

EEI bulletin

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Two ethics education events occurred in Victoria in the autumn of 2006. The first, held October 5-7, was for an international audience, the 11th Annual Values and Leadership Conference, hosted by the D.J. Willower Center for the Study of Leadership and Ethics of UCEA, Pennsylvania State University. The theme was “The Moral Agency of the Educational Leader.” The second, on November 29, was a BCSSA provincial event, the Ethics Education Initiative 2nd Annual Forum, a pre-conference session to the association’s Fall Conference. The forum’s theme was “Pathways to Creating an Ethical Culture.”

The common ground was, of course, ethics in education. What’s fascinating about each event was the passionate belief and understanding of the importance of viewing all dynamics and decisions with an ethical lens, always asking “What is the right thing to do here?” and using a framework to guide that decision.

The October conference sessions were many and varied but together highlighted the need to prepare students, school athletes, new and experienced teachers, school administrators, superintendents, university presidents, curriculum designers and education policymakers for moral and ethical debate and decision making.

Delegates from around the world came to Victoria to present papers and engage in discussion on the “Moral Agency of the Educational Leader.” The sessions were abuzz with the sharing of experiences. A delegate turned to the person in the next chair

and suddenly found herself in a discussion about education in Iceland and emerging ethical issues in the field. Two other neighbouring delegates were talking about the ethical foundations of university plagiarism policies. Session after session there were opportunities for new explorations and to delve deeper into issues covering a wide range of interests. Within the bigger picture the concerns were the same. What does the moral agency look like? How does it manifest? How does culture shape it? How do laws and policies shape it? How does it effect marginalized populations? There were more than 90 presentations, including:

School Administrators’ Perceptions of the Supports and Impediments to Ethical Decision Making in Schools: A University’s Response to Construct Comfortable Spaces for such Difficult Dialogue – Marla Israel, Loyola University of Chicago

Educating All Children: A Legal and Ethical Imperative – Susan Bon, George Mason University

Ethical Leadership as a Different “Way of Being”: *Educators and Aboriginal Students* – Wanda Cassidy, Davita Marsden & Kau’I Keliipio, Simon Fraser University

The Reasoning and Actions of Principals in Anticipating and Responding to the Emotional Dissonance of Teachers Involved in a School Change – Joseph Hunter, Oregon

Compassionate Moral Agency: The Heart of Trans-

formational Leadership – Frank Van Hesteren, University of Saskatchewan

Teaching and Modeling Moral Agency through Professional Codes of Ethics – Terry Harman, Bowling Green State University

Two leading BC educators delivered keynote addresses to the international audience. Barry Anderson, representing the Ministry of Education, gave a provocative speech: *Is Ethical Leadership an Oxymoron in Public Education?* His data-driven presentation documented the baby boomers' continual domination of the education workplace, a power position they have maintained by continually raising the requirements and standards for younger generations to be employable in the education field. This serves two purposes: it keeps the boomers in control in the workplace; and it provides them with more work developing and delivering training programs for the younger generations. "Is this ethical leadership?" asked Barry. Equally thought-provoking was the keynote presentation by Lorna Williams, Lil'wat from the St'at'yem'c First Nation, an assistant professor and director of aboriginal teacher education at the University of Victoria, and the Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Knowledge and Learning. She followed John Elliott, a local First Nations storyteller, who talked of his childhood on the tip of Vancouver Island with the Wsanc people. He recounted stories of ceremonies, canoe trips across the waters, the formal honouring of the salmon and other gifts from nature, and his people's connection to the land and their ancestors.

Lorna began her presentation, *The Aboriginal and Indigenous Perspective on Education: Lessons to be Learned*, by describing the focus of aboriginal education. Foundational to the child's education was the support received from elders who raised the child from infancy and recognized what gifts the child brought to the world. Then the child spent time with and received guidance from older siblings who were practicing how to be responsible. The learning was experiential, deliberate and intentional—a journey of discovering what it means to be human and what that means to everyone else, including the ancestors. Lorna explained the power of the naming ceremony, when at puberty the elders would choose a name recognizing their strengths and those of the youth. She spoke about the use of stories to teach the way to be human, conceding that we are the most pitiful and needy creatures on earth, unable to function without plants, animals and water.

Lorna then recounted the devastating history after contact, beginning in the mid 1700s when residential missionary schools were established to civilize and Christianize First Nations children. The religious leaders, federal bureaucrats and onsite school administrators and teachers developed strategies to break the young children's relationships with their family, community, culture and language. The teachers also reconstructed the students' concept of time and severed their relationship with the land. This delivery of education went through various models but, for the most part, policies, practices and laws of the dominant European-Canadians towards the aboriginal people were based on exclusion, forced assimilation and cultural cleansing. Recognizing that these attempts to civilize aboriginal children were not successful, in the 1950s the federal government negotiated with provincial education systems to have these children educated in the public school system. Bussing First Nations students to public schools began in 1960. And, while the students were no longer the sole focus of a system's committed effort to render them civilized, they entered public schools where teachers had received no preparation for the most effective way to instruct them, let alone understand and appreciate their culture, history or community.

Today 48% percent of First Nations students in the public system graduate; 5% can go on to post-secondary education. Dr. Williams shared her recommendations to improve success, which for First Nations students is based on their ability to border-cross between worlds. She believes that First Nations children who have strong identities and a supportive network of family, peers, caring teachers and counsellors can be successful in both worlds. Another important practice is that, through their education, these young people be encouraged to believe in and hang on to the goals they had as children. If they have opportunities in leadership and service at

school and in the community, and if adults have high but warmly supportive academic and social expectations for them, they can succeed.

The conference was interesting, lively and powerful. Victoria was sunny and beautiful and will be remembered when the annual conference meets in Pennsylvania next year.

At the end of November, more than two dozen educators battled storms around the province to travel to Victoria and participate in the BCSSA's 2nd Annual Provincial EEI Forum. From conception, this initiative has been developed with a grassroots approach, with the BCSSA providing the program and each district deciding how to best use it in its culture. This forum was designed for district leaders to share strategies they found to be successful for building ethical discussions into educational decision-making. Facilitated by Malcolm Weinstein of Weinstein Management Ltd., the forum began with presentations from the West Vancouver, Burnaby and Mission school districts, outlining the evolution of their EEI program and sharing successes, growth and missteps with the group. The three districts had taken different approaches to implementing the ethics program into their culture and spoke of the growth and challenges in their districts.

Brad Lund, a principal and trained EEI facilitator, presented an overview of West Vancouver's burgeoning program. Superintendent Geoff Jopson has been responsible for bringing Rushworth Kidder's work to the attention of the BCSSA and over the past few years has attended sessions at the Institute for Global Ethics headquarters in Camden, Maine, and sent two of his leaders to participate in workshops there. Brad is the third administrator to be trained as a facilitator. The district has hosted several of Rushworth's presentations. Through a number of sessions for trustees, teachers, students, administrators and parents, they have been introduced to or become more familiar with the ethics program practiced in the district. An Ethics Cohort, comprised of school-based administrators, meets regularly to engage in the difficult discussion of ethical issues in their schools. Ethical Fitness® Seminars have been presented to Parent Advisory Councils, teachers, administrators, and students enrolled in the Challenge program and Planning 10. Through an involved process the West Vancouver Administrators' Association developed a vision of leadership founded on members' shared values. Putting "Children First" at the centre, the group's values wheel displays leadership styles and the components involved in delivering the best education to all students. School District 45 is also in the process of building a decision-making model that uses ethical discussions and critical thinking.

John White, district EEI contact for the Burnaby School District, presented the overview of the SD 41 ethics program. Rushworth Kidder came early on to present his program to the district's leadership staff, who then introduced the program to a group representing students, parents, support staff, teachers, administrators, district staff and trustees. This group of 25 attended an Ethical Fitness® Seminar. The Social Responsibility Leadership Committee moved the initiative forward by seizing the ethical values agenda. A principal, who is an SR committee member, was trained as an Ethical Fitness® facilitator and she and her committee designed an ethical values process to be used in community forums to develop a common vision for the district's work in social responsibility. The values process was also used to assist a group of teachers to work together more effectively. Another facilitator was trained. There has been a bit of a juggle determining how to involve all teachers and administrators in the program, again realizing that the grassroots approach is the most effective. The administrators' book club read and discussed Dr. Kidder's *Moral Courage*, and the Social Responsibility Leadership Committee continues to guide the process of "Determining Our Shared Ethical Values," hoping that all worksites will have finished the process by the end of the 2006-2007 school year. Schools have started developing SOBs (Specific Observable Behaviours) for each shared value and the next step is to have the values visible at each worksite.

Christie Whitley, manager of BCPVPA's professional programs, presented the Mission overview, prepared by

Frank Dunham, who was snowed in and unable to attend the conference. School District 75 has been actively involved in the program since the summer of 2005 and Christie has facilitated many of the sessions. Ethical Fitness® Seminars have been presented to teachers, principals and vice-principals, the district team, trustees, aspiring school leaders, and interested parents and students. Two administrators and two teachers have been trained as Ethical Fitness® facilitators to continue to support the practice of discussing issues and decisions with an ethical lens. The district is committed to maintaining and evolving the participation of educators in this program, and its systematic delivery of sessions “constructs comfortable spaces for such difficult discussion” (from Israel’s presentation topic at the Values and Leadership Conference).

Following these three presentations on impressive and very different EEI district programs, Malcolm Weinstein led the group to reflect on what could be learned from them. Some of the group’s key points include:

- Champions make it happen.
- We already face the reality of dilemmas every day, but this ethical work is a portal to deeper dialogue and a framework for building trust and more productive conversations.
- It is important to build bridges between what can be “vertical silos” in the education community (trustees, administrators, teachers, students, support staff, parents ...)
- False starts happen – persevere, keep the “tipping point” in mind.

The 25 participants continued their small-group work to design some action guidelines for districts interested in embedding ethical discussions and practice in their culture. Initially, discussion was focused on three different levels for a district ethics initiative: early, intermediate, advanced. The groups posed suggestions for those levels, but in the end felt that most of the action guidelines applied to all levels of an ethical culture. Some of the group’s 36 recommendations are:

- Include everybody at the table from the beginning in a flat, non-hierarchical conversation.
- Articulate that dealing with dilemmas is the work of being a human being and an educator.
- Develop and use a common language about the concepts and dynamics; use the language in all your conversations.
- Honour the culture you have, value it; emphasize that you are not taking the journey as a “fix” for something that is broken.
- Put the core values into action – model the way.
- Involve students in the training and using the language.
- A starting point: tailoring education to the needs of each student, supporting all types of learning and ensuring success for all students in the public system.
- Have a champion at the district level.
- Communication is crucial—understanding what the other is really saying.

- Support experienced educators to mentor new educators.

It was interesting to see the issues raised at the first conference by Barry Anderson and Lorna Williams addressed in these recommendations: tailoring education to the needs of each student; and mentoring new, presumably younger, educators.

The three district presentations and Malcolm Weinstein's summary of the group discussions are posted in the Ethics in Education section of the BCSSA website: www.bcssa.org

New IGE Resource

The Institute for Global Ethics has developed a set of right vs. right education dilemmas that is posted on the IGE website: www.globalethics.org/resources/dilemmas.htm. There are about a dozen real-life ethical dilemmas and, while they may be American, private school or university level, most are familiar to our public K-12 system. These can be used to get a group of educators warmed up discussing a different educational culture before delving into the complexities of its own dilemma for analysis.

If you have any questions or comments about the BCSSA's Ethics Education Initiative, please contact Ann Naymie (tel 604 221-2231, anaymie@telus.net).