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“It takes a village to raise a child”: Educational futures in the troubled ‘village’ of British Columbia

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“It takes a village to raise a child”

There’s something wise and comforting about this saying, with its notions of empathic, extended families, its sense of broader communal caring and benevolent responsibilities, and collaborating for the common good. But if we take the word ‘village’ as a metaphor for community, it’s clear that some communities are troubled, with tensions, divisions, and conflict. So while the concept of the whole community working in collaboration towards an ideal is worthy, a realistic assessment of community context is required to determine if all are sharing in the drive to raise the child. If we consider the province of British Columbia as ‘the village’, and extend the metaphor to consider the Education Plan¹ as ‘the child,’ we discover a provincial community which is fraught, tense, and challenging. This context includes, but is not restricted to:

- an education system struggling to offer quality education because of consistent and pervasive underfunding, with the proportion of the province’s GDP spent on education in decline for some years;
- teachers struggling to meet all learners’ needs in a philosophically-inclusive system that fails to prepare its pre-service teachers for diverse learners, minimally offers in-service, and has systematically reduced specialist support for classroom teachers;
- a recent history of confrontation in the education system with considerable energy devoted to the struggle to control or to resist, which negatively impacts discussions of educational futures;
- a limited ability to build capacity and share promising practices through professional development and networking because of the paucity of funding, because of the energy devoted to conflict rather than construction, and because effective networks and knowledge mobilization and dissemination are not features of the BC education system;

¹ BC Ministry of Education. (2011). *BC’s Education Plan*. <http://www.bcedplan.ca/>

- a potential generation-divide among teachers, with many newly-qualified teachers unable to find full-time work as teachers, primarily because school districts have been forced to cut teachers over the last ten years, but also because many more teachers who are over 60 are still working compared to earlier years;
- an Education Plan where creative ideas for educational futures have been combined with antiquated concepts of managerial control over the profession of teaching, ensuring continuing conflict and division.

Looking at the Education Plan, there are tendencies to praise, emulate, critique, or dismiss the Plan among educators, students, and the public. And we may still need to explore the concept and have those debates. But it's not the immediate priority we should be addressing. It's not the concept we need to fix, it's the context. The 'village' of BC's education system needs a systemic and systematic review and renewal. By focusing on the wider context rather than the defined and somewhat limited parameters of the Education Plan, both the educational context and educational futures can be addressed. By focusing on the Plan alone, contextual factors which impact the plan make any significant progression to explore educational futures unlikely to succeed.

One example of negative context includes the persistent linkage of the Plan to the bargaining objectives of the BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) in areas such as professional growth until late June of 2012, when these demands were referred to a 'facilitated discussion.' The linkage wasted the opportunity for fruitful discussions on professional growth for many months because it mandated an employer-driven model, intended to de-professionalize teachers, and to increase managerial control over teachers' PD. This attack on teacher autonomy led to greater conflict rather than creating any impetus or potential for consensually-agreed-upon improvements and new directions.

This paper has two purposes:

- to continue the exploration of educational futures which includes but is not limited to consideration of the BC Education Plan;
- to consider how to change the context of BC's education system so that environments for students' learning and teachers' work are improved, and parent/community perceptions and satisfaction are increased.

Prior to addressing the BC context in more detail, short reviews of several authors' perspectives on educational change will be considered, all of whom are either Canadian or have had significant influence in Canada. The purpose in reviewing these authors is that each has played a major role in one or more of national, provincial, and district reforms and change in various countries. What might they offer to the many people who are looking for new directions for public education in BC? What might they be omitting? The following section explores a selection of their work before considering its relevance to the BC context.

1. Review of four influential authors' work

Michael Fullan

Whole system reform for innovative teaching and learning. (2011a)

Choosing the wrong drivers for whole education reform. (2011b)

Centre for Strategic Education Seminar Series 204. (2011)²

Michael Fullan spoke to BC school superintendents on his perspectives on whole system reform in September, 2011. Fullan argues:

Let me state the criteria that a right driver must meet in order have deep impact on students and teachers. Does the driver sooner or later: i) foster intrinsic motivation of teachers, and of students; ii) engage them in continuous improvement of teaching and learning; iii) inspire collective or team work; and iv) affect 'all' teachers and schools—100%. (2011a, p. 3)

Even the most hardy provincial Liberal would find it difficult to argue that the intrinsic motivation of BC teachers has been fostered by the government's funding, legislative, and contractual agendas over the last ten years, and while their actions have indeed affected all teachers and schools, few would consider the effects of continued and cumulatively damaging cuts able to inspire anyone who teaches in a K–12 public school.

In terms of the 'wrong' drivers, Fullan states:

The four 'wrong drivers' I identified, using the US and Australia as case examples are (the corresponding right drivers are in parentheses):

1. External, punitive accountability (vs. capacity building)
2. Individual (vs. group) solutions
3. Technology (vs. pedagogy)
4. Piecemeal (vs. systemic) policies. (2011a, p. 4)

While each of these pairings of 'wrong' and 'right' drivers has relevance to the BC context, the first and fourth preferred drivers (capacity building and systemic policies) have arguably been absent in BC in recent years. The focus on individual teacher accountability rather than collective group solutions has been prominent in the BCPSEA discussion papers and tabled language. Accountability demands, while rarely punitive, have been more prominent than capacity-building. With the province tightly controlling and limiting funding, the capacity of school districts to move beyond survival mode has been limited. Districts have been handed most of the problems resulting from inadequate funding, and have been forced to lay off over two thousand teachers, cut many arts programs, close schools, and in many cases barely scrape together effective professional development programs. There have been some notable exceptions in that some districts have maintained strong PD programs—one example being Coquitlam's 'Learning Team' approach:

Learning Teams provide the structure for small groups of educators from the same school or across schools to meet regularly for professional development. The

² <http://www.schoolchange.net/groupsaces/nde/resources/choosing-the-wrong-drivers-for-whole-system.attachment/attachment/FullanSeminarPaper204.pdf>

Professional Networks Series offers opportunities for whole school staffs to come together with the outside voice of a learning partner to engage deeply throughout the school year with particular topics, including literacy, numeracy, formative assessment, and early learning. Schools are directly connected to the District through Learning Support Teachers. These educators focus on building networks and directly assisting classroom teachers to improve instruction, assessment and learning. (School District 43, Coquitlam, p. 4)

Several Okanagan school districts have supported similar teacher inquiry. Richmond School District stressed union-management collaboration in several professional development projects in recent years. All of these examples reflect positive and sustained collaboration involving district and union to support professional learning. They illustrate the point that good practice occurs in these and likely many other BC school districts, thereby providing foundations for future development. So the dichotomy of BC is that systemic tensions caused by provincial government decisions co-exist and interact with some local and positive collaborations in some districts. In these districts, the positive dynamic of local collaboration ameliorates to varying degrees the impact of provincial actions, while in other districts both local and provincial relationships are fraught and tense. Fullan's 'right' and 'wrong' drivers may be one starting point for both district and provincial reflection on how to move forward, by considering how these drivers have and might be applied.

In his 2011 papers, Fullan references his book *All Systems Go* (2010), in which he discussed the role of teacher unions and the relationships between unions and governments. Fullan argued:

Teacher unions have a right to be suspicious about governments (for example in the US or Ontario, pre-2003) after years, and in some cases, decades, of failed reform where teachers received more blame than the "system" did for failing schools. Now, government has to go out of its way to rebuild relationships with the teaching force. It will take years of persistence, patience and perspective. It will be frustrating, sometimes desperately slow, but simply put, there is no way to make whole system reform work without the entire teaching profession and its leaders. (pp. 95–96)

In BC, teacher union suspicion of the Liberal government has many sources linked to funding, contracts, and legislation. As one example, while some of the government-induced cuts to teacher numbers since 2002 can be explained by reduced enrolment, the cuts in teacher numbers in the early tenure of the Liberal government were more than double the rate of reduced student enrolment, with some specialist teacher cuts at close to five-times the rate of declining student enrolment. Cuts of this range and quantity negatively impacted all teachers as workload increased, support for Inclusion declined, and teachers reported work intensification, increased stress, and less capacity to meet all students' needs.³

One less-known issue that increased divisions in the provincial education system was the use of government grants to educational stakeholders. Based on information provided as a result of a Freedom of Information request made by the BCTF, it became clear that the BCTF was systematically and deliberately frozen out of any grant funds which were liberally dispersed to other educational partners during the Liberal government's middle years in office. Between March 2005 and August 2007, the British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC) alone was awarded a total of \$4,297,000 by the provincial government. Some of

³ <http://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Issues/WorklifeWorkload/2009/ExecutiveSummary.pdf>

these grants were strangely labeled ‘for student achievement’, or allocated to pay for the basic operating costs of various organizations. The most bizarre of the BCCPAC grants was \$500,000 for training of parents and educators linked to the issue of crystal methamphetamine use and abuse—a subject perhaps best addressed with specialist knowledge rather than by a parent organization.

In addition, the BCSTA was awarded \$50,000 in May of 2006 to update the “Keeping Schools Safe” book, although no update was ever published. Of the approximately \$24 million doled out to organizations during this period, including the *Vancouver Sun* and *Times-Colonist* (‘Raise a Reader’), BC Principals and Vice-Principals’ Association (BCPVPA), BC School Trustees’ Association (BCSTA), BC School Superintendents’ Association (BCSSA) and others in 2006–07, not one penny was awarded to the BCTF. The \$24 million might have paid for close to 300 teachers, but instead was doled out with minimal accountability for many projects of dubious merit. What these grants reflected was not only the systematic isolation of the union but the co-option of other stakeholders into the Liberal agenda through grants for programs and subsidies to operational costs.

One key need in BC is to consider Fullan’s arguments about including teacher unions and to note how this was achieved in Ontario. In that province, it was understood that all stakeholders had something to offer and to contribute, and if they could work together then capacity-building could be enhanced. Thus, co-option of some and isolation of others needs to be replaced by collaboration involving all educational stakeholders in building better educational futures.

Fullan has been a prolific author in recent years, and I would argue that there is a change in his perspective, with the earlier work reflecting a drive to consider reform in a somewhat technocratic manner—what worked, and how to do it—with minimal consideration or focus on the dynamics of relationships in schools. In a 2001 paper⁴, for instance, Fullan speaks of “reculturing the professional community at the school level” (p. 4), but the school communities he described seemed to be entities there to be shaped into the vision of change deemed appropriate by governments and employers. More recently, his pressure on governments to improve relationships with teacher unions and to build greater trust reflects his current preference for a more inclusive and collaborative system. It can be argued that his views have evolved over time with a greater recognition in recent work of the need to build capacity through collective and more consensual actions, so that those 2011 works referenced above include a richer and more comprehensive analysis of change requiring greater collaboration not only among practitioners in schools but including teacher unions as essential participants in positive educational change. Greater consensus and improved collaboration may not be the current norm in BC, but they should be one priority for future action, and Fullan has much to offer in support of such a priority.

⁴ http://www.michaelfullan.ca/Articles_01/06_01.pdf

Ben Levin

Reforming Education: From origins to outcomes. (2001).

How to change 5000 schools: A practical and positive approach for leading change at every level. (2008).

In his book, *Reforming Education: From origins to outcomes* (2001), Ben Levin discusses ‘adoption’ and ‘implementation’ of policy. In terms of adoption, he states:

Adoption is the process of moving from an initial policy proposal to its final form in an approved form of legislation, regulation or other vehicle... In the adoption process, several elements collide. What began as a slogan or a concept... must be turned into a detailed scheme in the form of legislation, regulation or policy guidelines so that it can actually be put in place in a large and complex system. (pp. 115–116)

In terms of implementation, he argues that “moving from policy to practice is a very uncertain business” (p. 142). He outlines an evolution in research thinking about implementation, with a range of competing views about barriers, ‘fidelity’⁵, or as struggles between competing ideas and powers.

Levin therefore suggests that policy evolves from a general articulation of a concept in a government to the explicit codification in statute or regulation prior to implementation, but that even the complexity of adoption fades when compared to implementation. He outlines four factors which impact implementation: commitment, skills, cultures, and resources. In some cases, there may be support for a policy but no sense of how to implement it, or dislike for a policy and an intent to subvert it:

People make choices about their response to policy on the basis of several factors. One is practicality. Whatever people may think of a policy in the abstract they have to see it as workable in their own situation in order to accept it. What teachers are willing to do depends in large measure on their sense of what is workable in the classroom... Practicality is in turn affected by skills. People who do not know how to do something are likely to see that something as impractical even if other people can do it. Legions of examples can be cited where practices with strong evidence to support them were rejected because they did not fit with common practice. For instance, navies refused to carry fresh fruit on ships to prevent scurvy, doctors resisted the practice of washing hands in hospitals to prevent infection, and many people refused to wear seatbelts to protect against injury in auto accidents. (p. 146)

Levin additionally argues that both in-school and community contexts need to be understood and considered when implementing policy, especially in times of limited or declining resources, with the power and influence of parents often underestimated. Levin expands on this thinking in his book, *How to change 5000 schools: A practical and positive approach for leading change at every level*:

⁵ The term ‘Fidelity’ has been used extensively in USA reforms, often indicating an insistence that teachers must comply with mandated changes, with negative consequences for any failure to comply.

Most educational changes fail for one or more of three main reasons:

1. They are the wrong changes
2. They do not give adequate attention to political dynamics
3. They are not effectively implemented. (2008, p. 67)

He lists a number of actions that policy-makers should avoid, but frequently have not, including opting for charismatic leadership and introducing inappropriate incentives like merit pay or punishing schools. So if, Levin argues, governments and districts avoided such actions, they might bring about real improvement with four approaches which should be implemented concurrently:

- focus on a few key student outcomes that matter most and are most understandable for the public and for educators
- put effort into building capacity for improvement (skills)
- build motivation (will) by taking a positive approach
- work to increase public and political support for an effective, thoughtful, and sustained program of improvement. (2008, pp. 234–235)

Levin closes the book with a consideration of individual action and attitudes that can impact change and generate improvement. Thus he combines individual and systemic approaches, both imbued with some levels of optimism and care for others in what can be challenging and complex contexts.

Levin's comments on implementation might well resonate with those still waiting to see what the implementation of personalized learning actually looks like, or whether the metaphorical 'compass not a map' expression used by the BC government in its messaging actually means they have no clue what implementation involves. Levin's description of implementation as "a very uncertain business" seems like an understatement when considering the still-flimsy Education Plan launched with *PowerPoint* and *YouTube* and dropped onto an unsuspecting populace along with the 'compass' for navigation but no GPS. For some it's like being deliberately dropped into the wilderness and being told to find their way out. But it need not have been—there could have been much greater analysis and discussion of existing literature, promotion and funding of collaboration between organizations, and an avoidance of linking some of the potentially exciting aspects of the Plan to dubious contractual changes to teachers' PD, performance, and evaluation. There might have been greater discussion based in part on teachers', learners', and families' experiences, while connecting these experiences to the existing research literature, instead of the flimsy populist discussion in the Education Plan website.⁶

There could also be some consideration of what has been learned by Levin in terms of 'building motivation' or 'focusing on a few key areas' when creating policy and attempting implementation of the Education Plan. And, like all the other authors considered here, Levin stresses the rebuilding of relationships between government and teacher unions:

The Ontario strategy was intended to contrast sharply with the previous government's antagonistic relationship with teachers and other educators. The government began with the belief that staffs in our schools are committed professionals who have enormous skill and knowledge to contribute to school improvement. Respect for professionals was shown in a variety of ways.

⁵ <http://engage.bcedplan.ca/>

Most important... the government undertook to end the climate of conflict in labour relations by facilitating the signing in 2005 of the unprecedented four-year collective agreements with the Ontario teacher unions. These agreements created the climate of ‘peace and stability’ in labour relations that was essential to achieve the government’s goals for students and to sustain public confidence. (pp. 40–41)

Levin, like Fullan, has much to offer BC in terms of considering how, and how not, to change and improve educational systems. As in Fullan’s later work, he stresses not just the governance imperative and the technocratic steps to make change work, but places considerable importance on building motivation and support for change rather than imposing it. Levin appears more in touch than Fullan with individual educators, how they react to policy implementation possibilities and with the reality of schools. Yet he combines this with a system approach to change and a broad understanding of how educational systems work. He adds a touch of idealism and an optimistic vision that explores positive options to improve education in ways that can be supported and which are potentially sustainable.

Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley

The Fourth Way: The inspiring future for educational change. (2009).

Of the ‘four ways’ of educational change outlined in this book, two are historical, one current, and one projected as a preferred future direction. The first three ways can be summarized as:

- a first way of state support and professional freedom, of innovation but also inconsistency (1945–mid-’70s), ending with the emergence of Thatcher in the UK and Reagan in the USA;
- a second way of market competition and educational standardization in which professional autonomy is lost (late 1980s in the UK, early ’90s in Australia and currently in the USA);
- a third way that tries to navigate between and beyond the market and the state and balance professional autonomy with accountability (1999, primarily in the UK, Ontario after 2003).

A key message from Hargreaves and Shirley is that each of the three ‘Ways’ had their limitations, and that “the educational reform strategies of the Third Way have distracted its founders and followers from their ability to achieve the Way’s original ideas” (2009, p. 19). Thus, the authors argue, there exists the need for a Fourth Way which might build on selective strengths from earlier eras, including the spirit of innovation and flexibility (First Way); urgency to address inequities (Second Way); and ending the “discourse of disgrace” (Third Way) which placed accountability above innovation and inequities.

The Fourth Way is built on a national vision, with government ‘steering and supporting’. It includes three platforms:

1. The six pillars of purpose:
 - an inspiring and inclusive vision
 - strong public engagement
 - achievement through investment
 - corporate educational responsibility
 - students as partners in change, and
 - mindful learning and teaching.

2. The three principles of professionalism:
 - high quality teachers
 - positive and powerful professional associations, and
 - lively learning communities.
3. The four catalysts of coherence:
 - sustainable leadership
 - integrating networks
 - responsibility before accountability, and
 - differentiation and diversity. (pp. 73, 88, 95)

Hargreaves and Shirley argue that some coherence needs to be applied when addressing systemic improvements, but that this does not imply uniformity or total control. In some ways, theirs is a smorgasbord of ideas somewhat haphazardly thrown together but with an appealing optimism, many great ideas, and a few red herrings. And all of the above pillars, principles, and catalysts offer insights and potential directions which could be considered in the BC context.

Hargreaves and Shirley's articulation of "positive and powerful professional associations" offers advice on how teacher unions might engage in higher-profile activities which support teachers' professional needs. Their discussion of "lively learning communities" continues Hargreaves' historical preference for forms of learning communities that respect teacher autonomy rather than the imposed forms favoured by Dufour et al. (2006) and some BC districts and administrators.

The seven qualities⁷ that the authors document (pp. 85–86) in terms of 'mindful teaching' might be a useful reference for a more in-depth discussion of the notion of 'quality teaching' articulated but barely explored in the Education Plan. How might "caring and loving" help to build school connectedness so that all students feel connected and welcomed in their school community? What might "collective responsibility" look like? These ideas expand the parameters of what might be quality teaching, and are worthy of further consideration.

Their notion of networks is also of particular relevance to BC, with its chronic failure to build and sustain networks. BC could consider how to network through accessing a range of other literature including Jackson and Temperley's (2007) discussion of networked learning communities, and Katz, Earl, and Jafaar's (2009) book *Building and connecting learning communities*, or Katz and Earl's (2010) follow-up paper to their book. There are many examples of how to network; the reality is that networking is minimal in BC but crucial to building new educational futures. Within the BCTF, 33 Provincial Specialist Associations (PSAs) offer some networking opportunities and their efforts might form one foundation for expanding and supporting networking. One avenue might be the 'Professional Learning Portal' concept currently being explored by the BCTF and its PSAs. While at an early stage, this project considers how to use technology to connect teachers by providing better access to information on resources, professional development, and mentoring.

⁷ Open-mindedness; caring and loving; stopping (in order to reflect); professional expertise; authentic alignment of the teacher's pedagogy with his or her values; integration; collective responsibility.

Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan

Professional Capital: Transforming teaching in every school. (2012).

Contrasting ‘business’ with ‘professional’ capital, the authors argue against the business capital strategy being adopted in some educational jurisdictions while documenting its failed application in the USA. With quick returns on investment, the business capital model fails to recognize the long-term investment required in education to create and maintain a high-quality teaching force, the foundation of those educational systems with high and sustained success in countries like Singapore and Finland. With its three components of human, social, and decisional capital, Hargreaves and Fullan’s *Professional Capital* argues that professional capital encompasses the range of skills needed to build quality teaching and good education systems. Human capital is, simply put, talent, which, in the authors’ views, education systems need to recognize, develop, extend, and sustain. Social capital consists of the nature of interactions in what the authors argue must be one foundation of the collaborative endeavour of teaching. Education, they argue, is not an individualistic enterprise but a collective one, where positive and skilful collaborations improve outcomes for students and build professionalism in teachers. They also link this argument to the notion of collective rather than individual autonomy, where responsibility and accountability are collective, but where teachers are also trusted and encouraged to exercise their judgment. Decisional capital refers to the making of decisions in complex and evolving contexts:

Making decisions in complex situations is what professionalism is all about. The pros do this all the time. They come to have competence, judgment, insight, inspiration, and the capacity for improvisation as they strive for exceptional performance. They do this when no-one is looking, and they do it with and through their colleagues and the team. They exercise their judgment and decisions with collective responsibility, openness to feedback, and willing transparency. They are not afraid to make mistakes as long as they learn from them. They have pride in their work. They are respected by peers and by the public for knowing what they are doing. They strive to outdo themselves and each other in a spirit of making greater individual and collective contributions. (p. 5)

Hargreaves and Fullan constructively challenge the thinking of teachers, administrators, school districts, teacher unions, and governments, but reserve some of their harshest attacks for those trying to force inappropriate forms of Professional Learning Communities onto teachers:

But the new expectation that professional cultures have to be ones of collective autonomy, transparency and responsibility, that have to be deliberately arranged and structured around these principles, should not be a license for administrative bullying and abuse, or enforced contrivance either. Professional Learning Communities are not professional data communities or professional test score communities. They are not places for administrators to impose questionable district agendas that gather teachers together after busy days in class to pore over spreadsheets simply so they can come up with a quick intervention that will raise test scores in a few weeks or less. They are not places where overloaded literacy coaches convene hurried meetings with harried teachers who scarcely have time to refocus from the previous class before they have to rush off to the next one. Nor are they places where principals and superintendents convert challenging conversations into hectoring harangues, and where all the challenges come from above, with no comeback or reciprocal challenges allowed from teachers themselves. (p. 144)

If one key theme of Hargreaves and Fullan’s book is that education is a collective and collaborative enterprise, an intensely human concern where people, not products, are the focus, then their goal is to energize individuals, schools, and organizations to build capacity through collectively building professional capital and reshaping professional cultures:

In the old days, and still too much today, the professional culture of teaching was one of individual classroom autonomy, unquestioned experience, and unassailable knowledge and expertise. Nowadays, professional cultures are more and more collaborative. Teachers may actually still teach alone for much of the time, but the power of the group—and all of the group’s insights, knowledge, experience and support—is always with them. The best groups are diverse, full of unique individuals bringing their different insights, capabilities, and classroom teaching strategies together around a common purpose. (p. 145)

Hargreaves and Fullan build on the earlier works referenced here. They send out distinct challenges and clear messages that building capacity must be a long-term enterprise that builds on a base of quality teachers and teaching while also recognizing that diverse school cultures make the best of talents within them to create good schools and support student learning. Their guidelines for state, national, and international organizations encourage governments to “push and partner, stimulate and steer” (p. 175), implying guidance of and responsiveness to those working in schools. They also strongly argue for a wholesale redesigning of teaching as a career (through mentoring and networking), and for ‘bringing the teachers back in,’ so that polarization is eliminated as common agendas are developed:

In effect, you cannot get anywhere without widespread teacher ownership. The pursuit of professional capital furnishes a golden opportunity to rally everyone around a common agenda. This will be tough politics at the outset because of the current polarization. Involvement is not so much about the old cliché of “ownership” although it is almost certainly that. The more fundamental gain is that the very expertise that is required can only come through the subsidiarity of involved participation and development. How on earth can you change teaching and teachers, who are on the front lines of their profession every day, unless you involve, engage, and empower teachers and their unions or associations themselves? (pp. 180–181)

This message has particular relevance for BC, a province with an education system that is currently polarized and lacking any semblance of leadership at government level to create or extend inclusive, systemic collaboration, effective networking, or in-depth discussion about educational futures beyond *YouTube* and *PowerPoint*. Leadership in some districts often appears reduced to tweeting and blogging superintendents urging radical shifts reflecting their concept of the new millennium’s educational nirvana, while they increase class size, force inappropriate class composition, and cut specialist support teachers to balance budgets, but offer no challenge to the source of the cuts—the provincial government. Such efforts and approaches do not constitute capacity-building; instead, they reinforce the gulf between those who create or implicitly support policies and those who work in schools where the negative impact of such policies is felt.

While Hargreaves and Fullan stress that leaders in education systems have to ‘know where you’re going’, their fundamental message is that a system will not improve unless it builds on the professional capital of its teachers. They offered government leaders this advice:

So stop trashing and attacking teachers. Start saying why your nation needs them. Tell people over and over that teaching is a complex and difficult job, but one of the best jobs there is—in its daily rewards and in how it serves the nation. Remember the teachers who inspired you and helped make you what you are today as a national or state leader, and remind the public of their influence. Public statements of where you are going have to include building the teaching profession and its professional capital. Teachers, all 100% of them, are your nation builders. (p. 174)

Their focus on cultures is also of some importance to BC. Individual, school, district, union, and provincial cultures are all parts of the BC educational context, and no effective educational futures can be mapped out, with or without a compass, unless these cultures are better understood, respected, and challenged in a positive and informed debate about realizing the rich potential in BC's public education system. Hargreaves and Fullan offer a wide range of approaches but essentially a few key directions: build on collective strengths, collaborate, and 'bring teachers back in' while recognizing the cultures and contexts within which these proposed directions occur. They argue that you cannot build a positive educational future unless you address context and build relationships—another way of saying that it takes a whole village to raise a child.

2. So how might we consider these influences, to create a better educational future in BC?

Considering the work of Fullan, Levin, Hargreaves, and Shirley, and extending into other areas of the educational literature, it is possible to consider directions for the K–12 public education system in BC. The authors referenced have all observed functional and dysfunctional systems, and their analyses provide bases of understanding of what might be done to introduce system change in this province. By extending into other areas of literature, we might also consider what our key influences miss in terms of concepts and discourse. One thing we can clearly learn is that such a future need not, and likely should not, be monolithic, but should have some cohesion and central funding. Leadership should encourage innovation at the individual, district, and school levels, and should involve all educational stakeholders.

In addition, we should use the existing knowledge and expertise within the BC education system, so that some blending, some 'mixing and matching' of external and internal expertise, might occur, building on local strengths and knowledge while accessing what we can learn from external sources. Returning to the original analogy, the village needs work but there is a substantial base of expertise on which we can build to improve teaching and learning, and to change the current antagonistic and unproductive climate of the province's education system.

What follows is not a recipe, but some ideas for starting a discussion on building an educational future that works for the improvement of student learning, for families, for teachers, and for others who work in the BC public education system.

Four key areas are explored:

- i. Build trust at all levels in the system;
- ii. Reinvest financially and support all educators with expanded PD and networking;
- iii. Identify key areas for priority focus, action, and collaborations;
- iv. Reconsider the purpose of public education with a renewed focus on Inclusion and students' mental health issues.

Four ways to change BC's education system

i. Build trust at all levels in the system

If you want to change any relationship, you have to behave your way into it. Trust comes after good experience; first and foremost, politicians are going to have to show the way even if they are not rewarded for it at the start. What would push politicians to take the risk to revamp relationships with unions? Moral purpose is a start. But, so is pressure from the public and education leaders who want a better system. Public confidence, if awakened, generates political willingness to go even further. (Fullan, 2010, p. 9)

Permeating the ideas of all the authors identified here is one central tenet: you can't build a people-dependent system if you cannot demonstrate and build on trust among those who work in it, and trust is and has been in short supply in BC's education system. The first step in rekindling trust is to increase investment in public education—trust declines when resources are inadequate to meet needs, when teacher numbers are reduced at double the rate of declining enrolment, and when one educational partner is excluded from funding while others access significant amounts. It is reduced when teacher contracts are torn up and when policies like Inclusion are mandated but not supported. Much of the decline in trust in this millennium to date can be accounted for by the desire of government to cut costs and to isolate the BCTF. The massive reductions in specialist teacher support has reversed whatever progress inclusionary approaches were making, and increased workload and stress among the majority of classroom teachers. Recent negotiations saw an insistent demand from the government's agent, BCPSEA, for concessions in contract language around seniority and professional development. Teachers were to be deemed 'employees', not professionals, and as such were to undertake whatever professional development was deemed appropriate by the employer, with reduced or eliminated autonomy. All this was in addition to a zero-wage-increase mandate, with teachers the only set of provincially-funded employees expected to make concessions as well as receiving no salary increase.

The attacks on the BCTF and on teachers are not a BCTF invention. Chan, Fisher, and Rubenson (2007) stated the following, well before the College of Teachers was replaced with the Teacher Regulation Branch, and prior to the recent acrimonious round of bargaining:

We argue that the types and quantities of legislation since May, 2001, when the Liberal government took power, have been designed, in part, to undermine the BCTF and to deprofessionalize teachers. (p. 24)

Trust between the provincial government and the BCTF cannot get much lower than it did by the end of the 2011–12 school year—although perhaps one might expect some last-ditch efforts to turn this around as the BC Liberals prepare for the May 2013 election. However, it can be improved by a future government. The lessons of post-Harris Ontario (until recently) showed much of the way, as all the authors considered above have referenced. Inheriting a

confrontational, belligerent environment where teachers and their unions had been the targets of sustained and systemic attacks, the McGuinty government's first term was characterized by renewed investment, partnership, and efforts to build new levels of trust. Teacher unions received over \$21 million to support teachers' professional development. Induction and mentoring programs were introduced and funded at approximately \$15 million per year.

Key priorities and messaging engaged both the profession and the public in Ontario. The influence of Ben Levin as Deputy Minister was enormous, and one of his legacies was apparent at the 2012 Vancouver AERA conference, where dozens of Ontario Ministry of Education staff shared their research and approaches, a sharp contrast to the minimal attendance and even fewer offerings of BC Ministry of Education staff who, like their employer, appear to show little regard for referencing or producing educational research. In Ontario, ministry staff members are expected to research, to write, and to discuss their work in forums of peers—one sign of a mature, research-engaged, and trusting Ministry of Education which is lacking in BC.

Building trust and collaboration across organizations is simple to say but hard to do. One source of information in addition to the educational literature is in the world of business, where strategic alliances have been developed in contexts where individual companies could not achieve their goals alone, hence the need to form alliances with other companies—a situation I would argue is analogous to the BC education system, if we are to develop common goals in the future:

A “strategic alliance” was defined by Bartling (1998) as “a co-operative arrangement among two or more entities that combine their respective strengths to achieve compatible objectives while they retain their individual identities and share in the risks and rewards.” Some teacher unions are also using the term “strategic alliances” in their consideration of potential collaborations (American Federation of Teachers, 2001).

Many authors also explore strategic alliances and collaborations because they have been found to be increasingly necessary and because many fail (Parise and Sasson, 2002; Koza and Lewin, 2000). The literature on strategic alliances uses language similar to a more personal strategic alliance also prone to failure—marriage—with consideration of four terms: trust, commitment, control, and learning. A useful exploration of these themes can be found in the work of Inkpen and Currall (2004). They argue for evolution in trust and processes over time, with varying levels of formal monitoring depending on initial trust levels—the greater the initial trust, the less need for formal monitoring. Trust, they argue, is also related to risk, whether relational (a partner's opportunistic actions serving the individual organization rather than the collaboration), or in terms of capacity (the ability of each partner to fulfill its obligations). During the evolution of projects there is a trade-off between trust and control, whether formally or informally. Evolution is often identified within phases, with an initial “honeymoon” period, followed by a high-risk period if trust is weak. If the second phase is survived, then risk of failure is reduced. (Naylor, 2007, p. 42)

All the key authors referenced in this work argue that large-scale improvements in public education systems will simply not work unless the teacher union or unions are involved to a significant degree. They have all witnessed systems where confrontation is the norm and none of them have found such contexts amenable to positive change. They all recommend improving efforts to improve relationships and they provide evidence that such efforts pay off. Ben Levin, speaking at the 2012 AERA conference in Vancouver, stated that since a more collaborative

approach was initiated in Ontario, student achievement had risen, teacher attrition had been reduced by 75%, and private-school enrolments were in decline as public confidence in the schools of Ontario increased significantly.

What examples of trust are worth building on in BC? As discussed earlier, several school districts and teacher associations have forged positive relationships in terms of professional learning. Richmond, Coquitlam, and several Okanagan school districts and teacher associations reflect such positive collaborations and the type of school district and teacher union leadership which is constructive and collaborative. Some informal networks exist, including the Mental Health Coalition whose membership includes PSAs, staff from several government ministries, principals, teachers, Children's Hospital staff, community organizations, and parents. The 'Special Education Partners' Group' includes CUPE and BCTF representation in an informal network linking both unions with provincial community organizations that have an interest in inclusive education. These examples build and sustain trust over time by actively taking on tasks and working together on common goals. BC just needs many more of them.

Building trust is the first pre-requisite for building educational futures, and for moving beyond the stale and stubborn battleground that has been the key feature in the politics of public education in this province for some years. Building trust will have a better chance if all partners are engaged in discussions on policy and in terms of implementation, professional development, networking, and resource development. But those discussions should actually lead to practical collaborations or strategic alliances linking educational partners in areas of common interest, so that they can achieve results that would be much more difficult to reach without collaboration.

ii. Reinvest financially and support all educators with expanded PD and networking

Reinvestment in K–12 education is urgently needed, not only as a start to addressing the major funding shortages of the past, but also to compensate for inflation. While property tax rates are indexed, K–12 public school budgets are not, and current ministry funding allocations appear woefully inadequate:

The \$4 million increase to 2012–13 operating grants is well below the \$112 million needed for districts to keep pace with inflation (based on a BC inflation rate of 2.37%). And the ministry's plan to freeze operating grants at \$4.725 billion over the next three years means a potential loss of \$300 million or more in purchasing power for school districts (assuming the BC inflation rate remains the same for three years).

It is worth noting that the School Property Tax Rate–Residential (since 2003) and the School Property Tax Rate–non-Residential (with some exceptions) are indexed to the provincial inflation rate, according to the Budget and Fiscal Plan–2012/13 to 2014/15 (p. 62). By not indexing operating-grants funding to the inflation rate, the ministry is placing districts in the unenviable position of having to find cost-savings elsewhere to make up for the loss of purchasing power. This adds to the cumulative structural shortfalls school districts have struggled with in recent years that have resulted in school closures, larger classes, and the loss of educational programs. (White, M., 2012, p. 2)

As previously stated, cuts to teacher positions disproportionate to declining student enrolment have also been caused by funding shortfalls, and most schools and districts appear to be under-resourced in many areas of their operations. Addressing and reducing class size could be a prime focus. Specialist support teacher numbers should be increased, not just in Special Education and

Learning Assistance, but also in Counseling, Aboriginal Education, teacher-librarians, and ELL (formerly ESL). For too long, what have been seen as ‘peripheral’ positions—largely specialist support teachers—have been cut and in some cases decimated.

In a personalized system, the needs of learners with special needs require both classroom teacher and specialist support to create, for instance, new utilization of approaches like Universal Design for Learning (UDL). In a world where mental health is growing as an issue, schools need more counselors to support students in their formative and sometimes troubled years. The exciting work being done by teacher-librarians in the area of creating ‘learning commons’ and developing student inquiry approaches fits exactly into the Education Plan. However, teacher-librarian staffing levels have been consistently cut and their libraries starved of resources—at the same time as the province is looking to save money by extending the use and mandate of public libraries into the K–12 system.⁸

Specialist teachers have, in spite of the cuts, developed initiatives through their Provincial Specialist Associations (PSAs) which might also form bases for future collaborations. Both the Learning Assistance Teachers Association (LATA) and the Counselors’ PSA (BCSCA) have, as examples, pioneered new approaches to addressing students’ mental health in their conferences and communications. PSAs in these and many other areas are rich sources of professional capital long under-utilized in BC.

A key area of investment should focus on what Hargreaves and Fullan argued is needed to generate professional capital: investment in teachers and in their professional learning. Models for this approach are countries like Finland and Singapore, which both invested heavily in building capacity by raising the status of teaching, supporting the learning needs of teachers, and encouraging autonomy and professional discourse.

Focus and discussion of professional development in BC has been surprisingly lacking. In spite of (or perhaps, because of) the somewhat negative tone of BCPSEA ‘Discussion Papers’⁹ on areas including PD, there has been no significant discussion taking place. When Dufour’s traveling Professional Learning Communities (PLC) show arrived in Vancouver in the summer of 2012, a surprising number of school districts spent considerable amounts of money to send teachers and administrators to hear his version of mandated and top-down PLCs, the last thing needed in this province if we are to stand any chance of building trust. Instead of paying out large sums of money for imported, top-down versions of PD, BC needs to consider better use of BC’s existing talent (Hargreaves and Fullan’s human capital) while moving in appropriate directions for supporting teachers’ autonomous professional learning. These might include wider application of Inquiry approaches, and expanded and networked forms of learning communities within districts and across the province.

There are many inspiring and capable PD leaders in this province—some outstanding PD Chairs were the focus of a BCTF and international research project in teacher leadership over several years¹⁰. Six key themes emerged from this research about these teacher-leaders of professional development:

⁸ http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/pls/library_strategic_plan.pdf
<http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2012/sp/pdf/ministry/educ.pdf>

⁹ BCPSEA, *Perspectives in Practice*, online at <http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/resources/manuals-and-reports.aspx>.

¹⁰ http://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Issues/Teacher_Leadership/AERA2010.pdf

- a strong interest in understanding and extending experiences of professional development
 - an interest in the professional literature and discourse and how to apply both in pursuit of goals
 - a passion for wanting to support teachers' professional development
 - an ability to negotiate school district and local/provincial teacher union tides and currents, with expanding circles of influence—"system navigators"
 - strong communication and empathic skills, used to be responsive to needs but also to articulate new directions—"people persons"
 - a need to find new opportunities and challenges after reaching a plateau.
- (pp. 6–10)

These, and likely many other skilled, experienced, and very capable educators, are available right now in this province, but they are under-utilized because the investment in teachers' professional learning is low in many school districts, and because districts have been so much in survival mode that PD has suffered. We need to use the vast expertise of the master-teachers and PD organizers across the province of BC to build new approaches to supporting teachers' professional learning. In addition, earlier BCTF research found that many PD leaders also need space to grow professionally and have reported limited possibilities to do so¹¹. We are sitting on our professional capital, some would argue squashing it, rather than enabling our considerable pool of expertise and using it to build better learning, better schools, and a more collaborative system. We have teacher-leadership which is highly capable but not effectively utilized or encouraged by the province, and this needs to change. Professional capital is of little use if it is not invested, and our systemic investment in professional capital is inadequate.

BC is also greatly lacking in its support for new teachers, though a preliminary step towards developing a provincial mentoring approach was taken in July of 2012 by the government with a grant of over \$300,000 for mentoring in three BC school districts (Haida Gwai'i, Kootenay-Columbia, and Kamloops-Thompson). Quite separate from the recent government initiative is the excellent networking of the Teacher Mentorship Network created in 2009. This predominantly-lower-mainland group has met regularly for three years, built a website¹², shared resources, approaches, and ideas about mentoring, and could be the foundation of building better networks to support new teachers through induction and mentoring. The knowledge and the potential capacity exist in groups such as this, but they are not systemically supported in BC; instead, the Teacher Mentorship Network's impressive efforts are maintained by predominantly middle-level leaders in districts and unions as they do this work 'off the side of their desk' because they see the value of networking. This is exactly the kind of skilled and capable networking that could be expanded if there were a new level of investment in professional learning using those existing groups like the Teacher Mentorship Network as foundations.

iii. Identify key areas for priority focus, action, and collaborations

Levin's priority areas were few and focused, broad enough to engage both educators and the public. What might those areas be in BC, and should BC limit its focus in a similar way? While literacy and numeracy are the mainstays of the Ontario focus, this may limit the ability of the Arts to co-exist save as elective, and therefore inherently lower-status, subjects. The state of

¹¹ http://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Issues/Teacher_Leadership/AERA2010.pdf, p 10

¹² <http://teachermentorshipbc.com/aboutus/>

Queensland in Australia tried to counter the narrow focus on ‘the basics’ with its ‘New Basics’ curriculum:

At the heart of the New Basics is the idea that, to get the right things happening in classrooms, there must be an alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. And the alignment of these three must be in practices, not merely in statements of intention or expectations. The new basics themselves are the basics of the schooling our students need for a future that is already upon us: new economies, new workplaces, new technologies, new student identities, diverse communities, and complex cultures. The new basics are the educational outcomes, traditional and new, academic and social, needed by students and communities served by schools¹³.

The ‘New Basics’ Research Report, from which the above quote is taken, offers both conceptual and practical approaches which are very similar to some of the early ideas in the Education Plan, and might be a useful reference from an Australian state which initiated its version of appropriate educational futures in 1999.

There is no shortage of likely areas for action and collaboration but the lesson to be learned from other jurisdictions is that it’s better to start with a limited number of priorities and collaborations with the key goal of building trust. More inclusive and collaborative approaches to development of curriculum, consideration of assessment options, and even educational policy, would signal a significant shift in approach, and indicate a more constructive engagement of individuals and organizations. New initiatives to address and connect subject areas, better meet the needs of diverse student populations, share ideas about appropriate uses of technology, figuring out what personalized learning actually means—all of these and many other areas might in time be the focus of collaborations, networking, and sharing of ideas so that the whole system becomes a type of learning commons, enriched by all parties working towards common goals. In such a future, differences might enrich conversations and support learners rather than divide people and organizations.

As Levin, Hargreaves, and Fullan all definitively argue that positive educational change will not occur without the participation of teacher unions, perhaps BC should take notice. If there is a change of government after the May 2013 election, then some emulation of the spirit of McGuinty’s post-Harris approach in Ontario may unfold, but likely within a more cautious fiscal frame. If the present government remains in power, and were the BCTF to be sidelined in the future, the divisions will likely continue, and a rich vein of those teachers who prefer to experience professional development through their union would be lost to wider networks. However, in a more collaborative system, union, districts, and ministry might co-ordinate their individual capacities to bring greater benefits to the whole K–12 system.

There is much missing from the current focus on personalized learning, though arguably curriculum and assessment are reasonable starting points which have been identified for a series of initiatives. Teachers in BCTF Inquiry projects have questioned what personalized learning actually means in terms of pedagogy—when is learning teacher-directed and when is it student-initiated? What are the implications in middle schools, where some students have stated a preference for greater teacher direction in their learning? Where does Inquiry-based learning for students fit and how might it be introduced? Where, in a knowledge- and media-rich economy and a globalized world, do art and music fit, and are they included as equals or as lower-status

¹³ http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/newbasics/pdfs/1_keyelt.pdf

subjects in personalized learning approaches? How is technology used to engage all students in learning?

One possible reference that might further thoughtful debate about personalized learning is Brownlie and Schnellert's (2009) work, where they interpreted the instructional needs of adolescent learners in nine ways:

- direct, explicit comprehension instruction
- effective instructional principles embedded in content
- motivation and self-directed learning
- text-based collaborative learning
- strategic tutoring
- diverse texts
- intensive writing
- a technology component
- ongoing formative assessment of students. (pp. 3–8)

How might these be considered within the Education Plan? How does direct instruction interact with self-directed learning? What is the technology component? What do 'effective instructional principles' look like, and do they offer a possible progression in pedagogy starting with more direct teaching but evolving towards more self-directed learning? Brownlie and Schnellert, both BC-based, have ideas and approaches which connect themes generated in the Education Plan. The problem is that their work, and the work of many other BC researchers and PD leaders, is not being connected in the nebulous, glossy, and superficial evolution of the Plan to date.

Perhaps it may be better to separate the myriad of directions teachers and other educators might take from the systemic focus of the government. Teachers need to be enabled with support to explore their passion for teaching a subject, for their efforts to include diverse learners, for their development and sharing of resources, for their innovations in using technology as a tool to support learning. Systemic support for a wide range of teacher initiatives might be managed through improving PD opportunities and networking structures, while government priorities start within a smaller range, perhaps with some support for evolving curriculum and assessment, areas already underway.

The last area listed in the 'personalized learning' focus of the Education Plan is 'Students with Special Needs'—an area desperately in need of greater systemic attention and support but one littered with failure in terms of such supports in the last ten years. That area is addressed below.

iv. Reconsider the purpose of public education with a renewed focus on Inclusion and students' mental health issues

We live in an age in which discussions about education seem to be dominated by the measurement of educational outcomes and that these measurements play an influential role in educational policy and, through this, also in educational practice. The danger of this situation is that we end up valuing what is measured, rather than engage in measurements of what we value. It is the latter, however, that should ultimately inform our decisions about the future of education. (Biesta, 2010, p. 26)

Biesta argues that there is more to education than the academic outcomes measured most commonly in education systems. This paper focuses on two connected areas, making a case that inclusion and mental health are worthy of significant attention in any educational future.

Inclusion and mental health are not discussed by the authors referenced in this paper. Inclusion is considered here because the lack of systemic support for inclusive education has been central to the dysfunction of public education in BC for some years. Many parents and teachers have expressed concerns over the lack of supports to make Inclusion work effectively. Teacher preparation is inadequate to address diverse learner needs and the massive cuts in specialist-support-teacher numbers since 2002 have reduced expertise. Special Education/Learning Assistance jobs have become entry-level positions for new teachers in many BC school districts, and are often less than full-time. The inertia at the ministry level in terms of support for inclusive approaches in recent years has been startling. Ministry UDL pilots—in many ways epitomizing personalized learning—were funded for several years, then dropped to cut costs. The issue discussed here is not Inclusion, which is a fundamental human right, but the mandating of a policy while stripping the system of the capacity to implement it effectively. Including all students in learning is necessary if we are to respect human rights and to maximize the potential of each and every learner. But teachers, Education Assistants, and school districts need much more support to make this happen.

In practical terms, there needs to be a significant consideration of Inclusion policy and implementation with the twin goals of maximizing the participation and success of all students in learning while also supporting the work of teachers and others so that the first goal can be realized. Pre-service teacher education needs to address the issue of diversity as central rather than peripheral to teaching. Areas such as UDL and differentiated instruction have promise but have minimal systemic support and no networks to connect innovative practitioners. Some educators have built highly successful approaches but have few avenues to connect or share their work. Teachers at Livingstone Elementary School in Vancouver (Livingstone Inquiry, 2011) have demonstrated highly inclusive approaches using SMARTboards. They have authored and self-published a book on their approaches, and have offered PD to hundreds of other teachers at their own school, at UBC Summer Institutes, and at conferences, yet their efforts have been unsupported by either district or province. Richmond School District, the Richmond Teachers' Association, and the BCTF have piloted an approach to sharing promising inclusionary practices using web-based video and documentary materials, but their work was curtailed in the recent contractual dispute.

There is much promise, considerable talent, and energy within the BC K–12 public education system in terms of inclusionary practices, yet there is also much systemic stasis and paralysis. The existing talent—the human capital of teachers—can be better engaged if the systemic stasis and paralysis are replaced by cohesive and collaborative capacity-building.

The second issue addressed here, supporting students' mental health, is an emerging issue across Canada and in other countries. The evidence about mental health issues is startling:

Adolescence is a time when many of the substantive and persistent mental disorders including major depressive disorder, panic disorder, bipolar disorder, substance abuse, eating disorders, and schizophrenia first appear (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Kessler et al., 2005). Globally, neuropsychiatric disorders comprise the largest single category of medical disability in young people (Lancet Global Mental Health Group et al., 2007; World Health Organization [WHO], 2004). In Canada, approximately one fifth of young people suffer from a mental disorder, but only one in five of those requiring specialty care receive it (Health Canada, 2002; Waddell, Offord, Shepherd, Hua, and McEwan, 2002). Unrecognized and untreated mental disorders can lead to a

variety of negative long- and short-term outcomes, such as poor educational and vocational achievement, problematic social and personal functioning, and reduced life expectancy due to associated medical conditions and suicide. (Wei, Kutcher, Szumilas, 2011, p. 215)

One key approach which builds positive mental health is improving school connectedness, which links this issue to that of Inclusion. This is a positive, pro-active approach that many BC schools already incorporate into their ethos and programs. It simply means that every student feels wanted in school and is connected to the school community. School connectedness initiatives can be academic or social, but they ensure that all students are included, and that every student feels welcome in the community of school. Byrne Creek Secondary School in Burnaby was the 2012 winner of the ASCD award ‘Vision in Action: The ASCD Whole Child Award’.

Educators at Byrne Creek benefit from weekly collaboration time to discuss practice, identify struggling students, and look at ways to support learning gaps. As a result, many programs unique to Byrne Creek have been developed. They include a “Later to Literacy” program that supports the literacy needs of ESL students; the “Village of Attachment,” where staff, families, and community members create a web of support around the most vulnerable students; “Youth in Transitions,” an after-school program that works closely with students alongside their parents; and “PAWS,” a program designed to help immigrant students who entered the school system late in their high-school years develop fundamental skills for success.

To address essential needs beyond the classroom, Byrne Creek has multiple partnership agreements with community groups and associations. They include food programs, parent programs, early childhood literacy and youth programs, tutoring, and work placements. A comprehensive program of student extracurricular and intramural athletics, counseling, and social services supports a strong fabric of social-emotional health. All programs are supported by an educational component or curricular connection to ensure that Byrne Creek students and their families acquire the knowledge and skills needed to make healthy choices.¹⁴

The focus on the purposes of education is not simply a philosophical discussion. It impacts issues such as standardized testing and accountability, with the dominant focus on academic rather than social and emotional goals, including students’ mental health issues, and Inclusion. The 107th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (Coulter and Wiens, Eds., 2008) addressed the issue by asking: *Why do we educate? Renewing the conversation*. Diane Ravitch’s chapter focused on education and democracy. Others focused on indigenous knowledge (Barnhardt and Kawagley), economic development (Nielsen and Kinghorn) and the goal of creating a ‘flourishing life’ (Brighouse). What these authors discuss is largely absent from much of the debate on education in BC, across Canada, and internationally today, which focuses almost exclusively on how we educate (the means of education) rather than why and for what ends. If the ends are reconsidered, then the means may change. A dominant focus on approaches to educating therefore masks the fundamental purposes of education. If, as some of the authors in the Yearbook argue, a modern society needs educated citizens who can participate in a democracy, and who can engage with others in positive relationships and in community, then

¹⁴ <http://www.ascd.org/news-media/Press-Room/News-Releases/Byrne-Creek-Secondary-School-2012-Vision-in-Action-ASCD-Whole-Child-Award-Winner.aspx>

education should increasingly engage students in learning how to live. Students need to be included, they need to belong, and they need to participate in the community of school if they are to build positive and healthy lives.

White (2011) has also considered the issue of well-being in schools, essentially arguing that well-being should be a primary goal (or an ‘end’ of the education system). But White argues that well-being goes beyond material wealth, and he in part defines success as “engaging in intrinsically worthwhile relationships and activities” (p. 63)—relationships that are positive and fulfilling. Similarly, Smith discussed Noddings (1999), who has articulated a case for bringing the concept of caring as a focus for educating:

Nel Noddings sees education (in its widest sense) as being central to the cultivation of caring in society. She defines education as ‘a constellation of encounters, both planned and unplanned, that promote growth through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, understanding and appreciation’. (Smith, 2004)

While much of the work on educational ends may on occasion be difficult to access, the simple question ‘Why do we educate?’ is not, and might be addressed in ways that allow schools to widen their focus in order to develop the whole human being, to build inclusive and caring communities, and to strive for a better world by focusing on the whole child.

Revisiting the purposes of public education is not, therefore, an esoteric component of this argument for considering educational futures, but an essential one. Every student needs to learn how to live, how to relate to and care for others. We all need to participate in community and democracy just as much as we need to make a living in those knowledge or other economies of the future. Putting greater supports into Inclusion and addressing students’ mental health are therefore reasonable starting points for developing educational futures linked to more inclusive and caring societies.

Conclusion

This paper is not intended to be prescriptive but rather exploratory. Using respected educational change literature with relevance to the Canadian experience, the central question is: how does the BC education system move forward? The tentative answer is that we need to stop looking at proposals such as the Education Plan in isolation, because the provincial context in which the Plan is developing is troubling, and its unfortunate links to narrow and outdated notions of managerial control have triggered teacher and teacher union dismay and reactions. Changing the education system while poking a teacher union in the eye is the antithesis of what Fullan, Hargreaves, and Levin are arguing. Fullan spoke recently in BC. He was invited because he has much to offer, but a central focus of his advice—that teacher unions need to be part of any successful educational change (echoed by Levin and Hargreaves) has resulted in no audible public debate of his message and experiences.

Addressing context was a success in post-Harris Ontario, although it appears set back by recent government actions. In that province, re-investment, increased support for professional development, and a focus on key areas while building increased trust and collaboration shifted an education system from being a debilitating war zone towards its fundamental purpose: supporting the needs of students by building system capacity. This was achieved and has been widely documented, although that province’s positive momentum appears reversed with recent government actions. We can and should learn from the experience of Ontario in the years following the fall of the Harris government. We might also recognize what exists and can be

built on in terms of teacher, district and union strengths, with a redirected and more appropriate steering from the government and its ministry.

By addressing context, it is possible to change it. There exists an urgent need to focus on the 'educational village' of BC, to bring all educational stakeholders together to discuss fundamental purposes and approaches to education. We need to collaborate in practical and purposeful ways so that trust can build and so that collective energy goes into construction of a better system rather than confrontation within it. It is possible, it is manageable, and it has been done before. We just need to get on with it.

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