

# Adminfo

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Wired to lead and learn:  
a principal's journey

MEGAN



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# Multi-level advocacy

BCPVPA President Jameel Aziz writes about the Association's media, and social media, advocacy for principals and vice-principals.

**BCPVPA** members have often asked us about the Association's role as an advocate for their positions as principals and vice-principals. They have asked us to address issues with the media and to be proactive in

ensuring that there is a solid understanding among our formal and informal partners about the important role that principals and vice-principals play both as educational leaders and school managers. We have taken a far more public stance on several relevant issues over the past 18 months and we are now more frequently asked to share our opinions. We are, of course, mindful that the Association represents more than 2,200 individuals so we try to limit our comments to relevant subjects where I believe there is consensus.

This past July, the Association embarked on a quieter form of advocacy on behalf of members. Launched in September, the BCPVPA's Facebook page, *The Principal Connection*, features 20 video interviews with members who share their thoughts and ideas about their role, schools in BC and education in general. The purpose of these videos is to assist principals to share aspects of their leadership role, their vision, their beliefs and the ways they go about ensuring that their school communities and students are supported.

We are now working on



backgrounder information to enable members to target the videos to specific audiences and ensure that their messages are clearly communicated. I have been impressed with both the positive response to the videos and the cogent thoughts and ideas that our members display in their videos.

The role of the principal is complicated and ever-changing and yet we know that our leadership position can greatly enhance student achievement in our schools. Our ability to support our teachers in providing the best to their students should be our primary function.

We have to continue to work on engaging all stakeholders in meaningful conversation around what happens in schools and where we should be heading. Parents, teachers, students and the public need to be engaged in meaningful dialogue around the changing role of education. We are proud of the videos that have been produced but only when they are shared and used by our members in each District around the province will their real value be seen. Please look over the videos at [facebook.com/thePrincipalConnection](https://facebook.com/thePrincipalConnection) and share the thoughts and ideas contained in them with your school and local communities.

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# On becoming connected

A wired principal writes about his introduction to a wider world and how his connectivity enhances his educational role as leader and learner.

by Chris Wejr

When I first began promoting the use of Twitter and blogging as a tool for professional learning, I heard all of the comments like “Twitter-boy that is Twittering, Twittling, and Tweetering” and “we have no time for this.” Since then, however, the number of BC educators both using Twitter and blogging has increased and through this, my personal learning network (PLN) has grown exponentially. Social media (in particular, Facebook, Twitter and blogging) has lead me to connect with others and is now the most effective professional learning in which I participate; it has helped me to become a connected leader and, in effect, a connected learner.

I realized my addiction to learning during the first class of my Master’s program; the professor challenged our cohort’s views on education in a way that left me continually pausing to reflect. The 20 students in the cohort developed into what I now know was my first PLN away from my school district. While still in my program, I had the privilege of being offered the chance to be a part of the BC Educational Leadership

My social media strategy, was twofold: (1) to develop relationships, network and learn with others who are passionate about education and (2) to connect with and engage parents of our school in a different way. I determined that blogging was going to be a key part of this strategy as it would provide me with feedback around dialogue in areas that I felt were important to my growth.

Council (BCELC) cohort program for two years that additionally expanded my network of educators who challenged me and offered support when needed. Through these networks, I had the opportunity for continual dialogue and ongoing professional learning.

By the end of 2008, I had completed both of these programs and was left feeling slightly isolated from the professional dialogue that helped me grow as learner and as a leader. We met as a staff for meetings and other informal discussions and we met as an administrative team for meetings but these were often single events and did not fill the void of the ongoing learning and collabora-

tion which I had grown to love.

In early 2009, my wife and I met with a good friend, Kye Grace, *@kyegrace*, a bit of an online marketing guru, about how we could use social media to help market my wife’s dance studio. About halfway through lunch, while listening to Kye describe how using Facebook and Twitter could help my wife’s business, he stated “I am sure there are a few educators on Twitter you could network with and learn from ... and I think the parents of your school might like a Facebook page to read about all the good things happening at your school.”

Following this meeting, I created a Facebook page for my wife’s business and I played on Twitter for

about a month; I followed business folks, organizations, sports reporters and a few authors. I then took the plunge — I spoke to the staff and created a Facebook page called *Parent Info For Kent Elementary* ([www.facebook.com/KentElementary](http://www.facebook.com/KentElementary)) and opened a professional Twitter account, *@MrWejr*, that I would also use to send messages to parents. Little did I know that this new Twitter account would lead me on a journey to meet passionate and inspiring educators from around the world.

The first real connection I made was with a teacher from Alberta, Joe Bower, *@Joe\_Bower*. I came across Joe's article *For the Love of Learning* ([www.youblisher.com/p/7617-For-the-Love-of-Learning/](http://www.youblisher.com/p/7617-For-the-Love-of-Learning/)) and he basically described the journey I had gone through during my Master's program; I, too, began to question the use of grades, rewards, and punishment, and many of the current structures of school. Joe and I began to converse through email and he recommended I read books by Alfie Kohn, Sir Ken Robinson, Carol Dweck, Daniel Pink and Seth Godin. These authors, along with the resulting conversations with people around these books, have helped to develop my evolving philosophy of education.

My purpose, or social media strategy, was twofold: (1) to develop relationships, network and learn with others who are passionate about education and (2) to connect with and engage parents of our school in a different way. I determined that blogging was going to be a key part of this strategy as it would provide me with feedback around dialogue in areas that I felt were important to my growth. After about a year of tweeting and reading other educators' blogs, I jumped in and nervously created my own. A few

months after I began writing, our school made a decision to end our current awards ceremony; I followed this meeting with a blog post titled *Death of an Awards Ceremony* (<http://chriswejr.com/2010/06/02/death-of-an-awards-ceremony/>). Up until this point, getting 100-200 views on each post was about the norm. When checking the analytics of the site on this post a week later, I had more than 1000 views in a single day and I then realized that Alfie Kohn, *@AlfieKohn*, had tweeted my post to all his followers and then it had been re-tweeted a number of times. Not only was this exciting, but it also led me to connect with many other educators with similar thoughts; more importantly, it helped me to gain confidence in being challenged as an educator as many people did not agree

with our school's decision. Getting challenged online has significantly helped me in face-to-face dialogue; I have realized that getting challenged helps me grow as an educator and it is important to respond professionally rather than to react defensively.

During the rest of 2010, I began to realize how social media could power my PLN. I joined the *Connected Principals* blog site, created by George Couros, *@gcouros*, and Patrick Larkin, *@bhsprincipal*, that helped me network with many other administrators from other parts of the world. I read and was inspired by George's post on *Identity Day* (<http://georgecouros.ca/blog/archives/791>) so I stole this idea (a huge benefit of a PLN is stealing great ideas) of having students complete a project on themselves and presented this to

follow  
**Chris Wejr**  
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Editor Richard Williams

I have tapped in to my PLN to help plan staff meetings and workshops around motivation, literacy and assessment. I have also used it to continually collaborate with other passionate educators to help me grow not only as a leader but also as a learner. Twitter has become my own personalized human search engine as I am able to plug in to people with experience who can answer my questions. Through this, using social media actually saves me time.

the staff; because this aligned well with our school goals, we hosted our own *Identity Day* (<http://chriswejr.com/2011/04/27/identity-day-pride-in-who-we-are/>) in April 2011 (and will have another one February 2012). The fact that I had connected with George led our school to host this inspiring event that left me watching every student in our school (K-6) proudly present on a personal strength or interest. Our students have also grown through connecting with other classes through teacher-assisted email, posting blogs and using Skype. Not only has connecting with other educators benefited my learning but also the learning of the students in the school.

A huge *aha* moment came for me when I attended Edcamp Vancouver later that month. This Edcamp experience demonstrated an additional benefit of an online PLN — the relationships formed online would significantly impact my learning off-line at workshops and conferences. My previous professional development experience went like this: I would attend a workshop, sit in the back and take notes, come back to the school, try to implement some of the ideas in a school or class-

room and usually after a few weeks, the excitement would fizzle out and I would go back to doing what I had always done. For Edcamp, I found out about the (un)conference through some key members of my PLN (teacher David Wees, @davidwees, in particular). I then started to get excited by chatting about potential discussion topics with other educators who were planning to attend. When I arrived at the school, not only was I excited about continuing the discussions, but it was almost like meeting old friends for the first time. I felt I knew so much about these people — their philosophies, their classrooms and schools, even their families — yet I had never met them. The day was spent with endless passionate dialogue around how we could create positive change in education; in addition, these conversations have carried on in blogs and Twitter and continue to this day. This

excitement remained as I attended the Edtech BC conference, key-noted by George and Alec Couros, @courosa. At that point, I had never met George in person but through a variety of means, had spoken to him on a weekly basis. I was able to spend a few days (in between and after the sessions) with George and Alec chatting about learning and education reform; you can imagine how hanging out with the conference keynote speakers enhanced my conference experience. The attendance at these professional development events demonstrated that my whole professional learning experience, both online and face-to-face, has significantly improved since this journey began.

Not only has the development of my PLN helped me as an educator, but it has also helped me to create more avenues to communicate with parents. Engaged parents and educators whom I have met online have helped me to meet parents where they are. At our school we now use



Rod Maclean is a former Surrey principal. For a weekly cartoon email Rod at [ramaclean@shaw.ca](mailto:ramaclean@shaw.ca)


Facebook, Twitter (@kentelemschool), Remind101 (a text messaging service), Flickr (photo-sharing), YouTube and Animoto (video creation, sharing), WordPress and KidBlogs (blogging) and many other tools to help us connect with the families in our school community. The key for me is to use tools to develop communication *with* parents rather than only *to* parents. Instead of only handing out our newsletters in paper form (*to*), we now also have them in blog form so parents can continually offer feedback and ask questions (*with*).

My PLN used to consist of our school staff, the district admin team and the odd list serve; it was effective but primarily local. Now, not

only do I have my local PLN, but through the use of Facebook, blogs and Twitter, my PLN also consists of thousands of educators and is now global. I have tapped in to my PLN to help plan staff meetings and workshops around motivation, literacy and assessment. I have also used it to continually collaborate with other passionate educators to help me grow not only as a leader but also as a learner. Twitter has become my own personalized human search engine as I am able to plug in to people with experience who can answer my questions. Through this, using social media actually *saves* me time.

This learning journey is just beginning for me. I encourage you to tap into the resources at your finger-

tips. Use social media to become a connected leader and a connected learner.

When beginning your social media journey, know your purpose; develop a social media strategy. Be patient. Observe. Build relationships. Maintain balance. Seek out intellectual collisions by challenging others and being challenged. You will have that *aha* moment and after you do, your professional learning will never be the same. 

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Chris Wejr is Principal at Kent Elementary School in Agassiz. You can follow him on Twitter (@mrwejr), join him on Facebook, read his blog at [www.chriswejr.com](http://www.chriswejr.com) or email him at [chriswejr@gmail.com](mailto:chriswejr@gmail.com)

## Upcoming EdCamps in BC

Edcamp is an organic, democratic, participant-driven professional development model for people interested in education. There are no keynote presentations, there is no formal pre-set agenda, and participants set the course of the day. Participants at Edcamp are encouraged to contribute ideas in workshops and are invited to share a short presentation or propose a question. Workshops are interactive, conversation-driven and not typical lecture style presentations.



EdCamp **Coquitlam** • January 14  
<http://www.subproximus.ca/edcamp43/index.php>

EdCamp **Delta** • January 14  
<http://edcamp.deltasd.bc.ca/>


EdCamp **Courtenay** • March 3  
<https://sites.google.com/a/online.sd71.bc.ca/edcampvancouverisland/home>

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Cherokee people were marched to Oklahoma by the U.S. government over the infamous Trail of Tears and they carried bean seeds with them, he related. You can still find and grow Cherokee Trail of Tears beans.

Stewart is undaunted by the scope of this initiative. He sees a parallel between the anti-smoking campaign of decades ago and the nutrition programs of today. "Twenty years ago, the parking lot was full of smokers—teachers and kids—my oh my!" But education over time has worked. "It's the same with these initiatives." He said he's gratified to hear students talking about organic food.

School start up his fall, with financial constraints and a labour dispute, has been difficult for the Aldergrove high school and all schools in the province. Stewart's been relieved to have the Farm to School Program because it's provided so much good news. 

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# Eat well, study better

The introduction of the Farm to School program in Langley brings a host of benefits: well-fed students, sustainability and a better understanding of the food chain.

by Leslie Dyson

**“If** you haven’t eaten, you probably won’t be able to do your school work,” Gord Stewart, Principal of Aldergrove Community Secondary School (ACSS), tells students. A breakfast and lunch program caters to 20 regulars but there are many others who use the service on an infrequent basis. “We put a lot of money out for food,” he said, “and we’re always looking for funds to support this. But you just have to do it.”

He added that he can’t help thinking that fast food outlets prey on the students from economically challenged neighbourhoods. There are six, as well as a number of convenience stores, within a couple of blocks of the school.

Even with the provincially mandated healthy eating guidelines, which the school readily adopted, he said, “We can’t make pizza for a dollar a slice ... But we’re fortunate to be in an area of bad weather,” he laughed. “The rain prevents students from leaving the grounds at lunch in search of junk food.”

A newly launched *Farm to School Program* has energized staff and many in the school community.

Last spring, Shefali Raja, a registered dietician from the Langley Public Health Unit, called Stewart to tell him about a proposal to connect local farmers with schools in their communities. “I told her, ‘Let’s talk. I think we’d be a good match for this,’” he recalls. ACSS is nestled in the heart of the Fraser Valley with farmland all around.

Because Stewart never lets an opportunity or good idea slip by, the program has “taken on a life of its



own.” The importance of healthy eating resonates with everyone: students, parents, community groups and local farms and businesses.

As word about the program gets out, more connections are being made. “The best thing you can do is get out there into the community,” Stewart said. “It opens so many doors. We hear a lot about community partnerships, but it’s not just about asking for money,” he said. “It’s about sharing expertise. If they know it’s for kids they’re more than glad to help.”

The program is multi-pronged. David Catzel, from Glorious Organics Co-op which supplies Metro Vancouver restaurants and farmers’ markets with more than 30 varieties of salad greens and vegetables and flowers, is an important resource. He has provided advice and assistance in regard to the school’s greenhouse and its share of a nearby community garden and has talked to students about farming as a career.

The school has 60 grade 11 and 12 students taking the *Sustainable Resources Program* as a science elective. The program takes advantage of the school’s greenhouse and community garden and is especially popular with students who like hands-on experience. But more growing space is needed.

Recently, a weedy, neglected area between the school and automotive shop was cleared. The school will be receiving lumber at a reduced cost to shore up the slope and build raised beds. The produce that the students grow will be used in the cafeteria and given to families in need. Participants in Kwantlen University College’s Horticulture Program will be working with students to show them how to set up rain barrels and

a rodent-free compost system in the new growing area.

Having the Langley Environmental Partners Society (LEPS) involved in the initiative introduces students to sustainable agricultural practices.

The school cafeteria supports local businesses by purchasing healthy breads and buns from a nearby independent bakery and fruit and vegetables from local farm markets. Baker Erika Belyea ensures that fruit is a component in all the baked goods that she creates. Favourite treats are apple brownies, fruit breads and fruit scones. Sub Tuesday, when students get to build their own sandwiches using a wide variety of vegetables and sandwich ingredients, is also popular.

Grade 12 students Marc Cayer and Toni Morgan are in the work experience cooking program and are adherents of the healthy nutrition philosophy. They work alongside Belyea and Jackie McFee (head of the hot kitchen) in the cafeteria preparing the ingredients for soups, salads and sandwiches.

Toni said working in the cafeteria feels a little like working in the restaurant business. She said she’s learning how to cook for larger numbers of people. She supports the school initiatives because good food “puts you in a better thinking mode and you learn better.”

Marc said he believes *Farm to School* is “a really good idea because it’s not just about school. It connects to outside sources and small businesses.” He said he also sees great value in talking about healthy eating habits in schools. “When you start at a young age, you’ll hold onto them and pass them onto your kids,” he said. He also promotes the nutri-

tious cafeteria meals to his friends. “I tell them about Sub Tuesday. It’s popular because it’s different.”

Marc said that he loves cooking and baking. “I was always in the kitchen with my mom. So I’d say I’ve been cooking since I was one ... You’re in your own world, you can do anything you want and, in the end, there’s something you can eat.”

Inspired by the school program, he tried growing his own vegetables last summer. It didn’t work out well, he admitted. He learned that planting under trees did not provide the best growing conditions.

Local farmer Catzel said the logistics of bringing organic locally grown food into school cafeterias is “very challenging.” He can’t compete with Costco prices. He has invited enthusiasts to his farm to help harvest salad greens. He then asks them to calculate what they’d need to charge for the produce to receive \$10 an hour for their time. They do the math and then say, “I wouldn’t pay that much.”

On the other hand, Catzel said he’s seen “an explosion of interest” in knowing where our food comes from and how it’s grown. He’s hopeful that involvement from the students and LEPS volunteers will make the program workable.

He acknowledges that asking teachers to work gardening into the curriculum “can be like a second job,” but he said he believes it can be incorporated into all curricular areas. He knows of one school that uses PE time to have students cycle to nearby schools to collect compost materials. Social studies classes can examine the impact of food on different cultures, he added. “Every seed has a story.” In 1839, the

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# Identity and the Principalship:

Another lens through which to examine the principalship

A vice-principal researches how life experiences and identity play important roles in the leadership styles of school leaders.

by Simon Blakesley

This article presents findings emerging from a study of the principalship in Canada's Yukon Territory. Specifically, it identifies the seemingly under-examined roles that life experience and identity play with respect to how Yukon principals construe and enact educational leadership. This finding has implications for the study of educational leadership and how it may be understood by both practitioners and students of the field.

## The author and the Yukon context

Educational leadership, and the study of it, has been an endeavour which has intrigued and consumed me for as long as I have been immersed in the field. Upon reflection, my professional practice, particularly at the beginning of my career, was disproportionately influenced by what could be referred to as a Eurocentric conception of leadership. As a practicing school administrator in the Canadian North for the past 16 years, I've been intrigued by the lack of contextualised and culturally sensitive approaches to educational leadership in the extant body of literature exploring the phenomenon.

The more I have studied educational leadership, the greater has become my uneasiness with much of the literature and current trends specific to

Reconstructions of their childhood and adolescent experiences in schools were foundational to the ways principals enact educational leadership.

the field. I base my apprehension on the predominance of conceptions of leadership often grounded in popular business and management paradigms applied to schooling, which are focused on achieving primarily economic ends. Underpinning this sentiment is the language that has edged into educational leadership conversations — often in generalizing yet prescriptive ways. No longer is it foreign to educational conversations to hear phrases containing the words “competition,” “economic advantage,” and “products.” “Stakeholders” now include “customers” and “consumers of education” who have “choice” in where and how they come to school as a means of ensuring economic competitiveness in a global economy.

This is not to suggest that the educational leadership field should be immune to ideas generated in other disciplines. Nevertheless, the historical reliance on paradigms rooted in other fields and an inordinate focus on human capital approaches to education, has, I believe, served to confound the epistemology, or knowledge-base, of educational leadership and hindered the emergence of broader, more contextualised understandings of educational leadership.

Based on these misgivings, and quite frankly, my dissatisfaction with what I believed to be an under-examination of the lives and work of principals in the body of educational leadership literature (particularly in the Canadian North), I commenced a study of the principalship in the Yukon Territory in 2008. The relevance

of the BC educational context to the Yukon is not a tenuous one: what is taught in Yukon classrooms is based on the BC provincial curriculum. Many senior managers in the Yukon Department of Education have had prior careers in the BC educational system, and the *Leadership Standards for British Columbia's Principals and Vice-Principals* (2006) has underpinned the policy decision to develop a similar document (in the Yukon referred to as “guidelines”). Professional development opportunities and access to post-secondary study in BC are opportune, given the geographic proximity of the two jurisdictions.

### Study design

Given my aforementioned concerns, I designed my doctoral study around a number of research questions: the first being “How do non-Indigenous Yukon principals construct their professional identity and their role as educational leaders?” With respect to identity Clarke (2009) offers the following definition: “Identity references individuals’ knowledge and naming of themselves, as well as others’ recognition of themselves as a particular sort of person” (p. 186). To shed light on this question I employed ethnographic methods, conducting extensive interviews with two male and two female principals in both rural and urban schools. The aim of these interviews was to present their voices, feelings, interactions and meanings of interactions of the participants around their work as school principals. The

extensive narratives shared by four experienced principals — Jim, Rose, Bob, and Gina — were then analyzed using qualitative data analysis software to identify and elaborate upon emergent themes. Over a period of months, detailed observations and document reviews also served to create unique “portraits” of the schools in which they worked.

### Experience, identity, and educational leadership

One finding emerging from the study was the importance of the principals’ own identities with respect to how they thought about and enacted their practice. Specifically, their reconstructions of their childhood and adolescent experiences in schools were foundational to the ways they enact educational leadership. The stories about their past school experiences in public schools across Canada, marked by fear, corporal punishment and an oppressive organizational culture, were key to their identity as principals. On this point, Bob, an experienced rural principal reflected:

*I was the baddest of the bad when I went to school ...literally ... I went to Catholic school ... run either by nuns or priests depending on the school ... I fooled around a lot so I got the strap a lot. I hated school. (Bob, interview 3)*

When asked how his own experiences informed the way that he views his role in the present, Bob shared:

*To come full circle, what that has done for me as an administrator and a teacher ... .for me it's really important to go out of my way to give these kids guidance, and I do it in a very friendly, joking,*

*and reward-based way ... and the kids love it. My experiences in school were always pretty negative, so as a teacher and administrator I've gone 180 degrees totally opposite. (Bob, interview 1)*

Jim's recollections surfaced memories of what he viewed as disaffection on the part of his parents in relation to school in the 1950s:

*I also think that school was a relatively unwelcoming place as a kid. It wasn't horribly hostile, but I mean you could see it in your parents. Your parents were tense when they walked into the school and I can remember it to this day, and I think it's just institutional, that's how institutions work. (Jim, interview 1)*

Now a principal with more than 40 years of experience, the lasting influence of Jim's memories on his professional practice was underscored in a subsequent interview:

*It just seemed to me to be such a restrictive atmosphere at my school. Even the building. I think over the years as I've actually had the opportunity to be an administrator and realize that I had the power to affect change. Those are the memories that directed me. (Jim, interview 3)*

The diverse life experiences of principals were also brought to bear on how they construed and enacted their roles in relation to parents and the community. Looking back over her extensive career as a teacher and principal, Gina reflected:

*You know, I think that more than the courses I've taken, and I don't know how professional it is or whatever, is I rely on life experiences. The reason I'm saying that is for many, many years I was a single parent raising kids. Now, as a grandparent, you know, with the kids, the little ones again, [I relate] to parents and the school community on that level. (Gina, interview 1)*

Similarly, Rose, principal of a rural K-12 school, drew upon her experience as a parent as being foundational to informing her practice:

*I think being a parent for me has been my hugest asset because once I became a parent and watched my kids go through the school system I knew what it was like from the other side of the fence. (Rose, interview 2)*

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While principals did draw upon particular theories, authors or books, they indicated the greatest benefit of engaging in post-graduate study was the space it created away from the steady stream of demands one faces as a school administrator.

Both male principals looked back not on parenthood but on work experiences that shaped their identity and role as educational leaders. Jim reflected that his early years in the stock market and as a railway worker were key factors propelling him towards a career in teaching. For him, this diversity of life experiences resonated with the assertions of an educational philosopher he encountered when completing his post-graduate study:

*I think it is Thomas Greenfield [who] emphasizes in his writings that principals should have a certain degree of life experience because why should there be a distinction between life out there and school? It's all really the same package. And I think in my case, just living in the North, and all the experiences I've had in the North, outside the school as well, shapes the way I look at kids in the school-formal training, very little indeed in that area at all. (Jim, interview 1)*

For Bob, rural principal of a K-9 school, having an extensive background upon which to draw is also important as it informs how he engages with the children in his school. After dropping out in Grade 10, he describes the wide range of experiences which, ironically, led him back to the classroom as a student:

*So, I quit school in Grade 10. After that I got my millwright's papers, heavy equipment operator, I got into flying. Anyway, did all kinds of really crazy jobs. I worked for [a Yukon department store] for a little while even. I worked for [a trucking company] for a number of years in the Yukon, and then, after my stint with [the trucking company] I took off to Europe for two years... So, I did a lot of reflecting and I decided when I got back that I'd go back to school. So, I packed up everything, went down to College, got my Grade 12. It took me a year, so I did it. (Bob, interview 1)*

While Bob's recount of his disengagement from school and subsequent pursuits may be interesting, how does this breadth of experience inform how Bob constructs his professional identity and role as an educational leader? Entering teaching and the principalship later in life, and informed by this diversity of life experiences, as a principal, he answers this by acting in particular ways that are grounded in his desire to make school fun for his students:

*I think, because when you go back to school in your forties, you've got a whole lot of life experience behind you and nobody's going to pull the wool over your eyes. You're pre-seasoned although I'm pretty zany*

*and crazy and stay very young at heart. That, I guess, is another thing is my childish nature, if you will. I think it's really served me in good stead here because I'm not afraid to make a fool of myself with the kids and I do lots, like purposely. (Bob, interview 1)*

Having an extensive background upon which to draw is important, as it informs the way Bob engages with the children in his school. As someone who believes he has a "childish nature" he walks a fine line between being the principal, and someone who the children do not take seriously. Bob clarified this in a subsequent interview, stating that the children do see him as principal, but not through the traditional lens of principal as authoritarian and someone who metes out punishment.

### Metaphors for the principalship

The four principals were asked to describe their role, the challenges they faced, and how they addressed them. Their responses shed light on their professional identities: the principals did not use the term "educational leader," but rather invoked unique metaphors to describe themselves. Jim saw himself as an "orchestra leader" who, as the public face for the school, kept things running smoothly. Bob framed his role as that of "buffer" between parents and teachers and his community and the school, while Gina perceived her role as that of "parent" for the children attending her school. Arguably, the most metaphorically vivid was Rose, a K-12 principal in a rural community. With tension in her voice, she described the staccato pace of her role as akin to that of an "air traffic controller" who tried to keep pace and

deal with everyone's needs at once, all the while concurrently averting collisions and avoiding emergencies.

## Discussion

While the excerpts in this article present only a small example of the rich stories and reflections that these principals shared, a number of points for discussion emerge. First, the surfacing of identity calls into question the dominance of narratives of educational leadership from a Western-centric point of view that appear limited to external notions of organizational power, control and authority. In contrast, for the principals in this study, educational leadership is situated primarily in one's own experiences, their memories mediating their professional identities as principals and the manner in which they engage with the social world of their schools.

Reinforcing the importance of school memories and life experiences was the absence of any reference to the utility of Masters-level study specifically in educational administration and leadership by the study participants. While principals did draw upon particular theories, authors or books, they indicated the greatest benefit of engaging in post-graduate study was the space it created away from the steady stream of demands one faces as a school administrator.


From their perspectives, the de-

contextualized and de-personalized curricula of the educational leadership and administration programs they engaged in, with their emphasis on 'training for skills' rooted in managerial and business fields, excluded the importance of life experiences. In contrast, the metaphors they invoked stand as powerful identifiers for the principals in this study with respect to how they perceive themselves and enact their practice.

## Contributions to the study of educational leadership

While this article provides only a brief illustration of a much broader study, it nonetheless serves to illuminate an aspect of the educational leadership field heretofore unexamined: the extent to which the identities, lived experiences, and specific contexts in which principals

are immersed mediate their practice. Attempting to address this gap in the knowledge base, this research opens up principals' unexamined lives and perceived experiences, surfacing the importance of identity with respect to how they understand and perform their role as educational leaders.

This research endeavour also sheds light on the previously unexamined daily lives of principals in a particular location in the Canadian North. While the findings of this study, located in one small jurisdiction in Canada, may not lend themselves well to generalization across contexts, it nonetheless reinforces the intersections of experience, individuality, and context. In closing, this research serves as a call for deeper study into the personal and professional lives of principals as a means of better understanding educational leadership. 

## Know More

Simon Blakesley's complete study, *Remote and unresearched: a contextualized study of non-Indigenous educational leaders working in Yukon Indigenous communities*, can be downloaded at <https://circle.ubc.ca/handle/2429/24852>

### References

Clarke, M. (2009). *The ethico-politics of teacher identity*. *Educational philosophy and theory*. 41(2), 185-200.

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# Media Literacy & Questioning Credibility

Two educators share their strategy to teach students how to separate valid from suspect information on the web.

by Arlene Anderson and Brooke Moore

**M**edia literacy means thinking critically about the messages we create and consume. To be literate in this way means that students question author credibility, the evidence and rhetoric behind messages, the mode of communication, the intended audience, and the effectiveness of the pairing of media and message. Media literacy is also about operating responsibly and collaboratively within a network that expands and shifts constantly. Finally, media literacy is about empowering students to use technology creatively and for their own purposes rather than allowing technology to use students.

## Why does it matter?

In the same way students from a couple generations ago used pen and paper to explore their thinking, students now use a plethora of technological tools. They use these

tools to show their thinking, connect to others' thinking and work collaboratively on issues, projects and tasks. Teachers and other adults do not control the flow of information — we no longer control what gets published for public consumption and what does not. Therefore, rather than throwing students into a swirl of constant information and hoping they escape unscathed, we must ensure that students can navigate the omnipresent barrage of information with purpose and competence. If we do not teach media literacy, we leave our young people at the mercy of others' persuasion.

## How does it look?

In the classroom where students are media and technologically liter-

ate, they:

- Question the veracity of information and its source
- Design their own messages and texts through technological tools
- Communicate with clarity and innovation
- Adjust their mode of communication to an audience's needs
- Feel comfortable taking risks and exploring new technologies
- Navigate the digital world safely and respectfully
- Cite appropriately and



accurately

- Facilitate discussions to explore issues and ideas.

Following is a strategy we developed to teach these skills and practices.

### Giving credit and having credibility

With access to the World Wide Web, students often find themselves in a flood of information; the challenge learners face is in determining which information sources to trust. Wikipedia proves a good place to begin the process of critical evaluation with students because verifiability is at the core of the encyclopedia's content policy. Once students learn how to apply the standard, they can judge for themselves whether the articles they find on Wikipedia, *or elsewhere*, meet their information needs. They can also learn how to use formal citations to establish the credibility of the content they create themselves.

Before working through this lesson with students, become familiar with Wikipedia's criteria for a good encyclopaedia article ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Good\\_articles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Good_articles)). Reproduce it so it is available for your class to consult. Also in advance of your class, find a Wikipedia article containing content your students will be familiar with and that is accessible to them in terms of their reading ability. If students are familiar with the topic, they will be able to identify inaccuracies and unsubstantiated claims. Try to find an article that provides a list of references or links to external websites but contains few inline citations.

Ask your students to generate criteria for a good encyclopaedia article. Have them compare their list with Wikipedia's criteria for a good article. Confirm students clearly understand the importance of the following

terms:

- **Neutral Point of View:** articles are balanced
- **No Original Research:** articles report the published research of reliable sources
- **Verifiability:** sources must be cited so that readers can verify their accuracy

Read through the selected Wikipedia article with your students and, after they identify the article's main points, ask them to apply the "good article" criteria with emphasis on ensuring that readers can verify the accuracy of the material (students should find some points that need to be verified).

Have students note the first and subsequent points that need citations numbering them in the order in which they appear in the article (these will appear in the body of the text as informal inline citations).

Have students try to verify the claims either through independent research or by consulting the references and external links provided at the bottom of the Wikipedia article.

For information that can be verified through a reliable source, have students generate a formal citation and place it below the article alongside the number it corresponds to in the body of the article


As a culminating activity, have students write an article on a topic of their choice, citing sources as necessary. Upload the article to Wikipedia, or use another Wiki platform like Wikispaces for them to publish their article.

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### How's it going?

If students are working on this assignment collaboratively as a whole class or in small groups they will peer assess as they move through the task (assessment *for* and *as*). If they are working with an online collaborative tool, the history of who contributed will most likely be recorded, so you will be able to assess individuals' efforts (assessment *of*) while they are working as a group. Also, if you are able to be online at the same time as they are, you will be able to see their thinking as they move through the task in real time and you could make suggestions as they work (assessment *for*). If you are not working online, students will produce paper copies of their edits and a final draft. Either way, you will be able to see if they are able to correctly reference material.

The Wiki article that students write at the end of this strategy is an ideal summative assessment task (assessment *of*) as they will need to demonstrate all the skills discussed in this strategy. Offering students the chance to peer and self-assess (assessment *as* and *for*) their article before you evaluate it will give them the opportunity to ensure they are giving you their best work. Before any of the student or teacher assessments take place you'll want to ensure that students are working with clear criteria which they will derive as part of their investigation into the article used in the first several steps of this strategy. Using the criteria provided by Wikipedia is a good starting place. 

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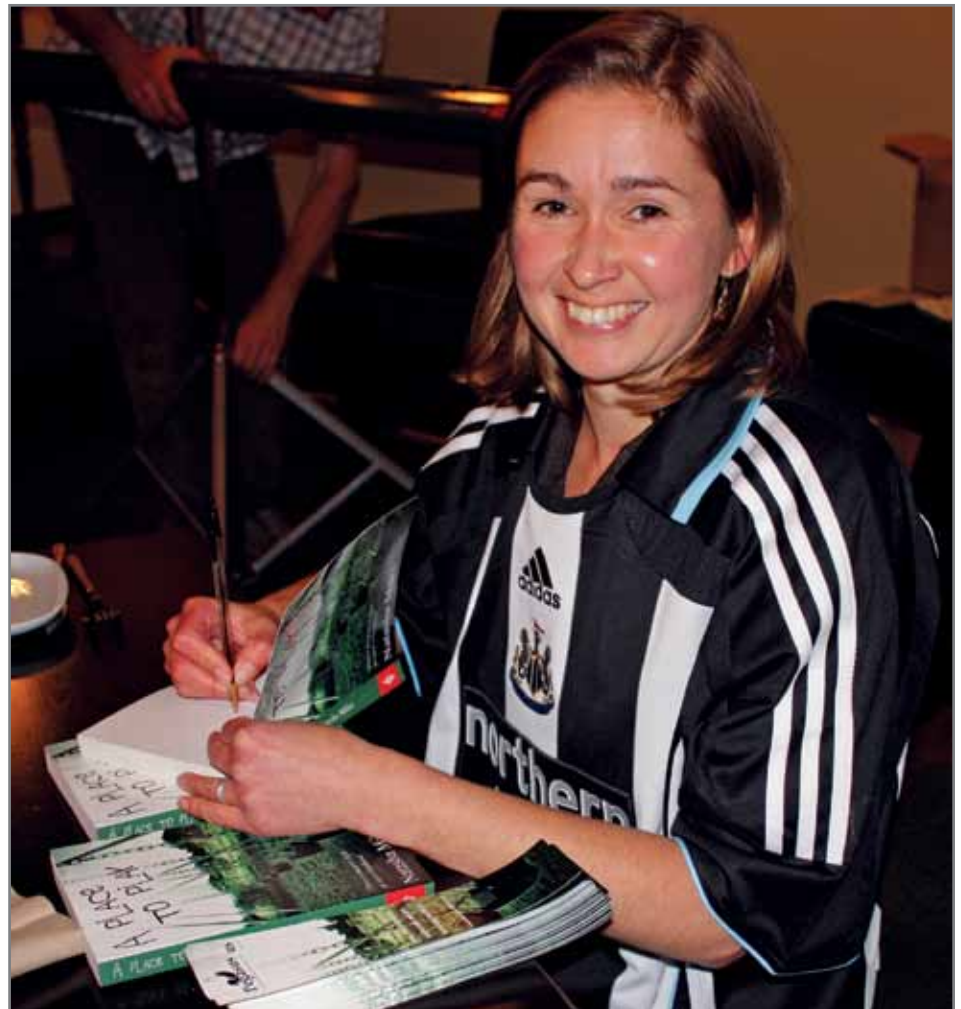
# Why I write

A principal draws on her experiences as a child in suburban London in the 1970s and 1980s and writes a novel set in the not too distant future when playing fields are a thing of the past.

by Natasha Miles

They say that there is a novel inside each and every one of us and ‘they’ are quite right. Any novel is a tale in some form or other of the human experience and what better place than to start with our own life. Think of the great characters that you have come across in your time, think of those who did not appear to be so great but now ponder on what were they thinking inside or hiding from you as your paths crossed? What if you chose not to get off the bus at the stop you intended to get off but chose to wait just one more stop? What if you didn’t get to work on time for your first job? What if you chose to attend SFU and not UBC? See, it’s not so difficult to come up with a story based around any of these scenarios is it?

But why a novel? Over the last 12 years when I started on a MBA in Educational Management, I have pushed myself to achieve academic goals to better myself in my own learning in the field of education. One of the lasting legacies for me from these years of writing, for ex-



ample, a thesis or an exam on Canadian Literature, has been that I enjoy writing. Being able to take the time to achieve a creative goal for myself was a new and incredibly rewarding experience. One December day at the end of 2008 during a wet Port Hardy Christmas, having finished reading yet another novel the night before, I literally woke up feeling that the time

was right to write the novel that had been nudging me from inside telling me that it was jolly well about time it was written. Three characters appeared out of the blue that day: Rudi, his sister Trojan and their plump friend Martha and they started telling me how the story of *The Last Field in England* would be told. I hadn’t worked it out beforehand; I

Photo of Natasha by Jan McMurray, New Denver Valley Voice

needed them to help me tell the tale. We worked together, the four of us, on the story and told anyone who cared to be reminded that a playing field is a precious space for children to be able to access for them to have their right to play. Of course there's a reasonable quota of baddies (mainly adults) in the story and a couple of twists and turns but be rest assured that the three friends use their wit to overcome the odds stacked against them.


The novel morphed into *A Place to Play*. It took me six months of rejections from Canadian publishers (saying things like, 'It's not Canadian enough,' and from UK publishers, saying things like, 'We like your style but don't think the story is for us,') for me to put the manuscript to one side and let it collect a thin layer of dust. Embarking upon a new adventure into the West Kootenays and SD10, followed by a snow-bound Christmas holiday I blew off the dust and did a revamp of the novel in sections. This task coincided with hearing about a small UK publisher who was being interviewed on CBC Radio 1 who said they would welcome manuscripts from first-time writers. Working with the publishers has been a learning experience through which I have become a little more adept at proof reading, have had to relearn some English word usage as Canadian vocabulary has managed to creep in after five years in BC and have had to start to use the digital world to help me market myself as a writer. I reluctantly created a Facebook profile and a blog, which I prefer, with a specific aim to be 'found' through internet searches as the author of *A Place to Play*. One perk of Facebook, I discovered, is being able to see the Facebook page from my publishers and knowing what the pundits are

saying about my novel.

The novel inside me grew out of my experience as a child in suburban London in the 1970s and 1980s. I remember playing outside from dawn until dusk in parks and fields (yes, they do exist in suburbia today ... just). I believe that my generation is the last generation that was able to play outside without the fear of strangers, without the trappings of the internet and social networking. What I have seen in recent years in BC is that the use of social networking by teenagers is taking away their time in face-to-face communications with friends. I recall, recently, when a teenager who we took to the local hot springs as an end of year treat, who had all his friends with him (New Denver is a small place) still went on to Facebook to talk to them.

UNICEF's *Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 31* states that a child has the right to relax, to play

and to take part in a wide range of recreational activities. Too many children I have worked with in recent years are carers for their younger siblings, need to take part time work in order for their family to survive or are over or under weight due to neglect. Their right to be a child, to have a childhood needs to be protected even in developed nations like Canada and the UK. I hope that my novel adds to the growing concern that children are not playing, that they are growing up too fast and that they don't know how to deal with human face-to-face interactions.

As for the success of my novel, time will tell of course, but the tale has been told, the characters have found peace as their mission was accomplished and I have achieved an ambition set around 1977 or so when my brother and I wrote a book together on ghosts complete with pictures. The ghosts were orange. 

Natasha Miles is Principal of Lucerne Elementary Secondary School, New Denver, in the Arrow Lakes School District. She became a permanent resident in Canada in 2006 having previously taught in the UK and Europe. Her first novel, *A Place to Play*, is published by Pegasus Elliott MacKenzie Publishers and is available from <http://pegasuspublishers.com> Natasha can be reached by email at [natasha.miles@sd10.bc.ca](mailto:natasha.miles@sd10.bc.ca)



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An excerpt from

## A Play to Play

by Natasha Miles

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“Remember I told you that there are four schools left in each of the Federation’s cities.” The teenagers nodded. “This is the only one that still has its playing field. The other ones lost theirs years before the schools were closed. A real tragedy.”

“Why?” asked Martha.

Instead of answering the question he turned to Rudi and asked his own. “Did you have fun, Rudi?” he asked pointedly.

“Yes, I ... yes I did,” he admitted.

“Good. Then let me show you why it is a tragedy that the other schools lost their playing field. Are you sitting comfortably?” Rudi wasn’t so he sat down in front of them on the grass. Dr. Grey pointed his laser again at the central point.

At first nothing seemed to happen. Then the children suddenly saw people appearing from behind the trees at the edge of the field. Some of the people were carrying balls, others bags. Some were eating what seemed to be chocolate bars, a few had stubby white sticks hanging out of their mouths. “They’re our age!” Martha said in amazement.

“Ssh! Watch. Listen!” was all Dr. Grey said in reply. A group of teenage boys wandered over to the ‘pi’ posts

and threw their jackets in a heap. The one who had been carrying the ball threw it onto the grass and suddenly the boys split up all over the space, shouting and laughing but all running after the ball. From time to time one of them would kick the ball to another and on other occasions a boy would hurl himself at the ball to impede its current direction.

Trojan nudged Martha and pointed at one of the benches. There sat three girls, talking to each other and giggling. One took out a hairbrush and brushed her hair even though it looked quite glossy from their viewpoint. Suddenly one of the young men who had been chasing the ball sauntered over to the girls on the bench and offered them a white stick. The three girls shook their heads and started giggling again. The boy’s shoulders dropped and he turned back to his friends. The girls continued to giggle and then collapsed in fits of laughter.

“What do you hear, Martha?” asked Dr. Grey.

She stopped looking at the girls on the bench. “I hear laughter.”

“And what about you, Trojan?” he asked.

“I think I hear ... I can hear, if you can I suppose, I can hear fun.”

“And you, Rudi the Brave. What do you hear?” the old man asked one more time.

“I can hear the past, can’t I? They aren’t here are they?” Rudi replied solemnly.

“You are all right of course. What you can hear and what you can see doesn’t exist. It is a mere projection that an old man keeps to remind himself of when he was young. It serves a purpose though for you. I want you to know but I think you already know if you look deep inside your own hearts that this is what your childhood, your teenage lives should be like. Listen to that laughter. Listen to that fun. Do you hear that every day when you study? No, I don’t think so. This is what they took away from you when they first got rid of the playing fields and then closed the schools.”

### Cover Art



Our cover art this month is by Megan Graw, a Grade 10 student at Dawson Creek Secondary School. She used pencil crayon, pencil and ink. We thank Megan, her teacher Lorraine Beggs, and Principal Keith Maurer for sharing this work.

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