

Adminfo

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A student-based curriculum:
meeting needs by listening

Building consensus

BCPVPA President Jameel Aziz considers individual and Association advocacy.

By definition, advocacy is: “active support of an idea or case etc.; (especially the act of pleading or arguing for something)” (<http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/>

webwn). While each principal and vice-principal has a vision of what that definition means and how it should apply to them as advocates (I quibble with the ‘pleading/arguing’ aspect, preferring to think of advocacy more as ‘reasoned discussion’), it is a reasonable place to start as we consider our advocacy on behalf of students, staff and school community.

In every principals’ and vice-principals’ daily life, we have to determine what areas require our vocal support and what is best left to other partners or interest groups. As principals and vice-principals we are called on to make these decisions regularly and will often seek out the guidance of our colleagues, excluded staff officials and greater community to decide where and when our voice is best utilized.

As an Association representing professional principals and vice-principals, the BCPVPA, too, is often asked about its advocacy. As a voluntary organization that represents more than 90% of all eligible members, we are a well-positioned, credible and reliable voice for government



and our partner groups when seeking input from principals and vice-principals. This very fact becomes the challenge that we as a organization face. We cannot assume a position that will be detrimental to our members’ ability to carry out their responsibilities and we must strategically weigh the possible effects of any position we take. As BCPVPA President, my personal opinions must give way to a broader perspective, one that brings consensus and is shaped by your input.

In meetings with our members, I am always aware of the range of ideas and beliefs that we have as individual members. Honoring the varied views of our membership is a reality that we value greatly. The challenge is to find consensus, whether the issue be standardized testing, new district or provincial initiatives, or supporting the actions and mandates of some of our educational partner groups.

The BCPVPA is currently in the process of formulating position papers on a variety of topics (such subjects as one principal/two schools, *Bill 33*, standardized testing, personalized learning, and the volume and complexity of the principals’

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Juggling your way to confidence

A circus arts program in Golden has students juggling, unicycling and clowning their way to acceptance and self-confidence.

by Ian Robinson



The Circus Arts Club is entering its 4th year at Lady Grey School. Students in grades 4 through 7 have the opportunity to participate in a noon-hour club to learn various activities including juggling, unicycling, Diablo, clowning and poi. Volunteers John Denham, a Child Protection Social Worker in Golden, and Jocelyn Wilson, a professional clown, volunteer many lunch hours to teach students various circus arts activities. Both individuals have a passion

for performing and teaching circus arts, and have a remarkable ability to connect with students in a fun and non-threatening environment. The students perform shows in the community throughout the year, as well as perform at the end of the school year at all the elementary schools.

The McCreary Center Society (*see Know More box, next page*) (Building Resilience in Vulnerable Youth – 2006) identifies protective factors that increase the likelihood of healthy development for children


and youth. While all students are invited to sign up for the club, The Circus Arts Club was designed with vulnerable children and youth in mind. These students often feel disconnected and unsuccessful at school. Many protective factors are fostered by involvement in the club. Positive relationships are developed, which result in students feeling connected to the school, having caring adults they can turn to with problems and having opportunities to develop supportive friends. Other

protective factors served by the club include the opportunity to engage in creative skills and artistic expression. Recent research also shows that these types of physical activities and movement improve brain function. Furthermore, for students who may not experience success academically, circus arts club provides an opportunity for success and mastery by engaging in activities they can develop mastery in. Students develop a sense of pride and gain prestige in the eyes of their peers.

There are many success stories, but one is worth telling here. One student has been a member of juggling club for three years. He has been ostracized, ridiculed and excluded throughout his school career. His dad made a point of letting us know how important the Circus Arts Club has been for his son. Not only is his son passionate about his new hobby, he has developed the confidence to perform in front of the entire school. His son now practices and teaches other students skills outside during recess and lunch hour and volunteers as a helper in the club teaching younger students.

Students who do not feel safe and welcome at school often have difficulty entering into playground activities. Often, these students have trouble in group sports and activities traditionally offered by schools and do not form the connections with friends and adults during unstruc-

ured times. Recently, the school has purchased extra juggling equipment for use on the playground during recess and lunch hour. Circus Arts is now a popular activity to do outside with many other students joining in. Students who have moved on to the high school have initiated their own circus arts club there. Another elementary School in Golden is start-

ing a Circus Club, interest sparked from the performances done there by the Lady Grey group. Schools are looking for innovative ways to foster students' strengths and to promote positive, supportive relationships with staff and volunteers. The juggling club is an example of an outstanding opportunity supported by community volunteers! 

Ian Robinson is the principal of the 100-year-old Lady Grey Elementary in the Rocky Mountain School District. His school has successfully run many programs to address the needs of vulnerable children. The school is currently running its Daily Physical Activity at the beginning of the school day for all students. He can be reached at ian.robinson@sd6.bc.ca or call 250-344-6317 (school).

Diane Tomaselli is an elementary school counsellor for the Golden Zone of the Rocky Mountain School District and has been instrumental in setting up and sustaining the Circus Arts Club. She has also initiated several other innovative programs to reach the district's most vulnerable students.



Know more:

The McCreary Centre Society is a small non-profit organization concerned with the health of young people in British Columbia. Since 1977 McCreary has conducted community-based research and projects addressing current youth health issues.

Internet address: www.mcs.bc.ca

Cirque du Soleil has several global programs designed to use circus arts as a means of assisting at-risk youth.

Internet address:

www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/about/global-citizenship/default.aspx

Educator

is the BCPVPA listserv.

It is an instant network for principals and vice-principals to share information and ideas, questions and concerns.

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Editor

Richard Williams

Putting students on a winning streak

Altering a school goal to reflect student growth gives meaningful feedback to students and leads to effective instructional changes.

by Debbie Cullum

“Historically, a major role of assessment has been to detect and highlight differences in student learning in order to rank students according to their achievement” (p.1). This type of assessment worked for me as I was a student moving through the system. I was driven and motivated by the marks and grades but as Stiggins points out in his article *Assessment Through the Student’s Eyes* (2007) this type of assessment has produced winners and losers and I was just fortunate to be a winner. Many of my colleagues had the same mindset – “it worked for me, what’s wrong with assessing the way I was assessed?” But as research evolves and we know more about assessment we must “embrace a new vision of assessment that can tap the

wellspring of confidence, motivation and learning potential that resides within every student” (p.1). Every student deserves to feel like a winner which can lead to more student ownership of their learning.

“Today’s schools are less focused on merely sorting students and more focused on helping *all* students succeed in meeting standards” (p.1). When I first came to Prairiedale the school goal around reading was related to a percentage of students fully meeting expectations. Many members of the staff, including myself, were not comfortable using a number because that then meant that some students would be *losers* even though they may have made huge gains over the year. We changed the goal to reflect student growth. The goal now reads – to improve stu-

dent’s reading by demonstrating at least one year’s growth. Staff were much happier with this as it reflected more of the B.C. Primary Program’s philosophy of working with each student at the level he/she is at and moving him/her forward not just pushing children through because they are in grade 2 so they get grade 2 reading instruction regardless if that is where they are reading at or not. Giving student ownership of their learning by using assessment tools like the PM Benchmarks and sharing results with the students has helped us to give meaningful feedback to the students and helped to make changes in instruction. I feel that we have become much better at sharing individual progress with our students throughout the year so they see themselves improving. We

Know more:



Stiggins, R. (2007) *Assessment Through the Student’s Eyes*. Educational Leadership, 64(8), 22-26.
Internet address: http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/may07/vol64/num08/



Debbie Cullum leads a kindergarten class at Prairiedale Elementary.


can definitely continue to work on giving meaningful feedback so students' know what their next step is in learning to ensure their success.

"Assessment for learning begins when teachers share achievement targets with students, presenting those expectations in student-friendly language accompanied by examples of exemplary student work" (p.3). Going around the school I have seen and heard teachers sharing learning intentions and seen criteria posted. Staff is beginning to incorporate the use of learning intentions and criteria across the curriculum. As we as a staff are new on this formative assessment journey so too are the students. Some of the comments I got from talking with students about what it is like when their teacher shares learning intentions and the criteria have been made clear included:

"What you're doing is getting

more clear as you have the criteria" ... learning intentions and criteria are "helping me by learning what you're suppose to do and how you're suppose to do it" Julian, age 8 (*just about 9*). A grade 2 student shared with me that she was glad and excited because the learning intentions and criteria "helped us out with our stuff." Owen in grade 2 said that having criteria made him mad because "I have to do it a certain way but then I just do it because I know what to do." With time and practice I know the students will become much better at articulating their learning and how formative assessment is helping them.

Having spent time this year learning about formative assessment

and making changes within our school, I am pleased to see that we are communicating more with our students about their learning and have really focused on sharing with the students what we are intending for them to learn and what fully meeting expectations will look like. "Rather than sorting students into winners and losers, assessment for learning can put all students on a winning streak" (p.1). It is my hope that by continuing to use formative assessment practices that all of our students will be winners and we will continue to move from a sorting focus where there is success for some to a learning focus where there can be success for all. 

Debbie Cullum is principal at Prairiedale Elementary, a K-3 school in the Nechako Lakes School District. As well as principal of the school, she is the kindergarten teacher. She wrote this paper as part of her requirements for the Certificate in School Management and Leadership program at the University of Victoria. She can be reached at dcullum@mail.sd91.bc.ca

The power of a student-based curriculum

The principal of Kent Elementary School in Agassiz shares a student-based success story from his last year as a high school physical education teacher.

by Chris Wejr

The following article was first published on Chris Wejr's blog, The Wejr Board, which can be found

at:
<http://mrwejr.edublogs.org/>

Chris can also be followed on Twitter

at:
<http://twitter.com/mrwejr>

Children should be given a voice not only about the means of learning but also the ends, the why as well as the what.

Alfie Kohn

In an education world dominated by mandated curricula and standardized testing, it is often difficult to imagine the effectiveness of a student-designed curriculum.

Prior to my days as a principal of an elementary school, I had the privilege of working as a high school math, science and physical education teacher. As I currently try to get back into shape, I have begun to reflect on the motivation to be healthy as well as events that took place during my final year of teaching high school; in 2006, I was involved in one of my proudest accomplishments as an educator.

At my previous school, grade 10 girls physical education classes were

the classes that PE teachers were not requesting to teach. The students were labeled as challenging, unmotivated and often absent. These classes were often given to new teachers or temporary teachers (*this is a whole other topic*). I, too, struggled to find ways for these students to become motivated to participate in the various athletic units that we were supposed to be teaching. We tried many different strategies (many of them reward-driven, but when the rewards disappeared, so did the motivation) including co-ed PE and different streams of PE. After a few years of observing and participating in this challenging class, a colleague and I decided to do something that

It is amazing what students can accomplish if we listen. The grade 10 girls PE students weren't the problem; the PE 10 girls class was the problem. Once the real problem was determined, we could work on a solution.

should have been done many years ago. Instead of trying to change the students, I would try to change the way PE 10 Girls was taught.

In the spring of 2006, I was teaching two blocks of PE 10 girls and instead of forcing them to do things they disliked, we spent a few classes focused on the following question: *If you could design a physical education class for girls, what would it look like?* They had to describe scheduling, activities, assessment and any details that came up in discussions. At the end, the goal was to implement the class the following year. The students knew that they were in grade 10 and therefore, the class they were designing was unfortunately not going to be open to them the following year.

I was overwhelmed by the discussions that took place during the few weeks that this went on (in between classroom sessions, we began to implement some of their ideas too!). Following are the thoughts about the problems with the current program that the students came up with:

- they don't like to sweat first period because they just got ready for school; they also don't like to sweat too much during third period as then they would have to sit through fourth period sweaty and red in the face (note: we were on a linear schedule so students had PE every second day; the blocks also tumbled so they would have it on a

- different period each day)
- they were sick of being forced to learn rules and participate in sports they disliked; they felt these sports had no relevance to them
- they did not like being assessed on skills for sports (the girls who were already involved in those sports outside of class just got the better mark)
- they did not like being forced to run — there were other ways to get in shape!
- they liked it better when the teachers were involved in the class rather than sitting on the sidelines
- most were not motivated by grades — many just wanted to get a high enough mark to get credit for the course
- they did not like the feeling of not being good at something and then forced to participate in an activity in which their lack of skills were ostracized; they would rather not participate than be out

there and look silly.

As you can see, there were some definite problems with the current manner in which PE was taught. Following this discussion, they had to come up with answers to the original question. Here are the strategies that they came up with:

- more individual activities (less focus on zero sum games, win/loss)
- they wanted to stay/get in shape but in ways of their choice (ideas included more dance, gymnastics, aerobics, power walking, stretching, yoga, pilates, circuits, etc)
- they wanted to see lighter workouts in the first and third periods and harder workouts in the second and fourth periods
- they would rather focus on heart rate than times during runs, etc
- they wanted say in the activities that were offered
- they felt they should be assessed on effort and projects (projects on issues that matter to their health), not on skill level (they said some people came to class with more skill than others and they should not be punished for not being taught those skills earlier)



Cover story

Our cover art this month is an oil pastel self-portrait by Coen Leopkey Johnson, who is a grade 6 student at Arden Elementary in Courtenay. Our thanks to Coen, his teacher, Chris Lamont, and Geoff Manning, principal.

- they liked the idea of guest instructors from the community
- they weren't sure, but pondered the idea about students teaching mini-classes
- rather than wait and see if this worked the following year, they wanted to see if it worked *now!*

Immediately following this discussion I started to become a PE facilitator rather than the PE teacher. I organized the schedule two weeks at a time (one week in advance) and included the students in all decisions. I brought in university students, community members, parents, senior students and businesses to teach dance, yoga, pilates, gymnastics and aerobics.

The rest of the year was a phenomenal success! Attendance was rarely

an issue and students were pumped to see their ideas implemented! I became more involved in the classes as I took the classes with the students. I think I was able to actually touch my toes after a few yoga sessions! I also taught a few classes of box aerobics, circuit training, core strength and gymnastics.

As we neared the end of the year, a student said, 'I never thought about this until now but what is my mark?' I responded with 'what do you think you should get?' This conversation happened with each student (most were harder on themselves than I would have been so we negotiated a better grade). In addition to this, I was there participating with the students in each class so I was continually assessing the efforts and participation of the students. I had students fill out a course evaluation at the end of the year and every one was positive; the only suggestion for

implementation they wanted was a class like this offered for them in grade 11.

We changed the name of the class from PE 10 Girls to Lifestyles Fitness 10 and it was offered to the current grade 9s to select for the following year. More than 75% of the girls wanted to take the class but I only had one period scheduled for me to teach and no other teacher wanted to do it. As we were limited in space we had to accept only the first 35 students.

The next year built on the early successes as I continued to facilitate with a new group of students. I brought in members from outside the school to guest teach, I had students bring in fitness DVDs, and we participated in projects and presentations about information that was important to the students (crash diets, eating disorders, peer pressure, bullying, nutrition, impact of media,



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etc). We scheduled activities such as power walking, yoga, stretching, pilates in first and third periods and activities like jogging, aerobics (Tae-Bo was a favourite!), dance, and circuit training in the second and fourth periods. Assessments were based on student conversations around their efforts in class activities as well as projects; we also came up with criteria at the start of the year about what good learning and participation would look like. The schedule continued to be decided weeks in advance (especially to schedule guest teachers) and a few students stepped up as representatives to help with scheduling.

As a teacher, I don't think I realized how great this class became until after it was over. The best compliment came when a group of students approached me after school one day and said, 'we want to start a LifeStyles Fitness 11 class next year.' I approached my department head and he said as long as the numbers were there, he would make it happen. When the course selections came back in to the counselors, we were able to offer both classes for the following year!

I wish I could take the credit for

this, but this was all from the students. It is amazing what students can accomplish if we listen. The grade 10 girls PE students weren't the problem; the PE 10 girls class was the problem. Once the real problem was determined, we could work on a solution.

I realize that I was able to do this because I was teaching a course

without a standardized test; however, this is yet another example of how effective learning can be if we moved away from a world of mandated curricula and testing to a world in which students and teachers had more voice and flexibility into the means and ends of learning that takes place in a class. 

Chris Wejr is principal at Kent Elementary School in Agassiz, BC. He has spent his career working with students as a high school physical education, math, and science teacher, an intermediate teacher, an elementary vice-principal, as well as a high school volleyball, rugby, track and basketball coach. In addition to his blog and Twitter account, he can be reached at cwejr@sd78.bc.ca

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At home with nature

Hartley Bay is a tiny school, just 34 students from K-12, but its innovative programs introduce students to skills that allow them to thrive in the wilderness.

by Leslie Dyson

Hartley Bay School students have felt the impact of a relatively small oil spill on their way of life. Now, they're concerned that hundreds of super tankers carrying crude oil could be plying the waters close to their homes. So they are helping to gather scientific evidence related to the impact of tides, currents and weather on items in the sea (whether bottles, young fish or spilled oil) and working with other groups to explain why it is so essential to preserve the habitats of northern communities — on the coast and in the sea.

Encouragement for their efforts



and confirmation of the urgency of their work came from a surprising source.

In late September, 20 students took part in the drift bottle project led by Fisheries and Ocean Canada. In each of the 700 bottles, they placed a message noting the date and location and requesting a reply. They and their teachers then boarded a boat, captained by a member of the

Raincoast Conservation Foundation, sailed out a few kilometres and tossed the bottles into the ocean.

The school has used previous bottle launches as a teaching tool for developing literacy skills and understand-

ing geography and ocean currents and as a way to connect with others living in remote areas. Some of the castaways show up days later, some travel great distances and take years to surface and others are never seen again.

Not long after the bottles were sent on their way, a mother humpback whale and her calf approached the boat. The captain cut the motor



and drifted with the two whales.

“I heard people say, ‘They know what we’re doing and they’re saying thank you,’” said Rachel in grade 10. “I think it might have been that way too.”

Grade 8 student Jenelle said, “by trusting us and coming up to the boat, they were saying thank you for fighting Enbridge.”

Ernie Hill, hereditary chief of the Eagle Clan at Hartley Bay and principal of the school, said everyone in the community is greatly concerned about the federal government’s Northern Gateway Project and specifically the proposed Enbridge pipeline which would carry unrefined crude oil from the Alberta tar sands to the container port in Kitimat to be loaded onto supertankers and taken to Asia and the US for refining.

Cam Hill, the school’s administrative assistant and son of the chief, said he’s convinced that “the whales knew exactly what we were doing and how personal it was for the students and everyone on the boat ... There’s still a buzz and a twitter.”

The whales stayed with the boat for almost an hour-and-a-half, swimming underneath it, breaching out of the water, diving deep down, spiraling up and then leaping out of the water. At one point the mother, with her head above the surface clearly “had one eye zoned in on the students,” the younger Hill said. “She was paying as much attention to us as we were to her. We could have touched her but we have too much respect for that.

“We were all speechless and in awe,” he continued. “It showed us how precious Hartley Bay is and just how lucky we are in our area and that there’s someone else that loves it as much as we do.”

Hartley Bay School, serving 34 students in kindergarten to grade 12, is unlike any other school in the province. Students are introduced to skills that will allow them to thrive

in a wilderness environment. Eco-tourism around whale and bear watching is growing in the area. So the students receive training in navigating swift water, gun proficiency, radio operation and marine emergency preparedness.

Isolation brings some difficulties and great advantages too.

Jenelle said that she likes the fact that “there are no cars so it’s not so loud and that there are hardly any lights so you can see the stars—and there are no murderers! I know everybody here.”

On the other hand, there is a 69 cent per pound surcharge on everything that has to be flown into the village and, even then, it only arrives if there is enough room on the plane. A 29 cent a pound pumpkin brought in from a Kitimat market for Halloween becomes 98 cents a pound by the time it’s unloaded at Hartley Bay. “We supplement our diet from the sea and we really value that,” Chief Hill said.

School staff and students and other band members went to Kitimat to hear speakers explain the federal government’s Northern Gateway Project and possible impacts of the plan.

If there was an oil spill, Rachel said, “it would will kill the animals and the food we get from the ocean. We wouldn’t be able to live here and we would have to move. I wouldn’t like it.”

Even the promise of double hulls offers no comfort to Chief Hill. He explained that poorer grade steel is used in the construction of these vessels to keep them as light as pos-

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sible and the sealed units can't prevent the corrosive nature of the seawater. "All you need is one spill and our village will be no more.

"The federal and provincial governments should look at a moratorium [on supertankers going down the BC coast]," he added, "It's a great concern for the Vancouver harbour and it's the same concern that we have.

"We're just a little band of 650 to 700 people and three-quarters of them live off the reserve. We have a little less than 200 people living here."

However, once the government's plan was announced, offers of help arrived quickly. The Sierra Club and David Suzuki Foundation called the band office wanting to know what they could do to help the band's efforts to alert the federal and provincial governments about the accompanying dangers.

"It means 250 tankers per year just one mile out," Hill explained. A stopping range of 10 miles while in a three-mile wide channel, is frightening for community members to contemplate. "We have to let our voices be heard," he said.

Hartley Bay made the headlines in 2006 when the Queen of the North ferry went down. The people in the town answered the late-night distress call and raced out in small boats to rescue the 101 survivors. But the story didn't end there.

"There was an oil spill," said Morgan, in grade 8. "It wasn't good. The clams and the cockles weren't good. They were contaminated."

Rachel explained, "We have fish almost every night." At this time of year, people are eating halibut, spring salmon, coho and octopus, she said.


The collision with rocks on the rugged coast resulted in the release

of "relatively clean diesel oil," Hill said. Weather, currents and time played a role in how it was dispersed. It didn't always show up as predicted and the community lost a valuable clam bed. It's taken four years for the shellfish to show signs of recovery. "This was the first year we could harvest clams," said the chief, "and it wasn't what it used to be."


Band members are also seeing the effects of climate change. Warmer

water temperatures and an altered Ph level have reduced the nori harvest that the band relies on for income.

"We have to look after what we have here," said Cam. "We can't risk our livelihoods and the lives of everyone else who shares this habitat with us."


Ernie said simply, "Our culture is alive and well and we want to keep it that way." 

Leslie Dyson is a regular contributor to Adminfo. She can be reached at Leslie@F2Fcommunications.ca



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Special thanks to BCPVPA

Aziz, continued from page 2

and vice-principals' work) that we believe will have a consensus amongst the membership and should provide assistance and talking points for principals and vice-principals when addressing these issues.

Principals and vice-principals hold a unique position, both within their communities and the operational structures of school districts. We work closely to support students, parents, teachers and other members of both the education community and the community at


Whiteland, continued from page 19

familiar or new, three concepts emerge which will guide our work.

The first is a confirmation of the importance of clear and regular communication. It is important for our members to have confidence in their Association to respond to both internal and external pressures and events. We depend upon our Board, Chapter Presidents and Chapter Council representatives to ensure that information is shared between our members and our Association.

Secondly, the BCPVPA needs to monitor both internal and external realities. Change is all round us and it is incumbent not only to be aware of proposed changes but also to be involved in the deliberations as new poli-

cies and initiatives are being considered.

large. We are deemed to be a respected and unbiased source of information, that stands apart from the political rhetoric that is often woven into education in BC. We have to weigh and measure our statements carefully, giving thoughtful consideration to the various interpretations that can be applied to our words. In all of this, we count on your feedback, positive and critical, as we shape our messages to represent both the interests of our members and sound educational policy. 

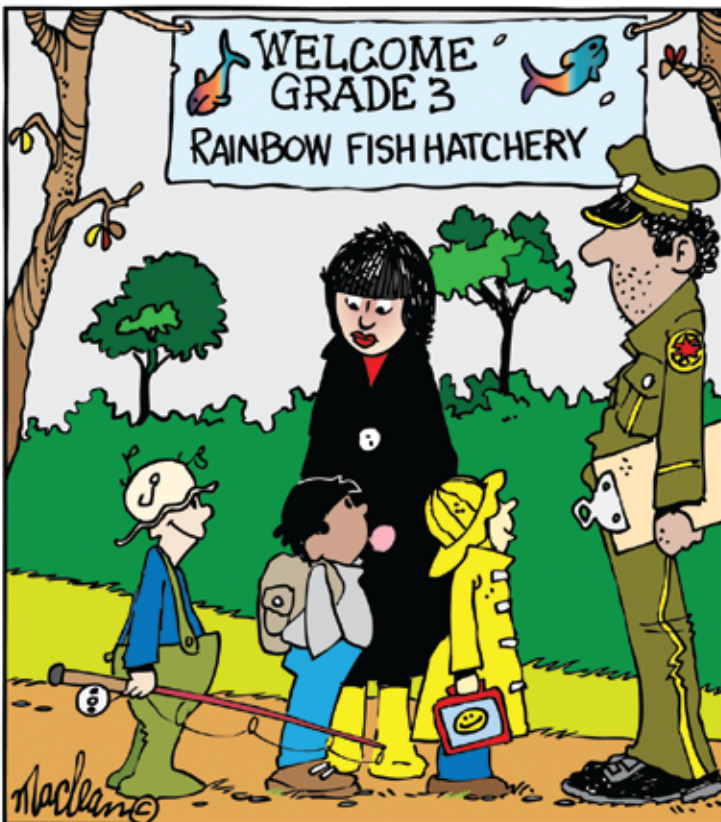
cies and initiatives are being considered.

Lastly, strategic planning needs to be an annual process and not an event. New goals and tasks need to be regularly identified to ensure that the BCPVPA is responsive to the changing landscape.

Based upon the success of this strategic plan, our members have demonstrated their readiness and willingness to engage actively in shaping our future. The BCPVPA will continue to thrive and grow with this commitment.

Postscript: A Strategic Planning package has been sent to all Chapter Council representatives and Chapter Presidents for sharing. 

JUST KIDDING



Rod Maclean is a former Surrey principal. For a weekly cartoon email Rod at ramaclean@shaw.ca

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Theory of action

A teacher's moral purpose to make changes to benefit students helps shape a school goal and clear vision.

by Denise Ell-Mansueti

We cannot always
build the future for our youth,
but we can build our youth
for the future.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Who am I and where am I going? To fully understand my leadership work and my leadership plan one must first understand my moral purpose. I am not the formal leader at Douglas Fir Elementary School. Presently I am a grade four teacher and have worked at Douglas Fir 13 of my 23 years as an educator. I am also a parent who has had the experience of raising both a high

achieving student and a low achieving student as defined by the British Columbia public education system. School has been a breeze for our son who is a logical, organized, critical thinker. On the other hand our daughter, who is creative and full of imagination, did not fare as well.

It became extremely frustrating as she moved through the school system with little or no assistance. Advocating for our daughter was a

continual battle. Testing situations became our family's worst nightmare. Her oral communication was exceptional (fourth year university level in grade 10) yet oral presentations were never recognized as an option of assessment. Once she reached middle and high school her poor academic standings were devastating and she was humiliated and ridiculed publicly for late assignments and often would not hand in completed assignments for fear of the ridicule that she would receive. Yes, this sounds like an exaggeration but unfortunately it is not. Our daughter was lucky as she had a family that was familiar with the education system and could advocate for her as she pushed through a structured and stringent system, yet this is not the case for the majority of struggling students.

One evening my daughter and her friends (of all academic achievement levels) were reflecting on their school experiences and I was fortunate to be included in the conversation. They asked, "Why do schools want

us to fail? Why do teachers not give us opportunities to redo tests, or to redo papers? We never even see our papers again! We won't cheat; we just want to know how we did. Yeah, but even when we get a grade it is the same every time. I always got Bs and would wonder how do I get an A?" Needless to say I was inspired. I had a tremendous amount of theory to support the use of Assessment for Learning but now I had a narrative mindset (Kaser & Halbert, 2009) straight from the most important people, the learners.

I went to work the next day and repeated the story. To my surprise few of the staff were interested. My thought process was clearly different. I believed that it was our moral purpose to make changes. Kaser and Halbert (2009) stated that "the moral purpose mindset asks you, as a school leader, to explore what the notions of quality and equity mean, and to consider the implications of developing new forms of quality" (p. 4). The conversation with my daughter's friends, her experiences in school, along with the indifference from my colleagues reflected that a lack of quality and equity existed.

Richard Elmore stated in his article, *A Plea for Strong Practice* that "in our society, educators are usually people to whom things happen, not people who make things happen" (2003, p. 9). This statement resonated within me because I wanted to be an educator who made things happen, an educator who made school and learning exciting for all learners (students and adults). At my school, Douglas Fir Elementary, Elmore's statement rang true; certainly some teachers working at Douglas Fir were waiting for things to happen. We were cruising along in the system. Learners were growing, stu-

dents took advantage of the sports program and attendance was good. No need to change what was working. Based on this and the above reactions I realized I needed to share my learning and maybe offer the "something" they were waiting for, but how? I started off by taking a deep breath and forged forward, keeping my moral purpose of quality and equity for all learners at the forefront of my mind.

I began by considering my intentions? What was my real purpose for sharing my new found knowledge? I formulated two intentions that I wished to share with the staff; 1) to understand the power of using formative assessment in the classroom 2) To experience how an inquiry question encourages reflection of the actions taken to improve student achievement. As I was formulating my ideas I began to realize that my true inner intention was to reignite the staff's curiosity about student learning. My intention was to make the shift from a sorting school to a learning school (Kaser & Halbert, 2009). By making the change from setting school goals to developing

an inquiry question Douglas Fir was beginning to shift from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset.

I then considered a theory of action or a "story line that makes a vision and a strategy concrete" (City et al, 2009, p. 40). Since I am not the formal leader of the school I began developing my theory of action by creating opportunities for professional conversations with the formal leader and with staff who were interested. I presented some foundational theory about Assessment for Learning (AFL) which created healthy debates based on formative and summative assessment. More staff began to "drop by" my classroom asking me to show them how I used AFL. Soon after this period of time I attended a district literacy meeting regarding school goals. The school goals in our district were too broad and it was suggested that we reshape the school goals into one inquiry question. I immediately realized the window for opportunity had arrived.

I returned to the school and presented the district's focus and suggested we use our next Professional



Denise with her students at Douglas Fir Elementary.

Learning Community (PLC) meeting to reshape our school's goals. I then introduced the "spiral of inquiry" (Kaser & Halbert, 2009, p. 76). The spiral of inquiry enabled the staff to establish a clear vision in their quest to develop an inquiry question, but more importantly it gave the staff a direction to follow once the question was formulated. By using the spiral of inquiry we were able to identify an important challenge, generate an improvement question, and develop the necessary criteria for success (Kaser and Halbert, 2009). The spiral of inquiry reassured the staff that the inquiry question was important and that "an inquiry – orientated approach to improving learning is not linear, sequential, or fully predictable" (p. 76) and its unpredictability would make it important to revisit and adjust along the way. With this understanding Douglas Fir staff was not only able to reshape the goal into an inquiry question but also decided to include the use of AFL strategies. The agreement to use AFL strategies was not a complete "buy-in." However, after it was explained to the staff that "best practice" was happening at Douglas Fir and that AFL could easily be incorporated into their present practice only a few remained skeptical. Recognizing the current "best practice" of the staff was important as it respected what they were already doing and they then trusted that I was not suggesting a complete change of their instructional practice.

It is important to note at this time that the issue of trust did not develop over night. I had the good fortune to have worked with the majority of teachers for many years and trust had been established through past experiences. Tschannen-Moran (as cited in Mitchell & Sackney, 2009,

p. 77) has found that, "when teachers perceived greater levels of trust in their school, they reported a greater sense of efficacy; ... trust was necessary for schools to reap the benefits of greater collaboration." To retain this trust I would need to ensure that "teachers are confident that they will be given the support they need to develop the more effective practice" (Timberley, 2008, p. 7)

How am I doing? While developing the school's inquiry question I utilized three of the four inquiry mindsets (Kaser and Halbert, 2009). I have "listened to the narratives" (Kaser & Halbert, 2009, p. 77), and asked myself "how to develop a new storyline" (p. 77). I have begun to "challenge theories of action" (p.77) and I will continue to reflect "both individually and with a trusted colleague" (p. 77). I am aware that I have not utilized the benefits of appreciative inquiry. Kaser and Halbert state that "many school leaders find that the use of appreciative inquiry as a form of investigation infuses renewed energy into their school's community" (p. 67).

Through the next steps of our theory of action it will fall on me to continue to renew the energy and to

build capacity by supplying the staff with resources, information and constant support.

Where to next? Douglas Fir staff has committed to implementing learning intentions and criteria over the 2010 – 2011 school year with the understanding that we will expand our focus to implement other AFL strategies over the next two years. The next steps are in the planning process and will involve adult learning by offering opportunities during staff meetings and PLCs to discuss and share successes and concerns when incorporating the AFL strategies. The PLC sessions will also include time to share archived webcasts which offer samples of AFL in practice across the province. A book club has been organized using the book, *Targeting Assessment in the Primary Classroom* by Shirley Clarke (1998) to begin to build a strong AFL foundation. I have made the book available as an option for interested staff to read over the summer months or they have the option to join the group in September. A second book, *How to Give Feedback to Your Students* by Susan Brookhart (2008), has been made available for those teachers who would like to

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forge forward.

I have established a critical friend (grade 2 teacher) within the school who will be working on a cross grade learner project (Kaser & Halbert, 2008) with my grade four class. As Timberley and Earl stated (as cited in Kaser & Halbert, 2008, p. 3) “significant change in schooling depends on the creation of new knowledge for the adults making the decisions.” I wanted to make changes in my classroom as well and by exploring something new I can then share this strategy with staff and invite others to incorporate this practice into their classrooms.

Without my formal leader’s understanding of distributed leadership this opportunity to build capacity and to recognize the importance of quality and equity for all learners would not have materialized.

He gave me the trust and respect to move forward with my knowledge. My leader realized the truth behind the statement, “Powerful leadership is distributed because the work of instructional improvement is distributed” (Elmore, 2003, p. 10). He paid attention to “who knows what and how that knowledge can strengthen the organization” (p. 9) and improve a school.

Teachers at Douglas Fir Elementary have begun professional conversations around Assessment for Learning, standardized testing and summative assessment. They have formulated an inquiry question focused on student achievement and are ready to learn more about AFL. Conver-

sations and education are happening and Elmore’s (2003) article stressed that one way to improve schools was through instructional practice and that “bad policy happens in part because of educators’ weak knowledge and weak practice” (p. 10). Douglas Fir is just beginning but our knowledge is growing and our practice is strengthening. My dream is that no other child will experience school the way our daughter did. My dream for learners today is that every educator “makes a shift from an emphasis on teaching to a focus on deep learning and to shift from learning for some to learning for all” (Kaser & Halbert, 2009, p. 17). 

Denise is a teacher leader, who is passionate about school change and equity. Denise is currently working on Vancouver Island and holds a Masters Degree in Educational Leadership from Vancouver Island University.

Know More

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Listening to members

The BCPVPA's executive director, Ted Whiteland, on a year long strategic planning process that has helped us to develop six priorities, 24 goals and multiple tasks.

Last year, I outlined the beginning of the BCPVPA Strategic Planning process (*An Engaging Process, Adminfo*, December 2009). I am pleased to provide this update on what became a process of high engagement.

Most members have participated in strategic planning exercises during their careers. Although the language might differ, undoubtedly, there are similarities and the major concepts prevail. I will provide an overview of our process as it was the most comprehensive strategic planning exercise ever undertaken by the BCPVPA. Its outcome will certainly have an impact on the Association for years to come.

Initially, we were guided by Canadian Professional Management Services, who provided significant in-service and guidance around strategic thinking and planning. We diligently developed and followed a strategic planning model throughout the process. Our mission — *to support members in providing quality leadership in public education* — guided the creation of our six strategic priorities, 24 goals and multiple specific tasks.

We relied upon feedback from both our members and others with an interest in our education system through an intake process where data

was gathered from more than 380 respondents through interviews and an online survey. As part of our risk management, we also performed a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats), which focused both on internal and external variables that might have an impact on the Association.

Following a review of our data, SWOT analysis and with consideration of our Mission and Constitution, six strategic priorities were identified. Once these priorities were confirmed by the Board of Directors, the staff was charged with developing a draft operational plan and budget for presentation to the Board at its summer meeting. Following the summer Board of Directors' meeting and a subsequent



review by the BCPVPA Budget committee in early September, the Board confirmed the strategic priorities, operational plan and budget. Since then, staff has been actively involved with the assigned tasks.

We have learned a great deal about our members expectations of the BCPVPA. Many, while wishing to maintain the status quo, also suggested new and different ways of thinking. We listened and have responded with a mix of new task initiatives to supplement what members believe works well now.

Regardless whether initiatives are

continues page 14

bcpvpa

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