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Boosting confidence

How one school gave learners a better chance

Setting priorities in the technological age

BCPVPA President Jameel Aziz writes about incorporating technology into effective instruction.

No one disputes that the world around us is changing in exponential ways. The same can't always be said about education. The world of education has in fact often resisted change and tried to keep it at bay outside the doors of our

schools.

Not so many years ago, districts struggled with technology policies as they cobbled together guidelines around appropriate uses of technology in the school. That struggle continues in many ways as we try to determine what technologies to adopt and what technologies add value to education in our context. Underlying these considerations are questions around the comfort level of the individual teachers with the various technological tools.

No one could disagree about the pervasiveness of technology. We are bombarded by its numerous forms everyday, and have come to accept that it is in the backpack of almost every student in our schools.

The terms "digital native" and "digital immigrant" are often used to differentiate between those who were born when digital technology was a part of their everyday existence and those who were born prior to the time when technology was woven into every facet of life. Digital immigrants, and that's most educators, have had to adapt as changes rolled along. A teacher's comfort level and interest seem to be the drivers of how and when technology is incorporated into class-



rooms today.

I have been greatly impressed in my visits to school districts with the preponderance of teachers who are using SMART boards, smart phones and other modern equipment to enhance their lessons of the core curriculum. In the hands of some, they are outstanding tools that make the classroom more effective and interesting for students. I heard many conversations at a recent conference in the United States about the push to have a SMART board in every classroom. The undercurrent through some of these conversations was that SMART boards would provide the necessary impetus to engage students. But one piece of technology, regardless of how smart or intuitive it is, will not in and of itself improve student engagement and learning. So how does one determine what priorities to set for a school or district community in this changing environment?

There are some things that experts seem to agree upon:

1. Technology will never replace great classroom instruction, planning and organization.
2. Technology will enhance instruction, not replace it.

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Assessment for Learning Strategies in a Sheltered Learning Block

The principal at Lake Cowichan Secondary works with his vice-principal and the school's ESL specialist to reverse the school's achievement trajectory.

by Peter Jory

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In a small school like ours, each cohort can have a very distinct personality, and that year's grade tens clearly were not going to raise our results out of any inherent love of learning.

We needed to make a structural change to better meet the varied needs of our learners and give them a better chance to be successful.

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Jeff Rowan and I faced a significant challenge in reversing the school's achievement trajectory when first assigned to be the new leadership team of Lake Cowichan Secondary for the 2008/09 school year. Careful examination of our school's data led us to believe there was no single issue responsible for the school's low results, so we felt it was going to take a multi-faceted approach to make the changes that were necessary. Our conversations with staff revealed frustration with the size of some of our academic classes and the inordinately wide range of ability in each room. Also, in a small school like ours, each cohort can have a very distinct personality, and that year's grade tens clearly were not going to raise our results out of any

inherent love of learning. We needed to make a structural change to better meet the varied needs of our learners and give them a better chance to be successful. The first idea that took hold was the creation of a sheltered learning block.

Although the first semester was already underway, we started with changes to the timetable that split our English 10 classes a third way, moving some of our most struggling and reluctant learners into a new block. We were able to make the moves we needed, with some difficulty, but we still needed someone to teach the class. Our ESL specialist, Karen Kloske, had a block of Learning Assistance time that was undersubscribed. Her thoughtful feedback regarding learning in the

school, her experience supporting ESL students through various levels of English classes, and her reputation as a skilled and determined instructor made her the leading candidate. Through a series of conversations I managed to convince her to take on this challenge.

Three weeks into the first semester we had a special Learning Services Team meeting to populate the class with students that were deemed to be “at risk” in school, with priority going to those already floundering in their semester one English 10 classes. The purpose of the smaller class was to give the students the best chance to pass the course legitimately *and* also to demonstrate the necessary skillset to pass the exam. Letters were sent to parents, and

Even if our theoretical background as a group was beginning to grow, neither of us had any practical experience at all using Assessment for Learning in a classroom. So now Karen was teaching a course that had already started, populated with challenging kids, with no enrolling experience with English 10 or AFL.

we met with each identified student to explain the timetable change and what the class would look like. All accepted the proposal readily. Though just a dozen students deep, and selected on academic need rather than behaviour, the class was still daunting in its make-up. Other teachers, many of whom had experienced these students in their own classes with mixed success, offered their opinion. “Good luck with that,” they said. Karen and I looked at the group and I asked her, “Can you get seven passes?” I figured I had the right person for the job when she responded, “How about all of them?”

The next decision Karen made was especially brave. She decided, on her own, to drop all traditional assessment practice and move completely to an *Assessment for Learning* (AFL) model. We had only just dipped our toes into this water in our school and in our district, and even if our theoretical background as a group was beginning to grow, neither of us had any practical experience at all using it in a classroom. So now Karen was teaching a course that had already started, populated with challenging kids, with no enrolling experience with English 10 or AFL. Daunting, for sure!

In October, with her class now underway, our next staff PLC session focused on learning intentions. Ses-

sions followed with criteria, feedback, and the Schimmer BCELC webcast (<http://bcelc.insinc.com/webcastseries/20081001/>), and these continued to add to Karen’s knowledge and comfort with her practice. She and I also had weekly, even daily, chats about her class, as well as several informal conversations with other interested educators in our Formative Assessment Roundtable. The initial goal for her class was retraining them to avoid the “good enough” mentality where marginal work merely reinforced their current level of learning. Requiring assignments to be “Fully Meeting” or “Exceeding” expectations before they would be accepted forced them to continue the revising process and to keep pushing their learning forward. There was then no stigma from poor assignment grades, as everyone was

expected to share and revise a draft many times over until an appropriate level of learning was shown. This concept, with repeated explaining, was eventually accepted by students. Without assignment marks to distract students from the focus of learning, and no “out” provided for missing assignments by averaging, the focus gradually switched over to completing better quality work. The philosophy of constant revision meant fewer overall projects, and the students’ notebooks were, by typical standards, very thin. “We’ve been working on the same assignment all term.” At least, that’s how it seemed to some of the students, but if the quantity of work was far less, the quality of their work was certainly far better.

None of this progress came easily. Every day presented new challenges, and the make-up of the class, the changes to her practice, and the constant search for engaging course material, stretched Karen to the edge of her own comfort zone. Class management was a struggle at times, but like the rubrics for many of the assignments, standards for behaviour were co-constructed with the group, and I came across many “conferences” in the hall reinforcing class expectations with the individ-

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Editor

Richard Williams

uals who needed extra reminding. However, one thing was clear, even on the worst days: students were learning.

As the first reporting session drew near, the process of developing a percentage for each student without spreadsheets or marks programs to fall back on added a new source of concern for Karen. There had been frequent reviews of student work and conversations regarding progress relative to criteria and course outcomes, but there still needed to be some sort of leap to generate a percentage to share with the students and then put on their report cards. Karen and I met several times to discuss where she thought they were in their learning, and it was my job, I felt, to empower her to use her professional judgement, which she eventually did. Several students received an "I" initially, as key assignments were still in the "Not Yet

Meeting" category, but then most responded with a work surge, and when their classroom assessment was revised accordingly they seemed pleased with their percentages in the "C+" range. This cycle repeated itself in the second term of the semester, as you might expect.

Aside from my guest appearances to help with specific curricular items, Karen continued to make the focus on skills and strategies that produced confidence. Still, the lead-up to the final exam was stressful as neither of us had any idea what would happen when they got in the room. "Is this actually working?" we often wondered. Students' ability to deconstruct text had certainly advanced and their final drafts were far better than anything they had done before; however, the question remained: when they finally sat down in the exam, would their skills transfer in a manner that indicated

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English 10 Exam Pass Rate		
	All BC	LCSS
2007/08	92	81
2008/09	92	91
2009/10	91	94

English 10 Cohort Exam Pass Rate		
	All BC	LCSS
2007/08	81	70
2008/09	82	78
2009/10	79	88

learning?

What did happen at the end of the course was more than a little encouraging. She did have two students who, despite frequent attempts to re-engage them in their learning, did not complete enough of the outcomes and would need to repeat. Another student dropped out for medical reasons and has since returned and re-engaged and has had enough success to be moved forward into grade 12. Of the students who took the exam, only one did not complete it. This was

disappointing but not completely surprising. He told us later that he “blanked” and that he was mad at himself and would have liked to have done better. He still passed the course. Another student wrote a test that marginally met expectations and earned a passing score. His essays weren’t polished for a grade ten student, but he filled the booklet with ideas that were thoughtful and reasonably on target. He then took a break, went back in to the gym, and used the planning strategies he was taught in his English class to pass

the Social Studies 11 exam he wrote that afternoon. For a student who had, until this course, not written a full page of text in a single class in his school career, this constituted a major breakthrough. If our intention as educators is to turn reluctant learners into confident learners, then this young man should be our poster boy.

The rest of class acquitted themselves well, writing exams that came close to or exceeded their class assessments, which were in the sixties. This meant nine students passing the course, most of whom were looking quite unlikely to do so at the end of September. In a small school like ours, this is a huge statistical boost in terms of pass and transition rates. More importantly, overcoming this significant hurdle was a huge boost to each individual’s confidence and sense of accomplishment as they moved towards graduation. They were able to complete a challenging course in which they were struggling, and seven of them even produced results that exceeded the

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school's exam average from the previous three years. This was indeed a breakthrough.

The other positive effect of this experiment was increased credibility for the *Assessment for Learning* strategies and practices. Teachers who had been skeptical were now at least curious, and those that had been curious were now genuinely interested. Several other teachers, buoyed by Karen's results and the shift in culture, decided to give it a try. Though the practices have not become pervasive in our school, most teachers not only use some or even most of the Six Keys (now posted in every class and staff washroom!), they do so in a much more intentional manner.

Karen has gone on to work in the ESL program at Frances Kelsey in Mill Bay, and though she is not currently teaching an enrolling class that would allow her to continue with her AFL practices, her added experience with the English 10 exam has helped her to better support her new students as well as lobby for changes to the way ESL students are assessed in our province. For the record, she is still not completely over the students that "got away" in that class.

The next year we repeated the strategy of the sheltered English 10 block with a wonderful new teacher who used AFL strategies right from the start of the course with an arguably more willing group, and had even more success. The entire cohort fared well in their classes and in their exam sessions, venturing into some rarified air for us.

The data piece I've been looking at more lately is the *Cohort Exam Pass Rate* (see box previous page), which I get by dividing the number of exam passes by the total September cohort. As it is our responsibility to teach *all* of our students, looking at how many in each cohort pass an exam is more meaningful to me than only considering the students who don't drop or are those that are allowed to write at the end of each term. It isn't flawless information, as students who drop can retake courses or rewrite exams with a later group which can lead to a rebound after a low year, but I still like it because it is much more inclusive.

Jeff and I have been pleased that our overall achievement continues to move in the right direction at LCSS, and we believe that the sheltered learning blocks and our *Assessment for Learning* work are important factors in our school's development. The vocabulary and conversations about learning have improved in our staff room and classrooms, and I am certain that Karen's success with that first group was paramount to kick-starting this change. Still, there remains some discomfort regarding a practice that can do so much to improve learning. The province's new Personalized Learning agenda may open the door for *Assessment for Learning* in courses with the most dense and prescriptive curricula, and perhaps one day AFL will become the norm in all secondary classrooms. In the meantime, it will take teachers like Karen who are brave and determined enough to let go of classroom practices that are comfortable, to make way for practices that are exemplary. 

Peter Jory is principal of Lake Cowichan Secondary School and can be emailed at pjory@sd79.bc.ca Jeff Rowan has moved from the VP position at LCSS to become principal of Quamichan Middle School. He can be emailed at jrowan@sd79.bc.ca

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The visioning process in a secondary school

Complexities and skepticism don't deter a principal from leading a secondary school through the visioning process ... a researcher, and vice-principal, explains the rationale and method.

by Rod Perrault

“

One of the risks of discussing vision in a school is that the term vision is often perceived as jargon and has been equated with time consuming processes that have often been divisive and have merely produced statements full of platitudes that carry little or no relevance to the functioning of an organization'

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To bring about change in a secondary school environment, the people responsible for making the changes need a clear sense of what they are trying to achieve – *a shared vision*. To be effective, the vision must bridge the gap between the future people perceive for themselves in their own personal and work lives and the larger school vision. The complexity of a secondary school environment makes the process of creating and managing vision particularly challenging. Though an in-depth consultative process is one way to develop a shared vision,

this may actually create an environment where motivation for change is inhibited as individuals' personal visions are stifled or lost in the process. Another way to create a shared vision is for a school's leader to make the connection between individual and school visions by acting as the steward of the vision. This is done through a process of dialogue and communication that acknowledges that the broader school vision needs to be responsive and connected to the personal visions of those within the school staff.

Ylimaki (2006) points out that

there have been two traditional views of how vision should be developed. The first reflects the idea that a leader creates his or her own image of the future for the school and is then responsible for ensuring that others within a school or a district fall in line with that image. The leader may or may not have communicated this vision but he or she would be responsible for directing resources toward the achievement of this vision. Aware or not of the vision, staff members would be expected to be compliant with the wishes or direction of the leader. The second traditional view of vision is that vision is reflected in the specific goals or targets that a school or district has set for itself and that those within the organization are expected to work toward attaining. Looking at vision strictly as measurable goals reflects an oversimplification of the complex operations of a school environment (Ylimaki, 2006). Both of these traditional models of vision do not take into ac-

Many of the staff members had been in the school for quite a number of years and have, at times, shared their willingness to wait out a current administrator.

count people's fundamental need for ownership or connection to a vision and both minimize the potential for a strong investment in the creation of a better school. If a leader is the exclusive holder of a vision or if a vision is simply focussed on goal attainment, the potential exists to exclude people a leader may need in order to implement the vision. Traditional models of vision ask employees to be compliant to the ideas of a leader or of a small leadership group, and leave them operating at a low level of investment, performing their duties in a perfunctory manner with little or no connection to how their work leads to improving the school. Traditional views of vision are based on a belief that people lack their own vision and that they are unable to manage the forces of change faced by the school or organization (Smith, 2001). Looking at vision as a process that includes all of the members of a school community has the potential to draw strong commitment to the vision and, by extension, to improvement of the school (Senge, 1990; Senge et al., 2000; DuFour and Eaker, 1998).

Examining vision as something more than just a component of the actions of a single leader requires a broad definition of vision. Nanus (1992) offered a comprehensive definition of vision as a "realistic, credible, attractive future for your organization . . . [an] articulation of a destination toward which your organization should aim, a future that in important ways is better, more successful, or more desirable for your organization than is the pres-

ent" (p. 8). Holding a shared vision can inspire the members of a school community and provides a tool from which they can align their day-to-day actions.

In a discussion of shared vision it is important to clarify what vision is not. Vision is not a solution to a specific problem; however, a strong shared vision does provide a framework for dealing with problems (Senge, 1990). Additionally, shared vision is not a one paragraph statement that can be etched into a plaque. One of the risks of discussing vision in a school is that the term *vision* is often perceived as jargon and has been equated with time consuming processes that have often been divisive and have merely produced statements full of platitudes that carry little or no relevance to the functioning of an organization. DuFour and Eaker (1998) performed a review of mission statements of North American schools and identified common statements that had little guiding impact on the day-to-day actions of schools. The vision for a school needs to connect in a meaningful way to what people are prepared to invest. A 'cookbook' vision statement does not offer this (Senge, 1990, p. 212).

Having a shared vision in a school is important for several reasons. It sets a standard of excellence from which people can measure their work, and it can create a proactive (rather than reactive) orientation to the day-to-day activities of a school (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, Nanus, 1992). It is peoples' images of the future and the value they place on

those images that can motivate or stifle action. The cognitive processes that drive people's actions, including memory, perception and learning are determined by images of how the future will unfold and are a powerful "causal agent" to both individuals and organizations (Cooperrider, 2001). Additionally, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) identified developing a shared vision as a component of the creation of school culture as one of the most significant actions of school leadership that has an impact on student achievement.

To have meaning for people, the shared vision for a school needs to connect to their own personal visions. This is one of the key reasons why having a vision for an organization that follows a top-down model does little to gain commitment from people. Senge et al. (2000) identify two key disciplines that ready people for engagement in a school's visioning. The first of these is *personal mastery*. The development of personal mastery is a reflection of the awareness people have of their own assumptions and attitudes from which they form their understandings of the world. Senge et al. (2000) refer to these understandings as people's mental models which are the places from which people base their actions: "Our behaviour and our attitudes are shaped by the images, assumptions, and stories that we carry in our minds of ourselves, other people, institutions, and every aspect of the world" (Senge et al., 2000, p. 67). By encouraging exploration of their personal understanding and visions for themselves, leaders can connect people to a broader, shared vision. In traditional models, the perspectives and vision of individuals was not held as significant as the vision held by leaders offering people little connection to what

is meaningful in their own lives. To develop shared vision, people need to move from seeing their work at the school as something separate from the meaning that they assign to their world and move to seeing their work as a part of the larger purposes that they assign to their lives (Cooperrider, 2001). Senge (1990) points out that there are many benefits derived from encouraging people to understand and to develop their own visions. By doing so, people can find a stronger connection to the organization as they align their personal vision with the vision of the organization. As Senge (1990) stated, "If people don't have their own vision, all they can do is 'sign up' for someone else's" and, by doing so, avoid commitment to the vision they have "signed up" for. It is personal vision that provides the foundation for building a shared vision in an organization. Connecting to

people's individual visions and looking for and finding the commonalities in these personal visions are the foundations for building a broader, organizational vision. Senge (1990) describes a shared vision as "a vision that many people are truly committed to, because it reflects their own personal vision" (p. 206).

Moving beyond individuals' visions for themselves, developing a shared vision is a process of creating an understanding of the images of the future that are collectively held by the members of the school and then working with these images to create a vision of the future described by Nanus (1992). The challenge for a secondary school is to find a way to engage in a process that allows the membership of the school community to express their shared vision of the future, and then to align these potentially competing visions in a way that facilitates full

engagement from the school community.

The author of this paper discussed creating a shared vision with the principal of a large, rural secondary school in the province of British Columbia, Jane Jones (a pseudonym). As a principal who has been an administrator at all levels of school in BC (elementary, middle and secondary), she described how the complexity of a secondary school acts as a challenge to developing a shared vision. She described her experience of developing a shared vision at an elementary school as relatively easy and a natural part of the learning process. Elementary school staff members had strong collegial relationships and were interested in working together. In a middle school, developing a shared vision was relatively easy based on how the impetus of "survival to the end of the year encourages everyone

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to work together” (J. Jones, personal communication, October 29, 2010). However, Smith has found developing a shared vision in a secondary school a significant challenge. By virtue of the size of the school, staff dynamics were complex. At times, people as individuals or small groups were defensive, expressing a need to protect their autonomy, though, at other times, staff members were quite cooperative and willing to work with others toward common goals. As well, because of the demands of provincial exams and graduation program courses and by virtue of the secondary school structure, it was easier for teachers at the secondary school to be isolated in their practice relative to teachers at other levels. Many of the staff members had been in the school for quite a number of years and have, at times, shared their willingness to wait out a current administrator. Finally, because of the volume of events that occurred in the secondary school, there was no binding or central connection that held a focus for the whole school community. Com-

bined, these elements were reflective of the challenge of creating a shared vision in many secondary schools. As a way of breaking through these challenges, Jones has focussed on developing the culture of a learning organization within the secondary school and has used a process of consultation and dialogue to develop a shared vision within the school (J. Jones, personal communication, October 29, 2010).

Creation of and implementation of a vision is a key component of the development of a learning organization. As Senge indicated, “You cannot have a learning organization without shared vision. Without a pull toward some goal which people truly want to achieve, the forces in support of the *status quo* can be overwhelming” (1990, p. 209). There are two models for developing vision in a learning organization that are common in the literature. One is a formal process for developing and communicating vision that involves large-scale consultation that creates a formal vision document for a school and the other is a process similar to

the one described by Jones that unfolds through a process of dialogue with individuals and small groups that focuses on the dynamic nature of vision. Both approaches focus on the development of shared vision by moving away from a top-down or traditional approach toward a co-creating process by which the formal leadership and the members of the organization build a shared vision through a collaborative process (DuFour and Eaker, 1998, p. 65).

The formal process for developing vision involves gathering together various stakeholders to create a formal vision statement. In the process outlined by Senge et al. (2000), teachers, parents, students, support staff, community members and administration engage in a consultation process that is guided by the school’s leadership, formal or informal, to go through a deliberate process of addressing current problems, generating the ideas for an ideal future and developing an action plan for that future. DuFour and Eaker (1998) offer a similar detailed process of formal consultation. Both

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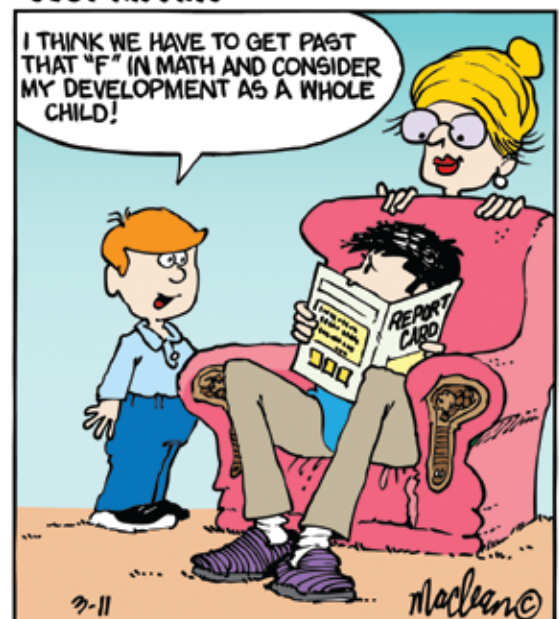
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JUST KIDDING



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

Senge et al. (2000) and DuFour and Eaker (1998) suggest that a vision statement should be generated from the process that offers codified direction for the school. DuFour and Eaker (1998) describe how the vision statement that is generated from this process needs to be much more substantial than a one-paragraph statement and should include specific ideals for many of the components of the school's operations. Within a formal process there is opportunity for nearly all stakeholders to be involved and to feel that they have made a contribution to the overall vision. Inherent in this process, however, is the requirement that people compromise on their personal visions and, by doing so, they may lose site of the connection between their own deeply-held images of the future and those expressed in the organization's generated vision statement. Ultimately, formal visions in this process are written by a committee who are attempting to consolidate large amounts of information. In this process, it is possible for people to feel that they have "discharged their visionary duties" and that their personal visions may have been ignored in search of a strategic or official vision and, therefore, feel little passion towards the vision (Senge, 1990, p. 212-3).

When asked about a formal process, Jones indicated that such a process was easily done at both the elementary and middle school levels. However, at the secondary school, she had taken a less formal but still effective approach to creating, communicating and implementing a shared vision (J. Jones, personal communication, October 29, 2010). In this approach, the leader acts as the steward of the shared vision. This is not at all the same as the

traditional model of a leader generating a vision and then communicating this vision — or not communicating this vision — throughout the organization; rather, the focus of this model is on developing shared vision through strong relationships, open dialogue and ongoing review and revision. Ylimaki (2006) describes this practice as being reflective of the visionary archetype. The archetypal visionary leader reflects a strong commitment to speaking the truth which the visionary leader discovers by listening without blame or judgement. By speaking this truth, the archetypal leader compels others to act on their vision and to use their creative strength by drawing them to the things that will help them to actualize their own visions. In a summary of Senge's *Fifth Discipline* (1990), Smith (2001) connects to this idea by describing how leaders are stewards of a vision when, through a process of dialogue, they gain insights into the complexities of their organizations and, by doing so, develop a relationship with their own personal visions and become committed to and responsible for an organizational vision that they do not own exclusively: "Leaders learn to see their vision as part of something larger ... and have to learn to listen to other people's vision and to change their own when necessary" (Smith, 2001). Jones talked about this as part of the process she undertook to develop understanding of the secondary school that she was moving in to. She met with each of the staff members of the secondary school to discuss both their experiences and their desires for what they wanted the school to become. By doing this, she dialogued with people to try to connect with their passions and values and their visions for what they desired the school to become.

Jones expresses how, after several years, the vision for the school has changed substantially as she has continued to formulate her vision and to align this with her experiences with the school's personnel. A large component of this process has been the ongoing dialogue that she has maintained with the staff of the school. Bennis (2009) describes this ongoing process of revising vision as something that leaders do as they "must be endlessly expressing, explaining, and, when necessary, revising" (p. 155).

As Jones demonstrates, to be a steward of a vision, a leader must have a strong awareness of the context that he/she is leading in. Marzano et al. (2005) describe this as "situational awareness" which is a deep understanding of the dynamics of the school environment. The key components to situational awareness for a leader are to understand the values present in the organization by examining how they are expressed through people's actions, knowing who the key stakeholders are in the organization, and determining the strengths and weaknesses of the organization (Nanus, 1992). A leader needs to be aware of the broad context that the school is operating in from a local, political level to having a broad understanding of global trends that are having or will have an impact on the operations of the school (Bennis, 2009; Nanus, 1992). Senge (1990) emphasizes that one of the key roles of a leader is to define reality which they can use to help people to gain a better understanding of the realities they are operating within. By helping people to be able to understand these broad truths, leaders are able to support others in defining and fulfilling their personal vision and in seeing where their vision fits within

the broader context of the school.


The process of meaningful dialogue as a tool for creating vision is an ongoing one. In this dialogue all participants must perceive they are able to be free to say what they need to about the direction of the school. The conversations include a dialogue about core beliefs (the reasons for being and “why are we here?” conversations), and a dialogue about the everyday experiences in the school. This honest exchange allows individuals to express their vision and to find commonalities and ways of blending key ideas together, thereby developing a shared vision which is a key component of developing a learning organization. Jones expressed how, since coming into the secondary school, she feels that she has both influenced and been influenced by others in the school. This has fostered in her and in others a desire to pursue best practices and to look carefully at the fundamental organization of the school. Fullan (2008) describes this as the “consistency-innovation dilemma.” That is, the challenge within the school to look carefully at what are best practices and also to encourage learning by constantly asking what can be done better. By engaging in this process with appreciation and respect for the work that teachers have done, Smith expressed that there has been more meaningful change than there would have been if she had taken a “stand and deliver” approach or formal consultative approach to developing an understanding of a shared vision. By engaging in this type of dialogue approach with staff members, a leader is able to draw out what Senge (1990) refers to as “pictures of the future” (p. 9). By engaging in this process, people are able to make direct connections between what is communicated as a

vision for the organization and their own personal vision. Senge (1990) describes how this process works:

No one can give another ‘his or her vision,’ nor even force him or her to develop a vision. However, there are positive actions that can be taken to create a climate that encourages personal vision. The most direct is for leaders who have a sense of vision to communicate that in such a way that others are encouraged to share their visions. This is the art of visionary leadership - how shared visions are built from personal visions.

Jones emphasized this in her interview when she described how the best way for her to communicate the vision for the school is to “live it by believing it to the core” and connecting her vision to the personal vision of others on staff” (J. Smith, personal communication, October 29, 2010). The process of dialogue is not limited to a formal leader-teacher communication. This type of dialogue occurs naturally among staff and needs to be nurtured to

provide people the opportunities to gain broad insights into the context of the school.

Vision is most significant when it becomes action in the school environment. It is through the process of dialogue and shared visioning that a school becomes a true learning organization. By exposing people to ideas through dialogue that connect to their own visions of the future it creates an environment where the reflective examination of individual and organizational actions can occur. Senge (1990) describes this when he states that “the hallmark of a learning organization is not lovely visions floating in space, but a relentless willingness to examine ‘what is’ in light of our vision” (p. 226). By connecting individual and organizational visions, people will be more prepared to invest in their own roles in the organization, to break out of their isolation and to make a meaningful contribution to the improvement of the secondary school. 

Rod Perrault is vice-principal of Brooks Secondary in Powell River. He wrote this article as part of his course work in the Masters of Educational Leadership program at Vancouver Island University. He can be reached at rperrault@sd47.bc.ca

Cover story



Our cover art this month is a digital artwork, Jully Black Live 2010, by Thomas Nelles, who is a grade 10 student at Sullivan Heights Secondary in Surrey. This work is a permanent installation piece in the Newton Cultural Centre. Our thanks to Thomas, his teacher, Marc Pelech, and Sheila Morrisette, principal.

Students as living books — with stories to tell

An elementary school in Chilliwack draws on the experiences of the community and students to build a Living Library and a powerful learning tool.

by Leslie Dyson



Lieutenant Governor Steven Point shares a story with rapt students at Chilliwack Central Elementary.

Scott Wallace, principal of Chilliwack Central Elementary Community School, can barely contain his enthusiasm about the school's Living Library, a relatively simple, but powerful learning tool. The Library is engaging students in this inner city school who had been showing an alarming degree of apathy, especially in the higher grades.

The school's Living Library, created by teachers Suzanne Bartel and Christopher Lister, is a collection of oral stories told by various community members and dignitaries and

soon some of the students themselves. They're recorded in front of an audience and then posted on a special website. It's easy to access the Living Library site from the school's website (<http://www.centralsharks.ca>).

"It's innovation, creativity and technology with a human face on it," he said.

Like many towns across Canada, Chilliwack allowed the development of gigantic malls on the outskirts of town. They were quickly followed by gigantic subdivisions. "Commerce in the downtown core was decimated,"

he said. Many of the residents left behind are struggling with tremendous poverty. Wallace said that every day he deals with the fallout felt by the students. "These kids have resilience that amazes me," he added. "It's incredible that they meet expectations and even exceed them."

The school is a hub for a myriad of programs under the umbrella of a Central Gateway for Families. The school halls ring with the sounds of babies, children and adults of all ages. The school is the centre for Better Beginnings, Nobody's Perfect, Families First, Family Literacy



It's not easy. "For many parents, school was not a pleasant experience," he said. In some cases, families are leery of giving out personal information or being judged. "Sometimes the parents are on the run," he added. "We support without judging" and the parents benefit when they see others are dealing with

"The Living Library is the piece that addresses the needs of the 21st Century learner to a tee," Wallace said. "It's not just the use of technology, innovation and creativity, or that it involves individual, pairing and group work. It makes learning relevant.

"Many of the children here aren't paper and pencil kids," he stressed, "and levels of engagement aren't only an issue here. Other districts and schools are having the same discussions. Teachers spend countless hours dreaming up lessons that will make learning exciting for kids. But I have seen the apathy and heard 'What does this have to do with me?' There are lots of reasons for the disinterest," he added.

Wallace said there have been conversations about bringing in Aboriginal speakers to tell their stories about why they quit school before graduating, or why they went into

and childcare at all times of the day.

Wallace has been at the Kindergarten to Grade 6 school of 265 students for 10 years, the last five as principal. One-third of the students are Aboriginal and all of them are living off reserve. "To assist our kids we have to involve the whole family so that what we're doing carries over at home."

the same issues.

There still are "invisible families," he said, "but we are reaching more people because of word of mouth."

He's also discovered that, no matter what the financial circumstances, parents are "wired." Everyone's connected to the Internet. The school is experimenting with Twitter as a way to stay connected.



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an alternative program or their residential school experience.

“We have kids right now who are at risk of not finishing school. Many of our boys live to play soccer, wear their hats sideways and give me grief,” he said. “But I see them with these storytellers and read their blogs and they’re engaged!”

Oral tradition is rooted in every culture on the planet. The Living Library marries these traditions with technology so stories can be heard over and over again.

The website states that the Living Library is intended to help the students “realize that they too are Living Books with stories to tell” and features a quote from Craig and Marc Kielburger of the *Me to We* movement: “In all corners of the globe, storytelling is a long-standing tradition with significance that’s lost on no one. It’s vital to preserving culture. It speaks of moments of pride. It speaks of moments of injustice. It offers an opportunity to learn. Most importantly, it inspires us to create change for the future.”

Bartel and Lister started the program last September, first by recruiting storytellers from friends and family and then by setting up the website with the help of Google. “It wasn’t a difficult process,” said Bartel. “You just have to know the options are out there.” On the other hand, proper recording equipment and headsets haven’t been as easy to acquire. A cellphone records the stories and earphones are being scrounged from various sources.

Bartel said she got the idea from the UBC library that allows patrons to “sign out professors.” The website, just like a library, enables the students and their siblings and parents to “sign out” stories and listen to them over and over.

Fifteen people so far, including

Lieutenant Governor Steven Point and school board chair Doug McKay, have told stories to rapt groups of students who are eager to ask follow up questions. Wallace said the students are especially transfixed by older people who are seen as wise and having information to share.

The Lieutenant Governor held the students spellbound with a recent history story and a legend.

Point was sworn in as Lieutenant Governor in 2007. Prior to that, he was a tribal chief of the Stó:lo Nation Government for 15 years. Central School is on Stó:lo territory. In 1999, he was appointed a provincial court judge. He said he’s chosen the promotion of literacy as a cornerstone for his tenure as Lieutenant Governor.

“I really enjoyed going out to the school and participating,” he said. “It was fun to hear the [students’] questions. They’re so honest and inquisitive. It’s just so uplifting. It’s one of the perks of the job.”

My Favourite Chicken, a humorous story he’s told at conventions, provided students with insight into what life was like for him as a child living in the area. A transformational legend about a naughty chipmunk child and her grandmother was about the common plight of children who don’t understand why their parents are so strict with them until much later.

He also explained that stories in his culture are told four times so that they will be remembered.

The online Living Library is “innovative and connects kids to our culture and the broader community,” he said. When children hear a story repeated, “it takes on different meanings as they grow up ... There’s nothing like seeing it first-hand but if they can hear it again and again, as kids like to do, I think that’s tre-

mendous.”

He also added that he didn’t learn how to read until he was in Grade 4. “You know, kids fall through the cracks [but] it’s a big handicap.” He said he believes education is the way to help Aboriginal people overcome tremendous problems such as poverty. He’s been visiting schools throughout the province, handing out books and promoting the importance of getting an education.

Some of the online stories are funny, some are sad. They are posted on the same day. Max, a Grade 5 student writes amazingly succinct and insightful synopses that appear with each story.

“I write the book reviews on Google docs and share it with my teacher and he puts it on the website,” said Max. His favourite story is *The Summer of ’58* by McKay. “It was told really well, with lots of detail, hand gestures and changes in expressions and tone of voice.” He added, “I think the Living Library is a good idea because if students are away from school and miss it, they can go to the website and listen to it as many times as they want.”

The students are eager to have their own stories recorded. Bartel said, “They’re developing their writing techniques so they don’t just get up there and finish in one minute.” For students who have difficulty writing their thoughts down, “it’s definitely going to be a challenge,” she said, but they will be encouraged to write their stories in point form. “But there are those who are fantastic writers,” she added, and they will have to learn how to refrain from just reading what they’ve written.

All the students who wanted to be interviewed for this article, answered in well-articulated, full sentences.

Lakota, Grade 5, said he’s looking forward to telling a story about

his family in the smoke house. He said storytellers “have to speak with a clear voice, not mumble or talk about a lot of boring things or you might lose your audience.”

Whitney, Grade 5, said she might tell a story about going to Kelowna for a photo shoot. “Everyone can tell a story,” she said. “For me, it should be really funny and definitely catch the audience’s attention. You should wait a couple of seconds until you catch all the kids’ eyes,” she advised.

Samantha, Grade 5, said, “it’s all about how you tell your story. You can’t just say ‘this happened, and then this happened.’ You have to practice — you can’t wing it — and you have to change your tone of voice.” To overcome her fear of the audience, she said “you should tell your story to someone in the audience who means a lot to you, but you have to move your eyes and look at the whole class.”

The Living Library “was created to prove to us we all have a story to tell,” Samantha added. “I knew I had experiences, but I didn’t know you could turn them into stories you can tell.” She said she’s also discovered that when she tells her friends stories, they share their stories in return.


“The simplest ideas are usually the best,” said Wallace, “and the kids are lined up wanting to do it. The level of engagement is heightened, not just by the technology but by others in the community—by hearing their grandpa, uncle or neighbour telling stories. It’s a paradigm shift and it’s helping these kids develop skills for the 21st Century.”

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

Jameel Aziz, continued from page 2

3. Students need and want a teacher both to connect with and as a guide as they work through the curriculum.
4. Schools will never be able to keep pace with the rate of technological development, nor will they be able to always provide state-of-the-art technologies to students.
5. Many of the skills students need to learn to be productive citizens will not come from technology.

Principals have a dilemma in trying to determine what and where to invest both their resources and time. We have a responsibility to work with our school communities to determine the right fit for our context and then work to support that vision, knowing that things will need to be re-examined on an annual, or more frequent, basis. We cannot determine a technology strategy on our own, nor can we let technology address issues that we know are human issues. We also have to help our communities understand that not all aspects of learning now occur within the walls of the school and that a lot of student learning will occur at home or other non-school environments.

The school’s priorities should not be how to attain or make use of technology. The focus has to remain how can technology enhance the experience of the learner and lead us to better student achievement. 

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A Trip to Nepal:

A Room to Read experience

A retired principal journeys to Nepal and reports on the progress being made to bring education to the world's most needy children.

by Nancy Campbell

Namaste ... namaste ... namaste ... I repeated over and over as the students festooned us with marigolds and bougainvillea. My friend and I giggled self-consciously on the stage as the 600 students of Shree Mahakali Secondary School in Nepal buried us in flowers. The children in this school are largely from the Dalit caste, or untouchable caste. We were the honoured guests as we represented *Room to Read*, an organization that had built a library in their school. Under a huge banyan tree, we were honoured with flowers, speeches and dances. In the end, we provided some entertainment ourselves as we joined staff and students on stage to dance. Fortunately, there are no photographs of this part of the day!



This school was a typical one in the developing world; classrooms were bleak quadrangles with no windowpanes, no doors, a single blackboard at the front, and jam-packed with rows of children on benches in front of narrow tables. In stark contrast to this was the newly-built library, a separate building with carpet on the floor, bookcases filled with children's books written in Nepalese, bright and colourful pictures and posters on the wall. Clearly this was a special place of learning for these students. This trip took nine hours,

six of them on a terribly rutted, dusty road, in 30-degree weather. It was well worth the time spent; we were delighted to see firsthand the impact of this organization.

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world, yet rich in history and incomparable beauty.

Twenty-five years ago, Nepalese were basically living in the middle ages. Now, people are more used to foreigners. They live in well-built stone houses, but few have electrical power so they use indoor fires. As most homes do not have chimneys

This school was a typical one in the developing world; classrooms were bleak quadrangles with no windowpanes, no doors, a single blackboard at the front, and jam-packed with rows of children on benches in front of narrow tables.

to siphon off the noxious fumes, many people suffer from lung related diseases. Yak and mule trains and human porters carry goods from village to village. The average wage per day is about \$1.

Kathmandu, the capital, is a city of narrow streets and Hindu and Buddhist shrines, sometimes side by side. It is also an assault on the senses. There is a prevailing stench from garbage and animals and a cacophony of car horns and hawkers. Yet, once inured to the chaos, you begin to appreciate the culture of two religions coexisting in relative harmony, and the indomitable spirit of the people, who are always smiling and welcoming.


This visit to the school marked the end of a three-week trip to Nepal and was a highlight for us as we both have been working hard to fundraise for *Room to Read*. *Room to Read*, a non-profit organization founded by John Wood, author of *Leaving Microsoft to Change the World, an entrepreneur's odyssey to educate the world's children*, promotes literacy and gender equality in the developing world. In just more than ten years, John and his team have

had an impact on the lives of more than five million children in Bangladesh, India, Laos, Nepal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cambodia and Zambia by establishing 1400 schools, 10,000 libraries and supporting 10,700 girls on long-term scholarships. *Room to Read* has accomplished this in partnership with the local parents, communities and governments. This year, on *Barron's* prestigious list of the top 25 Philanthropic Organizations of the World, *Room To Read* ranked 7th. This was the only organization not built on wealth or fame, or both. John Wood likes to think of *Room to Read* as a movement.

We had the opportunity to meet the country coordinator, a Nepalese, educated as an environmental engineer in the US who realized that, to introduce environmental awareness to children, you needed to make sure they are literate. He explained the literacy program *Room to Read* introduces into selected elementary schools. Teachers receive training about how to execute the programs with such techniques as formative assessment. I was impressed when I heard this as this concept is still be-

ing introduced into our educational system. They also fund regional authors and illustrators to write children's books in the local language, so students have culturally relevant reading material. In most countries, these *Room to Read* stories are the only children's stories available.

One of *Room to Read's* programs is called the Girl's Education Program. *Room to Read* provides scholarships to girls to attend school, particularly those who are at-risk of dropping out. In Nepal, the Kamlari system has indentured their girls, sending them to work at a very young age for other families. *Room to Read* has worked with a local non-governmental organization (NGO) to stop this practice. The local NGO pays the family the money they would earn from being indentured so the girls can return home. *Room to Read* provides them with a scholarship to attend school. Not only do they pay the fees, but also they provide a uniform, health care, a female mentor and life skills' training to ensure these girls will be successful in school.

As educators, we know the power of education to transform lives. Having taught in Nigeria for two years, I am well aware that education is not a universal privilege, especially for girls. 

Nancy Campbell was a principal with the Sea to Sky School District when she retired at the end of the 2009 school year. She can be reached at ncfrenchy@gmail.com.



How to Help: *Room to Read* has begun a school-based project. *Graduate to Graduate* involves graduating classes leaving a legacy of a one-year girl's scholarship (\$250) in the developing world. If you are interested in your grads participating in this program, email me at ncfrenchy@gmail.com. If you are interested in joining our movement, or learning more, please visit <http://www.RoomtoRead.org> or email us locally at vancouver@roomtoread.org.

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