building capacity
the sum of all its parts
the discipline of trust
Prince George rocks
first person singular
Are we in the future yet? Old Popular Science magazines illustrated predictions that by the dawn of the 21st Century we’d all be flying around in hovercars and dressing like the Jetsons. Contemporary technology is amazing but the roads are clogged with pavement-bound vehicles and button-down shirts abound.

The fact that hovercars and Jetsons’ attire aren’t common doesn’t mean that change isn’t taking place but just that the future is hard to predict.

In the midst of this accelerating change, the purposes of schools remains constant – literacy, numeracy and social responsibility that develops students as productive citizens in a civil and liberal democracy.

Principals and vice-principals are professionals, skilled individuals, guided by a moral purpose toward the common good. The professional has a special relationship with her community, one that is different from other citizens. He is accorded responsibility and status in exchange for the commitment that his skill and knowledge will be applied to the betterment of the community. In our case, bettering the community includes making improvement to our education system as conditions change.

Michael Fullan has written widely on the subject of system improvement.

One aspect of his work is the notion of “capacity building with a focus on results.” He claims that to set the system on the path to improvement one needs to assume that if improvements are not being made then it is because educators either do not know how to improve it or they don’t believe that it can be improved. Although this sounds like a harsh indictment of the individuals in schools — that school personnel (and, presumably those at the district and Ministry levels, too) are ignorant and defeatist — this assumption does indeed lead to a positive frame of reference. That is, educators are not incapable or unwilling but rather they lack only some knowledge and skills that may be developed. All of us would agree that the prospect of success with a group of individuals who require additional skills and knowledge is far greater than the prospect of success with those who, although they have the necessary tools at their disposal, are disinclined to make a difference.

Fullan defines capacity building with a focus on results in the following way: “… capacity building involves any policy, strategy or other action undertaken that enhances the collective efficiency of a group to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning for all students. Usually it involves the development of three components in concert: new knowledge and competencies, new and enhanced resources, and new and deeper motivation and commitment to improve things — again, all played out collectively.”

I meet on occasion with the Deputy Minister and others to talk about building capacity. In preparation for one meeting, I discussed building capacity with the BCPVPA’s Professional Development Advisory Committee. We agreed on two elements. First that building capacity needed to be directed toward a mission, vision or goal that focused on raising the bar and reducing the achievement gap. continue page 12
A whole lot of benefits

Qualicum Beach Middle School in School District #69 has been using Whole Faculty Study Groups for the past two years to address student achievement, improve instructional strategies and as the system and structure to promote collaboration and meaningful dialogue. In the February 2006, Adminfo, the school shared the 2004/05 accomplishments, lessons learned and goals for the upcoming year. In this article, the school provides the 2005/06 results from each of the study groups and their next steps in improving student achievement.

by Jessica Antosz, Don Boyd and Karl Clauset

Whole Faculty Study Groups (WFSG) is a student driven approach to professional learning. It has as its core “improving student achievement” and identifying at the skills, knowledge, and instructional strategies that the staff uses to improve student performance.

Carlene Murphy, author of several WFSG books, writes, “It is a job-embedded, self-directed, professional development system designed to build communities of learners in which professionals continuously strive to increase student learning.”

Based on the school’s annual growth plan and an examination of classroom, grade-wide, and school-wide student performance data, the Qualicum Beach Middle School staff formed eight study groups for the 2005/06 school year — two groups addressing student learning needs in literacy, three groups focused on numeracy needs, and three groups focused on social responsibility needs. Each study group engaged in cycles of action research involving collecting baseline data on student learning through teacher-designed classroom assessments, identifying instructional strategies to address learning gaps, trying strate-
gies out in classes, assessing their effectiveness through data analysis and looking at student work, and deciding next steps.

Beginning in May 2006, all staff, including teacher, support staff, parents, and administration began examining a variety of data to assess the impact of study group work on student learning. The data included classroom data, school-wide and grade-wide data such as results from teacher developed assessments, Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) results, data from student, parent and staff surveys, student grades in classes, participation information, tracking referrals both academic and social information, report card data, and reading and writing samples. Subsequent meetings were held to discuss, analyze, categorize the information, and establish new goals and new study groups for the 2006/07 school year.

Numeracy #1
Activity-based Projects

The guiding question for this group was, “How can we improve student participation, attitude and satisfaction, while meeting learning outcomes, through the use of activity-based projects that correlate with each unit of study?” The study group focused on the five grade 8 Math classes consisting of 145 students. They designed four math projects and activities that were used grade-wide to address their guiding question and specific math concepts: measurement project (fractions), design project (area and perimeter), real estate project (ratio and percent) and problem-solving algebra (equations). They also developed an eight-question follow-up survey for students regarding their level of satisfaction with the project-based approach.

Based on the survey data, they concluded that student participation, attitude and satisfaction improved through the use of projects. They also found that students were more likely to complete project assignments than regular assignments. Student survey responses indicated that project-based and relationships and 3D modeling, revising and improving the 2005/06 projects, and assessing the impact of project-based activities on learning mathematical concepts.

Numeracy #2
Problem Solving Grade 6

The focus for this group was “How to improve grade 6 students’ ability to solve math word problems?” They designed their own grade level pre-assessment tool that was administered in October 2006 to all five grade 6 classes totaling 155 students. The assessment tool included: computation problem solving, measurement problem solving and comprehensive (multiple step) problem solving. They also developed and modeled lessons for one another and acquired learning resources to assist them in improving students’ ability to solve word problems.

The study group noted that there was a significant increase in students’ ability to solve word problems.

They decided to continue to work together for 2006/07 and to further develop learning strategies to address students’ ability to solve word problems. Their goal is to further improve performance in computational and comprehensive problem-solving and to have 85% of students able to successfully complete computation, measurement and comprehensive word problems.

Numeracy #3
Problem Solving Grade 7

The guiding question for this group was, “How can we improve grade 7 students’ ability to solve mathematical word problems?” The study group worked with four grade 7 math classes consisting of 119 students. The
group developed a five-question assessment tool for both pre- and post-assessments. The assessment included questions on percent and fractions, coin problems, probability, division and multiplication, and perimeter and area. The group then worked on each problem type and identified or developed sample problems on overhead transparencies, strategies and lessons to use with students to improve their problem solving.

The study group’s target was 75% of students being able to complete word problems successfully. The percentage of students who were able to correctly solve word problems increased in each of the identified areas. One of the recommendations from this study group was to spiral math problem-solving throughout the school year rather than to teach it as a specific unit.

The end product for the study group was creating a teacher binder, *Word Problem Solving Resource*, of overhead math problems with accompanying strategies and lessons. This resource was provided to each grade 7 Math teacher and is currently being used by all teachers in the 2006/07 school year.

This study group has stayed together for 2006/07 and is continuing to address students’ ability to solve word problems and to further develop instructional strategies for teacher use.

**Literacy #1**

**Reading Comprehension:**

The group focused on improving students’ reading comprehension in two grade 8 English classes consisting of 54 students. They developed a three-point self-assessment tool (often, sometimes, rarely) to determine the frequency that students used “before reading, during reading and after reading” strategies. Each of these categories consisted of five to seven reading strategies. After analyzing data from the self-assessment, the teachers chose to focus on “questioning skills” that students could use before, during and after reading. They identified specific questions for students to ask before, during, and after reading, modeled using these questions with students, had student develop their own questions, and had students practice using these questions in their reading. The group created a binder of lessons, resource materials, samples of student work, and assessment data. This binder was shared with other teachers and is currently in use for the 2006/07 school year.

From pre- and post-student self-assessments, the group found that students slightly increased their us-
age of questioning strategies (before, during, after reading). Through classroom assessments, teachers found a slight increase in students’ ability to identify key facts, themes and to make inferences.

This study group continued together in 2006/07 and narrowed their focus to “before reading strategies” and students’ ability to access prior knowledge.

**Literacy #2**
**Study Skills**

The group focused on improving students’ ability to use note-taking and identify key facts from their reading. They created a four-point scoring rubric (not yet within expectations, meets expectations (minimally), fully meets expectations and exceeds expectations) based on the BC Performance Standards scoring rubrics and quick scales. Teachers provided instruction in taking “power-notes,” based on the work of Leyton Schnellert, to one grade 7 class (28 students) and two grade 8 classes (57 students). The study group created a binder of lessons, learning resources, an assessment tool, and data regarding student achievement. This binder has been made available to other teachers for their use during 2006/07.

Overall there was a slight increase in student achievement in both boys and girls at the Grade 7 and 8 levels.

At the end of the 2005/06 school year, the study group members decided that they would disband and join other study groups.

**Social Responsibility #1**
**Leadership Development**

This study group focused on improving students’ ability to describe and understand the characteristics of leadership and to become more involved in both their school and community in leadership roles. The study group developed a survey that assessed the level of understanding that students in grades 6, 7 and 8 had on the qualities of being a positive leader, designed leadership lessons for all grade 6 and 7 students, created a binder of leadership lessons for all staff, and revised the student leadership program at the school.

The study group continued their work in 2006/07 and focused on developing more opportunities for students to assume leadership roles within their school and community and ensuring that students understand the many roles and characteristics of being a leader.

**Social Responsibility #2**
**Respectful Learning Environment**

The guiding question for this study group was, “How can we empower students to be proactive in creating a mutually respectful learning environment?” The study group developed a survey that focused on eight criteria for being socially responsible. These included: discrimination against others, empathy for others, participation and involvement, morality (right from wrong), teamwork, taking personal responsibility, taking action against bullying and world responsibility. This survey was given to two grade 8 classes consisting of 58 students. The survey data identified two areas (morality/doing the right thing and taking action against bullying) that needed to be addressed.

The study group followed up the survey with lessons and discussion of case scenarios to enhance the students’ ability to make the right decision and to take actions against bullying.

Data from a post-assessment survey indicated an increase in awareness of appropriate responses. In addition, data from the monthly referrals for the whole school indicated that the total number of student referrals for 2005/06 dropped from 441 to 265 and that the number of bullying situations also dropped from eight to five. The number of referrals for the two grade 8 classes indicated that the sample group had a fewer number of referrals per pupil and no situations of bullying.

The group had set their target at 75% of students being proactive in creating a mutually respectful learning environment.

The group decided to stay together for 2006/07 and to continue the development of this area for the following year, expand the sample group to include all grade 8 classes, and revise the survey.
The focus for this study group was on having students develop socially responsible behavior by showing tolerance towards others in the school and community. The group developed a five-question survey that focused on social issues such as race, body image, and looks. This survey was administered to all five grade 8 classes totaling 145 students. After the data was collected they delivered a series of lessons based on the series “flipped” that demonstrated the problems associated with stereotyping people. The lessons that were developed have become part of the Career and Personal Planning curriculum for grade 8 students.

Lessons Learned:

Students’ views and the acceptance of people that are different than themselves improved after the completion of the lessons in each of the four categories.

The study group has continued the work of creating a tolerance and acceptance of others in the 2006/07 school year.

Ensuring that dates are set and meetings held on a regular basis.

Monitoring that groups complete logs for each meeting and update action plans as needed.

Securing funding for study groups to purchase resources.

Giving regular feedback to each study group and asking probing questions to improve the quality and rigor of study group work.

Arranging professional development for study groups to improve their skills with creating common assessments, analyzing data, engaging in action research and using protocols for looking at student work.

Providing each group with the necessary school data to help them with their work.

Creating mechanisms for regular sharing of study group work among study groups and with parents and the community.

Educating new staff members about the WFSG model and involving them in one of the study groups.

Next Steps

WFSG study groups at Qualicum Beach Middle School continued into the 2006/07 school year. The whole staff along with the parents met in May and June 2007 to reflect on the work that the study groups did this past year, reviewed the school data and identified areas that are in need of improvement for the 2007/08 year. In recognition of the work that has been done throughout the year, the staff shared their successes and challenges at the final staff meeting and celebration in June.

For information about Whole Faculty Study Groups visit the website at http://www.murphyswfsg.org/definition.htm

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Assessing Trust
A pivotal leadership element

by Julia Hengstler

“Leadership is getting results in a way that inspires trust. Anything else is management and administration, but these are not leadership ... [and] Trust is a discipline.”
Steven M. R. Covey (telephone conference, March 30, 2007)

Trust — it’s something that all too often leaders take for granted, but take a moment to ask yourself: how much does your staff trust you as a leader?; how much do you trust your staff?; are your perceptions of trust levels accurate? These are the pivotal questions that are the very roots and foundation of leadership and organizational functionality. Trust is one of the values Kidder (1996) found universal across cultures. Despite the vital nature of trust, as late as 2002, Bryk and Schneider wrote, “Although social trust in school communities has emerged in a few studies as a key element in improving schools, little systematic research existed on this topic as we began our work. Little attention has been focused on the nature of trust as a substantive property of the social organization of schools, on how much trust levels actually vary among schools, and how this may relate to their effectiveness.” (2002, p. 12)

More recently, in Sustainable Leadership, Hargreaves & Fink wrote, “Trust in schools is essential” (2006, p. 215). In establishing oneself in a new leadership position, developing trust is a critical task. Yet even for established leaders, trust remains critical; trust must be maintained or in certain circumstances regained (if possible).”

Bryk and Schneider’s (2002, 2003) research in more than 400 schools found that social trust among teachers, parents and school leaders “improves much of the routine work of schools” (2003, p. 41) and “reduces the sense of risk associated with change” (2003, p. 43). Similarly, Bolam et al. (2005) found that mutual trust is among the eight characteristics of an effective pro-
Not only is trust essential for change, but it is the foundational element for any relationship in/among organizations, as well as for organizational leadership. For Hargreaves and Fink (2006), trust is an important segment of leadership knowledge and most specifically insider knowledge. They define the three critical types of leadership knowledge necessary for succession as:

**Inbound:** the knowledge that can change, shift or make a mark on a school.

**Insider:** the knowledge gained from and exercised with other members of the community to improve the school after becoming known, trusted and accepted by them.

**Outbound:** the knowledge that reflects over time to maintain previous improvements and continue them past an administration. (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 73)

Additionally, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) state that, regrettably schools “are mainly preoccupied with in-bound knowledge” (p. 73). Consequently, schools place less value on aspects such as insider knowledge and by extension, trust.

Another important recent work on trust is S.M.R. Covey’s (2006c) *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything*. Although not geared for the educational leadership or academic research market per se, the book makes some unique practical contributions to the study of trust. Like Bryk and Schneider (2002, 2003), Covey (2006c) argues that not only is trust essential for change, but it is the foundational element for any relationship in/among organizations, as well as for organizational leadership (Covey, 2006c). His findings indicate that increased trust reduces the time and money required for organizations to accomplish all kinds of tasks (Covey, 2006c). According to Covey (2006c), the reverse is also true. Covey’s work (2006c) posits a trust “tax” or “dividend” will be applied to an individual’s words and actions based on context and history.

Covey (2006c) categorizes and characterizes seven levels of tax/dividend groupings as: Nonexistent Trust (80% Tax), Very Low Trust (60% Tax), Low Trust (40% Tax), Trust Issues (20% Tax), Trust is Not an Issue (No Tax/Dividend), Trust Is a Visible Asset (20% Dividend), and World-Class Trust (40% Dividend) (pp. 22-24). A Nonexistent Trust level, for example, is categorized by “dysfunctional environment and toxic culture (open warfare, sabotage, grievances, lawsuits, criminal behavior), militant stakeholders, intense micromanagement, redundant hierarchy, [and] punishing system and structures” (Covey, 2006c, p. 22). This means that most of what is said or done in this organization is discounted, disregarded or second-guessed at a rate of about 80% (Covey, 2006c). In contrast, a world-class level is characterized by high collaboration and partnering; effortless communication; positive, transparent relationships with employees and all stakeholders; fully aligned systems and structures; [as well as] strong innovation, engagement, confidence and loyalty. (Covey, 2006c, p. 24)

This world-class trust level is accompanied by a 40% dividend (Covey, 2006c). A dividend is “like a performance multiplier, elevating and improving every dimension of your organization and your life … [it] materially improves communication, collaboration, execution, innovation, strategy, engagement, partnering, and relationships with all stakeholders” (Covey, 2006c, p. 17). This is consistent with Hargreaves and Fink’s (2006) assertions: “Trust works. It
The lack of value for personal regard is perhaps where the catch-all aim of Covey’s work falls short for the educational sector.

improves organizations, increases achievement, and boosts energy and morale” (pp. 215-216).

From Covey’s (2006c) point of view, trust starts from the inside/out-growing from individuals keeping promises they make to themselves. In contrast, Bryk and Schneider (2002, 2003) begin their assessment at the interpersonal level. This difference is reflected in their relational groupings. Bryk and Schneider (2002, 2003) classify their groups as teacher/student, teacher/teacher, teacher/parent, all groups/principal. Covey (2006c), however, theorized five concentric rings of trust: self trust, relational trust, organizational trust, market trust (organizational-educationally speaking, school or district-reputation) and societal trust. Yet both Covey (2006c) and Bryk and Schneider (2002, 2003) agree on the importance of observable behavior, discernment, and their impact on a group as they relate to trust. Covey (2006c) writes, “we tend to judge others based on their behavior, and ourselves based on our intent. In almost all situations, we would do well to recognize the possibility — even probability — of good intent in others … [sic] sometimes despite their observable behavior.”

In choosing to look beyond the behavior of others (especially teenage children or troubled coworkers) and affirming our belief in them and in their positive intent, we lift them. Our own behavior in doing so gives expression to our higher motives and caring intent. (p. 84)

Bryk and Schneider (2003) have written, [individuals] “are constantly discerning the intentions embedded in the actions of others” (p. 41); “discernments take into account the history of previous interactions. In the absence of prior contact, participants may rely on the general reputation of the other and also on [mutual] commonalities” (p. 41); “discernments tend to organize around four specific considerations: respect, personal regard, competence in core role responsibilities, and personal integrity” (p. 42).

The authors’ earlier work, Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), provided a more detailed academic description: At its most basic (intrapersonal) level, relational trust is rooted in a complex cognitive activity of discerning the intentions of others. These discernments occur within a set of role relations (interpersonal level) that are formed both by the institutional structure of schooling and by the particularities of an individual school community, with its own culture, history, and local understandings … these trust relations culminate in important consequences at the organizational level, including more effective decision-making, enhanced social support for innovation, more efficient social control of adults’ work, and an expanded moral authority to “go the extra mile” for the children. (p. 22)

Here, Bryk and Schneider (2002) articulate an importance of roles and role relations for building trust that is not seen in Covey (2006c). The importance the authors (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, 2003) placed on this aspect explains to a large extent the relational grouping differences when compared with Covey (2006c). Both the works of Bryk and Schneider (2002, 2003) and Covey (2006c) claim four critical components of trust (Some of these overlap with Kidder’s (1996) other universal values: loyalty, respect, freedom, mercy (love/compassion), justice, as well as the valuing of the individual and the community); however, Bryk and Schneider (2002, 2003) say trust is dependent on respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity while Covey (2006c) states trust...
is dependent on integrity, intent, capabilities and results — thus devoid of the facet of interpersonal relationships. In both cases, the work of Covey (2006c) and Bryk and Schneider (2002, 2003) state that a compromise of any one of their four core trust aspects “can be sufficient to undermine a discernment of trust for the overall relationship” (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 23).

The lack of value for personal regard is perhaps where the catch-all aim of Covey’s (2006a,b,c) work falls short for the educational sector. As Bryk and Schneider (2002) state, the social dynamics of schools “are much more important, from a productivity perspective, than in settings characterized by well-defined and routinized production process[es]” (p. 20) such as those of business or government. They state that “A complex web of social exchanges conditions the basic operations of schools. Embedded in the daily social routines of schools is an interrelated set of mutual dependencies among all key actors: students, teachers, principals and administrators, and parents” (p. 20).

Bryk and Schneider (2002) add: “In general, interpersonal trust deepens as individuals perceive that others care about them and are willing to extend themselves beyond what their role might formally require in any given situation. Principals, for example, show personal regard when they create opportunities for teachers’ career development. Expressing concern about personal issues affecting teachers’ lives is another way in which principals reach out to their staff. Correspondingly, teachers who exhibit caring commitments toward students internalize obligations more encompassing and diffuse than is typically specified in collective bargaining agreements or school board work rules.” (p. 25)

They conclude, “Personal regard thus represents a powerful dimension of trust discernment in school contexts. As noted earlier, the social encounters of schooling are more intimate than typically found in associative relationships within most modern institutions” (p. 25).

Both Bryk and Schneider (2002, 2003) and Covey (2006c) state the juxtaposition of their four core characteristics with observable behaviours is central to building trust.

Covey’s (2006c) work provides some fresh perspectives on trust. Firstly, Covey (2006c) argues trust is a discipline, competency and measurable factor. He defines “counterfeit” behaviours that look like actions intended to inspire trust, but which are not actually well-intentioned, and therefore undermine trust relationships (Covey, 2006c). He also states that even if we do not already embody the core elements and 13 behaviours, we can behave our way into them (Covey, 2006c).

The Speed of Trust book and website provide a practical framework, assessment tool set and methods to develop – and even recover – trust (Covey, 2006a,b,c). To support his work, Covey (2006a,b) produced a series of online assessment tools to determine personal “credibility gaps” with your stakeholders. Some useful instruments are: “Who Trusts You?” personal credibility, the 13 behaviors at work and personal practice of the 13 behaviors or their counterfeits (Covey, 2006a,b).

The work of Kidder (1996), Bolam et al. (2005), Hargreaves & Fink (2006), Bryk and Schneider (2002, 2003), as well as Covey (2006a,b,c; 2007), all underscore the importance of trust. While Covey’s (2006a,b,c) tools do not address the interpersonal and personal regard aspects emphasized by Bryk & Schneider (2002, 2003), they do provide a starting point for assessing perceptions of trust and a way to further develop your leadership capacity. Trust is the fundamental currency of leadership. It is a pivotal element – perhaps the pivotal element – that allows leaders to lead. To lead, educational administrators must cultivate, maintain – and at times regain – the trust of their stakeholder groups. So, “How much do your stakeholders trust you?”

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Cover art Our cover art this month is by Yeon Son who was a student at Sentinel Secondary in West Vancouver when she completed this work last year. Yeon is now studying at the Rhode Island School of Art and Design. Our thanks to Yeon, Barbara Sunday, her art teacher, and Barbara Jones, her principal.
Like a two-legged stool, however, this pair of elements seemed in need of a third leg. The twin criteria of a mission — even a commonly held mission — and of activities directed toward the mission does not seem sufficient.

The necessary third leg is a framework that includes some important agreements. First, that classroom instruction is the cardinal leverage point for improvement in achievement and, second, that professional learning activities, allocating resources and making personal commitments must be aligned with an informed agreement on a robust and moral approach to classroom instruction that will ground any plan for building capacity.

Unfortunately the adoption of an instructional paradigm, whatever is chosen, will stand at the heart of resistance to an overall plan for building capacity. This resistance stems from an unsupportable view of professionalism as autonomy that allows one to justify actions on the basis of personal opinion whether or not informed by research and best practice. Teachers and educational leaders need to redefine and adhere to a more defensible definition. I repeat Fullan’s quote of Richard Elmore: “Educators equate professionalism with autonomy — getting to use their own judgment, to exercise discretion, to determine the conditions of their own work in classrooms and schools. In fact, professionalism outside of education is exactly the opposite of this definition. Professionals gain their social authority not by exercising autonomy, but by subscribing to an externally-validated body of knowledge, by agreeing to have their discretion limited by that knowledge, and by facing sanctions if they operate outside that body of knowledge.”

Principal and vice-principals have the BCPVPA Leadership Standards as our “externally validated body of knowledge.” Our challenge is to lead discussions among ourselves and others to refine and flesh out that body of knowledge. It’s also up to us to lead respectful discussions with other educators to identify the externally validated body of knowledge that will lead us to a common understanding of effective classroom practices and to increased achievement for all of our students.
A district where heavy metal rocks
A hands-on program for students builds success by establishing learning partnerships within the construction industry

by Leslie Dyson

The Heavy Metal Rocks program, offered to secondary school students in the Prince George school district, is not just a lot of fun; it has turned some kids’ lives around.

“Ever see 32 kids walking on air?” That’s how Rory Summers, the district’s Career and Technical Centre coordinator, summed it up.

From April 25 to 28, when the snow finally left, students from five high schools learned the basics of operating 16 pieces of heavy equipment, including front-end loaders, backhoes, graders, articulated rock trucks, a forklift, a rubber-tired backhoe, excavators, dozers, a packer, a mobile 80-ton crane and a truck crane. Most importantly, they learned how to do so safely.

Brian Toll, principal of DP Todd Secondary, said, “it seems to be picking up speed. More and more students are getting involved as the kids who’ve been through the program talk about it. They vote with their feet.”

Its success is due to the concerted effort and commitment of all players (the school district, the College of New Caledonia, the Prince George Construction Association, the Operating Engineers’ union and WorkSafeBC). They also have a deep appreciation for the special role each performs.

Toll said, “The way the program is run, it’s so professional, it’s set up for success.”

The instructors are experienced operating engineers. “The operators are so positive and enthusiastic about passing on their skills,” said Rosalind Thorn, president of the construction association.

Construction contractors spend some of their time watching students to see who would be assets for their company. “Many of these students end
up getting full-time jobs from the program,” Toll said.

Ken Morland, branch manager for Sterling Crane and chair of the steering committee for the program, said construction contractors appreciate that these young people are getting hands-on experience.

He said he enjoys his involvement because “kids are fun to work with” and the students and parents obviously appreciate the experience. “One time, a single mom came up to me crying,” he said. “She had a boy, 15 or 16. She was having a bad time with him, but she saw him running a grader.” Seeing that he had a promising future ahead of him brought her to tears. “He got on with one of the contractors. He’s probably still working in the industry.”

Herb Conat from the Operating Engineers’ union had a similar experience. He recalled one mother coming up to him and saying, “My son would never have finished high school if not for this program.”

“The parents are just blown away and amazed,” agreed Thorn. “Lots say they wish they would have had this opportunity.”

Funnily enough, that was also the reaction of the operating engineer instructors when the program was introduced three years ago. Morland said, “One of the first things they said was, ‘Where the hell was this when I was a kid?’”

The contractors provide the 16 pieces of equipment. Adding up the cost of the equipment and the volunteer time would probably total $450,000, Conat said. WorkSafe supplies students with hard hats, gloves, safety vests and goggles. Everything they need to work safely, with the exception of the steel-toe boots that are also required.

Morland said, “We treat them [the students] like a crew going to work.” To this end, they arrive ready for work at 6:45 a.m. The day begins with a “toolbox talk” on safety presented by WorkSafe. Before they approach any piece of equipment they learn about the hazards on the site.

“The whole safety aspect has to be so clear,” said Toll. “Often kids feel they’re invincible.”

Because the safety training is so comprehensive, Summers said the greatest concern comes when the parents and dignitaries arrive on the final day to see students demonstrate what they’ve learned. “They’re the biggest hazard,” he said. “They’ve not been through the safety orientation ... it’s like herding cats.” He explained that they pay little attention to safety beepers and notices as they move directly to the demonstrations.

Student Dustin Sketchly said, “It was a really great experience. I’m thinking about something in the trades and I wanted to get a feel for it.” His father is a heavy duty mechanic.

Both Dustin and Eric Sullivan (entering their graduating year) liked the front-end loader best. “It’s fairly easy and you can move a lot with it,” said Dustin.

Eric has been drawn to heavy equipment almost his whole life. “When I was a little kid, I played with Lego and Tonkas. I always watched the snow plow.” It’s the talk about high-paying jobs that’s keeping his interest now.

Through the program, Eric said he discovered that knowing how to drive a car has little relevance to operating heavy equipment. “Most of them are quite different. It’s more like a video game, but you use your hands and your feet.” The experience confirmed his passion for construction. “I do want

Heavy Metal Rocks in Prince George puts students on the road to a successful career in skilled construction jobs.
to pursue a career in the construction industry. I’m taking math and physics next year. I might go into some kind of engineering.”

Samantha Hogan, grade 12 and the only girl in this past session, told her principal, Brian Toll, “We need to get more girls involved in this!” She’s encouraging her little sister and her friends to take the program. “I would do it again, if I could,” she said.

One thing that she observed was that the boys approached the machinery with a different attitude. “The boys are more willing to test the machinery hard. They take more risks. I was afraid I would break things.”

She said operating equipment was a lot harder than she thought. “Excavators are ridiculously hard,” she said.

Her interest in heavy equipment came from her work last year at a lumber mill where she had to pressure wash machinery. “I wondered what it would be like to work on a construction site.” Now she thinks she’d like to operate a grader some day.

Only 32 students are accepted each year. “It’s not an easy program to get into,” Eric said.

Students go through a rigorous screening process that involves writing a 200-word essay, demonstrating the right attitude in an interview and having the support of their parents.

Heavy Metal Rocks provides tuition-free, two-year, dual-credit, dual-stream trades training. Students receive additional technical training at the College of New Caledonia. After a little work experience over the summer, they return to their high schools in grade 12 to finish the courses required for graduation.

Thorn said, “We just completed our third year with no end in sight … It’s such a positive experience for the students.” Morland said he believes that if everyone maintains the same high levels of commitment, “we can keep it going for the next 20 years.”

Other school districts are thinking about introducing similar programs. Nechako Lakes district has been running a program for 20 years teaching students in the area how to operate logging equipment and Fort St. John is running a camp-like program that introduces students to work in the oil and gas industry, said Summers.

It’s a gratifying experience for everyone, especially the students. “You can see the excitement in the kids’ faces,” said Toll.

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Have you ever wondered what Winston Churchill, Tom Cruise, Walt Disney, Agatha Christie, John F. Kennedy and even my son might have in common? Besides being celebrities in their own right, they all had trouble reading or suffered from a form of dyslexia. Many would have shown signs of ADD or ADHD and they likely would have spent time in remedial classes. Many would have been dubbed “slow learners” or “lazy” and maybe TMR. Undoubtedly, like my grown son, they would have “felt dumb.”

For many of these students, the problem could be Irlen’s Syndrome, named after Helen Irlen who identified the condition and worked on ways to minimize its impact. Irlen noted that hundreds of students who had difficulty reading would become fluent readers when specific colored overlays were placed over the black and white page. The change was sudden and dramatic.

The work with the colored overlays may sound familiar to many. In fact, I was familiar with the idea but did not understand who might benefit from them. The colored or tinted overlays are just a piece of the puzzle and unfortunately many educators have got a hold of a variety of colored acetate sheets and tried them with students to find some make somewhat of a difference, and left it at that.

But imagine if the colors and tints were multiple and specific? My 19-year-old son has always been a reluctant reader at best and shied away from print. Although intelligent and athletically gifted, he complained that he saw more white spaces on the page than words. He was highly distractible and appeared unmotivated. He failed first year college English twice and did poorly on exams. After failing, yet another exam, I asked his coach, “How can this be? He loves this

Rod Giles, a principal from Creston, shares his story about his son’s long struggle to make sense of the written word. Other educators will likely find the information helpful in their work with poor readers.
Rod Giles is principal of Adam Roberts Elementary in Creston. He can be reached by email at rgiles@sd8.bc.ca

subject and enjoys you as a teacher.” His coach suggested, “He might have Irlen’s Syndrome which is accentuated by bright light and black print on white paper.” My son, like all the rest had written his exams under horribly bright lights in the gymnasium and, of course, the exam was on white paper.

Fortunately, there is an Irlen’s Syndrome screener in Cranbrook and after his coach/teacher asked him a series of questions posted to the Internet, he felt it was definitely worthwhile taking him to the local screener.

After 90-minutes of intense work, my son emerged shaking his head and holding three tinted overlays. His report, “This is weird, dad. The words seem like they fall out of my mouth, I can track, and the words don’t move and I see them better than the lines.”

We then got an appointment with the Irlen’s diagnostician. I was present. She asked him to read lines of random letters and numbers while asking him to look through different tints of different colored lenses. I could hear his reading becoming smoother and smoother then, as different lenses were applied, begin to get rough again. The diagnostician came back to the lens which resulted in the smoothest reading. She then moved on to the next color, each time finding the best tint.

Blake was being affected by three colors. The next thing I found stunning. Blake held the lens to his eye and the diagnostician lectured him on a topic he knew nothing about. She questioned him and he answered accurately. Next, she asked him to place the lens down and she continued lecturing. There was a click somewhere in the room, Blake turned away from the speaker. The photocopier in an adjacent room began and Blake turned again. A staff member walked into the room and again he was distracted. “Why are you turning away?” the diagnostician asked. “You’re boring,” was Blake’s reply. “Put the lens back on.” Again, Blake was able to stay focused on the teacher and ignore the noises and movement in the room.

Further, when interviewed with the lens on, Blake answered fluently and had no trouble providing sound rationale for his answers. Without the lens, his answers were hesitant and his rationale usually began with “I dunno.”

I was touched emotionally by the demonstration. There he was 19-years-old. He had been to Special Ed., had had psychological testing, avoided reading at all times yet loved books on tape. He had struggled all of his school career. He had been branded a “dumb jock,” and told his parents he was dumb and that his brain didn’t work.

Blake has tinted glasses now and when he phones home to talk to us, we can tell if he has his glasses on or not, simply by the conversation. Fortunately, contact lenses can be colored and fitted to remedy self-consciousness as he is reluctant to wear his glasses to class. “They will think I’m a druggie,” he states.

The damage to his self-esteem and confidence as a learner are evident and deep, yet in the short time he has had his tinted glasses, I notice his writing has improved and he repeats with pride that he can work on his essays and research projects much easier. Blake, after 15 years of struggling, is a learner now, can begin to gain confidence and maybe survive at the university level.

I am told approximately 10% of all people have Irlen’s Syndrome to a significant degree. Wow, if this is true I have almost 40 students in my school that can be helped. Already we have identified five. These students present themselves as lazy, unmotivated, highly distractible, dyslexic and have trouble with comprehension and memory.

My question is, “How many students are in your school, struggling, learning that they too are “dumb,” can’t stop the words moving, see rivers and streams on the page and are taking up time and space in Learning Assistance and remedial classes? How can you identify and help them?”

Fortunately, our area has a trained Irlen’s screener who refers students to the diagnostician for glasses and contacts. Hopefully your district will do something significant to identify and help these students. In California, I am told every grade three student is screened for Irlen’s.

For more information, visit the Irlen’s website at http://www.irlen.com. I hope you will be able to help more students become successful and they will not have 15 years of struggling as my son did.

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What changes when one retires? Certainly not one’s approach to life. If you are a leader and take-charge person, as most school principals and vice-principals are, you will continue to be so in retirement. This is why we find these people in leadership roles in all kinds of organizations and clubs or maybe in a new management career.

I come across a lot of retired school leaders in my own activities, which include being the editor of the Nanaimo Probus newsletter. On the Probus management committee, one can always find one or two people who have come from the school system. For those of you contemplating retirement, look up the organization’s website (http://www.probus.org) and learn about this wonderful organization started by Rotarians.

Sometimes Corine and I say we are too busy, we are retired, we should sit more and read. When my Adminfo editor, Richard Williams, asked me if I planned to continue to write for the magazine and do retirement income planning for BCPVPA members for another year, I said ‘yes’ without even thinking about it. Corine said, ‘I thought you were going to read more.’ I told her I would, but now it would include reading tax, pension, financial and other related literature. The ultimate retirement will have to wait a little longer.

This year so far has been a busy one with our visit to France and just last month, a ten-day trip with friends through Northern BC, including the BC Ferries 18-hour mini cruise from Port Hardy to Prince Rupert. We had heard good things about this trip from other people who had sailed on the Queen of the North. Of course, that ship went down on March 22, 2006 at about 11.30 pm when it failed to alter course and ploughed at into Gill Island. We sailed aboard the replacement, the Northern Adventure, and we were given the opportunity to visit her bridge and learn about all the navigational equipment that pretty well guarantees a safe arrival. But we sailed by daylight with hundreds of passengers “keeping watch” which was reassuring. The Northern Adventure has similar seating options and restaurant facilities as most larger BC ferries and the only hint of a “cruise” was the white table cloth at night along with an option of roast beef (which was excellent) and a glass of wine. The scenery, of course, is spectacular. In Smithers we stayed at the Log Pile Lodge, a 20-room B&B built by a Swiss couple (from logs of course). There I ran into the Smithers BCPVPA Chapter conducting a workshop. It was fun seeing some familiar faces from my last workshop there in the late 1990s.

On our return to Ladysmith we had more overnight visitors but Corine says she is going to shut the “hotel” down for a while now that our fall activities are starting up. For me, that includes doing plans and maybe a retirement/financial management workshop or two. You can not plan your retirement early enough. I am not suggesting that you should pine for retirement and not enjoy your work and career, but long-term planning is the ideal way to put today’s financial decisions in their proper perspective. This is how we see it here in Ladysmith when we look back.
Permit me both to introduce myself and to describe the thought process that has motivated me to assume this new position of leadership as executive director of the BCPVPA. As Seneca has noted, every new beginning comes from the end of another experience. I am no different.

I have enjoyed a most rewarding career as an educator in eastern Ontario. With a career that has spanned four decades in both elementary and secondary schools, my path is similar to that experienced by many Adminfo readers. Of course, there have been deviations from the role of in-school administrator. I have had many opportunities to serve colleagues at district, provincial and national levels and those involvements have helped to round out my experience base.

The BCPVPA has played a significant role in my journey as an educator. Back in 1997, our Ontario colleagues were embroiled in a job action as legislation had been introduced to effect significant changes for the education community, including the removal of principals and vice-principals from the teacher unions. The guidance provided to Ontario educators by the BCPVPA was the beginning of a long standing and productive relationship between Ontario’s and British Columbia’s instructional leaders.

Based upon these years of service, why in the world would one desire to start afresh when conventional wisdom says it is time to slow down, to smell the roses, to travel and to hone those golf skills.

My belief system is directed by the moral purpose that Les Dukowski has enunciated in his article (see page 2). In my case, this special relationship is with the community of school leaders. Supporting colleagues and providing experiences that will ultimately improve their efficacy has driven much of my professional practice. Symbiotically, the enthusiasm that colleagues exude is a significant motivation to stay involved.

There will be many challenges and the concurrent opportunities to shape education in British Columbia. I firmly believe that our members will take their rightful place as catalysts of positive change not only in this province but also in jurisdictions across this country.

As this school year progresses, it is my intention to work with our board of directors, members and partner groups to search out opportunities to highlight the excellence found throughout this province.

I look forward to the journey.

“Every new beginning comes from some other beginning’s end.”

– Seneca

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A resource locator to link to resources related to any of the BCPVPA Leadership Standards as provided by professional development providers, districts and organizations (to assist BCPVPA members see what professional learning opportunities exist that match the BCPVPA Standards).

A direct connection to important links.

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