — from academic growth to personal and social growth.

Final word

Building relational trust is a process and a discipline, to which we must attend even in our smallest interactions. My hope is that this game will provide a fun way for you to foster Kochanek’s (2005) “respect and personal regard” (p. 26) in your school, district, and/or community as well as a way to increase your “collective capacities for more complex [and higher risk] subsequent actions” (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 43). Let me know about your experiences — or variations — on this activity. Your feedback might provide the basis for a follow-up article.

References for this articles are available by email, rwilliams@bcpvpa.bc.ca

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The development of a professional learning community in an existing school culture

At L.A. Matheson Secondary in Surrey, teachers develop a culture-specific collaborative team, open to all.

by Robert Killawee

My introduction to school-wide collaborative work among teachers came from Elliot Eisner at a Surrey Visions 2008 conference where he spoke about his idea of schools as centres for teacher development. Eisner’s teacher-centered approach resonated with me, and I have advocated for, supported and researched collaborative processes for the past five years. Hargreaves’ (2006) discussion of professional learning communities takes into account all aspects of student and teacher development and supports Eisner’s (2004) broad view. Collaboration models advocated by those such as Dufour, et al. (1998) have provided useful guidelines and goals. However, there is a perception among some Surrey teachers, and especially the union, that such models impinge on teachers’ professional autonomy. The union’s stated concern is that these models focus on increasing student achievement that is narrowly defined as higher results on standardized tests, and could be used as tools to direct teacher’s professional work (Lalli, 2007). Instead of a directive approach, Shirley Hord suggests guiding principles that motivate greater teacher engagement in collaborative work. In her research, “[s]hared leadership emerged as a critical component of successful professional learning communities — and yet, the level of shared leadership achieved, turned out to be almost entirely dependent on the principal’s willingness to share authority and his or her ability to motivate teachers to take on new responsibilities.” (Hord, 1997)

Hord also provided this project with tools for analyzing the L.A. Matheson (Matheson) collaborative community. These tools include the School Professional Staff as a Learning Community Questionnaire (Hord, 1996), administered to staff, and the guiding principles of its development, which are supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application of learning, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice (Hord, 1997).

Background and context

In a 2004 action research project, Matheson teachers identified ‘time to collaborate and evaluate’ as the best pathway to improving reading comprehension (Nygaard, 2004). In the same year a Surrey Action Research Project created opportunities for Matheson teachers to work together during the school day with release time...
While the focus of initial discussion was creating time for teachers to collaborate … professional reflection with a focus on student learning became part of the foundational idea of the project. Collaboration was seen as an enhancement to teacher's professional capacities, suggesting a high quality of teacher professionalism.
The process was planned and significant decisions were made almost entirely by teachers, with the principal providing initial ideas and ongoing consultation. This level of teacher authority in the process is key to understanding how other essential factors, such as union support, developed so strongly.

While the main focus of initial discussion was the alteration of the timetable to create time for teachers to collaborate, the process itself involved a great deal of collective reflection. This meant that professional reflection with a focus on student learning became part of the foundational idea of the project. Collaboration was seen as an enhancement to teacher’s professional capacities, suggesting a high quality of teacher professionalism.

Learning

There are at least two related types of learning taking place: the learning process involved when the initial idea of changing the timetable was introduced, and the learning which takes place in the new collaborative structure. These types of learning were discussed by four interviewees.

Learning was identified as both long and short term, covering past years and past practices in the long term, (in the case of a former vice-principal who “had to have been laying the groundwork,”) and the process of staff learning about the specific model of collaboration that they would vote on in the short term, that “ended up to be something that was old, that we never had time to do, and because it was never worked into our daily work schedule, it became something new.” The short term process was characterized by extensive opportunities for all staff to provide feedback into the final product. For one staff member this learning empowered her to take a leadership role in the development of the model; “when I first heard about it I didn’t know what PLC was. And I wasn’t against it but I stayed in the steering committee because I was leery of it and I really wanted to know what we were buying into.”

The learning that takes place in the new collaborative structure is characterized by continuity and integration — that is, learning on collaborative topics happens on a regular, frequent basis. Three teachers said learning is not limited to the collaboration sessions, but ideas and insights can be followed up at any time because colleagues are available for consultation during the workday. This is explained by one teacher who said, “[w]e’re constantly interacting with colleagues in our little groups, and they might ask you a question in the middle of the week that we don’t have PLC and you think ‘Oh yeah, I’ve got to try that, I wanted to try that’, and it’s like instant feedback from people that you respect, from people that you enjoy working with. And um, I think that that’s the strength of PLC, is that it’s right there in the moment, constantly around you.” The collaborative learning process now is characterized by the same open-mindedness and curiosity that characterized the process of learning about the timetable change and the uses of collaborative time. Another teacher said that “we’re just exploring the tip of the iceberg when it comes to perfecting this process. I think huge gains have been made just through that small exploration.” (T4) These observations suggest the features of a functioning collaborative community grow out of the conditions in which it develops.

Relationships

Though they have changed positively over the past several years, relationships are not the most influential aspect of cultural change at Matheson. Most of the feedback on relationships comes from Teacher 2 and the survey, so there is less support for developing theories on relationships. However, Teachers 1 and 4 suggested that what would help move the collaborative community forward were the positive and supportive relationships present among the staff (“we’re a big happy family” (T4)). Teacher 2 agreed in general, but with more qualification, suggesting that while relationships had improved, there was still a strong orientation toward self on the part of many teachers, even among teacher leaders. The survey suggested that there is definite room for growth in this area. In comparison, staff rated the structural process (“time set aside for collaboration” and “a variety of processes are used to encourage staff communication”) and shared leadership more highly than relationships. The quality of staff relationships may be less critical if shared leadership and structure are effective during the developing stages of the collaborative community.

For future growth, the teachers
interviewed believed that trust had to increase for there to be more focus on individual teaching practice. Teacher 2 states that the “department itself has to be very very strong and has to do a lot of character building within themselves before they can question assessments and compare them.”

Still, it was clearly recognized that relationships had improved though the collaborative community, and teachers are more willing to be more transparent with each other (T6), to take risks and expose their practice to the view of other teachers. Teacher 2’s comment that the building felt different upon return from leave suggests that the increase in trust was already apparent by February of 2007. Therefore trust increased significantly at least through the process of the development of the Matheson Model, and perhaps over the first five months of its active existence.

Leadership

There was general agreement that leadership was developed by learning. Teachers felt that they had to be knowledgeable about something to be leaders of it: “I’m not always in the lead, I’m sometimes tagging behind, but that’s only because I don’t know enough yet.” (T1) The principal stated that “My job is to bring out the leaders within. And one of the ways I do it is by asking people to go to seminars, workshops, conferences to learn.” (P) This perspective was supported by another teacher who said that “leadership and Pro D go together, because when you attend Pro D then you’re taking a leadership role” (T6).

Four of the six interviewees described their confidence that the administrative team will engage with and support their ideas. The principal declared this as her intention, that “you don’t come in saying that this is the way it’s going to be, you move with people’s strengths and people’s talents and people’s interests” (P). One teacher stated “they will let me follow my ideas. And they embrace my ideas the way I embrace my own ideas” (T1). This approach seemed to create greater engagement on the part of teachers with the idea of taking responsibility for leadership, and more willingness to engage with the principal’s ideas and try them out, particularly in the case of taking leadership on collaboration. According to one teacher, the administrative team “saw leadership potential in certain individuals on staff, and they poked them, and they encouraged them to further research it, or they sent them to certain workshops where the idea was coming about, and then from
there, those teachers took on that leadership role and word just kind of spread, through the school” (T6).

The survey results also support the agreement of the administrative team and staff perspectives, with staff and the administrative team rating nearly equally on the statement that “school administrators consistently involve the staff in discussing and making decisions about school issues.” There was also a high rating on breadth of shared leadership, that “administrators involve the entire staff.”

Another aspect of leadership at Matheson is that staff desire to have a significant role in decision-making. The principal understood early on that “you have to understand your culture … the culture of this school means that telling people what to do is never going to work” (P). She passed the leadership for the discussion of changing the timetable to create formal collaboration time to staff, but she made sure that she specifically encouraged staff leaders to be part of the discussions. At various points as many as 25% of the staff were directly involved. The principal described it as “very difficult for me not to be in there and hearing the discussion,” (P) but she trusted the leadership that she had built up, in a sense trusting her own democratic leadership style to produce her desired result. Her confidence was validated by “people on staff who don’t view this as an adversarial relationship, they do see it as a collegial collaborative relationship, so people were sharing things with me” (P). When the principal shared decision-making responsibility, staff responded with greater sharing and trust towards her.

Interpretation

The interviews and surveys revealed a strong convergence of opinion in the areas of the conditions, learning and leadership. There was less agreement on the quality of relationships, and wide divergence, and perhaps uncertainty, on sustainability and the future. The original hypothesis that “[t]he factors that the staff attribute as motivating them to choose the collaborative model can be directly correlated to the principal’s use of practices that support and share leadership with teachers” is generally supported by this research project. According to Hord’s framework (1997), the areas of strength developed in the Matheson collaborative community are the shared leadership, supportive conditions (including the structures that enable collaboration and trust in the administrative team) and collective learning.

In the environment of Matheson, where directive styles of principal leadership are resisted by teachers, Hord’s theory of shared leadership is particularly enlightening. The skillful sharing of leadership by Matheson’s principal engaged not only the support of teachers in general for collaboration, but also that of the union leaders at the school. In this case, effective leadership was not focused on directing teachers’ work. It was focused on developing teacher leadership, supporting teacher passions, and then challenging teachers to apply their collective wisdom to approaches for meeting the learning needs of the students. As Hargreaves states, learning communities “cannot be forced; they can only be facilitated and fed” (2005). In response to this style of leadership, teachers engaged with the challenge and have come up with their own solutions, suited to the culture of Matheson.

The Hord framework suggests that shared vision is the next critical aspect in need of development. The insight that, “telling people what to do is never going to work on this staff” (P) suggests that the exercise of authority may not be effective, but engaging teacher desire to learn with high quality professional discussion will likely have an impact. Teacher leaders will likely experience success if they engage staff more directly in discussions of shared vision, and follow the process of previous collaborative activity, that is, with high
staff involvement and high transparency in the discussions, persisting until consensus is developed.

Recommendations

In light of the effectiveness of the principal’s shared leadership in the development of the Matheson collaborative community, there are several recommendations that can be made. For schools considering creating collaborative time in their schedule:

1. Carefully examine and understand school and staff culture.
2. Develop positive relationships by supporting teacher’s ideas and interests.
3. Encourage and develop a broad base of teacher leadership.
4. Engage the whole staff in discussions of the educational needs of the students, and follow-up these discussions with action.

Beyond these it is difficult to make more specific recommendations, as the appropriate action depends on the school context.

Caveats

1. The principal’s explanation of her leadership processes and thoughts, while clear and specific, are extensive and may overwhelm the observations of teachers on leadership. This may skew the interpretation of leadership factors.
2. This paper deals with sensitive and sometimes political issues. As it will be read by the community it is written about, the analysis may have unintentionally been weakened.
3. The number of teachers interviewed was manageable, but limited. It is possible that not all points of view on staff may be represented. No staff who had stated explicit opposition to the “Matheson Model” of collaboration were interviewed. However, the interviewees are clearly concerned with and aware of their peers’ points of view as well as their own. Most staff are at least indirectly represented in the interviews.

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Our futures are not determined simply by what we do but how and why we do it.
The list of public school responsibilities is never ending. This year, it’s daily physical activity (DPA).

However, Les Dukowski, BCPV-PA past president and president-elect to the Canadian Association of Principals, doesn’t think that schools should shrink from this latest challenge.

With the growth in childhood obesity, Type 2 diabetes, allergies and asthma, something had to be done. And who better to add this challenge than the public education system? Look how effective it has been in changing public attitudes and behaviours towards use of seat belts and participation in recycling programs.

“The public’s expectation that we can do all these things is not misplaced,” he said. “We hold the promise of future society and whether we move forward in a civil society.”

The evidence is overwhelming and educators know instinctively that healthy, active students are ready to learn, have greater self-esteem and achieve more. So, the Ministry of Education has formalized this common knowledge into a requirement. Kindergarten to grade 9 students must undergo 30 minutes of sustained moderate to vigorous physical activity each school day. Students in grades 10 to 12 use a self-reporting system to ensure that they get 150 minutes of physical activity a week.

“That’s not to say that there aren’t logistical issues, especially for secondary schools,” Dukowski said. “When change is proposed in an already crowded enterprise, there is going to be some difficulty.”

However, he added, “a few schools are doing some neat things and there are more opportunities to exercise through clubs and intramurals.”

One school held a daylong prob-
lem-solving session at the end of last school year to talk about the obstacles to implementing this initiative. All the participants indicated it was a particularly effective activity.

Technology, which holds great appeal for kids, is also providing some interesting options. “Exer-gaming,” in the form of Konami’s Dance Dance Revolution, Nintendo’s Wii Fit and Electronic Art’s Skate It are being used in schools in the US.

“All good teachers and parents know that you give kids what they want that fits with what you want them to do,” he said.

Dr. James Levine, at the Mayo Clinic, is doing research in the field of non-exercise activity thermogenesis, losing weight by paying attention to how you carry out your daily activities. For example, students burn more calories if they work while standing, rather than sitting, at workstations.

Dukowski was the only educator invited to the McGill Health Challenge Think Tank of scientists and health practitioners in Montreal in November. He was given 15 minutes at the opening plenary on behalf of the education system. “Anything to do with societal change, people start saying, ‘Well, the schools should – without necessarily knowing how they work or involving K-12 educators early on in the policy discussions. Our schools need more resources, not just more advice.’

This is one of the points he stressed to the 160 delegates. He also pointed out that while health and education have similar mandates, we speak different languages. While the health system must follow strict protocols and address acute care issues, the focus for education is more long term and educators must be intuitive and flexible.

He gave the example of the anaphylaxis protocol and its requirements around record keeping. School secretaries were greatly concerned that initially the protocol didn’t require recording parents’ casual remarks, such as, “My child is sensitive to paint fumes.” Medical advisors were not aware that parents expect their schools to listen and do something even if a comment appears offhanded.

For DPA to be successfully implemented, Dukowski said, K-12 principals and teachers have to be involved in policy discussions and program construction from the beginning. In addition, well-trained and knowledgeable people must be available to provide advice and support. School districts have to look at how physical buildings are utilized and how services are organized. We also need creative thinking around partnerships.

Although the ministry appears to be continually adding new de-

DPA Resources

The benefits of an active, healthy lifestyle are well documented. Students who are active on a daily basis are healthier and perform better academically than their inactive peers.

Program guides and resources

Program Guide for Daily Physical Activity K-12

Frequently Asked Questions

DPA Listserv

The DPA Implementation Ideas listserv is a place to access support in the first year of implementation of DPA and to access information and ideas about the broader provincial initiatives focused on healthy living. The listserv is open to all and has two purposes: to share good ideas emerging in schools and communities and to have a place where teachers, principals and vice-principals, and community partners can access help from others in the province in solving problems related to the challenges of implementation. The moderator of the listserv is Teresa Saunders, a principal in Prince George who is enthusiastically joining her staff in implementing DPA.

Join by emailing dpa@bcpvpa.bc.ca
mands without taking any away, he acknowledged, “It is really trying to make an effort to streamline its reporting requirements.”

Despite the high expectations, he said the BCPVPA is “cautiously optimistic,” that DPA can be achieved “because it’s the right thing for kids.”

Leslie Andersson, principal of Dogwood Elementary School in Surrey, said DPA is embedded in the school’s Growth Plan. Staff and parents finished the plan last spring with three foci: numeracy, writing and healthy living. Every month, staff members revisit every goal “to see what works, what they hate and what’s boring,” she said.

There was some passive resistance to DPA initially, she admitted, but “it all comes down to trust … They were skeptical, at first, but it grew to ‘Yeah, that could work.’ “There was lots of conversation. It was about building trust and listening to everybody,” she said, “The staff have to own it for the kids to own it.”

The 30 minutes of exercise a day come in a variety of forms. Students have regularly scheduled gym classes and the whole school runs or walks outside for a half hour once a week. Parents are also joining in and Andersson said teachers enjoy using walking or running time to connect with students on things other than academics.

However, the biggest obstacle to providing DPA was space, especially in inclement weather. Classroom space had to be found and that meant cooperation and juggling students and teachers. With everyone onside, the school was able to find a classroom to set up as an action room.

The room has six stations focusing on coordination, speed, agility, flexibility, strength and endurance. Success comes from the fact that the focus is on becoming fit, not competition. One teacher manages the facility, chooses the activities, sets up the stations and makes sure everything is in place for students when they arrive. Lively music plays in the background. School funding has provided equipment such as mini-hurdles, rubber tubing bands, balance boards and giant equipment balls. Education assistants and parent volunteers help the students do the exercises properly and safely. Staff and parents enjoy working through the stations too.

Andersson is confident that DPA can work well in all schools. The district is organized around families of schools and there is good conversation between the elementary and high school. She said she sympathizes with secondary schools that are feeling pressure from many directions. “All teachers want to do their best and that’s why they’re stressed.”

Her advice: “We have to start with what’s working. It’s really about having conversations and enjoying coming to school. We all go home to different situations, but school has to be a good place to be.”

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Sandy Prentice, principal of the international program with the Kootenay Lake School District (KLSD), writes that our cover artist, Yu Jung, came to the KLSD from Seoul, Korea, with only minimal English. She began her studies in grade 10 but due to her English language skills, she spent a great deal of time in ESL classes working to grasp what was going on in regular classes. A timid, insecure young girl, she had come to Canada searching for an education system that valued each individual student for a variety of different talents, even though as she would describe them — they were “only artistic” and “not academic.” Thus began Yu Jung’s journey in the BC public school system and after enrolling in a grade 10 art class, Yu Jung describes how for the first time in her life she liked school. Yu Jung went on to take art classes each year until she graduated and in her final year, painted the cover picture of her sister who was still in Korea and whom she missed her very much. The happiest of endings came when the sister made the trip to Nelson for Yu Jung’s graduation and at that time, Yu Jung presented her sister with the cover painting. The sister’s appreciation and joy was a wonderful experience for all of us who were present. Yu Jung had found her talent and her passion and a school and teachers who valued her talent. Yu Jung is presently a student at the School for Art in Calgary and is continuing her quest to become a graphic artist.
Last March, ten grade 11 students from Rockridge Secondary in West Vancouver decided to make a difference. Triggered by an epic race across Canada by a local group of cyclists pedaling for a cure, the students had become aware of the devastating effects of juvenile diabetes (JD). Canada has the 3rd highest occurrence rate in the world with children the most affected. Most significantly a cure is considered to be close. The students agreed to focus their attention on the JD Research Foundation (JDRF). With the benefactor identified, the event began to take shape; a fitness orientation would be the focus, supporting the healthy living mandate of all those suffering with diabetes. Cyclebetes, a 24-hour Spin-a-Thon benefiting JDRF, was born! The students teamed up with a local bike shop, John Henry Bikes, and invited the community to participate. The student group took on marketing, promoting and organizing. They formed teams to ride for 24 hours indoors on stationary bikes or spinners in a quest to accelerate a cure for JD. They set an ambitious target of $50,000 and stipulated that to enter each team had to raise a minimum of $1000. On March 7 – 8, 35 teams and 350 participants filled the gym of Rockridge Secondary, spinning continually for 24 hours. The event raised $80,000, united a community, transformed a group of students into confident, vital leaders and established the foundation of the Cyclebetes Secondary 24-hour Spin-a-Thon, an event that has now been launched across Canada. The Rockridge students had accomplished what they set out to do: they made a difference! 

To get involved & learn more about Cyclebetes visit http://www.cyclebetes.com/
One minute, the sounds of a routine conversation between two educators might have been compared to the redundant churning of a 70s vintage washing machine. Then something changed. This is that story — the story of ANIE.

We had been bouncing around ideas for a numeracy assessment to compliment the work being done in literacy. With districts firmly attached to the development and use of reading assessments, there seemed to be a large numeracy void. Brainstorming concepts was easy; but coming up with good ideas was proving to be the opposite. In Kirk’s words, “We needed a math assessment that was complicated enough to get the students to think, but not so ridiculous as to confuse the outcome of the assessment.” The assessment also needed to align with the Numeracy Performance Standards. After months of spending spare moments on the task, we had accomplished little more than sorting through existing assessments.

What we did notice was that existing numeracy assessments seemed to fall into two categories. First were the traditional accuracy based models, which consisted of a series of questions. These were termed single result and were connected to an idea of legitimacy by volume. Student ability was reflected in the number of questions they got correct and the number they did not get correct. The second family of assessments used word problems based around a math skill. These assessments were considered to have legitimacy by complexity in that students’ score were based largely on their ability to comprehend the language. The more complex the language the fewer students would have a correct response.

We considered both these assessments to have strengths and weaknesses. Single result assessments could provide information about student accuracy and help a teacher make a general comment on learning outcome mastery. However, the information was limited to correct or incorrect, providing a possible assessment of learning but struggling to do little more. Word problems, married tightly to literacy skills, appeared to provide interesting information on a student’s overall academic ability, but provided a limited dialogue on a student’s math specific abilities.

Because of the limitations of the single result assessment, we began a series of trials to produce an epic word problem assessment. Our hope was to carefully manipulate the language of the question to provide the best possible numeracy information. These efforts met with no success. It was after one depressingly sober conversation in Kevin’s living room when one of us said (there is still some discussion about who), “When it comes to assessment, it’s almost like there’s more concern with staff feeling the need to prove they have covered curriculum than with student progress. It’s upside down.” But whoever said it, we both agree everything suddenly came into focus and ANIE was born!

As the idea was put to paper, interest flooded in. Pilot projects were initiated and data began flowing from teachers all over the province. When ANIE material became available over the web in April 2006 it was downloaded more than 3000 times and found homes in classrooms in Canada, the United States, China, South Korea, Israel and India.

The idea was simple; take a word problem and flip it upside down. Word problems start with language and students pull the relevant information out of the word problem, perform the math skill and return an answer. This assessment would reverse the process starting with the math skill and ending with students providing an application for the skill or, as one student put it, “I created my own idea problem.”

ANIE starts with a mathematical learning outcome represented by a math equation. Students work through the question by using mental math to make an estimate/guess, followed by working out the answer. They follow this up by explaining their work and finally they apply the math by using the concept in a “real life” situation.

Over the past two years the ANIE format has been revised and simplified based upon feedback from a host of pilot projects and teacher comments. Successful classroom implementations lead to requests for a primary specific version called the ANIE Junior. “ANIE Junior,” says Kirk, “has been used extensively with special needs students and the story element has proven especially effective with autistic children.”

We’ve seen students and whole schools quite suddenly develop a new direction and understanding of math learning; it has been exciting to see ANIE be that piece in the puzzle.

ANIE, ANIE Junior and the other family members of the Savagebird assessment model are free and can be downloaded at http://www.sd54.bc.ca/savagebird

Kevin Bird is a principal in the Bukley Valley (kbird@sd54.bc.ca) and Kirk Savage is a principal in Chilliwack (kirk.savage@sd33.bc.ca).
Building results through relationships

The BCPVPA’s executive director, Ted Whiteland, on a balanced and professional approach to reaching goals

The public policy process is an important function of government and is critical in moving its agenda forward. Government relies upon a myriad of constituent input to identify priorities, to seek approval, to implement those priorities, to respond to and revise where appropriate, to seek further input during the review cycle and, ultimately, to update priorities based upon new information and context.

The BCPVPA is well-positioned to influence the public policy process. We are a non-partisan advocate for students as best exemplified for the past 10 years through Student Voice. We are the recognized voice of educational leadership in both the province and in our communities. Our guidance in the development of the Leadership Standards for principals and vice-principals in British Columbia attests to this. In addition, the BCPVPA is important to the delivery of the government goals, whether they be in education or more broadly in health, early learning or environmental leadership.

To influence the public policy agenda positively, it is important to recognize that such efforts need to be coordinated. Government relations and advocacy go hand in hand.

As principals and vice-principals are governed by both provincial law and school district policies, it is important to recognize that an effective advocacy program takes place at both provincial and district levels. To move forward with a consistent and targeted focus, it is critical to take a dual track advocacy approach.

Dual advocacy is used to influence action and results. Our work with government relations and advocacy at the provincial level continues regarding recruitment and retention issues. At the provincial level, we have relied upon a concerted effort to gather the data we require. We have used polling data, feedback from Chapter Councils, discussion at Board of Directors meetings and staff input along with data from other associations, including the BCPSEA to assist in the shaping of a coherent and defensible approach to decision makers.

Advocacy at the local level is also a critical component to influence public policy. The BCPVPA provides local leaders with the resources and suggested strategies they require to influence local decision makers. At the same time, local leadership needs to have a clear understanding of the elements of a provincial approach that have local implications as they engage with both school district and provincial leadership.

Influencing public policy at any level is predicated upon a clear and consistent approach and a desire to work collaboratively to ensure the end goal of positive action and results. A balanced and professional approach to dual advocacy and government relations offers the greatest path to the end goal of positive action and outcomes.
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