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## Leadership for Learning Academy

It is said that when the planets line up, auspicious things can happen – that has been the case with the Leadership for Learning Academy program jointly developed by the British Columbia Superintendents Association (BCSSA) and the British Columbia Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association (BCPVPA). These associations have collaborated over the past few years using grants provided by the Ministry of Education for the purpose of supporting improved student achievement. The grants provided developmental programs for district staff, principals and vice-principals and teachers that build our capacity to improve student achievement.

The first two years of the Leadership for Learning Academy focussed on data driven dialogue – using data to help plan for improvement in student achievement. These topics were presented by Bruce Wellman and Laura Lipton. Years 3, 4 and 5 saw a major shift in direction as Faye Brownlie brought literacy and assessment for learning as the major focus of the Academy.

Faye Brownlie has played a major role in the content development and delivery of these programs. Many of you reading this article will have experienced one or more of Faye's presentations. You will also agree, that because of Faye's excellence, this program, originally planned as a one-year project, has evolved and grown much deeper in the teaching and learning.

The main purpose of the program in Year 3 was to provide a better understanding of the teaching of literacy to persons in leadership roles – superintendents, district staff and principals. Questions such as: "What does it mean to someone in a leadership role to support literacy instruction - to assist in implementing assessment for learning?" and "How is best practice linked to research?", were prevalent. The

initial program design saw 5 two-day sessions offered in each region of the province. The reputation for value in this program grew, and Faye was called upon to continue into Year 4.

Year 4 saw teachers join Faye's presentations. The "vertical slice" proved to be an excellent design piece as principals and teachers learned together from Faye and each other. The reputation of the program had grown and numbers swelled beyond capacity. This year, 20 days of presentations in the five regions were offered – 2 days each to elementary and secondary audiences. In Kelowna, over 200 educators attended. The focus of the presentations shifted to instructional skills and strategies for teaching literacy as informed by assessment.

In Year 5, the program continues but with a major innovation. Recognizing the demand for these techniques and ideas, it's impossible for Faye to deliver throughout the province. So a number of teachers became mentors working directly with Faye in her presentations to increase her ability to deliver these important ideas. These mentors co-present with Faye, are coached by Faye and build their own knowledge to ensure that their capacity is available within regions of the province. The program is now called, "Toward a More Literate Learning Community: Aligning Instruction and Assessment in Reading and Writing".

Eighteen teachers, consultants and principals are working with Faye in this mentoring role. She spends a full day with the mentors in the fall and spring. They commit to assist Faye in delivering three workshops in each of the fall and the spring. The mentors' districts commit to covering any TOC costs in return for building this valuable in-district resource. Attendance at regional sessions remains very high. Over 700 teachers, principals and district staff members attend these sessions in the regions of the province.

This year, Faye presents during the morning of each session, and one or more of the mentors guide the learning in the afternoon. Session evaluations by

participants are very positive, and the mentors and Faye gather immediately following the day to debrief and assess their learnings. Some of the quotes from the participant evaluations demonstrate just how effective this design and delivery has been.

- "So many great ideas - plans for our district - so many rich strategies"
- "More work with our principals on balanced literacy"
- "Excellent - totally great day. Great to be able to talk in small groups too"
- "Very valuable day with lots of informative and thought-provoking conversations in the morning and real-life examples and scenarios in the afternoon"
- "Very valuable, especially because all of our teaching staff was here - we'll start lots more conversations"

The mentors have already become a resource network to improve accessibility to these important ideas and to deepen the learning and work in these vertical slices.

Faye has been central to this professional learning, but she will be the first one to say that there were many others who facilitated the evolution and development of the programs. Cathy Elliott, now Chief Executive Officer of the British Columbia Leadership Council (BCELC), was key in the early days when she worked as program director with BCPVPA. Kim Young, working as a consultant with BCSSA, was central to the Leadership for Learning Academy continuing though faced with many transitional issues. Christie Whitely, now Program Director with BCPVPA, continues to play an important role in the literacy and assessment work in support of the Learning Academies. Of course Wendy Lee and Stanley French, executive directors of BCSSA and BCPVPA respectively, have had their shoulders to this wheel to keep it turning. Many others like Pat Dooley in the Kootenays have been key supporters in their regions and contributed to program design and content.

The term "Learning Community" has become difficult to define because of its multiple meanings and over use. The Leadership for Learning Academy illustrates the key aspects of a Learning Community very well. The focus on original purpose - student achievement - has remained strong. The Academy has grown and evolved becoming more effective and likely sustainable through the unselfish work of a number of people and organizations under the strong leadership of Faye Brownlie.