

EEI bulletin

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EEI Provincial Forum – November 2005

On November 16, 2005, BCSSA's EEI-trained facilitators and EEI district contacts met in Victoria for their first provincial forum. Wendy Herbert, Superintendent, School District 64 Gulf Islands, and Mike McKay, Superintendent, School District 36 Surrey, facilitated the session. Also attending was Rushworth Kidder, president of the Institute of Global Ethics (IGE), located in Camden, Maine, with a Canadian headquarters recently established in Vancouver.

Participants included:

Bill Reid, Superintendent, SD 8 Kootenay Lake
Bob Peacock, Superintendent, SD 22 Vernon
Donna Rispin, Principal, SD 36 Surrey
John Anderson, Superintendent, SD 37 Delta
Bruce Beairsto, Superintendent SD 38 Richmond
Jim Martens, Assistant Superintendent SD 38
Corine Clark, Co-Director, SLC, UBC
Chris Kelly, Superintendent, SD 39 Vancouver
Janet Grant, District Principal, SD 40 New Westminster
Susan Close Earle, Assistant Superintendent, SD 40
Joey Sahli, Principal, SD 40
John White, Director of Instruction, SD 41 Burnaby
Sharon Domaas, Principal, SD 41
Geoff Jopson, Superintendent, SD 45 West Vancouver
Christie Whitley, Principal SD 45 (Manager of Professional Programs, BCPVPA, commencing in 2006)

Philippine Pereira, Vice-Principal, SD 45
Rod Allen, Superintendent, SD 54 Bulkley Valley
Matt Monkman, District Support Teacher SD 54
Robin Dielissen, Principal, SD 57 Prince George
Bonnie Chappell, Director of Instruction, SD 57
John McLay, Principal, SD 57
Ron Samborski, Superintendent, SD 60 Peace River North
Jim Cambridge, Assistant Superintendent, SD 62 Sooke
Joe Grewal, Principal, SD 63 Saanich
Janet Poth, Principal, SD 63
Jordan Tinney, Assistant Superintendent, SD 63
Frank Dunham, Superintendent, SD 75 Mission
Ann Naymie, Consultant, BCSSA

Roundtable Discussion I

For the first hour, the participants engaged in a two-part discussion, sharing “What’s happening?” in their districts and “What are the results and feedback from these ethical sessions/discussions?” The following are comments presented to the group:

WHAT'S HAPPENING

- A variety of deliveries are being practiced around the province: trustee retreats, principals' meetings, district pro-d days, Rotary Youth Club, leadership training, school board discussions, student leadership groups, principal/vice-principal mentoring groups, committees looking at social responsibility, ethical-study groups.
- It was useful to consider this ethical framework as it applied to the recent job action.
- The Ethical Fitness® foundation would strengthen programs like "Virtues" and other values curriculum.
- The framework could be used effectively to develop a greater understanding of issues (eg, political issues).
- One district offered an externally facilitated session for trustees and only one person showed up, raising the question: How do you frame the invitation for successful participation?
- A successful strategy is to embed an ethical-dilemma approach, instead of a problem-solving approach, in public processes and reports.
- Workshops provided should always be for mixed groups to widen the circle and avoid "private knowledge."
- Asking the question "Is it ethical?" effectively recultures the school community.
- Ethical study groups using real-life examples, start with the real issue and then bring in the theory.
- This ethical framework is being connected to the social responsibility initiative, and can be put in the accountability contract as a strategy.

RESULTS AND FEEDBACK FROM ETHICAL SESSIONS

- People are appreciative of the concept (it is why we are educators) and the content (which is current).
- People want more time and opportunity to explore these issues and become more fluent in ethics.
- Considering the four steps of mastery, unconsciously incompetent ⇨ consciously incompetent ⇨ consciously competent ⇨ unconsciously competent how do we get to become unconsciously competent within this framework?
- A secondary vice-principal designed a school-data collection on student behaviour and referenced it to the performance standards.
- Using the language raises awareness and whets appetite for training.
- Finding right versus wrong and right versus right dilemmas are often problematic.
- If you create an awareness of the ethical dimension of everything and this consideration is the foundation, it will introduce the struggle of discussion and questioning followed by the ethical construction and, finally, the ethical action.
- To build trusting relationships and create safety in a group, organization or culture, you have to have an open, articulated ethical intention.
- The opportunity to stop and think about our values, our ethics and how we are using them is important. Are we as ethical today as we once were?

Rushworth Kidder's Update

Institute for Global Ethics president Rushworth Kidder spoke about current projects and issues at the IGE. Below is a summary of his talk, the information he shared and the points he made.

We seem to be emerging into a new era. There is a hunger to be more serious. We are evolving from a superficial time to a time more conscious of values.

IGEs projects include:

- Working with the BBC, which is interested in receiving training about the ethics of journalism.
- Working with the U.S. Navy, which wants a character education program for ALL of its officers and enlisted men and women.
- At an ethics conference in New York for teams of journalists from eight East Coast papers, journalists discussed how to write effectively about ethics. They recognized that they knew how to write about politics (where's the power) and economics (where's the bottom line). This conference focused on writing about ethics (what's right).
- The electronic version of the Ethical Fitness® Seminar (available online) has been very well received.
- IGE Canada has moved to Vancouver from Toronto, re-establishing its board and hiring a new executive director. The establishment of an office on the west coast of North America will hopefully impact across Canada from the Maine headquarters.
- IGE Canada is looking for opportunities to work with the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Winter Games and have an ethical Olympic Games, modelling a new way of doing the event and building on Canada's global reputation as an ethical nation.
- "Sports Done Right," a report published by the University of Maine which IGE helped draft, is a program that looks at middle school and high school sports programs and how they are run. Parents reacted favourably across the U.S. after the program was reported in *Parade* magazine, a Sunday newspaper supplement reaching 60 million households, in August 2005.
- The Institute for Global Ethics, together with its UK affiliate, have been working for a number of years with educators in each of the four education systems of the UK: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. In 2002 and 2004, two delegations from the UK visited Maine and now IGE is considering how to get a group from Scotland together with educators in Maine and BC who are also involved in ethics work, so that they can share their ideas and experiences on an international level.
- BC educators involved in this work are developing a standard of practice for education.
- The working title for Rushworth's next book is *Cultures of Integrity: How Strong Leaders Build Ethical Organizations*. He will be describing how cultures have vectors of ethical behaviour which shape communication, performance, leadership, and decision making.

In the question and answer period that followed, several issues were raised.

QUESTION: How we can develop ethical leadership and followership and not be politically based?

RUSHWORTH: We need to develop a clearer voice, especially as educators, developing a language of public discourse that lets us speak freely and directly about ethical issues without sounding preachy, old-fashioned, or naïve.

The new so-called “Millennial Generation” is different. According to data from the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 82 percent of millennials say they have “no problem” getting along with their parents—up from only 48 percent in 1974. And by a 2-1 margin, they say that “values and character” will matter more to them than to today’s adults. This generation has a stronger sense of community, will work together as part of a team more easily and effectively, and will engage in ethical discussions more naturally.

There are **two models for getting at the truth**:

1. **The lawyerly version**, where you amass all the evidence for your side and attack the other side’s evidence in every way possible to prove them wrong.
2. **The scientific version**, where you develop a hypothesis and consider all evidence, from whatever source, to prove or disprove it.

Currently, the political arena relies on the first model, where political opponents try to destroy the opposition and where every issue is seen as right versus wrong. In fact, we would have healthier debates and a more effective democratic society if we used the latter model and framed our major issues as right versus right.

QUESTION: During the BC teachers’ job action it seemed that fear drove people in their interactions with each other and the media. Do you have any comments about this?

RUSHWORTH: The best way to prevent fear-based, reactive, accusatory communication during a crisis is to develop a thoughtfully sophisticated way of relating in calm times. This culture of interchange will be the foundation of communication in varied situations. It’s important to demonstrate risk taking and moral courage, where people say what they need in a given situation and ask what the other group needs.

A participant made the point that all of this work takes time, and that to become sustainable, it must be modelled and mentored. As baby boomers, we go for instant gratification; but for ethics we need to establish the framework for extended conversations.

Roundtable Discussion II

For the final hour of the forum, participants shared what they felt were their school/district/community’s next steps to move the ethics initiative forward and what support they needed to take that step.

Needs

1. Using an ethical framework to systematize study groups, conversations and public articulation of the local issues.
2. Knowing what is going on in other ethical initiatives on a global level.
3. Continuing to model ethical behaviour and discussions and to promote the understanding of ethical fitness.
4. Engaging in conversations that require moral courage (take the time to do this).
5. Creating a culture of curiosity instead of right versus wrong. Keep moral purpose as part of the

equation so one can pose the “hard” questions at the risk of upsetting people’s comfort level.

Next steps / support for ethics initiative from BCSSA

1. More “exposed” conversations of how/what has occurred (idea: a discussion at Metro chapter meeting).
2. Bring the initiative to the education partners and other parts of the community.
3. Create additional opportunities for people to meet (facilitators and contacts).
4. Develop more of a cross-section of people to be trained (ie, building capacity).
5. Target the population that is not drawn in—get them engaged!
6. Have day or half-day sessions and invite the most influential leaders from different cultures to see what this is about.
7. Embed this initiative in an action research project to see if the guiding principles, when implemented, make a difference (social responsibility and literacy) and celebrate our successes.
8. How can we get these conversations to the Learning Roundtable? It would be constructive to get to a win-win perspective rather than them-versus-us.
9. How can we contribute to resolutions rather than seek safe harbour?
10. The BCSSA should write a thoughtful white paper analyzing the strike, looking at right-versus-wrong and right-versus-right issues. Also analyze what are the core moral values and possible trilemma solutions that maintain those core values.
11. Involve journalists in discussions about white papers / discussion papers. One suggestion was a role-play session where each side is presented and multiple journalists observe, comment and critique, and that this discussion could lead to an informed paper. The members of the audience of this session would be partner groups.
12. Have BCSSA go back to districts after three months and six months asking: “How has our ethical workshop affected you as a leader? Have you used what you learned in your school/district community?”
13. Have café dialogues about ethics and educational issues.
14. The BCSSA should design a poster with its logo and phone number included, that presents IGE’s five core values, four paradigms, and three resolution principles. This poster could be displayed in visible public places in our environment as a constant reminder and point of reference.
15. The BCSSA’s discussion paper on class size and composition for the Learning Roundtable should be a model for analyzing an issue using the scientific version stated by Rushworth. This paper was written as a submission to respond to School Act recommendations, “with the intention of enriching dialogue at the Learning Roundtable and thus contributing to shared understandings that can lead to mutually acceptable action that will increase the ability of schools to ‘enable all learners’.” (The discussion paper is attached to this EEI bulletin.) There was a conscious choice to not become positional, right versus wrong.

The group was very excited about the discussion and the direction of the initiative. There is a strong commitment to train more people. A single training session offered in February has filled up and a second one is now being offered to provide training for other interested educators.

Any questions or comments [please contact Ann Naymie at anaymie@telus.net](mailto:anaymie@telus.net)

Discussion Paper
on
Class Size and Composition
for
The Learning Roundtable

This discussion paper is provided in response to the Premier's invitation for other Learning Roundtable participants to submit their own comments following the BCTF's unilateral tabling of School Act Amendment recommendations on November 14, 2005. It does not counter those particular recommendations, but rather examines the class size and composition issue with the intention of enriching dialogue at the Learning Roundtable and thus contributing to shared understandings that can lead to mutually acceptable action that will increase the ability of schools to "enable all learners."

The following assumptions have been made:

- Participants at the Learning Roundtable share a sincere common commitment to students and to the public education system in British Columbia.
- The class size and composition issue is complex, involving the interaction of many pedagogical and fiscal factors. An effective response requires thoughtful consideration of that complexity and the experience and expertise that illuminate it.
- There can be multiple, valid points of view on the issue which, although rooted in common values and goals, result in conflicting responses of equal integrity.
- Students and the public education system as a whole will benefit most from principled deliberations that seek to understand the perspectives and interests that underlie diverse positions rather than negotiations based solely on the positions themselves.

This discussion paper is intended to contribute to the principled deliberations that the BCSSA believes the Learning Roundtable was established to foster. It is a starting point for discussion based on the experience of our members rather than a position statement. We fully expect to learn more about this topic from the response of others, and to revise our perspectives and understandings as necessary when we do.

The Nature of Class Size and Composition Concerns

Class sizes have increased relatively little on average at Intermediate and Graduation Program grade levels. This small increase in average size, however, belies the more significant increase in the number of classes in secondary schools that exceed reasonable size. This is a serious concern that affects both the range of choice offered to students and the quality of support for learning that teachers can provide. If some smaller classes are retained in order to offer less popular electives or address safety concerns in shops or labs then there must be a corresponding number of larger classes, generally in the academic areas, to maintain the average class size that is fiscally supportable.

Fundamentally, the increase in some secondary class sizes is a workload issue for the teachers involved (an observation that is not intended to diminish it), but it can also become a learning conditions issue for students in some cases. The problem can be alleviated in many cases by eliminating small enrolment classes, but this would reduce options for students and that may be detrimental to the success of some.

In some elementary and secondary schools the effect of small increases in average class size is exacerbated by the more critical fact that support services¹ may have been reduced. This has made it harder for classroom teachers to provide the support that students with exceptional needs require, which then also affects the support they are able to provide to students with more typical needs. Student diversity, or class composition, seems to us to have a more significant effect than class size on most students' school experience at this time.

Class composition cannot be adequately understood by simply thinking in terms of students with special needs. For one thing, in many metropolitan districts there are large numbers of students with English as a second language who are not "special needs" but who require very specific support from the classroom teacher. In some rural areas the same is true of First Nations students.

To understand class composition we must also appreciate that combined classes of two grades are increasingly the norm in elementary and are also not uncommon in elective courses at the secondary level. In both cases this is more prevalent than in the past.

However, the main reason that class composition concerns are not simply a matter of the number of special needs students arises from the inadequacy of the concept of special needs in representing student diversity. The particular categories of need defined in provincial policy do not capture all of the "special" needs of students and some of those that are not represented by any ministry funding category are the most challenging for teachers; for example, behavioural and mental health issues. Within the categories that are funded, the diversity of students is so great that some may require no support at all while others in the same category present significant challenges.

For those students whose challenges are adequately described by ministry funding categories, it is our experience that in many cases their challenges, frequently medical in nature, have become both more severe and often multiple than in the past. Thus, while the number of students in a particular category may not have increased, their needs and the cost of their support have increased in many cases because not only educational assistant support is required but also consultation and support from a resource teacher, speech pathologist, behaviour consultant and/or others. Such complexity, of course, also implies more meeting and planning time, not to

¹ For the purposes of this discussion paper, support services include all services that assist the classroom teacher in providing an inclusive program for all students. This may include traditional special education support, ESL, First Nations, counseling, etc., as well as para-professional support from education assistants.

mention the paperwork that accompanies it. This is particularly true in the Physical Disability / Chronic Health category.

All students are welcomed into the inclusive school and participate in the inclusive classroom, which is a demonstrably successful and viable approach with adequate training and support for the classroom teacher. Ministerial Order 150/89 makes inclusion official provincial policy by requiring that: “Unless the educational needs of a handicapped student indicate that the student’s educational program should be provided otherwise, a board shall provide that student with an educational program in classrooms where that student is integrated with other students who do not have handicaps.” As a result of this directive, and because it is generally considered to be “the right thing to do,” schools are increasingly attempting to design the regular classroom so that all students can be successful. District classes for special needs students are much less common than only a few years ago.

In an inclusive educational model, the classroom teacher is the first and most important source of assistance and support for all students. While other educational services will frequently be required to extend or enrich those which can be provided by the classroom teacher, under an inclusive educational model they should never displace the classroom teacher as the person with fundamental responsibility for enabling all learners under her care. Just as an architect may call upon structural engineers or interior designers to apply their particular expertise in the construction of a building, so too a teacher may call upon various colleagues within or beyond the school setting. Like the architect, however, the classroom teacher must retain overall responsibility for requesting, coordinating and integrating those services in the interests of the student.

This architectural metaphor contrasts with a commonly used medical metaphor in which the classroom teacher is analogous to a general practitioner who deals with common situations but passes responsibility to a specialist when complications arise that require knowledge beyond that individual’s experience or training. That metaphor applied reasonably well in the days when students with special needs were often referred out of the regular classroom to segregated settings, but it is no longer valid now that we are attempting to “enable all learners” within the regular classroom as much as possible. It is difficult for classroom teachers to assume their new responsibilities but they are trying valiantly, and with notable success, to do so. If outside support that is essential is reduced, teachers will feel that they do not have adequate professional and para-professional assistance. This creates both practical difficulty and emotional distress that depletes physical, emotional and psychic resources.

Unfortunately, the BC history of unproductive and unpleasant collective agreement negotiations taints the discussion of class size and composition. These discussions at the Learning Roundtable need to move forward and allow the Ready Industrial Inquiry Commission to do its work. However, we do acknowledge that this creates tensions for teachers.

It is understandable, therefore, that the BCTF seeks guarantees with respect to class size and composition. We absolutely understand the issues and experiences that give rise to this demand, and we share the urgent desire for improvements, but we do not feel that the response recommended by the BCTF will actually accomplish the desired ends, and we are concerned that it will impede wise professional decision making and efficient stewardship of scarce resources.

Formulaic prescriptions cannot appropriately provide for the uniqueness of students and contexts. Put simply, such prescriptions require districts to allocate resources needlessly in some cases and thus to not have the required resources in other situations that are not covered by any contractual provision. This is not in anyone’s best interest.

Thus, it seems to us that a critical issue for the public education system is to provide teachers with the assurance that their voice has been heard on this issue, that a serious attempt is being made to address the underlying causes, and they can be confident that this will continue to be the case. In part that assurance will be provided through a funding response that must be agreed between the BCTF and the government. Although the BCSSA is an interested party, it does not see itself as directly involved in this discussion. Where we can contribute more is in the discussion of how decisions are made about the allocation and use of resources once the overall budget is determined.

In this respect, the BCSSA feels that it is essential to avoid targeting of funds or prescriptive guarantees that eliminate local flexibility. We appreciate that this familiar recommendation from “management” may not be well received in schools or districts where trust is low. We also believe that there are many schools and districts in which it has worked in the past and would be welcomed in the future. Nonetheless, we would recommend that the Learning Roundtable carefully examine local decision-making processes in order to identify ways in which all parties—teachers, parents, administrators and trustees—can be given confidence that a thoughtful, principled and collaborative process will exist, with effective but efficient processes of appeal when required.

Conclusion

This brief overview of a complex topic has been intended to open discussion at the Learning Roundtable that the BCSSA hopes will contribute to deeper and more commonly shared understandings. We believe that this is the essential pre-requisite to finding a solution that is acceptable and sustainable.

Problem solving often fails when insufficient time is spent accurately defining the problem. Conflict resolution often fails when the parties focus on their dispute over proposed solutions and are unable to look beyond these “positions” to understand the underlying “interests.” The BCSSA hopes that the Learning Roundtable will not suffer from these common and predictable pitfalls. Consequently, we invite and will appreciate the concerns, perspectives and experiences of the other partner groups as we probe for understanding that can provide a foundation for successful problem solving and conflict resolution.