

ABANDON
ACADEMIC
ADAPTIVE
ADMINISTRATION
ADVERTISING
ANALYSIS
ANARCHY
APPRENTICESHIP
ARTS
ASSESSMENT
ATTACHMENT
BLUING
BRITISH COLUMBIA
BIOGRAPHY
CANADA
CANADIAN
CASCADIA
CITIZENSHIP
CLASSROOM
CLIMATE CHANGE
COERCION
COLLECTIVE
COMMUNITY
CONNECTIONS
CONSERVATION
CONSERVATIONISM
CONSTRUCTIVISM
CONSCIOUSNESS
CRAFT
CREATIVITY
CULTURE
CURIOSITY
DECONSTRUCTION
DEMOCRACY
DESCHOOLING
DEVELOPMENT
DIGITAL
DREAMS
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ECOSYSTEM
EDUCATION
EDUCATORS
ELECTIONS
ELVES
EMBODIMENT
EPISTEMOLOGY
EXISTENTIAL
EXPLORATION
FAERIE
FAMILY
FEARFUL SYMMETRY
FIRE
FLUVIAL
FOLK
FORESTS
GAMING
GENEALOGY
GENERATIONAL
GENEROSITY
GEOGRAPHY
GEO MORPHOLOGY
GLACIATION
GROWTH
GUILD
HABITAT
HERITAGE

HISTORY
IDENTITY
IMMIGRATION
INQUIRY
JARGON
JOURNEY

LEADERSHIP
LIBERALISM
LIBRARY
MASTERY
METAPHOR
MIND

NATURAL DISASTER
NATURAL HISTORY
NATURE
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PINION
PACIFIC SLOPE
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TRAVEL
TRUST
TWITTER
UNDERSTANDING
VALUES
WAR
WATER
WEBRIVER
WORKMANSHIP
WORKSHOP
X-RAY VISION
XEROGRAPHY
YOUTH
YURT
ZEITGEIST
ZOMBIE
21ST CENTURY
22ND CENTURY

TURNING STONES

A PROFESSIONAL GROWTH PLAN

G. THIELMANN

D.P. TODD SECONDARY

UPDATED FEBRUARY 2012

JOURNEYMAN
JUST SOCIETY
JUSTIFY
KICKSTART
LANDSCAPE

MOVIES
MOVING BACKWARD
MOVING FORWARD
MUSIC
MUTUALISM

"Turning Stones, A Professional Growth Plan"

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DEFINING PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Why do this, why read this?

I have put this together to remind myself what I've been and where I think I'll go, to be accountable to my peers, and share ideas with anyone who is looking. This is also a public (open) platform from which I can make connections between my professional practice, my beliefs & values, and the system in which I work.

I have already learned from the process of drawing in ideas, goals, writings, and schemes into one place; it feels like a good spring cleaning and helps bring some closure to unanswered questions while setting my sights on new ones.

If you -- colleague, student, parent, whomever -- want to question something you read here, to challenge me on my thinking, offer something fresh or at odds, or simply wish to comment. Contact information is included in the colophon (p. 2).

To paraphrase Frou Frou: let go, jump in, whatcha waiting for, there's beauty in the breakdown.

MY APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind. To make a deep physical path, we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives.

Henry David Thoreau

What is professional development?

One of the neat things about being a teacher is the chance to be deliberately engaged in life-long learning. This happens during the work day, on my own time, on non-instructional days, and in summer. Personal and professional learning are part of an “ecology,” a connected cycle of theory-making, reflective practice, and action-research. This “pro-d” takes many forms for me:

- conducting research and reflecting on how, what, and why students learn, and understanding the educational landscape in which this takes place
- learning more about my subject area as I plan for lessons, read and write on topics like democracy, citizenship, environment, sustainability, and history, and focus on what students do/can't do/could do/should do
- participating with other educators in collaborative discussions and projects on topics like heritage research, identity & inquiry, analyzing trends in current events, authentic balanced practice, critical thinking, meaningful assessment, and educational technology
- independent study, course design, textbook review/writing, advocacy for public education, and follow-up on all the powerful questions raised by colleagues and students.

My classroom is about student learning and student achievement, as is the planning, instruction, assessment, and humanity I put into my time as a teacher. Reflecting on my professional development is a step back (or a pause, at least), centered on what I am up to, but it is ultimately about the same thing... the social, intellectual, cultural growth of the students I meet. Regardless of the theme or focus, pro-d is ultimately about what I am learning, and what others are learning around me.

There is a special role in my reflection (and thus this document) for interrogating the structures that accompany public education, for celebrating the emergence (in any form or context) of cultural attributes that signal a new attitude towards community development, environmental sustainability, total cost economies, and perhaps some other “cultural” values that reckon with my own. The BC public education system is rife with dysfunctional structures, shallow thinking, and misunderstood paradigms, but it is also filled with creative ideas, caring educators, curious students, and committed parents who are making moves towards new cultures of being that are good for people and the planet. When we see formal learning as a relationship between real people in community, more like a guild and less like a factory, the bizarre eduspeak and various social agendas attending our system can be broken down and allowed to find their appropriate place. A central irony in my practice is that I seek some form of disruption, not unlike the calls for education reform from our own government, and yet the approach reformers take is almost always at odds with both my way of thinking and what I believe to be sound politics, discourse, and progress. I suppose I am fated to dwell midst the irony, and do so as a polemic loner.

I have also come to realize that in order to remain caring, hopeful, and optimistic as an educator, I have to own my trajectory and work towards my dreams with or without the support or understanding of structures and people around me, while at the same time working to improve the structures and listen to others. This hit home for me while listening to Stephen Lewis' eulogy for Jack Layton (Aug 27/11).¹ The basic idea that caring public service starts with a desire for fairness and mutual aid is a deep conviction and compelling goal.

¹<http://www2.macleans.ca/2011/08/27/stephen-lewis-eulogy/> or http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2011/08/27/ndp-statesman-stephen-lew_n_939139.html

ORIENTATION TO BELIEFS & VALUES

What are some of my primary pro-d goals and interests as an educator?

My work with students and educators focuses on the emergent identity of learners, the social, geographical, metaphoric, and curricular lenses by which this can be examined, and an assessment of the transformative experiential and technological tools by which this emergence can be realized. In short, I'm interested in contexts.

While modern Canadian History and is compelling and occupies most of the curriculum within my teaching assignment, I have a particular interest in regional British Columbia history and geography, and Canadian immigration stories from the 18th to early 20th century. My approach to all subjects is to engage student and educator identity (a product of both heritage and culture) in the exploration of significant and useful learning. This is supported with a reliance on authentic inquiry and assessment. One example of the boundary between my interests and the work I ask of students is the use of project-based learning in the area of heritage research, a combination of critical thinking and personal reconstruction of history through interviews and analysis of personal sources and modalities.

Underpinning my beliefs and values is a notion that a new culture is needed in our society, one that can be (should be) influenced by what happens in my classroom -- a culture of active citizens pursuing creative, intelligent, and connected pathways towards a sustainable future; grounded individuals who challenge the dominant culture on issues of relevance and who seek out new ways for values of community, heritage, and ecologically resilient adaptations to emerge.

What are some of the educational values that inform my teaching practice and my personal and professional growth?

- fair and reasonable assessment, a key part of a just practice
- balance of skills, knowledge, habits, means (process/path), and ends (outcome/goal)
- strong orientation towards development of student identity and narrative self-inquiry
- building self-governance, self-reliance, and responsibility in students
- building community without coercion, seeking interdependence not dependence
- rigorous learning related to relevant and meaningful learning outcomes
- respect for simple and direct student inquiry and constructivist learning
- strategic, thoughtful, narrational, and transformative use of digital technology
- creativity and diversity (multiple modes of seeing, knowing, expressing)
- learning that is embodied, holistic, and well-rounded
- curriculum design that looks for connections to citizenship and environmental sustainability
- work-life balance, importance of student and teacher personal time

What are some criteria I use to determine whether to join in a pro-d offering?

- event appeals to at least some of the values expressed above
- event is the result of an open, intelligent, and inclusive process of planning
- planning addresses a thoughtful question, relevant issue, or obvious need
- the topics are fresh, applicable, and somewhat original (I don't want to repeat the same idea over and over unless I have some new role to play as a participant)
- I won't feel dumbed down, talked down to, or subjected to rudimentary skills, ideas, or practices
- pro-d allows for a stress-free and learning-focused application of teacher contract considerations

BUSHWHACKING NEAR KULO CREEK, 1994



Working near Hazelton I fell in love (again) with stepmoss, devil's club, and western hemlock. I also grew to loathe the devil's club; sometimes it formed a canopy that one could almost walk under, but always the threat of thorny spikes on bendy stems striking one about the face, arms, and legs. I wore raingear always, as a futile defense against the club. Life in the woods was a lot simpler than one I lead now, but I feel as if those years built up a great storehouse of inner strength that never quite fades even as the joints age and tiresome thoughts swirl like mosquitoes.

What are some of the broader influences that inform my identity and my personal and professional growth?

Just Society

- Canadian relationships, values and community more important than statehood and nationalism
- the context for all other forms of free political and economic experiments is a free, secure, and socially cohesive nation that respects its distance on key issues
- equality (freedom) balanced with fairness (social safety)
- Middle Power, agency, diplomacy, compassion, liberty
- Pierre Trudeau, Stephen Lewis, Romeo Dallaire, Tommy Douglas

Adaptive Identities

- identity as a neural narrative, society as a geographic narrative
- self in relation to horizons of significance and authenticity
- self in exploration: dead reckoning vs comprehensive map
- consciousness is the narrative centre of gravity
- society as the outcome of human adaptive strategies
- Daniel Dennett, Jared Diamond, Charles Taylor

Inquiry Based Learning

- To what extent should divergent questions be the basis of education?
- How do these influences hold up to postmodern and postcolonial analysis?
- What is the cusp between self and society? How appropriate is it to think of them on a continuum?
- What pulls harder, human agency or resource base, when considering adaptive strategies
- Neil Postman, Charles Weingartner, David Suzuki, Jesus of Nazareth, Carl Sagan

Ecology

- ecological model and metaphor for systems organization at many levels
- informing context for sustainability and human-environment relationship
- basis for understanding social ecology, sociogeography, ecopsychology, ecotherapy
- provision and inspiration for narratives of identity
- orientation for environmental ethos (in contrast to other ways of approaching environmentalism)
- David Suzuki, H.D. Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, E.W. Teale, Murray Bookchin, David Abrams, Theodore Roszak, Chris Maser

Mutualism

- free market socialism, labour credits, barter system
- mutual aid, the role of cooperation in species & system success
- Peter Kropotkin, P.J. Proudhon, Ivan Illich, Kevin Carson
- Jura Watchmakers Federation in Switzerland

Self-Rule

- Swaraj, home-rule, self-governance, community building
- political & economic decentralization
- regenerate new reference points, systems, and structures that enable individual and collective self-development
- M. Gandhi, Helen and Scott Nearing, Ken Kearn,
- Indian independence movement, intentional communities, bioregionalism, 100-mile diet

Individualist Anarchism

- individual will comes before external ideals and social/political constructions
- evolution over revolution
- free associations in society, no coercion or manufactured consent
- Noam Chomsky, H.D. Thoreau, George Woodcock, William Godwin, M. Gandhi, Benjamin Tucker

Nonresistance

- related to nonviolence, passive resistance, pacifism, noncoercion, aspects of civil disobedience
- strategy for social change discouraging resistance to an enemy or simply discouraging violence
- important connection with Anabaptist/Mennonite beliefs and practices
- Menno Simons, Henry David Thoreau, Socrates, Leo Tolstoy, M. Gandhi, Václav Havel, J.H. Yoder, Jacques Ellul
- Quit India Campaign, Velvet Revolution, African-American Civil Rights Movement, Arab Spring

Feminisms

- aspects of anarcho-feminism, post-modern feminism, ecofeminism, feminist geography
- value of analyzing society and thought from a new perspective
- gendered and postgender politics, ecology, sociology, social justice
- Stephen Lewis, Emma Goldman, Mary Wollstonecraft, Naomi Klein

Phenomenology

- theory of consciousness and existence that provides both mystery and scientific understanding
- a context for the sensing and thinking and acting that takes place in one's "lifeworld"
- Jean-Paul Sartre, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir

Cascadianism

- West coast sensibility, Pacific Slope Orientation
- landscape as a relationship negotiated by art & poetry
- cultural landscapes of BC hold connected stories
- wider context for the practice of bioregionalism
- home of Sasquatch, bears, salmon, doug fir, redcedar, swordfern, and so many other formative denizens of the canopy, understory, and forest floor
- Emily Carr, M.A. Grainger, Peter Trower, Kirkpatrick Sale, John Green

Folk Geography

- organic relationship between people and their living spaces
- society as the outcome of geographic narratives
- bioregional contexts for *dasein* (home-instinct) and *topophilia* (love of place)
- pattern language(s) affecting adaptive strategies at many scales
- Christopher Alexander, Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs, Tom Brown, Wendell Berry, Robert Kroetch, Tim Lilburn, Bruce Chatwin

Faëry

- the power of myth, language, and imagination to explore and develop core values
- recreating ideal geographies and societies
- imaginative landscapes and narratives as historical experimentation, identity playground, and insight into the nature of power
- J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, the Biblical Narrative, Beowulf, Norse Saga, Germanic Folk & Fairy Tales, Arthurian Legends, Robin Hood, Isaac Asimov

Poetic Unity

- embracing irony and submitting to metaphor
- struggling with innocence and experience and the proliferation of resemblances
- understanding language, words, speech, meaning, sensing
- exploring the threshold of the imagination
- the power of hearth-words and stories, heroics, beauty, embodiment
- William Blake, Walt Whitman, Wallace Stevens, Allan Ginsberg, Peter Trower, John Sorrell, Derk Zimmer

EXPLORATION OF MY PRACTICE

What were some all-time favorite learning experiences that informed my teaching practice and my personal and professional growth?

- Building genealogy charts (cultural history and family background) for my family (Mennonite heritage) and my wife's family (Maritime Canadian heritage) using mostly online sources (2010)
- The "Finding Enkidu" (2004), "Being Earthly Bodies" (2003) and Cedar Symposium (1996) mentioned below
- A poetry-infused walking tour a friend and I put together for a Pacific Northwest Literature class while in university (UBC 1994); the experience still haunts me many years later and (I believe) provided a narrative hearth around which the professor continued to build his practice
- Planning for my wedding (1999) -- food, fire, writing, people, music, and landscape alterations; it was an exercise in geography, social discourse, and poetry as much as it was about love

Since becoming a teacher, which pro-d events have made an impact on my growth as an educator?

Cultivating Visionary Leadership in a Time of Global Change, Victoria BC, July 2011
Participant in a session called Nature and the Human Soul by Dr. Bill Plotkin at Royal Roads University; explored how we can progress from our current egocentric, aggressively competitive, consumer society to an ecocentric one that is sustainable, cooperative, just, and deeply imaginative. While the talk itself did not necessarily resonate, the premise and surrounding details of my brief trip have renewed some of my focus as an educator

Pacific Slope Consortium, Prince George SD 57, 2010-2011
creation of curricular projects for Social Studies and co-facilitator of a think-tank for critical inquiry, public education advocacy, social commentary, citizenship & sustainability; the use of critical inquiry, humour, mutual accountability, wit, original assessment, even some dadaist thought to broaden and enrich the boundary between identity and learning

Sustainable Resources Course Development, Distance Education Consortium of BC, 2009-2011
course writer and curriculum development for an online/DE version of Sustainable Resources Forestry 12; part collaboration, part soul-searching and connecting the dots from years worth of observations, part deconstruction of how distance learning does/could/should occur

More with Less Research Group, Prince George SD 57, 2010
provided leadership and media relations to a dynamic group of educators and parents who created a vision for sustainability in a school district facing massive cuts; our key focus was a report modeling an alternate budget process and list of creative measures to sustain educational and social capital across school communities (see appendices)

Teaching with Blogs: A Case Study of Technologically Mediated Literacy, 2010
contributing author to a peer-reviewed article in the International Journal of Learning and Media (MIT Press). The research centered around a blogging experiment I had done in 2005 English 8 & 9 students. My writing role, in this context, was limited to editing but I got to see inside academic publishing -- from observation to publication was 5 years and many premises have changed!

"Dead Reckoning," BC North Central Zone Educational Conference, Feb 2010 (presenter)
Topic: powerful questions about how students learn and demonstrate understanding; tracking a course through curriculum, identity, instruction, assessment, and student behaviour

UNBC Tech for Learning Series, UNBC Prince George B.Ed program, 2007-2010
(guest presenter in candidate teachers' classes) four somewhat connected presentations on the possibilities of technology for students and teachers and some inquiry as to how the identity of both plays a role in all learning transactions

Pearson Education Canada

Consulting writer and reviewer, Counterpoints 2nd ed. Social Studies 11 textbook, 2009-2010

New Pathways to Gold Symposium, Barkerville, October 24-26 2009, (participant)
resource discovery and session discussions on a more inclusive history of BC; attended with other Socials teachers from PG and joined in a chaotic but compelling mix of people, presentation, and ideas, some incongruent but all challenging at some level

District Action Initiative Technology Grant, Prince George SD 57, May 2009
mobile learning and content, ipods as geographic literacy tools, continued support for 2006 grant and web publishing of related resources

"Digital Storytelling," BC North Central Zone Educational Conference, March 2009 (presenter)
Topic: building and assessing accounts of deep learning with and without technology; learning to recognize the unique ways in which our students arrive ready to share what they have learned

Exploring Voice, Vanway Elementary, Spring 2008

Series of group sessions with elementary students teaching use of Garageband for application to a story-telling project: sound effects, narration, identify/personify tone and mood, personal discovery

"Technology, Curriculum, Identity," BC North Central Zone Educational Conference, March 2008

(presenter) Topic: the role personal identity and self (of both teacher and student) have in making curriculum awaken and learning stick, and an understanding of how this is impacted by technology

District Technology Coach, Prince George SD 57, 2003-2007

Activities: team and individual mentoring, pro-d, training, and collaboration on Web 2.0 tools (blogs, podcasts, wikis, etc), rich media applications Garageband, video editing, web savvy & safety

"Exploring the Digital Landscape," BC North Central Zone Educational Conference, March 2007 (presenter) Topic: making the most of the wired classroom with transformative educational technology; some surprising ideas on what works and what doesn't (included research results from an Innovation Grant)

District Technology Innovation Grant, Prince George SD 57, May 2006

focus: podcasting for global literacy, exploration of rich media and ipods for field interviews
nature of grant: \$11,000 for equipment and release time

"Blogging and Beyond," BC North Central Zone Educational Conference, March 2006 (presenter)
Topic: Educational Technology to bridge the gap between curriculum and identity

Less Marking, More Assessment, Heather Park Middle School, February 2006 (facilitator)
workshop with a group of Grade 8 teachers looking to decrease their own busywork and marking load but improve the quality of their assessment; developed a collaborative plan to experiment with open-notes assessment (use of in-class work for problem-solving) that we termed "verification"

Public Health Agency of Canada Project, July 2005

documentary film about a culturally-based drop-in centre and HIV/AIDS program in downtown Prince George (The Fire Pit, managed by Positive Living North); my role was writing/filming/editing. The film was used to locally to promote the program and was also shown as part of the media showcase at the XVI International AIDS Conference, 2006

Technology for Learning District Committee Member, Prince George SD 57, 2004-2005

Team of educators examining best practices for the integration of technology into learning communities

Quality Learning Globally Member, Prince George SD 57, 2004-2005

Team of educators engaged in professional development of resources, tools, and practice for online learning; key component was inquiry into how students succeed in distributed learning environments

ALTIS Tech Planning Workshop, Edmonton December 2005

attended with assistant superintendent and district tech principal; focus on managing information technology infrastructure and integration from a district perspective

"Blog This!" BC North Central Zone Educational Conference, March 2005 (presenter)

Technology and the Humanities: new tools and new challenges for thinking, communication, research, and literacy, including a look at a blogging project involving 112 students

"Finding Enkidu" SFU M.Ed Cumulative Examination Presentation Conference, July 2004

explored the use of ecological models and geographic metaphors to inform the process of narrative self-inquiry and curriculum design (part of a continuum, or landscape); presentation included a paper and accompanying film project

District Technology Team Secondary Teacher Rep, Prince George SD 57, 2003-2005

Decision-making committee overseeing technology standards and district plans; served on Technology Standards Working Group, Technology Assessment Working Group

"Being Earthly Bodies" SFU M.Ed Collaborative Project, July 2003

A poetic, embodied, connected exploration of ritual in both performance and writing. The physical aspect of our inquiry took place in the forests on Burnaby mountain, an encounter designed to bridge classmates' identity with the complexities of a midslope ecosystem

UNBC Geography Symposium - Prince George, May 2003, participant

Provided some assistance with field trip support material, attended workshops on human and physical geography, and contributed to a panel discussion on Geography education (focus on connecting the secondary and post-secondary communities)

Technology Committees, D.P. Todd and College Heights Secondary, 2002-2010

team development of a 3-year plans, focus on staff training, pro-d and inservice on website construction and management, marks programs, multimedia presentation and video editing

"Mobile Metaphor" SFU M.Ed Team Project, Feb 2003

Understanding the relationship between technology, identity, and student learning -- four different lenses on the role of tech in learning and an experiment in collective examination of evidence

Braided Stream Project, College Heights Secondary, 1998

It began with photo that launched a website and long term interest in educational technology. This collaborative effort between three SS teacher demonstrated the power of spontaneous, transformative professional development when an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect exists

The Lessons of Basketball, Coaching at College Heights Secondary, 1997-2002

Some students convinced me to coach their Grade 8 basketball team and I was hooked (for a few years anyways) -- I learned a great deal about student motivation, how to bring a group together, organization, web design, and a bit about hoops.

The Lessons of Horses, Flying U Ranch, 1997-2001

Art Reed, an administrator that centered his practice around making meaningful connections with students, invited me to join him as chaperone and organizer on a rip with 40 Gr. 8s to a working ranch on Green Lake, B.C. Having done this trip as a Gr. 8 student myself, I felt like this was my initiation into a teaching profession that was *CALLING* for authenticity in dealing with students

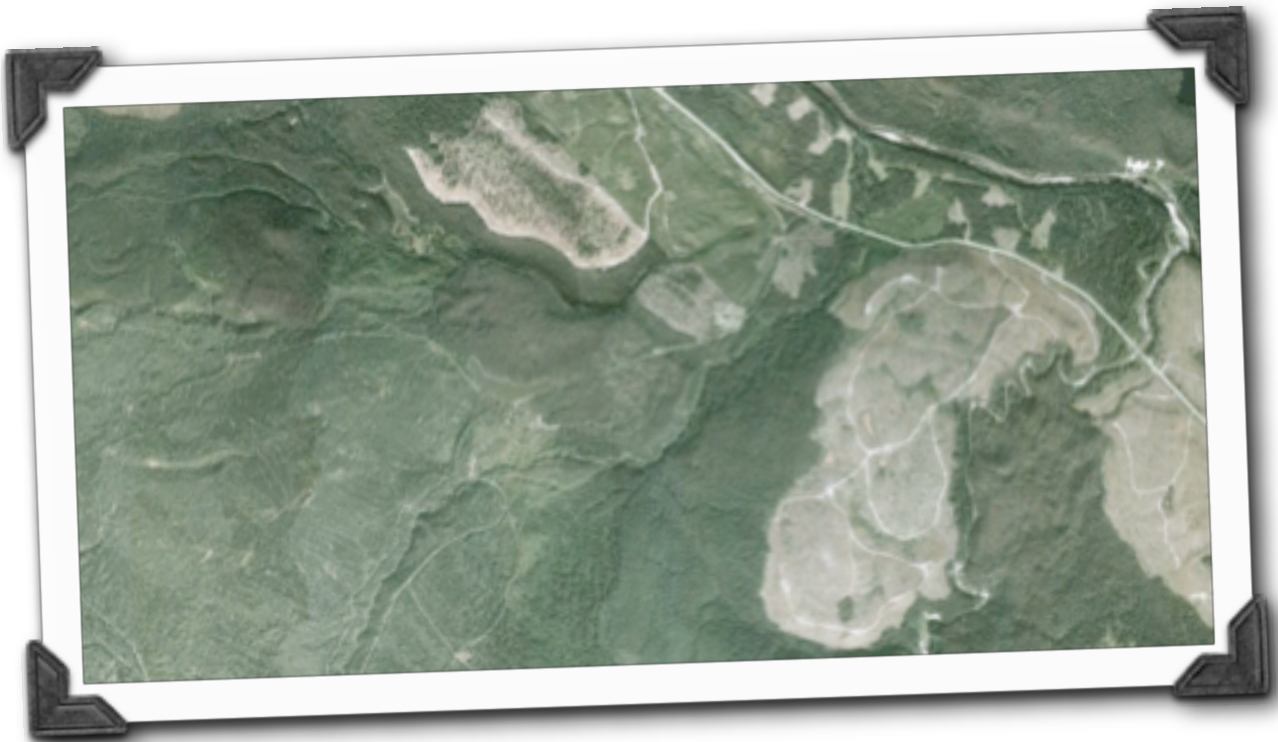
Summer School of the Arts, Island Mountain Arts, Wells, BC, July 1997

Drawing and watercolour workshops -- this gave some solidity to my foundation for teaching art and showed me a few things I could do well and others I could not

Cedar Symposium, Queen Charlottes Islands/Haida Gwaii, May 1996

Participant in a remarkable collection of stakeholders: cultural, ethnobotanical, ecological and economic perspectives on growing Western Redcedar and Yellow-Cypress on the Queen Charlottes Islands/Haida Gwaii

THE ENVIRONS OF THURSDAY CREEK



This is a curious little spot near the confluence of George Creek and the Willow River, each of which have peculiar stories intertwined with my own. The smaller Thursday Creek (centre) has been the scene of some interesting encounters and explorations in three key time periods of my adult life.

What is some of the contract language that informs teacher pro-d in our school district?

Section F Professional Rights - Article F20 Professional Development

20.1 Professional development activities are desirable but not required activities undertaken by teachers to develop themselves as professionals. Professional development activities most often involve teaching/learning strategies designed to enhance the learning environment and may take place during or outside of the regular work day or work year. Participation in a personal professional development program is voluntary. However, teachers are encouraged to participate with colleagues at the school, zone and district level in professional development activities that have been planned for their group.

[this establishes teacher autonomy over pro-d and choice to participate in specific pro-d activities]

Article F22 Non Instructional Days

22.1 The maximum number of non-instructional days as provided for in Article D.20 shall be allocated as follows:

- a. one (1) day for the District-wide professional development day;
- b. the remaining days to be used as mutually agreed between the Principal of each school and the staff of that school subject to the Standard School Calendar Regulations and the relevant Ministerial Order(s).

[this establishes that the allocation of activities to NIDs is by mutual agreement -- participation in these activities is still voluntary; traditionally the first NID of each year is set aside for admin-directed activities, although most of these are turned over to staff to plan]

Has this contract language been respected?

For the most part, there has been solid respect for the contractual framework for pro-d on out district among teachers and the broad range of staff representing the employer (e.g. school administrators). The most obvious issues seem to be disengagement among both these groups around making pro-d time meaningful, and an occasional attempt to corral teachers into a room for a canned delivery of some kind. I think most educators recognize that well-planned professional offerings have a higher appeal and uptake of learning outcomes than coerced, perfunctory exercises, but many teachers and district staff are hard-pressed for the time it takes to make pro-d great and so they settle for whatever happens by chance or come to rely on the work of others (see *buzzwords* below).

How has this influenced my approach to pro-d?

- advocated for teacher autonomy at every opportunity, informing staff and administration about both contract language and history of interpretation
- refuted models of pro-d that use coercion or are designed for compliance with largely unexamined goals or poorly planned activities (sadly these are too common)
- made a point of being public about what I have planned for my own pro-d and inviting others to join me in professional development activities if I have not already joined someone else's
- modeled autonomy by designing unique, powerful pro-d for myself and others; I have offered or hosted some kind of pro-d for fellow staff on 3-4 NIDs each year from 1998-2007 and on at least one NID each year from 2008-2011
- although the practice of facilitating widespread offerings was great for about 10 years, my focus has shifted to more pro-d on citizenship, heritage, and cultural geography (less on technology) with new groups of educators (e.g. Pacific Slope Consortium)
- I consider this shift (occurring around 2010) to be something like a 10-yr trajectory exploring more targeted avenues for participation and delivery of my pro-d time

What are some of the current pedagogical buzzwords that could offer promise if they become detached from cursory treatment, political manipulation, misunderstanding by administrative groups, and the tendency towards jargon?

- Professional Learning Community
- Assessment For Learning
- 21st Century Learning
- Personalized Learning
- Project-Based learning
- Action Research
- Learning Teams
- Teacher as Facilitator

(next step: identify pros/cons, need addressed, challenges & solutions... some of this is covered in the Position Paper section)

STUDENTS WITH BOOKS, 2002



An early attempt at 21st century, personalized, 1-1 tech, inquiry-based learning before I knew what those labels meant. Students were working together, but pursued unique questions with their choice of learning tools.

What are some of the local trends in pro-d coordination?

- the school district used to be buzzing with small scale pro-d events organized either by teachers or jointly between teachers and district staff (2001-2005)-- so many events that an online registration system was needed to keep track
- this type of pro-d was creative and authentic, as it was rooted in classroom practice, but did not always have depth (long term commitment and follow-up to ideas presented) or breadth (numbers of participants -- this fell off after 2005 and coincided with some changes at the School Board Office)
- the model has shifted to management-defined goals and the use of team grants as the vehicle for realizing these goals (release time for groups with a project), although teacher agency is still the key ingredient in bringing these goals, in some fashion, into the classroom
- this type of pro-d has more long-term benefits if teachers are able to use the opportunity to build power and meaning into the structure offered; however, the board office goals on their own are often too vague or divergent from classroom needs to be taken up without modification, and so the emphasis of team grants must be rooted in authentic inquiry to have meaning
- resilient, creative teachers have usually found a way work within these parameters. i.e. within the shift that took place between 2005-2009
- the trend towards less teacher involvement and less teacher-admin-board office partnerships across the district has created some issues with trust and expectations. It may also be an inevitable consequence of cutbacks and downsizing, and has meant a deterioration of the energy that most teachers are willing to put into district-wide professional development (2009-2011), and a growing gulf between teacher and management perceptions of each others' willingness to engage on real professional development beyond the surface treatment of jargon and popular models imported from outside the district
- the result of this recent trend has been erosion of an acceptable level of rigorous planning, input & feedback, inclusive decision-making, program designs that can stand up to scrutiny, and detailed, sound rationale. I expect this of my own designs for learning in my teacher practice, and I expect it of the people I work with and the structures that supports my work -- I hope the trend I detect is a self-correcting one
- I am highly conscious of the division that has taken place and have , accordingly, designed my own pro-d to have practical uses that preempt the jargon and long-term logic that survives the current popular models; while keeping an eye open for the fresh and fabulous (I am not immune to good ideas, even when they come with a trademarked program!)

What are some challenges and solutions faced by our school district?

There is much to celebrate in how our schools, district, and education system delivers learning opportunities to students and sees them through to becoming whole people with broad skill sets and an eye to what they are good at and even what they are not. Our district has some structural barriers that need to be overcome to sustain and improve the good work that is being done:

1. Educational Leadership - vision (where present) often built in isolation context (school/teacher input), recycling of educational jargon without understanding how they fit (or don't fit) together
2. Sustainability - credibility gaps throughout, adversarial process, design flaws, green failures, priorities revealed political agendas and affirmation of power concentrations
3. Management Philosophy - autocratic practice, promotion of servility, misreading needs (not an indictment; these are ageless society-wide habits that are hard to break)
4. Technology - backroom decision-making, erosion of support structures, shut-out of educators
5. Goal-setting - District and School planning processes/documents suffer from multiple contradictions and cursory treatment

These issues are not unique to our organization, nor are the fault of any one person or event. And they can be chipped away at in a number of ways: intelligent system design, inclusive decision-making, mutual accountability, removal of political barriers. When this happens, we move towards something fresh:

1. Educational Leadership - vision is built and constantly renewed out of well-understood contexts, continuous improvement is a big circle and is not always moving "forward"
2. Sustainability - designed for credibility and inclusion, earth and community consciousness, partner groups are included, not just consulted or informed of results
3. Management Philosophy - distributed practice, promotion based on successful praxis, ongoing needs assessment
4. Technology - inclusive decision-making, creative use of support structures, reliance on educators
5. Goal-setting - District and School planning processes are integral to items 1-4 and are grounded in both the beautiful/ideal and the practical/evidenced

This analysis may seem like an excoriation, but that is not the intention. Organizational deficits and frustrations are not unique to the school system, and thus my thoughts on our structures are as much an extension of my values as they are rooted in local observations. Change in most organizations is so often reactive, or when proactive, based on very shaky understandings, so it sometimes need to be pushed from people, like me, who care and have paid attention to what is going on. My aim in sharing these thoughts is to apply rigorous critical thinking to all aspects of public education, something which is a shared responsibility among all educators.

It is also fair to note that I have personally felt well-supported by fellow educators and most district staff for many of the years in which I have been involved with district and global initiatives related to transformative technology, assessment, student learning & identity research, and educational communities. The list of pro-d experiences mentioned earlier is a testament to the freedom I have had to explore meaningful learning. I have also been blessed with interesting courses, fantastic students, and memorable teaching & learning environments. Teachers build up a great resilience to funding shortfalls, drab interiors, stale air, zany school politics, and the aforementioned organizational deficits, and in so doing we are able to focus on our students and the subjects of inquiry regardless of the milieu. It seems fairly clear though, that anything we can do to make the milieu more dynamic, intelligent, calm, fun, functional, balanced, inclusive, or wild (according to each teachers' need and context), it is worth putting in some effort to make it happen; thus my present discourse. One must do what one can.

What are some defining characteristics of my current work environment?

School Mission Statement

We will provide a safe environment which will promote the intellectual, cultural, physical, and social development of all D.P. Todd students. We would like our students to become productive, responsible and adaptable members of our ever changing society.

History

The school is situated in the Heritage Subdivision of Prince George, British Columbia. It was built in 1977 and officially opened in September 1978. The school name honours former District Superintendent of Schools, David Todd, who retired from School District No. 57 in 1976. Among other things he was known to dazzle students with his magic shows. Initially the school housed Grades 8 to 10, but progressed to Grade 11 and 12 by 1979; June 1980 saw the first graduating class leave D.P. Todd Secondary School. The school has seen many staff come and go over the years; one of the original teachers, Randy France retired June 2011 and another Judy Addie is still here. Their legacy, like all those who have long-term dedication to a school community, includes humour, respect for student difference, and confidence in the ability of people to overcome difficulties and find success. Another "original," John Vogt, retired in 2007 and had a similar influence on the school's reputation and student success. Many of our current students are children of past students, and are able to see that the school forms an important niche in their concept of community. The school has some strong traditions in music, leadership, film, and athletics in addition to academic and elective successes. The school has had some mechanical upgrades and minor renovations over the years, and is currently third on a district priority list for building projects. The building has been over-capacity for some years (we have a working capacity of 625 mitigated by three portables), and would see the addition of a classroom and multi-purpose room added in 2013 according to the district schedule for capital upgrades.

Demographics

Situated adjacent to D. P. Todd is our long-term "feeder" school, Heritage Elementary, which has supplied about half of our new Grade 8s each year since the closure of Meadow Elementary in 2002. D. P. Todd enrolls about 750 students. The school is located in a quiet neighbourhood and is served by Prince George Transit Service. With the closure of Lakewood Jr. Secondary, in September 2010 D.P. Todd will welcome the students from two additional feeder schools: Foothills Elementary and Quinson Elementary. While there will be less room for students enrolling under the district's open-boundaries transfer policy (about half of our students were from out-of-catchment in 2009-2010), our school will become more reflective of the community in which it is situated. We also appear well-positioned to weather the effects of declining enrollment being felt across much of British Columbia. It is a testament to our successful programs, caring staff, and supportive student/parent community that we have been able to stay full via transfers during a period of demographic transition in Prince George.

Programs

We offer a full range of educational courses in Math/Sciences, English, Social Studies, French, Home Economics, Technology Education, Business Education, Physical Education, Music (Band), Art, Leadership and Drama. Special programs include Special Learning Resources, Alternate Education, Pre-Employment, Learning Assistance, and an Aboriginal drop-in room. In addition a Curriculum Enrichment Program is available at the Grade 8 and 9 levels and an array of Career Preparation Programs and Apprenticeship opportunities are available at the senior grades levels.

Special Characteristics

On the topic of the “geography” of learning it is worth noting the role our library plays in the culture of our school. As a meeting place, safe spot for diverse cross-sections of students, study zone, conversation pit, resource centre, open classroom, technology hub, and centre of excitement for readers, our library is a very high-traffic zone and has been described as the heart of the school. The volumes of students and depth of impact our library attracts is a source of pride and is shared by all staff. Similarly, these observations might be made about many areas in our school for smaller groups (Alt Ed., the shops, the Film Studio, the Band Room, the Gym, etc.) where students are treated with respect and supported in their learning. Another area of recognition is the high rate of parent volunteerism in support of school programs such as Music. Our Band Program has set a high standard for continuous improvement, performance accomplishments, and per-capita enrollment.

Our staff has a long tradition of respect for policy, democracy, and clear communication while at the same time a willingness to experiment and provide leadership to the school district in distinct ways. Some notable structures and activities now common in our district schools had their start at D.P. Todd: Pre-Employment Program, use of computer networks and servers, open boundaries, accelerated enrichment program for junior academics, a film program, service-based leadership classes, elementary retreats, sequenced grad portfolio program, healthy schools initiative, and technology innovation grants. In at least four of these cases, our work met with resistance and critique before becoming standard practice in the district. We value our tenacity and creativity as much as our considered approach to collective change.

Some of these characteristics have suffered some erosion over the last few years, partly due to the disorientation in our school district brought on by “Sustainability” cutbacks to services and supports, but also due to changing leadership and educational paradigms that are common throughout our school system with their own peculiar manifestations at our site.



What is my teaching background?

BC Public High Schools (Prince George SD57)

Duchess Park Secondary, College Heights Secondary, D.P. Todd Secondary teacher, 1996-2011 (with number of times taught - semestered courses or blocks):

- Social Studies 8-11 (55)
- Geography 12 (8)
- BC First Nations 12 (3)
- English (Language Arts) Gr. 8-12 (14)
- Art 8-9 (6)
- Planning/CAPP 10-11 (4)
- Other - Alt, Math, Drama (3)
- Leadership positions (10) - Student Leadership, Social Studies Department Chair, "P.O.S.R."

Central Interior Distance Education School - Secondary and Adult Learners

- Online and Paper-based Contract Marker For Social Studies, Geography, History, BC First Nations, and Comparative Civilizations, 2001-2011
- Course writing - Sustainable Resources 12 Forestry

Post-Baccalaureate & Post-Secondary

- Guest Speaker UNBC Teacher Education Program (on Technology & Assessment), 2008-2010
- District 57 Technology Coach, 2003-2007
- SFU TLITE Post-Bacc Mentor (Teaching & Learning in a Technological Environment), 2004-2006

Where did I go to school?

Simon Fraser University, Off-campus Cohort, Prince George, BC completed July 2004 - Masters of Education (Curriculum/Instruction/Leadership)

Simon Fraser University, New Caltec Module, Prince George, BC completed December 1995 - Professional Development Program

University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC completed April 1994 - BA in English and Geography

College of New Caledonia, Prince George, BC 1989-90 - one year of University Transfer courses

Tauernhof (Torchbearers/Capernwray School), Schladming, Austria fall 1987 - a semester of religious studies

Duchess Park Secondary, Prince George, BC 1982-87 - high school grades 8-12

Ron Brent Elementary School, Prince George, BC 1976-1982 - elementary grades 2-7

Millar Addition Primary School, Prince George, BC 1975-76 - elementary grade 1

Tenbroek Elementary School, Abbotsford, BC 1974-75 - kindergarten

Have I published anything?

Judith C. Lapadat, Willow I. Brown, Glen N. Thielmann and Catherine E. McGregor. *Teaching with Blogs: A Case Study of Technologically Mediated Literacy*. International Journal of Learning and Media 2010 2:2-3, 63-79 pros: peer-reviewed publication cons: I made minor contributions to the article writing, although my class & students were the focus of the study

What other jobs have I had?

Timberline Forest Inventory Consultants, Prince George, BC 1992-1996

Position: Ecosystem Geographer

Responsibilities: biological/geological data collection for maps and development of ecosystem-based forestry management plans

Other "Bushwork." Prince George, summers 1988-1991

Ministry of Forests (P.G. Region), Athenree Enterprises, Wehr Enterprises, Northern Forest Management, Tawa Enterprises

Positions: Silviculture/Ecology Research field assistant, treeplanter, timbercruiser, surveyor

Responsibilities: general grunt moving through the hills and valleys, hiking, quadding, bushwhacking, digging in the ground, looking up into the canopy

YEAR 2000



So many ideas to consider, so many ways in which my dreams could play out, and pathways they could take. I have become content with a certain amount of restlessness, a realization that many ideas are meant to simply dwell, and others that beg new horizons.

ACTIVE PRO-D PLANS

What did 2009/2010 look like for my pro-d?

Sep 8 School Goals-based Non-Instructional Day

- staff-based discussion of department and school goals for the year -- these can be a bit painful sometimes but often provide reference points for other, more productive conversations throughout the year

Oct 23 Provincial Pro-D Day

- follow-up on the New Pathways to Gold symposium in Barkerville² (attended with other teachers Sep 24-26) -- review of resources, developing prospects for use of "cultural landscape" material in Social Studies 9-11

Jan 29 Semester Turn-around day

- preparation for upcoming zone conference presentation (see below)
- preparation for second semester coursework (SS11 revisions)

Feb 26 District Pro-D Day

- workshop presenter at the BC North Central Zone Educational Conference³. Session title "Dead Reckoning: How to get your students talking about their learning journey." With Ian Leitch, we guided a group of teachers through powerful questions about how students learn and demonstrate understanding; and the value of tracking a course through curriculum, identity, instruction, assessment, and student behaviour
- took in the keynote session

March 26 School-based Pro-D Day

- professional writing related to technology change and district level technology planning

Apr 30 School-based Pro-D day

- Pacific Slope Consortium startup -- devoted some discussion and writing time to its goals around curricular projects, critical inquiry, public education advocacy, and meaningful assessment, and identity/learning boundaries

Yearlong Ongoing Pro-D in 2009-2010

- involvement at a few levels in the "District Sustainability" process related to school closure, program reconfiguration, and changes to technology standards -- this sucked a great deal of time from Jan-June but was probably worth it; very few teachers felt free to express their thoughts and get involved, so it was important for a teacher/parent point-of-view to be vocal and keep the district staff and trustees informed and accountable
- research and writing for Distance/Online Sustainable Resources 12 Forestry Course Development

² http://www.barkerville.ca/docs/pathways%20to%20gold%20symposium_%20release_sept%202009.pdf

³ <http://bctf.ca/Northcentralzone/brochure%202010changed%20for%20website.doc>

What did 2010/2011 look like for my pro-d?

Sep 7 School Goals-based Non-Instructional Day

- staff-based discussion of department and school goals for the year
- course planning for a new approach to teaching SS9 (centers the curriculum around focus questions and four pivotal narratives)
- outcome: sorted out classroom resources and revision of course outlines for SS9 and Geog12

Oct 22 Provincial Pro-D Day

- meet with a group of Social Studies teachers (PGSS, CHSS, DPTS, plus two retired SS teachers invited as guest speakers) at a deep symposium on the topic of Assessment for Learning
- hosted by the Pacific Slope Consortium, this experimental pro-d retreat model has since been specifically endorsed by the Ministry of Education with an invitation to sponsor the Consortium's work in the future
- outcome: developed action research on folk culture ("mumble-the-peg") and rigorous debate on the text and subtext of public education agendas at local and provincial scales

Jan 28 Semester Turn-around day

- evaluation of SS11 exams
- planning for/with student teacher for division of duties in his final practicum
- outcome: deeper commitment to essay outlining for SS11 and confidence in the instructional design for the upcoming practicum

March 4th District Pro-D Day

- North Central Zone Conference: GPS for Educators with Rob Bryce (all day session at UNBC)
- outcome: learned enough to use the GPS for a basic geocache activity; still more to go before I'd be ready to design GPS-related activities for students

May 6th School-based Pro-D Day

- incorporating current events in to core Social Studies curriculum (at CHSS)
- student-led demo on the potential of facebook to serve school website functions
- outcome: made a start towards using a matrix for creating phenomenological ecologies in SS11 -- a means of focusing student inquiry on current events while bringing in critical thinking, skills & habits, and curricular contexts

June 3rd School-based Pro-D day

- organizing local heritage/geography walking tour of downtown Prince George
- requested by 4 staff, anticipating about 12, build on the legacy of Keith Gordon, Garvin Moles, and
- planned follow-up includes a public library local history literature review
- connections to local history, cultural landscapes, evolution of public space, topophilia, geomorphology; pre-planning included some research and package preparation for attendees
- outcome: 15 attended, many in the group were able to add to the collective understanding of the cultural landscapes in our city -- excellent questions, discussion, exercise, and shared experience; fortunate timing with a firefighter's bbq at City Hall ready just at the end of our walkabout!

Yearlong Ongoing Pro-D in 2010-2011

- reading and project design related to cultural landscapes and problems in 17th and 18th century Canadian history
- ongoing website development for teacher and course webpages -- focus this year on fixing broken links, rebuilding SS9, updating SS11
- collaboration sessions with department on many fronts related to student learning (from the mundane to the esoteric), but mainly our school's Gr. 10 Barkerville trip
- genealogy for students -- connects with the Heritage projects in SS8-11; focus on chart graphics and symbols (e.g. heraldry)
- reclaiming history and geography resources (mainly books) from closed schools (LWJS, JMJS)

- textbook review for Pearson Education: Pathways 2 (SS8)
- follow-up (action research?) on community-based initiatives with the More-With-Less group advocating for greater accountability of the school district to parents, educators, and others
- some topic-specific writing projects connected to accountability for the education system in which I work; the results have been shared with school and district administration
- staff and wider educational discourse on progressive alternatives to some of the stagnant ideas and micromanagement that pervade our educational system (i.e. mitigation)
- research, feedback, and advocacy related to school district plans for technology standards and support
- took on a UNBC student teacher for his final practicum in my SS11 and Geog12 classes
- used data gathered in 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 to reflect and refine my strategies related to formative assessment in SS9, SS11, and Geog 12
- course designs: SS9 -- major revisions to outline and assessment
- collaboration with Pacific Slope Consortium research group on development of two student projects (SS9 Cultural Landscapes, SS11 Echo Generation)
- course writing: Sustainable Resources 12 Forestry, an online course design for the Distance Education Consortium of British Columbia
- correspondence with teachers in BC and offshore BC schools in China on SS9 and Geog12 resources & approach to design, instruction, and assessment

What does 2011/2012 look like for my pro-d?

Sep 6 School Goals-based Non-Instructional Day

- staff-based discussion of department and school goals for the year -- these can be a bit painful sometimes but often provide reference points for other, more productive conversations
- revised course planning for a piloted approach to teaching SS10 (pivot the curriculum around focus questions and narrative hearths)
- practice some video podcasting for posting lesson elements online (the "inverted classroom")
- revisit some of my assessment regimen, particularly deadlines and exam recommendations
- draft a funding proposal for 3D printing project -- artifact recreation
- draft a funding proposal (PAC) for mobile student-run school newspaper (3 ipads)
- revise/simplify rejected ipad proposal for Socials/SLR from Oct 2010
- **Note: this NID was postponed by School Board Office;⁴ I have tried to incorporate these items in other NIDs**

Oct 21 Provincial Pro-D Day

- 2nd annual Pacific Slope Consortium retreat at Purden Lake. The PSC employs a deep symposium model involving creative thinkers, compelling ideas, and an inspired setting.⁵ Both the model and the PSC agenda were endorsed by the Ministry of Education in 2010.⁶
- This year's agenda included: trend analysis (society, student identity, teacher evolution), Vimy Ridge Tour 2017, Role Play throughout the SS continuum, and celebration of all things Social Studies.

Jan 27 Semester Turn-around day

- possible evaluation of SS11 exams -- this is to help out a colleague who would otherwise be marking them all by himself!
- curriculum planning and redesign for adapting SS11 to the new textbook and digital resources
- planning session with the Pacific Slope Consortium for the North Zone Conference -- they are sponsoring a workshop I am co-facilitating

⁴ This was quite interesting -- with less than two weeks before the beginning of the school year, our superintendent sent a mass email (also posted at <http://sd57.bc.ca>) stating: "We have made a number of decisions regarding the beginning of the school year:

- Due to the uncertainty of pending [PGDTA] job action we have decided to postpone the Non Instructional Day scheduled for Tuesday, September 6th until some later date in the school year. Tuesday, September 6th will now be the first day for student attendance. This will be our typical shortened, 90 minute, first day of school. Wednesday, September 7th will be a full day of school for students.
- Morning recess breaks will be cancelled for the length of Essential Services job action. This is being done in recognition of the challenges for exempt staff to supervise this additional period of time. For elementary schools, the typical 15 minutes of recess time will be removed from the minutes of instruction by having seven minutes taken from the beginning of the day and eight minutes taken from the end of the school day." One could argue that killing recess was necessary for safety reasons, but taking away the NID poses some interesting questions about what it is for and who gains an advantage from its presence at the beginning of the school year. The last job action in 2005 did not require cancellation of recess, and the exempt staff had ore schools to attend for supervision. I suppose they know this job action will last longer and they want to join the other six districts that have prioritized normalcy of exempt staff schedules over the benefits of recess to students and teachers. The first NID is typically an admin-directed day ("ministerial orders day" as the BCTF calls it), but is also a chance to gear up for the school year and renew the focus on learning. The decision also begs questions about how much notice is needed for families to make changes to their summer plans in anticipation of school startup. Needless to say, the intertwining of politics and education is always a source of fascination to me.

⁵ <http://twitter.com/#!/pacificslope/following>

⁶ Endorsement was the result of two meetings in November 2010 which PSC member Ian Leitch presented the model and work to the PSC, first to education minister George Abbott and then followed up by the ministerial secretary

Feb 17th School-based Pro-D day

- develop digital resources on genealogy for students, conducting interviews, examination of cultural landscapes, and the continued integration of technology, curriculum, and identity
- local history research and writing -- incorporate some pre-history based on the Boundary Research Series discussions on the holocene/pleistocene transition (also, listen to Holocene by Bon Iver)
- perhaps gather research and draft writing of article material for submission to academic journal (s) (see *Yearlong* below); the idea of a heritage agenda and cultural agenda in Social Studies has been intriguing me lately
- review some of the student samples from the Through a Different Lens group in SD67 Okanagan Skaha; I've been invited to be a guest blogger for their project so I should put some time into the three pieces I have planned: SS10 Heritage project, SS11 Echo Project, Geography 12 Embodied Learning
- planning session over breakfast with the Pacific Slope Consortium for the North Zone Conference in March -- they are sponsoring a workshop I am co-facilitating

March 9th ZONE Pro-D Day

- morning: present on the topic of heritage-based research and project work in Social Studies; this is part of the Social Studies Round Table that I'm co-facilitating with Rob Lewis, Ian Leitch, JP Martin, and Joe Pereira at the North Zone Conference held at PGSS
- afternoon: attend something relevant to critical thinking and/or Social Studies

April 27th School-based Pro-D Day

- possibility 1: Pacific Slope Consortium-hosted event
- possibility 2: repeat of last year's Prince George Cultural Landscapes walkabout
- possibility 3: try or follow-up on something valuable from a previous pro-d event
- possibility 4: compilation of research material and article writing for journal submission (see *Yearlong* below)

Rescheduled Sept 6th NID

- note to self here really... I'd like to be bold in suggesting that our school take some positive lessons from the year's job action and sort out the parts of our job that are essential and the parts that are obligatory, unnecessary, and frustrating. Let us renew our profession on both sides of the "leadership divide" and eliminate the painful activities and busy-work that holds us back from being mentally and physically present for the rest of our joblife.

Yearlong Ongoing Pro-D in 2011-2012

- website development and maintenance for teacher and course webpages -- focus this year on regular updates, use of course calendars, and posting lesson elements
- collaboration sessions with department on many fronts related to student learning
- use data gathered in from 2009-2011 to reflect and refine my strategies related to formative assessment in SS10, SS11, and Geog 12
- collaboration follow-up with Pacific Slope Consortium research group on development of the SS11 "Echo" project; some commitment here to web development
- writing for submission to peer-reviewed academic journals -- topics: Heritage projects in SS education, Embodied Geography, possible publishers: *Qualitative Inquiry*⁷ and *Educational Insights*⁸
- continued research & writing advocating for greater accountability, inclusive decision-making, and intelligent discourse within the school district and in respect to students, parents, educators, and others
- looking for some time to develop my agility with GPS devices and use more of this with students; in particular, a geocaching element to our annual Barkerville trip would be cool

⁷ <http://qix.sagepub.com/>

⁸ <http://www.ccfi.educ.ubc.ca/publication/insights/index.html>

- professional writing connecting some of the themes from previous conference presentations: I've used a set of metaphors to explore educational understandings: ecosystems, yurting, bildungsroman, dead reckoning, etc. -- I'm curious if the right kind of thought experiment can find a common thread beyond the content, some kind of superlative metaphor that binds them together

Professional Learning Collaborative Group in 2011/2012

BOUNDARY RESEARCH SERIES

Last year, a collaborative group at D.P. Todd met and developed a vision for a professional learning series that blended critical inquiry, educational theory, and dada. We had very positive feedback on our research questions, discussions, and findings and have thus set out an aggressive inquiry agenda for this year. Our discussion topics in 2011-2012 will include:

1. <i>Brain/Curriculum Ecology and the Narratives of Individuation -- how do the stories we tell ourselves tell us all we need to know?</i>
2. <i>Organizational Metaphors and the Contexts of Dysfunction -- how do we make sense of the entropic trends in our education system?</i>
3. <i>Greenhorn Sleuthing the Pleistocene/Holocene Transition -- what was it like? what do we owe to the distant past? what's that smell?</i>
4. <i>Evolution of Self in the Educator's Long Memory -- have students changed, or do we just see them differently? (safety notice: involves fire)</i>
5. <i>Dead Reckoning: Theory-making for Digital Navigation in Curricular Landscapes -- what has technology done to us? what could it do?</i>
6. <i>Unpacking Gregory: A Slippery Definition of Place -- how do we geo-graph our learning journey?</i>
7. <i>Phenomenology of Inquiry in Cultural Landscapes -- what happens when we situate the right question at the wrong time?</i>
8. <i>The Longest Beard and Other Denizens of Identity -- who populates your professional growth plan?</i>
9. <i>Before Chomsky Dies: Lessons from the Ornerly Anarchist -- how can self-reliance and independence survive the corporate cataclysm?</i>
10. <i>Moving Forward on Jargon -- is it possible to PLC an AFL until it's 21C? That being said, at the end of the day are we all on the same page going forward?</i>
11. <i>Ship of Fools Redux: Social Conventions and the Politics of Schooling -- when is it polite to stop listening ("can I go to the bathroom")?</i>
12. <i>Imagining 22nd Century Learning -- what's next when the 21st Century isn't cool enough?</i>

Note: the pursuit of topics #1-12, a.k.a. the dissentient dozen, may be collapsed into a single endless dangerous meme generating discourse, part of something that has been going on for a while and appears to be resist erosion or official designations like "collaborative group"

Curriculum connections: SS8-11, Science 10, Geology/Earth Science 12, Sustainable Resources 11/12, Geography 12, CompCiv 12, Eng 11/12, Lit 12, Psychology, Biology, probably some Math, Foods, Phys Ed, definitely some Fine Arts if not Applied Arts, hoping for some German (Foods) and tolerant of French

Target audience: educators, praxis pugilists/curriculum ninjas, misanthropes, dreamers

Meets: most Wednesdays on most 5-day weeks often from 2:30-3:15 sometimes in room 180

Space: while this seminar was designed for a true Thoreauvian statement (1 seat, perhaps 2 if they are spaced far enough apart), we will entertain adjustments

Sponsors: The Pacific Slope Consortium extends their warmest regards to this Boundary Research endeavour, and has offered an open invitation for mutual critique as well as a small grant that will cover a snack.

What pro-d do I anticipate for next year (2012/2013)?

- reflection and revision on Geog 12 course design and direction
- ongoing website development and maintenance for teacher and course webpages
- media release for Echo Generation project
- collaboration with Pacific Slope Consortium on new projects
- Pacific Slope Consortium annual retreat Purden2012
- completion of research and journal submissions for two articles (Heritage projects in SS education, Embodied Geography)

ROOM 180, D.P. TODD



POSITION PAPERS

Why included this writing here?

Some of these “papers” appear in one form or another on my blog(s), some are built from the content of emails, forum submissions, letters, and verbal communications, while others derive from papers submitted in university, mainly at the graduate level. These by no means represent the collective sum of my professional writing, but I think it is important to “go on the record” with ideas that are relevant to my professional growth. Many of the ideas presented are rough and just as likely to show my thinking at a particular point in time than permanent tenets, more like lobster sticks than dogma. Nonetheless, most of these ideas are grounded on values and experience and are presented here to hold myself accountable to a reflective practice. This collection is meant to show growth over a number of years in my professional thought and practice, for better or worse, like the rings on tree.

BECHER BAY, JULY 2011



ASSESSMENT

The Verification (February 2006)

How do teachers know what students are learning?

Recently I was asked by the principal of Heather Park Elementary to facilitate a discussion among his Grade 8 Humanities teachers on the topic of assessment. He had heard from them consistently that their marking load was too intense and they were unsure as to what value all their marking produced or whether their efforts were sustainable.

I can certainly relate to the idea that a teacher's busywork is often overwhelming but of questionable value -- I, too, had marked piles of papers, worksheets, paragraphs, and problems in order to see if students had "done their work."

We refreshed our understanding of some different ways of looking at teacher-directed evaluation:

Assessment for Learning --formative, ongoing, criterion-referenced (e.g. based on PLOs), teacher/student/peer-evaluation, used to help teachers adjust their approach

Assessment as learning -- formative, ongoing, usually self-oriented (e.g. based on personal learning goals), used to help students adjust their approach

Assessment of learning -- summative, exists at key points in course, teacher-directed, use of criteria and/or norms, used to make judgements about student performance in relation to standards

It became clear, then, that these teachers wanted a reduction in their marking load but an improvement in the quality of their assessment. We developed a collaborative plan to experiment with open-notes assessment (use of in-class work for problem-solving) that we called "verification." I had been using open-notes assessment for a number of years, but had not always thought of it in terms of a verification -- a measure of learning checkpoints, relevant work, tasks completed, understanding of lesson material, or diagnostic assessment.

[...in progress: need to dig through notes from HPMS presentation]

Thoughts on Assessment (2010)

[Submitted to D.P. Todd staff June 2010 in response to pending mandatory staff meeting⁹ on the topic of assessment]

What kinds of values do I hope to encounter as I explore assessment?

- fair, balanced, and reasonable measurement
- balance of skills, knowledge, habits, means (process/path), and ends (outcome/goal)
- strong orientation towards development of student identity
- building self-governance, self-reliance, and responsibility in students
- building community without coercion, interdependence not dependence
- rigorous learning related to relevant and meaningful learning outcomes
- respect for student inquiry and constructivist learning
- creativity and diversity (multiple modes of knowing)
- learning that is embodied, holistic, and well-rounded

What kind of assessment structures do I currently use in Social Studies?

Verifications of learning outcomes -- usually open-notes quizzes or assignments. These require the students to have made sense of some connected learning outcomes, most commonly through some notes or gathered evidence that answer focus questions and more detailed content questions. This tool is formative in that students are required to revise their work and responses if they have not met expectations on the first attempt ($\geq 67\%$), and can also use other methods and formats to express their learning. It is "for/as learning" in that the assessment activity is a chance to reflect critically on the evidence gathered by students and prepares them for other learning outcomes and assessments in the course. It is also integrated (formative/summative/progressive), as their best mark for each verification is recorded, and their lowest verification score is dropped.

Projects -- usually long-term unit assignments and creative demonstrations of learning. Assessed with a rubric (usually one for students, one for teacher). I give a basic set of options for completion, often with use of exemplars, and sometimes with expected outcomes and products (e.g. a piece of writing or a class presentation). This tool is formative in that students are requested to revise their project if they have not met expectations on the first attempt, and can also use other methods and formats to devise their projects and express their learning.

Unit Tests -- summative assessments, usually closed notes, but sometimes taking the form of an assignment. Students not satisfied with (or missing) their first attempt are given an alternate test to complete (e.g. re-write), and can repeat this as many times as they like

The message is that I am interested in having students show what they have learned, by the methods I have designed or by the methods they have designed (by choice, i.e. if they have not met expectations or they wish to pursue another mode of expression).

⁹ The irony of this scenario prompted the paper. I had a hard time reconciling the idea of forcing people to attend a meeting where the topic, ostensibly, is allowing students more freedom and flexibility with requirements.

I don't give unalterable zeroes -- I have null scores that students can turn into a mark $\geq 67\%$ any time within the current term. These scores turn into zeros if the student refuses all opportunities to meet expectations and reasonably address the learning outcomes.

I have due dates, but I do not have late penalties. The due dates usually coincide with natural breaks between topics, and often involve some class sharing (non-marks motivation). The due dates apply to unit projects, of which the number is few and the intake manageable.

What kinds of learning activities and formative assessment tools are used within these structures?

In no particular order, and probably incomplete: notes & written questions, exercises & problems, essays, maps, reports, presentations, timelines, readings, debates, webs & clusters, library work, posters, tests, portfolios, graphs, diagrams & drawing, scales & rubrics (teacher, student peer), journals, arts-based interpretations, group projects & groupwork (e.g. charts), video logs, field work, blogs, student-teacher conferences, digital mashups, direct questioning

How committed am I to this scheme?

I have set some core assessment values in front of me for 15 years, and every change I have made has been an attempt to draw closer to a system that embodies these values, more-or-less. I usually look at minor changes whenever they make sense, and I try to keep major practices in place for at least two years. I am currently one year in to a major set of changes, probably the fifth time I have done this. My values are, of course, the result of my own identity trajectory and an attempt at authenticity, but they also form an external horizon of significance, partly derived from the strong influences by the circle of friends and colleagues who have modeled successful pedagogy for me, and by the authors that have attended to my imagination.

How are students affected by my assessment practice?

The changes I've made to assessment over time affect students differently. Mainly, my concern has been how to find out if the students actually know or understand what is expected (learning outcomes and broader curriculum). Self-motivated students usually find a way to excel in any assessment context. Struggling and at-risk students have difficulty in almost every context as well. The rest will usually rise to the expectations that are set for them, but may often try to get through by minimally meeting expectations. I have developed structures now for helping (1) the weaker students meet expectations, (2) for ensuring that students in the middle are in fact meeting expectations and addressing the learning outcomes, and also (3) for any student to have a means to exceed expectations. These are all structures in addition to the regular assessment that establishes student achievement in my courses, and they involve the use of formative work, rubrics regarding expectations, alternate assessment, and multiple attempts. Some "quick research" on this semester's classes reveals the following observations.

(1) within two weeks of the course's end, about eight students of my current eighty-three were at risk of failing the course or term. Two of these would probably not thrive in any sound assessment regime within a regular academic stream, and six have some very clear and realistic means available to them to get through. These six would not have passed under the assessment scheme I have used in the past, and they will probably do and learn more under my present scheme. As of

the semester end, the two did indeed fail, and the six ALL were motivated to complete some missing work, address some weaker learning outcomes, and fulfill some expectations regarding demonstration of understanding.

(2) I have a much clearer view of what students know -- as far as marks it has meant that most students are "repelled" from a mark in the 60s -- either they fall below this (no work handed in, no catch-up, no re-writes, etc.) or they have latched on to the support structures I've provided, found a way to meet the learning outcomes, and are getting 67% or better. It has definitely focused who I need to spend time with for certain purposes -- help for some, deeper learning for others.

(3) this is relatively untapped -- I've had only a handful of students try this out during this school year. Most students getting marks in the 80s or 90s are usually quite content and did not pursue more.

Success for all? 81 of 83 passed with an average mark of 75% (11 C-s, 10 Cs, 9 C+s, 30 Bs, 21 As). There are so many reasons why this is the way it is, but it appears to me an improvement on my classes from a few years ago, with no loss of "learning" as far as I can tell (i.e. I'm not "easing up" on expectations, if anything they are higher). The two that failed will be supported in an alternate program that meets their significant needs.

What was my previous assessment policy?

Same tools and similar structures, but they were used less "formatively" -- no requirement to meet expectations, less second chances, and 2 days dues, 2 days late (assignments due over two classes, then accepted for two more classes with 20% deduction). I used a series of technology solutions for dealing with missed or below-expectations work, and I did not allow rewrites on unit tests.

Why did I change it?

- I saw other teachers using methods with their class and achieving similar goals more successfully
- my understanding of multi-modal literacy convinced me that students needed a variety of ways to demonstrate learning that were authentic and elegant
- the changes helped me draw closer to some of my values such as self-governance and non-coercion
- the reading and research I have done on the inquiry method and role of student identity in engaged learning, as well as my work on ecosystem theory in education
- my method did nothing for the students most at risk, it was superfluous to the high achievers, and it did not challenge the students in-between to wake up and try to really succeed at something
- some students would "muddle through" and aim for the bare minimum in order to achieve 50%; the message sent was that mediocrity was encouraged and rewarded

What assessment tools or practices have I used through-out my career (sacred cows)?

- open-notes assessments (test what they know as "larger selves" not confined to a brain)
- some form of self-assessment on major projects (what did you get out of it?)

- some basic acknowledgement that student identity is the curriculum (the medium is the message)
- reality timelines: the closer to the original assessment event, the more detailed and objective the marking and feedback
- strong role for fairness: I want students' final marks to reflect the degree to which they seized the opportunity to learn
- not interested in marking for the sake of marking, e.g. collecting notes to check for completion or assigning new homework to see if they'll work at home and then checking it off
- students are ultimately responsible for their own learning

What should I probably do more of?

I'd like to use more co-creation of assessment tools, criteria, and timeline with students. I need to create shorter, tighter assessments more closely tied to focus questions, some of which need to be generated by students (inquiry-method). I'd also like to ensure that students know in advance how the assessment relates to marks, and to wean students from being motivated by marks and replacing this with intrinsic rewards and self-determined indicators of success.

What do I make of the current (e.g. SD57) emphasis on Assessment for Learning and some of the associated pressures on policy & practice?

- I've come across some very good ideas, many of which I think I use in one way or another, and have used increasingly with time (e.g. more use of formative assessment, more use of multiple attempts to demonstrate learning based on student's self-developed approach, more use of self-assessment).
- Most of what I've read on assessment in the last six years seems to me to be educationally sound with some exceptions in the area of using coercion to follow up on assessment results and the "guide on the side vs sage on the stage" metaphor. Some of the very best and most successful teachers I know, and have ever known, are story-tellers with spartan assessment techniques.
- A general skepticism that "AFL" proponents have not fully grasped context -- the realities of the classroom, the limits of a teacher's work environment, and the nature of our public education configuration in B.C. preclude certain idealistic, trend-based, or expensive practices. For example, the district plan for student success speaks about focused support in every classroom and with every teacher to address the "knowing/doing gap." How have they determined what teachers know, whether it is relevant or important for them to know this, and what is gained or lost in a shift in practice related to what should be known. I'm not convinced of the problem that needs fixing.
- "AFL" has been blended with PLCs, SPSS, Continuous Improvement models, and Data-driven Decision-making as part of a then/now mashup, a shift from the bad old ways to the good new ways. Combining educational theories like this is incredibly complicated and often contradictory and seems to be done in order to convince practitioners that coordination exists when none is needed nor asked for. Criticizing specific past practices (with relevant evidence) can be beneficial, but to sweep away "the old way" is not respectful of what has worked well in the past nor does it reflect the incredible diversity that exists among current pedagogy.
- To the extent that "AFL" has been a "conversation" I applaud the implication of respect for teacher autonomy; I also fear that when these conversations have been invitation-only, many teachers voices' have not been heard, and yet the "conversation" seems to be the first step towards policy language. First it is a popular theory, then it saturates the district "offerings," then it becomes a recommendation, then an expectation. I appreciate that to date the plan to

implement assessment strategies has been to provide opportunities (e.g. learning grants) as opposed to the use of directives.

- Our district plan for student success makes some assumptions that a particular approach to “AFL” is the best way to achieve it’s goals and that teachers and administrators should make the “paradigm shift.” This does not seem congruent with the “AFL” strategy of allowing learners to be actively involved. In other words, if we expect students to construct their learning, we should expect teachers to do the same in regards to assessment. Assimilating an externally-determined teaching philosophy, even if the goals are the same as our own, takes away from teachers’ ownership of professional learning and bypasses a key step in the inquiry process.

What are my views on adopting school-wide assessment policies, non-binding or otherwise?

I believe, generally, that a compromise or “median” position does not serve a school well as it excludes the creative and robust theory and practice that exists on either side of the median. Compromises work best when a single solution is needed to address a single problem but multiple solutions exist. What we are facing in our school is not a single problem, but a set of conditions (most of which are not problematic) to which an appropriate response is a variety of approaches, each matched to a condition. To state this for my own practice, I believe, with thought and evidence to back it up, that what I do is successful, intelligent, fair, non-coercive, and focused on student learning. I can think of ways to move this “forward” as they say, but to align with an unnecessary compromise that might erode what I am developing is a “move backward.” Many aspects of an assessment discussion will benefit from cross-curricular collaboration, but much of it needs to be worked out with my Social Studies and classroom context. I can govern myself and be a teacher for my students, but it is not just for me to impose norms on the unwilling or take something that is individual in nature and apply it to a perceived community without appreciating difference or context.

What would be my recommendation for staff regarding assessment?

Continue articulating to each other and to students how and why you structure assessment the way you do. Be willing to adjust, change, experiment, and take risks with assessment. Probably the most difficult and important person you have to convince for permission to change is yourself. Beware of global solutions to hypothetical problems. Avoid sameness for the sake of being the same (this is frightening); it is more interesting to differentiate in all areas (including assessment) and look for internal consistencies. Trade a discussion about zeros and penalties for a more productive and transformative discussion about assessment values and what we intend for our students.

Differentiation & Personalization (2012)

How do we respect the individual midst the batch model of public education?

The goal of a truly personalized education system seems to be on everyone's radar these days. From the references in the blogosphere¹⁰ to the extravagant BCED plan¹¹, personalized learning is the new PLC or AFL, the next great thing in education. To be succinct, it would require faith that students, without significant intervention, can be let loose as independent learners and meet or exceed existing outcomes and improve achievement based on even higher standards. This is ambitious, and contentious. I add "without significant intervention" because this dramatic educational reform will not be successful without significant intervention, and this is not likely considering the government does not want to increase funding to education. Personalized learning creates a Catch 22. Set students free from the shackles of the factory-age school system as a cost-saving effort, hope for improved results, but block access to the time or money it would take to equip both learners and educators for this journey. The Ministry of Education solution is to lay this out as a problem with the teacher contract. If only teachers could be more flexible, more facilitators than instructors, more willing to rebrand deficit as difference, then perhaps the Great Change can occur without any investment. To build in the kind of differentiated learning and assessment experience for each student would either be incredible expensive, or left to chance (not supervised by educators, more likely poorly supervised by a mix of educators and clerks). That's why it's a Catch 22; the government wants to deschool society but needs to keep up the pretense that we'll maintain and assess rigorous standards. Their mechanism for this is to consolidate power over professional development, teacher evaluation, job placement, and ed change with school administrators. Centralization and Deschooling are not complimentary, especially when accompanied by relative funding cuts.

I think we need a pattern language¹² of education that allows educators, individually and collectively, to dial up or dial down personalized learning depending on context. There are times when students should all be doing the same thing, and many times when they should not. There are times when learning should be embodied, written, spoken, drawn, built, and times when learning should take place hidden from view, unknown and unassessed by a teacher. There should be choice at times, no choice at others. Sometimes trial-and-error, multiple attempts, forgiveness of mistakes, and at other times consequences and expectations which are applied across an assembled group. There has to be a recognition that society demands some kind of batch-processed child-rearing by teachers, while respecting the diversity of learners. These choices should be guided in part by students, or influenced by other stakeholders in the educational community (e.g. parents), but the scheme needs to have a teacher's touch. I am a strong advocate for teacher autonomy, even when it means we have to protect some struggling teachers. The quality of the system makes a big difference, but in the end students tend to remember the quality of their teachers, the passion for the subject, their provocations and questions, the ease or intelligence or humour in front of (or beside) a class, the demonstration of care and empathy, the willingness to listen and learn from students. So, it's complicated, and that's why I suggest the pattern language as a means of creating spectrums rather than solutions.

¹⁰ <http://cultureofyes.ca/category/personalized-learning/>

¹¹ <http://www.bcedplan.ca/theplan.php>

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pattern_language

MIND AND MEDIA

Yurting: The New Digital Nomads (2005)

How is growing up digital affecting the learner's brain and approach to knowledge?

[...in progress: need to pull notes from Zone Conference presentation]

Exploring Digital Landscapes (2007)

What does education look like when digital learners are turned loose?

[...in progress: need to pull notes from Zone Conference presentation]

The Digital Bildungsroman (2009)

It what ways are digital learners crafting their identity tales?

[...in progress: need to pull notes from Zone Conference presentation]

Dead Reckoning (2010)

How have identity and curriculum navigation changed for digital learners?

[...in progress: need to pull notes from Zone Conference presentation]

21ST CENTURY LEARNING

In Defense of Libraries

How do our libraries and schools reflect the need for a deeper interpretation of "21st Century skills" and personalized learning?

[Submitted to local Teacher-Librarian online forum June 2011]

Reference "**Librarians Fight for a Role in a Digital World**": <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/technology/digital-culture/social-networking/librarians-fight-for-a-role-in-a-digital-world/article2023169/>>

The article was timely for me, as I was thinking lately about how various applications of so-called 21st Century Learning pose challenges to traditional roles in our education system, including libraries and librarians. If you're unfamiliar with the "21C Ed" collection of ideas, don't feel left out... it is a bit of catch-phrase for anything new in education, but often includes a few basic characteristics:

- students can/should learn more independently
- students should have more choice about what & how they learn
- teachers should do less direct instruction and more direction towards resources and opportunities
- students should learn more out in the community and less in schools
- parents should have more opportunities to co-develop learning environments and designs
- all of these things should make better use of digital technology and web resources

There is no single definition, but these links provide a few different views on what "21C Ed" looks like:

- <<http://www.21learn.org/site/archive/about-the-initiative>>
- <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U>>
- <<http://www.standard-freeholder.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=2779372&archive=true>>
- <<http://educhatter.wordpress.com/2011/01/18/the-21st-century-schools-movement-is-burying-the-past-the-wave-of-the-future/>>
- <http://www.gov.bc.ca/premier/technology_council/news.html> (try the reports to see the BC gov's vision for education, albeit from the last premier and with no real idea about how to bring this about -- other jurisdictions have had to either commit serious time/money or force of legislation to make these kinds of changes)
- <<http://www.technologybitsbytesnibbles.info/archives/4595>> (this one presents the real dilemma to me - some of these things are great and I've tried them for years, others, I think, are destructive and promote disassociation)
- <<http://www.bctf.ca/IssuesInEducation.aspx?id=23050>> (this positions "21C Ed" as anything innovative, especially if it involves technology; the BCTF seems to struggle between embracing innovation and change (as it needs to do from time to time) and offering critique to ideas that erode teacher autonomy or shake up the school system)

I've got criticism and praise for different aspects of these ideas from a purely educational point of view, but the Globe & Mail article reminded me it will probably be used as a cost-savings measure in our school system. The rhetoric is often buried under terms like "choice" and "flexibility." If one follows the reasoning, students of the future will need less teachers and fewer schools, and will

need more apprenticeship-like opportunities, greater choice about what and how they learn, and better guidance through digital resources and and technologies. My reserved praise relates to the angle of deschooling society, an old idea that becomes more relevant when school culture supplants key aspects of family and society-based culture (see Illich's work, or Gatto's at <<http://www.preservenet.com/theory/>>). One of my concerns, however, is that the "21C Ed" ideas seem to assume that the trend towards our students being peer-raised and emotionally detached is inevitable (see Gordon Neufeld's work on this topic e.g.<<http://schools-at-the-centre.ning.com/video/dr-gordon-neufeld-what-makes-a>>), and that a narcissistic technology-addicted lifestyle is conducive to deep learning and social growth. I think this trend, unexamined, is a sure way to build a dystopia. We can only deschool society if we have something better suited to educate kids in a way that leaves them whole, connected, balanced, intelligent, and useful. Allowing students to follow their own technology-enabled course of study (and personal development) will only work for a very few students, probably those who can set their own standards and start with a socioeconomic advantage.

So, how does this relate to schools and what does a library look like when the traditional roles are being challenged? If anything, "21C Ed" tries to make librarians out of all of us -- directing students to appropriate resources, effective use of educational technology, facilitating learning alongside guidance in ethics, critical thinking, habits of mind, and multiple intelligences/literacies. I'm not sure how realistic this is, but I could see it as an excuse to follow the trend mentioned in the Globe article. Librarians will likely be in a defensive position over the next few years (already have been?), alternately defending the impact they have on people and learning, or reinventing their programs to meet new challenges.

I would like to share some thoughts drawn from observations of our library at D.P. Todd Secondary School. Perhaps these traits are common at all libraries, but my experience has been shaped by the library I know. The librarian Sandra will forgive me if I idealize some of her contributions, but I also know what a dysfunctional library looks like and I'm so very glad to celebrate one that is working well and has set a positive model for the emerging librarian.

Meeting place: The Market of Ideas

Our library is fortunately positioned at a crossroads in the school, especially for staff... some schools have libraries tucked in a corner or are tangential to the traffic. The result for us is an inflow of people and ideas all day long. It is by the librarian's desk (which is not hidden in a back room) or the circulation counter where many staff pause and work something out. It is a neutral ground for a good argument, or a critical examination of a school issue -- the classroom is too private and "turfed" for staff discourse, just as the hallway is too public and unmediated. The librarian often finds herself playing facilitator, referee, and instigator (e.g. when new ideas are needed), or simply someone to ask how's it going and mean it. Many students, especially seniors, head to the library to orient themselves in the morning or wrap up loose ends at the end of the day. It is our only lecture hall (grad meetings, guest speakers, etc.) and is one of the few places that can be easily reconfigured to suit a purpose. Like a marketplace or town square, the "meeting-place" quality extends into ideas as well as physical encounters. The librarian resides at the centre of the collaborative culture of our school, bridging school-wide goals and programs precisely because she has to deal with every kind of idea and problem, not just those specific to a subject area. While this relationship between librarian, ideas, and passers-through often begins with a book, it invariably progresses to other media and a deeper conversation. Our librarian knows the reading habits of kids because she knows the kids -- they arrive with a completed book and she asks them about it, what they liked and didn't, what they want to try next. She often has a next book waiting. In return the students open up and provide the kind of introspective reader-response English teachers would pay for. The "mode of literacy" is not just about the books, it can be about what the students use on their phones and ipods, the knitting (and knitting books) set out for students who need to unwind, the start of a video editing or cartooning project, the book and media displays that coincide with current events, and the websites recommended to put a twist on someone's line of inquiry.

Skills and Contexts

As a true learning lab for the school, the library has become associated with two ends of a spectrum that are often missing in a classroom -- research skills based on critical thinking (separate from curriculum), and deep curricular contexts explored through sourcework (that are often beyond what "comes up" in the classroom). These are the zones in which the librarians shine and apply diverse strategies: storytelling to model self-inquiry, table-by-table group brainstorming and division of tasks, decoding a special photo or passage or map, preparation of websites and webquests to redeem the time spent at computers, small group circle-time to work out issues. Because the librarian knows a bit about almost everyone that comes in, she can match resources, learning objects and webtools to individual students -- the practice of personalized learning. Behind the scenes is some expert resource selection (books, digital tools and media, etc.) that requires intensive collaboration with staff and students. The library has been culled of what doesn't get read or used, and is replenished with requests and artfully anticipated hits-in-waiting. The librarian is also the usual suspect for the introduction of new technologies -- 7 years ago it was educational blogs, now it might be a request for e-readers or a pro-d session on apps. In some magic time between class visits and needy students, the librarian also finds time to set-up Olympic-themed events with books, displays, and big-screen live coverage, a tea party for the royal wedding (with books, displays, big-screen coverage and those little sandwiches), or a Harry Potter Event, a card-making station set out for mother's day, and so on. The librarian isn't trying to "get through" curriculum or teach Socials, Science, or English. She is offering cause & effect, pattern recognition, assessment of significance, interpretation of meaning, application of judgement, comparison of sources and evidence, and venturing into multiple intelligences. As a classroom teacher, it becomes easy to beat the same drum and try the same tricks, but the librarian starts with the premise that a trip to the library is a chance to explore ideas from a fresh perspective, to gain something for the teacher and students that can't be had just a few feet away in a different room. It is the emphasis on critical thinking and deep contexts that sets the library apart from the classroom which has the added burden of a curricular calendar and a fixation on evaluation.

Island in the Stream

Libraries are often a place for students to take a break from the intensity or monotony of classroom experience -- the librarian and her space round out the "whole education" students receive at school. Like an island, it is a calm place to stop moving and reflect on the journey -- read something, talk to someone, look something up, get caught up, spread one's things out and get organized. Some students on spares really do look like they've just clambered out of a swamped canoe -- the library is the safe place where they can get their act together before facing a tough class or difficult conversation with a teacher. The librarian walks this island and offers help, comforting words, a voice of experience, listening, and a fresh perspective. She seeks out the students (and staff) who are most in need and takes a very human approach to coaxing some productive action -- less formal than a counseling appointment but usually more one-on-one than a classroom teacher can afford, a balanced "boundary-zone" in which the practice of empathy is viable. Students enter high school and have a kind of conversation with themselves that lasts for 5 years -- they pose questions about their own relationships, reading, thinking, emotions, body, behaviour and gather "evidence" each time they come to school -- they live the teenage life but they also imagine it endlessly, playing out possibilities and speculating about "what-ifs." This all takes place in secondary schools which overwhelmingly are fragmented and chaotic. Staff find it difficult and sometimes unattractive to build 5-yr relationships with students, and yet the students beg this continuity from us -- they may constantly be pushed towards their peers, but I think we'd be surprised how many would soak up any time their parents had for them (if they weren't so busy) and, failing that, from other caring adults. The library forms one of the few welcoming spots where the students can attach and make sense of that five-year questioning -- and the librarian is a key part of that conversation -- a caring person who can often suspend judgement (e.g. doesn't have to assign a grade), but is nonetheless an adult with the long-term growth of students in mind.

Filling the Leadership Gap

Our district and secondary school administration are tasked with being educational leaders, and yet this is a part of their jobs they often do not get to. Most of their time is spent on the "business" of education, a variety of duties related to the community (e.g. student discipline and follow-up, parent inquiry, policy & process discussions, ministry requirements, etc.), the management of staff, and indirect efforts at affecting learning. Elementary admin seem to have more direct involvement, although they have many duties that pull them away from educational leadership as well. What's missing is the inspirational role, the task of teaching teachers. So who takes up the slack? Much of it goes undone or left to chance (e.g. follow-up on professional development, delving into school data, matching resources to teacher's expressed needs, etc.). The rest is delegated -- just as some administrative tasks that used to be shared responsibilities have been downloaded to counselors, many other educational leadership tasks are now completed by teachers and librarians. For the latter, these functions include review of professional material related to the craft of teaching and specific subject areas, assessing teaching and learning resources with a school-wide perspective, establishing a research (or inquiry) focus for staff practices, voicing the educational arguments and student perspectives in discussions involving budgets (particularly technology), judging trends in education (problems and possibilities) and setting new paradigms into motion, connecting the individual and collective learning trajectories and educational goals of teachers with relevant resources, and taking a lead role in the value-setting events in the life of a school (e.g. network ethics, plagiarism, cyber-bullying, tone at staff meetings, etc.) Suffice to say that if a librarian is good at these things, the school has a solid foundation for staff morale and program longevity, and that if these functions are absent the school runs at an emotional, professional, and educational deficit. It is often the librarian who picks up the pieces of a poorly or hastily planned initiative, plan, or dictate and makes it staff-friendly or gives it a pedagogical backbone. Administrators, Curriculum staff, and School Boards groups should thank librarians routinely and emphatically for taking up the torch when their part is finished. Our current teacher contract negotiations face demands for more management rights by the government's negotiator BCPCEA, in part to lubricate their plans for "21C Ed", but I don't think they realize how scared and unqualified a huge part of "management" is to take this on. If we want change it has to be a partnership and can't be administration directing teachers to use the latest jargon, which is where the commitment to change usually ends. Please correct me if I'm describing an isolated phenomenon, I would love to see the exceptions to this "torch dropping" become the norm.

These roles for librarians range from concrete to abstract, but all are invaluable in the culture and journeys of students and staff. If librarians were simply wardens of books, replacement teachers for resource-dependent class activities, and cataloguers, then their role would and should be in jeopardy. Similarly, if the librarian is concerned only with learning technology and new digital tools, she will again become superfluous as this is everyone's business and her only edge is that she has more time to evaluate resources. I would make the case, however, that the emerging librarian is someone our schools need more than ever. She is grounded in principles of learning, moves deftly through the terrain of ever-changing resources and technologies, has a mind to the whole development of others (intellectual, physical, emotional, social), is able to connect people to ideas using a variety of tools, anchors the professional development of staff, loves the kind of knowledge and passion for the world that comes (in one form) from the written and spoken word, and has created a welcome, safe place for thought, growth, research, and experimentation. In short, she nurtures the boundaries between all the disparate pulls in our learning communities, and both moderates the difference and spurs staff and students into thought and action. I don't think these qualities are new or "21st Century," but I do think they are the ones we should celebrate when we look at the role libraries play in the future of our education system, and not the books or the technology. My school would be heartless and cold without the library and librarian. Still, the promise of new interactive, personalized technology and the necessity for critical examination and experimentation is well suited for the library, and is probably one of the future criteria by which library programs will be judged. In the midst of this, the librarian's continuous learning curve relates somewhat to resources and technologies, but more importantly to finding the rich existential boundaries in which she cultivates habits of mind and meaningful relationships with staff and students.

The QLG Recommendations: Foundations of 21st Century/Personalized Learning and School District Response to the Advice of Educators (2011)

An issue that deserves some attention is the gap between what our school district educators and staff in leadership and support positions know about how so-called 21st Century/Personalized Learning ("21C/PL") can/could/should work and what they are doing to allow it to flourish and receive critical examination in our schools. Digital skills and literacy aimed at making relevant technology a regular component of education (more than just an elective) is built on a foundation going back about 12 years (to 1999), but hitting a critical juncture about 6 or 7 years ago. The emergence of the "21C/PL" jargon and the challenge to rethink aspects of program delivery are real tests of that foundation, and make it necessary to reflect on how decisions made in the last few years will affect the passage of "21C/PL" theory into practice. Rather than build on success and respect the existing diffusion models that work among educators, our district appears to be developing its model for change in isolation and/or contradiction of relevant evidence, existing resources (human and otherwise), input from practitioners, and research initiatives designed specifically to address, examine, and assess "21C/PL."

We've seen some interesting examples in the past year of how ubiquitous technology (tablets, mobile devices, etc.) could have a major impact on the classroom and for learning in general, both positive and negative. This is accompanied by a sea of literature and online content related to "21C/PL," often cliched or poorly understood but part of our reality nonetheless. We are surrounded on tv, the web, and print media with powerful new educational uses and apps for pods and pads, and hints at what makes tech-based learning work. Locally, UNBC prof Andrew Kitchenham has recently put out 2 texts/etexts on mobile learning strategies and blended learning environments (distance + face-to-face). Our board office staff have acknowledged a need to take these ideas seriously, and have even written them into various plans, and is beginning to use the "talk" (for better or worse) of "21C/PL." The problem remains that the milieu has shifted in our district from wide-spread interest and action in the use of innovative technology to frustration over the lack of communication and support. This has been compounded by the rejection of both relevant feedback and a number of "21C/PL" proposals which would have provided teacher and student experiences to put "21C/PL" theory through its paces. I've written and spoken on these ideas enough that I'll spare the details here, but if you want more background on this issue, I've attached some thoughts which can also be found on my blog and website in one form or another under the rubric of professional growth.

For a reference, I take "21C/PL" to be any initiative that aims at one or more of these goals:

1. Greater involvement of parents & community by allowing/encouraging/facilitating learning opportunities outside of schools
2. Wider and more effective use of distance and blended learning environments
3. New flexibility for project, course, and program options/designs by students and teachers, including a new view or curriculum as a shopping list rather than a set of prescriptions
4. Removing barriers to the uptake of new technologies and teaching/learning that incorporates mobile devices, online or cloud-based learning objects, and interactive digital systems (e.g. social networks)
5. Changing role of teaching from directing student learning and leading the inquiry to that of facilitator or "guide on the side"

A number of elementary and secondary teachers, with varying levels of access and expertise with technology, continue to make forays into these "21C/PL" goals in their lessons, student activities, project construction, unit structures, and assessment. In an effort to increase the ambition and impact of their work, at least five "21C/PL" project proposals (learning team/funding grant applications) were floated last year, all of which were ironically rejected by principals or district staff (no one is quite sure who or why, although budget shortfall was

never mentioned). At the same time, a presentation aimed at gathering input on district tech directions resulted in a gloss of the issues and a brush-off to the responses. These rejections, added to the platform change and the end of many district support systems and structures (notably the DTT), has created a shockwave of distrust between teachers and admin/district staff and has made the job of "moving forward" that much more difficult. In some respects it was unavoidable as the cutbacks of 2010 surely meant there would be less capacity (staff/money/vision) for technology leadership, coordination, and collaboration. Teachers and students are used to obstacles, and so the business of learning and experimenting with new technology continues, with or without the necessary supports. This is the current milieu in which we ask questions about what we do, and in which we look for more open and sensible answers from district leadership than we have had over the last two years, well documented in the district's tech feedback wiki (now expired), and various 57 Online forums.

The "historic" milieu is also important. Teachers and students (usually with district support) have been continuously trying, mastering, discarding, renewing digital technologies and associated methods for much of the last 12 years -- websites, moviemaking, blogs, wikis, podcasts, mashups, digital recordings and compositions for assessment, assembling evidence, and presentation. There has been a dynamic mix of content-creation and content-consumption, each fueled by different needs and skills, but both important for teaching and learning.

The year 2004 deserves a closer look. This was a time of tech coaches, a planned system of training and workshops starting with a scope & sequence but aimed at creative, student-centered transformations, coordinated/vertically integrated leadership (from ass't super though admin, tech support, tech support teacher leaders, diverse teacher leaders, teacher practitioners, and students -- all more or less committed to the same goals). In that year (give or take a few months) TLITE's first cohort was underway (SFU diploma in tech-based teaching & learning), Tech for Learning Leadership Team was established, "Key Tech Contacts" picked at every school, the District Tech Team created its first Tech Standards document, and it was the last time we saw a collaboratively constructed District Technology Plan for Student Success. 2004 marked the beginning of a process of standardization which ultimately led to the computer greening program and platform consolidation.

2004 was also when the work of "QLG" wrapped up. The "Quality Learning Globally" group assembled teachers and admin/district staff, most of which were tech leaders, to inquire into some key problems emerging with tech-based learning. Among other things, they met about 8 times, studied, and experimented with distance/blended/synchronous/asynchronous environments -- an early and intense look at what we now call "21C/PL." The QLG research concluded with a number of observations aimed directly at three connected questions faced by (and encouraged by) the district:

1. What should distributed learning look like... should it occur at many schools and be integrated into the options faced by students (course selection) and teachers (course design, career specialization), or should distributed learning be the purview of our distance ed school?
2. What technology should we use, and why... virtual classrooms, CMS, platforms, peripherals, access issues, budget & greening issues, what works in various contexts?
3. What pedagogy emerges from, or shapes, the technology and the choice of delivery models... synchronous vs asynchronous, what degree of "blending," how is the vision, coordination, and support sustained in schools and in the district?

The research looked at teacher and student experiences in contexts that explored as many of the possibilities brought up by these questions as possible. The QLG group asked these questions from the perspective of teachers and students, and in the end recommended:

1. Distributed Learning should happen at every school, at any time in which teachers in these schools were willing to experiment in such a way that could be supported by administration. Teachers excited to try teaching an online course or increase the amount of interactive technology they use with regular classes are the best bet for success. Dumping online course work and new tech on unwilling teachers will not work and will halt any momentum built elsewhere. While the integration of distributed learning has a logical place at the secondary level, it should be placed within the continuum of integrating all forms of teaching and learning strategies that make use of rich media and interactive technology, not just the ones that lead to more independent (distant) student learning. This has implications for the continued promotion of technology skills and digital literacy among staff and students, and commitments to support, training, and leadership.

2. Online and distance learning works best when the students are also connected to a learning community and teachers -- real people (with bodies and nuanced expression) and real social environments that are essential for human development, so some face-to-face is a must except for special cases and for most should be the primary experience, even at higher grades. The group spent a lot of time on the creative/collaborative/critical process involved in building and analyzing content (distributed "learning objects," resources, courses). Some felt there should be an attempt to build original, professional resources specific to BC curriculum contexts, while others were confident that existing online (free/external) resources would increasingly meet learning needs. This has implications for inter-school communication/collaboration and the coordination of some aspects of course programming across the district.

3. Technology and distributed learning should not remove and try to replicate the best of the classroom experience, but should seek to revolutionize the worst and most problematic aspects of the classroom experience. Thus virtual classrooms that imitate real discussions are often a step backward unless no alternatives exist. Just as the powerpoint can take a meaningful presentation and turn it into something segmented, trite, or didactic, interactive technology can create addictive, self-absorbed recluses where once were curious, social kids. The group was confident that the interactive web could extend and enrich but not replace the social fabric of schools. This has implications for school and district tech direction, planning and licensing.

These conclusions were, for the most part, rejected or ignored. They were supported by then principal of PGSS (later an ass't superintendent), but the "discussion" at the board office supported a focus on the distance ed school (rebranded the CLA) rather than widespread uptake of distributed learning and tech-based blended learning environments at many schools. PGSS was given a few "backdoors" to continue practicing some distributed learning (license shifting to allow videoconferenced classwork with McBride, more use of Coolschool, etc.). CLA took a couple of years to ponder on this and then very slowly began the process of moving courses into Moodle and offering more online learning opportunities. Some tech innovation grants created pockets of creative teaching & learning embracing these (or similar) conclusions. This helped offset the concurrent move to district-wide standardization, which was acknowledged to come at cost to the originality that is known to drive change and open up new educational vistas. These exceptions aside, the district has closed the door on most "21C/PL" projects and the buzz around educational technology has faded. The means for collaboration on technology problems (wikis, social networking, etc.), and the external encouragements (e.g. consider Dr. Kitchenham's new texts), have never been more readily available, and yet we have entered a period of stagnation and confusion and "go it on your own" that has taken us back about 12 years, although the curiosity remains that accompanied the heady days of shocking new technology.

Personally, I don't mind the chaos... it makes it clear that I have to design my own learning systems, many of which bypass technology, if I want to create rich environments for my students, and find like-minded people to help. The school district has lost the capacity to "play" at this level with the current level of funding and choice of directions. I'm ready to be challenged on this, to be shown examples of how dynamic "21C/PL" experiments are working and have also been supported by schools and the SBO. I also realize, as others have pointed out, that the technology itself, the "stuff," is not the commodity in education or our school district, the commodity is the collection of teachers and students who are excited to learn and are willing to use relevant technology to do so. And despite my many rants on technology and educational design, I am not generally excited with the majority of implicit promises and changes suggested by "21C/PL." The most interesting part to me is not the technology or the changing roles but the possibility that more community-based learning will allow more teens to get out into natural environments more often, do something to address the "Nature-Deficit Disorder" that has grown with the digital age.

The "it" of "21C/PL" is hard to define, and for many simply means an examined life as a teacher that is willing to innovate and experiment habitually. Bring "it" on, we're ready for it, many of us have been doing it for 10 years and already know which parts to take or leave, and the SBO must surely know by now that we're also ready to talk about it whenever you're ready... you know where to find us.

Project & Game-based "21C" Learning (2011)

What potential does gaming and rich interactive technology environments have for learning?

Reference: <<http://video.pbs.org/video/1797357384>>

This stuff sure pulls me in two directions... there are some aspects of this that appeal to me, and so much else that seems dystopian. The idea of a class without walls and guild approach to learning has always appealed to me, but I'm concerned that this approach has been derailed by corporate interests and a misreading of what self-taught looks like in kids compared to adults. Neither a fan nor stalwart critic, I need to "interrogate" the paradigm presented in the video because I want to know what I can learn from it. I'm left with questions about:

How does society, consciousness, ethics, sense/value of history change when knowledge is accessed on demand rather than stored in the brain? Are we still intelligent if we just rely on problem-solving skills and a personal interpretations? Are we independent simply because parents and teachers have left us to be peer-raised or raised by whoever dominates broadband?

The video features a wealthy school and tech array designed for self-indulgence. How can "21st century education" build interdependence without narcissism? How can the poor benefit from this approach? How can cash-strapped schools embrace a vision without being willing to foot the bill? How will Aboriginal Learners fare in this environment? (I can see some scenarios in which the concepts actually align better with a Aboriginal approach to learning, but also some barriers)

What do these "21C" ideas look like if we take the technology away? Is it really a new approach to education? Do none of these qualities appear in traditional classrooms? Is it the revolution or change in thinking the experts describe, or do they just make the contrast greater so they can sell their unique product? Half the time I wonder whether public institutions pick up the "21C" stuff in order to reduce costs and push privatization.

Gaming addictions are just passion for learning (bit at 13 minutes)? Really? What about the whole area of health, avoidance, procrastination, and social interaction?

Although I can think of a hundred ways in which public schooling as a social experiment has failed, the areas for which it has not are truly basic in any kind of caring (or just) society. It is these areas of success that I do not want to see traded away in another kind of experiment.

EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION & PLANNING

I don't want to go to your meeting (an unsent email, 2009)

What circumspection takes place when I consider meeting-like events?

When I devote my time, thought, and energy to meetings and meeting-like events, I must apply some criteria in order to be fair to myself and the people with whom I meet. Once committed, my participation consumes my thinking and commands my action, so I do not usually take saying "yes" lightly. I am most interested when the event involves a free and optimistic exchange of ideas. I am most wary when the event appears to be for remedial information, perfunctory exercises, didactic presentation, repetitive discourse, or artifice. Further, the event should appeal to one or preferably more of the values that attend my practice as an educator. While it is not necessary for you to design your event to meet these values, it is necessary that your event provides some food for the journey if you want the benefits of my participation.

Some of the educational values that inform my teaching practice and my personal and professional growth include:

- respect for creativity and inquiry
- a just and fair practice
- learning is relevant and meaningful
- insightful use of technology
- space for active citizenship
- environmental responsibility
- embodied, personalized learning
- means and ends are congruent
- self-reliance and responsibility for me and for students
- building community without coercion
- multimodal and holistic thought, action, and product
- identity connections throughout

I certainly make exceptions and apply my criteria quite loosely, for I am also interested in listening to the stories, concerns, dreams, and progress of others and I am equally interested to critique and improve the structures within which I work. I am willing to risk the unknown for the sake of my own professional development, but I have not seen convincing proof that this event petitions any of these values or sentiments. I am completely open to the provision of this evidence. Let it be known, in fact show by example, that all of your meetings are exciting & engaging, relevant & connected, honed with skill, steeped in knowledge, well researched, challenging in both thought and action, inspiring in the present and future, inclusive & mindful of alternate perspectives, built on a foundation of community & inquiry, and aimed deftly at the aspirations and needs of the audience (requiring that this relationship has already been cultivated). Whether the premise is celebration, disquiet, airing of ideas, or even dead reckoning in uncharted waters, the event requires craft. It is an opportunity to teach & learn, to show mastery, facilitate problem-solving, or come alongside the questions of those present; it is akin to a lesson in a classroom. The event should adhere to some design principles -- not necessarily the ones I hint at -- if it is to be taken seriously. Raise the expectations! Disprove the redolence that has come to be associated with dull meetings. This effort will be rewarded by the investment of creativity and expertise from those who arrive.

While these observations are not always at the front of one's experience when attending a meeting, they exist in the subtext and perhaps the subconscious, and are surely part of the background thinking that either secures the commitment of the participants or allows it to slip away like leaves in a stream.

Excerpts from “**More with Less, A Supplemental District 57 Sustainability Report: a three year plan for saving nine million dollars**”

How can educators, parents, and members of the community be involved in the process of school district budget and goal-setting?

This report was submitted Feb. 12th, 2010 to school district staff and the school trustees by a collaborative group of 30 parents and teachers, myself included. While some of the numbers and contexts have since been explained/corrected by district staff (which was one of our hoped-for outcomes), there still remains a host of creative ideas for improving educational delivery while creating a more sustainable system in every sense.

I’m not certain I’d stand by all of the recommendations now, some time later, but the experiment in progressive community activism represents an extension of my personal and professional values and bears repeating in this growth plan as a record of “where my head was at” in 2010. There are still many unmined strategies in the recommendations, in particular the creative ideas in the non-costed recommendations 24-45. I hope that these ideas from the group are not ignored entirely.

One of the interesting (untapped) areas of interest is in carbon emissions. While it is not as easy as reducing a carbon footprint and receiving a rebate, the possibility exists for new initiatives to qualify as carbon capture projects with the Pacific Carbon Trust, once-removed through a contractor if necessary. Exploring the idea would be a good start, something the District Sustainability Committee was not willing to do in 2010, although some movement has been noted in 2011 (again, using processes and frameworks that will not go far or fast... I sure wish they’d do their homework on program design before they strike their “ad-hoc working groups”).

At the January 26th, 2010 public board meeting, School District 57 trustee Roxanne Ricard challenged the audience of parents, educators, students, and the general public to help come up with solutions for addressing the district’s anticipated budget shortfall. Although our expertise and insight is spread in many directions and has limitations, we are honoured to be tasked with this challenge and have taken the request seriously.

In addition (or in alternative) to measures taken by the board to close and consolidate schools (and other actions from the *DSC Report*), here are some ideas that could impact district budget sustainability and save over \$9 million within three years. We welcome feedback on these ideas, by email or in person, as well as corrections to our cost estimates, positively or negatively. Without intimate access to all budget data, we have used approximate figures based on available evidence; conservative estimates were used when possible.

These recommendations are intended as an example of the savings that could be considered and achieved through an alternate planning process and are without prejudice to current district practices or individuals. Many of the savings would only be realized after three years, but would also result in lower overall long-term operating costs if sustained beyond the three-year period. Alternately, alleviating some of these measures in three years would leave all partner groups in the district with the sense that everyone pitched in to make sustainability possible. Some of these savings are realized by cuts from district management infrastructure, others through reductions in school allocations, and others have already been referred to in the *DSC Report*. In all cases involving labour costs we recommend the use of attrition and reassignment over layoff, and prior consultation with representatives of affected labour organizations.

There is no doubt that the district needs to balance its budget and pursue sustainability. This quest is where the questions and decisions need to dwell, and it is here that we wish to provide options. Beyond financial savings, many of these suggestions could put SD57 at the cutting edge of Northern Community Sustainability, innovative educational leadership, school system sustainability models, choice/diversity of programs, and continued focus on student learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. REDUCE TRAVEL COSTS

Three-year freeze on non-essential out-of-district travel paid for by district funds. Encourage use of Eluminate and Skype for virtual meetings and take advantage of the many available virtual education conferences and Knowschool online professional development short courses. Discharge contracted travel agent. Apply carbon offsets and consider cap-and-trade system for board office travel air-miles or calculated carbon impact. The district currently spends \$1,113,355 on centrally administered Professional Development and Travel (does not include money schools use for this purpose from their allocations or the BCTF Pro-D Fund) according to the published 2009-2010 budget. This translates to some combination of 629.75 (\$1800) trips or 3711.18 (\$300) teacher-release days each year. Estimate based on 20% total budget reduction for Professional Development and Travel for each of three years (approximately 126 fewer \$1800 trips per year: flights, agent fees, accommodations, transit/car rental, meals, and registrations). Carbon offset savings are not included. Various accountability tools exist to screen out-of-district travel if it is difficult to establish criteria.

Area of savings: District/CAO travel costs

Estimated cost savings: \$680,400

2. REDUCE/RE-ENVISION RELEASE TIME

Restructure release-dependent professional development, district meetings, and school projects. Use a three-year freeze on non-essential meetings requiring use of paid release time. Restructure release-dependent action initiative grants and mentoring. Mitigate with macro-level use of non-instructional time (e.g. existing collaboration blocks) or micro-level alternatives or incentives to find meeting time (three-year trial). Consider using BCCT-certified district staff or administration as guest speakers and learning facilitators to alleviate teachers from instruction when this is still needed. This could be part of a structured outreach/professional portfolio required by district staff and school administration similar to requirements for government officials. Such a program would be invigorating for BCCT-certified district staff and administration, and would lead the province in educational innovation. In 2009-2010 the district spent the equivalent of 3711 \$300 teacher-release days each year on Professional Development and Travel. Estimate based on reduction of 372 release days per year (x3) at \$300 per release day (10% of total yearly Professional Development and Travel 2009-2010 budget). Getting schools to match district savings on release time at an appropriate ratio would also further savings. Further clarity could be gained by publishing the data for travel vs. professional development as separate items in the annual district budget. Recommendations 1 & 2 represent a total reduction of about 30% applied to the district's Professional Development and Travel budget, and leave considerable room to continue meeting the Board's obligation to the teacher's Pro-D Fund as per article F.21 in the Collective Agreement.

Area of savings: release time

Estimated cost savings: \$334,800

3. REDUCE CATERING SERVICES

Remove or create alternatives to food catering in the district, or begin a three-year freeze on catering. The district paid \$215,267 to two catering companies in 2008-2009. Some portion of this relates to event and meeting catering. Estimate based on reducing total catering costs by 25% in each of three years.

Area of savings: catering

Estimated cost savings: \$161,450

4. CURB USE OF PERK/POOL/LEASED VEHICLES

Transfer all CAO (Central Administration Office) executive vehicle allowances (5?) and CAO pool car allowances (2?) into a fund for per-km reimbursement. As Canadian Leasing Laws are currently being revised, the timing on this change would be proactive and strategic. Restrict use of subsidized travel to essential tasks (some of which may be reduced through other recommendations) and recover surplus. Examine travel record for patterns and match district staff

travel routes to public transit. Our CAO and most schools are on efficient bus routes and documented use of transit could be applied as a carbon offset and used as a Sustainable Communities promotion opportunity. Estimate based on reducing use of subsidized (leased vehicle) travel sufficiently to cover the per-km fund (use of personal vehicles) and public transit passes (a choice for district staff). The second part to the savings comes from a reduction in total vehicle leases, fuel purchases, and servicing: 4% in year one, 8% in year two, and 12% in year three (consistent with decline in student numbers) starting with perk and pool vehicles. Last year the district spent \$250,968 on leases and at least \$205,142 on fuel and vehicle service centres. Carbon offsets not included.

Area of savings: CAO travel

Cost savings: \$109,466

5. PROACTIVITY ON CARBON OFFSETS

Create carbon offset team from all partner groups to develop three-year plan for reducing carbon footprint by 15% over three years (2010 carbon offsets under the Greenhouse Gas Act cost district \$200,000). Most strategies should focus on reducing heat and electricity costs, although there are many areas for action. Even planting 80-120 pine, spruce, or fir trees on school district property would capture one tonne of a carbon per year. Every one-hectare plot of removed trees in our district decreased our ability to capture carbon by approximately 200 tonnes per year (with stems 5 metres apart). Estimate based on meeting the goal with 5%, 10%, 15% reductions over three years. The team could also manage the carbon balance software for the district and establish a cap-and-trade system for each zone in the district (friendly competitions to reduce footprint). Reducing fuel consumption (recommendation 4) is the most effective way to score carbon credits, and any efforts to reduce utilities costs will have spin-off benefits beyond the impact on the carbon tax. The opportunity is here to address loss of community greenspace due to pine-beetle damage and set a standard for northern communities addressing climate change, sustainability, and carbon neutrality.

Area of savings: carbon offsets

Estimated cost savings: \$60,000

6. REDUCE COPYING AND PRINTING

Issue a friendly challenge to reduce paper footprint by 5% or more cumulative each year in each CAO and school department for three years with a small prize at each site (goal: 15% less or more copying and printing by year three). Most district employees are not even aware of their current paper footprint, although this data is tracked. Sponsor a student viral video competition to show how many trees (or another measure) it takes to justify our volume of photocopying. End use of paper-based memos, especially one-sided, where electronic communication meets access and equity tests. Balance this goal with the recognition that provincial curriculum development and online provision of print materials has increased our paper demands. Even a one-year 5% reduction at one school (D.P. Todd Secondary) with 60 staff would save \$900 based on \$18000 of print- and copier-dependent costs and servicing (does not include lease or machine amortization). Estimate extrapolated for 1097 district users for three years only at 5%, 10%, 15% reductions. The number of 1097 includes 755 teachers, half of the 401 CUPE employees, 22 PEA, 79 administrators, and 41 exempt staff but does not include 57 Trades or 100 Custodians. The estimate does not include positive impact on carbon offsets nor extension of service anticipated for printers and copiers.

Area of savings: photocopying and printing

Estimated cost savings: \$98,730

7. REDUCE PROFESSIONAL PRINTING

Match goals to reduce paper footprint with a goal to reduce professional printing costs. The district spent \$122,557 in 2008-2009 at two professional print vendors, and perhaps more with other vendors. Estimate based on a 5%, 10%, and 15% reduction of this known amount over three years. Encourage fidelity to existing district goals to go increasingly paperless.

Area of savings: professional printing

Estimated cost savings: \$36,767

8. DEPARTMENT BUDGETING EFFICIENCIES

Publish budget details related to supplies, purchases, and expenditures in CAO and school departments as an accountability measure. Some budgets have been squeezed for years, others will be shown to have potential for savings. Accompany with a friendly challenge for all CAO departments and schools to eliminate non-essential purchases for three years and self-target surpluses for recovery. Estimate based on a short study of three school departments with five staff spending and average of \$700 in department budgets and \$100 in central supply budgets per year (this would vary highly depending on departments (e.g. HR vs. lab sciences). A three-year total freeze may not be realistic, so a 25% reduction in each of three years is assumed or can account for differentiated nature of department budgets (e.g. staplers vs. hydrochloric acid). Extrapolated for 1097 staff. The potential to apply this to learning resources is not present in the current estimate.

Area of savings: department supplies & purchases

Estimated cost savings: \$131,640

9. SUPPLY BUDGET EFFICIENCIES

Clarify nature of \$5,688,063 supply budget and look for savings. Set a target of 3% reduction over three years (1%/2%/3%). Some of these savings may already be anticipated by associated measures.

Area of savings: supplies

Estimated cost savings: \$341,284

10. REDUCE USE OF PLANNERS

Begin a three-year freeze or reduction in the use of student and teacher planners and similar "school agenda" products. Seek a sponsor to provide these for free or use an alternative (web template, study skills calendars, Firstclass calendars, notebooks, year-less calendars that can be recycled). The estimate is based on a 50% reduction in the costs associated with Premier School Agendas (\$58,425 in 2008-2009) for each of three years. Carbon offsets not included.

Area of savings:

Estimated cost savings: \$87,638

11. USE LANDSCAPING ALTERNATIVES

As a three-year trial, seek donated trees and plants for use in district landscaping and horticulture projects. School programs have not had difficulty accessing free trees in the past. Work with the carbon offset team to identify school properties requiring "re-greening." Estimate based on reducing plant store costs by 50% for three years (the district spent at least \$33,924 on this last year)

Area of savings: plants and trees

Estimated cost savings: \$50,886

12. INITIATE ADMIN HIRING FREEZE

Three-year freeze on hiring new administrators. Use attrition (retirements, relocation) to assist other recommendations involving CAO reductions. Long-term trends normally require hiring at least three new administrators per year. Avg. principal/vice-principal salary in 2008-2009 was \$98,015 and \$100,038 in 2009-2010. Benefits are in the range of \$20,896 per year per school administration employee, and average expenses of \$624 per school-based administrators is (Special Purpose Fund in the 2008-2009 Financial Statement). The typical new hire would cost somewhat less than this total of \$121,558. Estimate based on not hiring 0/2/2 over three years with savings perpetuating (used 90% of average cost per school-based administrator. Normally admin hiring would be net zero, but our admin numbers have grown in recent budget years relative to student population. Reversing this trend is essential in meeting a balanced budget and would bring school district 57 closer to provincial averages for administrator-student ratios.

Area of savings: admin hiring freeze

Estimated cost savings: \$656,413

13. ESTABLISH ADVANCED LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Reduce assistant superintendent positions by one upon the first available retirement, and remain thus for a period of not less than three years. Respect the legacy and importance of this position by dividing some of the relinquished job duties among principals and vice-principals as a three-year advanced leadership program. This would mirror the district's Encouraging Leadership Program at a senior administrative level and assist human resources in identifying principal and CAO executive candidates. Estimate based on reducing an average assistant superintendent salary (\$127,152), benefits (\$20,896?), and expenses (\$16,932) thus \$164,980/yr (2008-2009 Financial Statement), assuming a retirement.

Area of savings: CAO staffing

Cost savings: \$494,940

14. CREATE EXPRESSED NEED HR POLICY

Consider a three-year trial for a human resources policy that restricts the placement of administrators between school level assignments at the Central Administration Office. Recent policy, while intended to support student learning and resolve human resources issues, has increased the cost of the CAO while other areas in the district have decreased in response to demographic decline. Establish criteria for creating new jobs (e.g. district support positions, district principals, other labour groups) at the CAO only with expressed need from constituent partner groups. Use the existing process and qualification criteria for returning surplus administration back to teaching positions, even if it is for a transition period between administrative assignments (could also be asset to professional portfolio and alleviate burnout). Estimate based on reduction of four FTE positions in year one, two in year two, and none in year three. Based on district principal average salary (\$105,262), benefits (\$20,896?), expenses (\$5395) thus \$131,553 with savings perpetuating. Utilize attrition (retirement/relocation) rather than layoffs to implement policy. Capitalize on CAO experience by using any transfers related to this policy as experts to define, coordinate, and participate in an Advanced Leadership Program.

Area of savings: CAO staffing

Estimated cost savings: \$2,104,848

15. INITIATE TEACHER LEADER PROGRAM

Convert some vice-principal or even principal positions to rotating teacher positions of special responsibility. Add this "Teacher Leader" opportunity to the spectrum of leadership identification programs that already include Encouraging Leadership and might include Advanced Leadership. Select promising candidates for part-time or full-time secondments to assignments that include current administrative duties, especially those centered on instructional leadership. This helps address a perception gap that administration and teaching are on separate tracks, and allows teachers to make an important leadership contribution and then return to the classroom with dignity. It will also help identify the future leaders of the district with a built-in risk-aversion scheme: many are called, all are honoured, some are retained. This would be another opportunity for the district to lead the field in the ecology of leadership, and recognize that "master teachers" may wish to contribute to leadership structures without permanently losing their classroom. The trial would build four part-time positions (0.5 FTE x 4 = 2 FTE) and two full-time positions (2 FTE) in each of 3 years (total 12 FTE) with District POSR stipends (\$8100). This cost would be offset by reducing four FTE administration positions in each of three years. As with other labour items, the filter to apply to this trial should be to use attrition over layoffs to determine spaces available for Teacher Leaders, or apply a no-net-loss across labour groups as there will be some movement. This program could be used to make small and rural schools more viable (staffing flexibility), and is based on a similar "Head Teacher" program in School District 20 Kootenay-Columbia. This program may also be a means to write and coordinate the School Plans for Student Success. Finally, this program, once applied, would be flexible as to the amount of FTE needed per site and may be a respectful way to reintegrate laid-off administration (i.e. from school closures) back into teaching positions. The differential between full-cost teachers (with district stipend) and administrators is about \$26458. The estimate is based on 12 FTE teachers vs. 12 FTE administrators.

Area of savings: administrative costs

Estimated cost savings: \$317,496

16. ELIMINATE POSR GRANTS

Each secondary school currently has a minimum of one Position of Special Responsibility charged with developing the School Plan for Student Success and fulfilling other school-determined duties, at a cost of one district-funded block (about \$10000) and a \$5600 stipend. These duties can be taken up at the school level and supplied with prep blocks and/or lieu days similar to what is being done for athletics coordination and department leadership positions. This has the advantage of making these positions based on needs generated on site and not perceived needs from the district. This estimate does not include district POSRs (support teachers; covered elsewhere) and would require that SPSS writing and coordination are funded by the district through an alternate means.

Area of savings: service consolidation

Estimated cost savings: \$108,500

17. RENEW TECHNOLOGY GREENING PLAN

Extend greening schedule for computer lab replacements by one year with allowances for replacement machines. Recent computers show an increased life expectancy in terms of their ability to remain current with developing software needs. Conservatively, a minimum of 40 schools replaces a mid-functioning lab (\$30,000 including some associated costs) every five years (\$1,200,000) every five years. Additionally, our five secondary schools replace a minimum average of one lab per year (\$750,000 over five years). Yearly cost of \$390,000. Moving to six instead of five year rotations would realize a 16.7% cost savings or \$65130 per year. More tech support time may be needed for aging machines; however, this may be balanced with fewer installations and startup support time each year.

Area of savings: technology greening plan schedule

Estimated cost savings: \$195,390

18. REVISIT PERIPHERALS AND ASSOCIATED GRANTS

Three year freeze on purchasing technology peripherals, including smartboard and projector purchase/installation and also including a three year freeze on district innovation and action initiative grants, especially where they involve purchases. Estimate based on yearly purchases and grants of \$4200 at a school of 750 students and 60 staff. If 13350 students generate similar needs, this is \$5.6 per student or \$74,760 per year. Alternately if 1079 staff generate similar needs, this is \$70 per staff or \$75,530 per year. Estimate uses lower figure x three years. Involves both DTT budget and school allocations.

Area of savings: technology peripherals & grants

Estimated cost savings: \$224,280

19. END TO CELLPHONE SUBSIDY

End subsidization of district Blackberries and cellphones. Encourage more use of existing land-lines, emails/free messaging systems, devices that replicate Blackberry functions, and face-to-face communication to mitigate loss of subsidized cellphones. Estimate based on an elimination of the Telus Mobility Cellular bill (2008-2009 Financial Statement) for three years.

Area of savings: cellphones

Estimated cost savings: \$149,491

20. LAPTOP GRANTS

Revisit administrator laptop grants where a duplicate, dedicated machine already exists at an administrator's worksite. Create a greening fund for administrator laptops or desktops that allows for a limited set of options and configurations (determine choices from a user-based needs assessment). Set the schedule to coincide or mirror school greening cycle. Estimate based on 50% reduction in each of three years (79 Admin, 22 PEA, \$2000 laptops), with computers amortized over five years.

Area of savings: technology

Estimated cost savings: \$60,600

21. CHANGES TO BCeSIS STRATEGY

Adjust approach to using BCeSIS. Abandoning BCeSIS is not realistic although it would realize substantial savings. Any alternative would also be expensive, and some aspects of the data system are meeting current needs and have required substantial investment of time and money. More effective would be to work with provincial partners to renegotiate the contract with eSIS/Fujitsu in recognition that we don't need many aspects of the service (e.g. use of the teacher assistant module for gradebook entry is now an exception rather than district practice). Our initial province-wide contract was based on delivery of a product designed around input from a small focus group and was not subjected to field tests or end-user trials. Our district could be a provincial leader in applying the knowledge we've gained from the "trial period" and revising our description of the product we actually require from eSIS/Fujitsu, and, in return, helping make their product more viable in new markets. Contract negotiation should set a goal of at least a 10% reduction in user fees to reflect our restricted/revised use of the service. Reflect these changes, as well as the demographic decline in the number of students in our data system, by adjusting the district staffing for BCeSIS (tech support and oversight) – our "trial" period is over and we should not need as many oversight and technical positions to run this program. Estimate based on reducing at least one FTE of program oversight/support (\$104,000, savings perpetuates) and reducing our fee per student from \$20 to \$18 by the end of three years (\$2 x 12,500 students = \$25000). Impact and potential reductions in school data officers are not included.

Area of savings: BCeSIS

Estimated cost savings: \$337,000

22. RESTRUCTURE DISTRICT RESOURCE CENTRE

Consolidate the District Resource Centre at PGSS. Reorganize and streamline service based on a needs assessment from the people who use the DRC. Estimate based on reducing DRC costs by 50% (perpetuating) based on a yearly cost of \$300,000 (figure used during 2002 closures). Additional savings will be in shipping, streaming video consolidation, and removal of duplicated service at PGSS (will hold 11% of district's student population in 2011). Alternately, the DRC could simply be absorbed into existing libraries with a new protocol on inter-library loans. Part of a transition year could be used to make sense of library consolidations from closed schools, remove duplicated services, and investigate the use of district-wide streaming video services.

Area of savings: service consolidation

Estimated cost savings: \$450,000

23. PROPERTY SALES AND THE CAO

According to BC Assessment, the CAO property is worth \$3,228,000 (land \$1,822,000 and buildings \$1,406,000). The John McInnis site is worth \$17,329,000 (land \$6,264,000 and buildings \$11,065,000), and the Lakewood site is worth \$10,014,000 (land \$1,388,000 and buildings \$8,626,000). In a year of large potential for student movement between schools, the sale of the CAO property is most realistic, considering its operations could be housed elsewhere (e.g. John McInnis or Lakewood), and the other two sites are student-ready. The CAO site is also prime real estate with commercial potential indicated in the Prince George Official Community Plan (http://www.city.pg.bc.ca/city_services/ocp/ocp.pdf p. 50). The estimate is based on 100% of assessed land value and 50% of assessed building value. This number (\$2,525,000) has then been multiplied by 75% to factor in anticipated moving costs and modifications to the new CAO host. Tax savings and carbon offsets not included.

Area of savings: service relocation

Estimated cost savings: \$1,893,750

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

These other measures, although difficult to quantify, would result in significant savings and continue the process of addressing change while maintaining a focus on student learning.

EFFICIENCIES

24. Encourage "healthy schools" approach to real communication vs email and hands-on teaching and learning strategies. Set a goal to cap or reduce student-computer ratio and enforce district standards on servicing and maintaining obsolete machines. Make up access deficit by implementing/fast-tracking existing plans to allow appropriate use of protected networks by students and staff on their own computers. Efficiencies should also realize savings in tech support, and make use of our collective knowledge as to how to use computers and technology more effectively for essential and innovative tasks.

25. Freeze any plans for parking lot repaving in the next three years and extend any current repaving schedules by a number of years to realize substantial savings.

26. Assuming some cuts at the CAO, empty space will open up for new opportunities. Consider relocating the Centre for Learning Alternatives (key operations) to the CAO building. Alternately, both the CAO and the CLA (and others services) could relocate to Lakewood or John McInnis and their former sites sold or leased.

27. Establish a district-wide "greening" process for textbooks (bulk purchase of recommended titles). Transfer unused class sets ("off-semester") between sites based on need. No central administration of this is required as our coding system works across district and would only require cooperation between libraries and monitoring by business managers.

28. Investigate potential savings in using ebooks/pads for textbook delivery (pilot one class set at each secondary school). Savings likely but not necessarily within the three-year period.

29. Investigate how Netbooks, iPads, cloud computing, open source, and thin clients might be used in our schools, especially when something other than a full computer is not needed. Pilot needed and savings not likely within the three-year period.

30. Re-examine snow removal contract/bidding process.

31. Allow schools and employees to seek less expensive options for replacing equipment and resources when they can demonstrate that the item meets the intended need. For example, a replacement bulb for a digital screen projector can be purchased online for \$160 compared to the \$300 price quoted by our district supplier.

PROGRAMS

32. Alter mentorship program to make better use of in-school match-ups. The appeal in being a mentor is not in the release time, it is in contributing to the profession. Use inexpensive incentives (e.g. UNBC uses gift certificates for thanking practicum teacher-sponsors) instead of release time wherever possible.

33. Extend the mentorship program to identify and recognize successful teaching & learning environments and programs. Issue grants to record and archive the educators in these programs, and build web-accessed content for use in distant education and rural/small schools. Along with some synchronized sessions and a teacher/facilitator, these asynchronous offerings could make a multi-subject or multi-level classroom more realistic and manageable at small schools. There has been some experimentation with this already in the district, but without the archival use of mastery

teaching & learning in an asynchronous environment. Podcasts and web content exist that parallel this model, but very little of it is tied to BC Curriculum. This might also be an excellent way to transition educational leaders (e.g. surplus administration) back to the classroom. This may require partnering rural schools with larger schools and aligning timetables to allow for the virtual classroom/videoconferencing (synchronous) part.

34. Create a three-year focus of all learning, technology, and action-initiative grants on teaching & learning projects that centre on viability and sustainability. For example, a project that provides solutions for educational delivery in a rural school would be considered for a grant. Tie the size/scope of the grant to the impact on savings and positive impact on learning.

35. Use partnerships with UNBC and CNC to encourage more research exchange. This may provide alternatives to release-dependent professional development and alleviate the need for some of the CAO-administered curriculum and instruction support and multi-site mentoring. The advantage (and mutual benefit for different educational systems) is in tying the expressed needs of educators to authentic and existing (and free) research assets. Examples of contributions that post-secondary educators and grad students could make include reading coaches, technology innovation, informal auditing, multimodal literacy projects, music therapy, and creative writing seminars. Likewise, our K-12 educators have much to offer to their post-secondary counterparts, especially concerning assessment for learning. Set goals for this mutual exchange to benefit small and rural schools.

36. Pilot a school organization (timetable) project wherein the learning needs of similar groups within a school (e.g. enriched students, reluctant learners, jr. core classes, math students, art students, all students at a small school interested in trades, etc.) can be treated as outcome-based cohorts rather than grade- and course-specific classes. Allow teachers and principals (and students) to design a program of study based on the cohort's needs that targets teaching & learning while maximizing on class-size savings. Allowing flexibility on divisions (5 groups of 18 vs 3 groups of 30), cross-curricular content, and self-directed options ensures that the class-size fits the learning needs. This has been tried before, on various levels, in our own district (PGSS), SD35 (D.W. Poppy), SD42 (Thomas Haney), and elsewhere. Savings would be realized in schools and scenarios where programs and courses would otherwise not be viable.

37. Pilot use of school grounds for community gardens. These have traditionally met roadblocks. A current proposal exists that, if approved, would have no net costs to the district (donated materials arranged) and provide a teaching garden for two distinct groups of students, and an opportunity for summer involvement by the neighbourhood and local seniors' residence. The value to the district is in carbon offsets, reduction of other learning resources costs, school beautification, daily physical activity, and community ties.

AUDITS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

38. Set up a first-year audit (formal or informal) of all secondary schools impacted with population changes. Ensure that expected efficiencies (economies of scale) translate into savings. One of the justifications for larger schools is efficiency of service, but this goal requires specific changes and monitoring.

39. Set up a comparative audit (formal or informal) to ensure that cuts to district infrastructure are carried through to related costs. For example, less new postings at the CAO and district schools should result in less money being spent at the Prince George Citizen (\$33,906 in 2008-2009). Savings should also be expected from travel, office supplies, travel, paper, computers, and other vendors. A goal that an audit may highlight could be a reduction of total costs to all services and vendors consistent with the demographic decline in our district.

40. Work at matching user-groups to targeted computer platform and configuration consolidations. Use a comprehensive needs assessment (if not a formal technology Program Evaluation) to determine cross-district strategy for bulk purchase of computers and systems, including secondary levels (not yet included in greening plan). Site-specific decisions on consolidation and differentiation of platforms may induce savings, as some high-performing computers labs are underutilized (built for potential) and other areas with low-performing machines are in need of upgrade or platform swap. While “greening” has resulted in savings, the savings data for single platform consolidation were successfully challenged four years ago (data was based on the separate cost factors of reduction of service and the elementary greening plan, and an erroneous measure of tech support by platform). Global platform consolidation will not save money as it would accelerate the obsolescence of millions of dollars of hardware and erode years of OS-specific professional development and inservice. Conversely, having a flexible strategy is the most effective way to bring secondary schools on-board with the overall greening plan. Most PCs are cheaper to buy than most Macs, but costs rise if software parity is important to the end-users. PCs generate tech tickets faster than Macs (4 x faster at one of our schools), but are also easier to upgrade and use with open-source software. Both platforms have significant long-term investment of money, time, and use in teaching & learning. Perhaps each site gets a set number of high-performing machines (either platform, variable but limited number of configurations), and a set number of functional machines (least expensive machines and platform, and simplest base configuration). Let the needs assessment determine the agenda, and any consolidations targeted on a user-group basis. Long-term planning by numerous stakeholders is necessary so as not to incur a net loss through replacing current high-functioning hardware where it is not necessary to do so.

SUSTAINABILITY MODELS

41. Consider an addendum to the Jan. 19th *DSC Report* with more granularity behind figures, explanations, and rationale. For example, provide details as to the savings were calculated in removing dual-track from the three elementary schools. This could then be compared to renovation costs and timeline considerations for an altered John McInnis. Another example would be to use school maps and formulas to show how nominal and working capacities were determined. More information would make the decision-making process more transparent and would make feedback more specific and constructive. Although data and details do not always tell the whole story, they provide the public with another tool for thoughtful feedback and accountability.

42. Consider macro-level budget allocations in light of the goal to rebuild the school district on sustainable principles. For example, re-visioning how and why our district allocates Supplies & Services or devises its plan for administration, oversight and support could significantly reduce our budget strain. Compare, for example, our district with another similar in size:

<u>2009/2010</u>	<u>SD57 Prince George</u>	<u>SD73 Kamloops</u>
# of schools	47	46
# of students	13,374	14,128
# of teachers	755	767
# principals/vice-principals	79	64
total FTE staff	1334	1354
total revenue	\$125,538,281	\$121,686,051
teacher salaries	\$53,105,137	\$55,051,567
non-teacher salaries	\$37,443,175	\$34,511,368
Supplies & Services	\$18,304,323	\$13,216,310

43. Consider other models of consultation on future facilities configuration. Having a process that invites feedback on potential closures and other options before a comprehensive puzzle-locked proposal is placed before trustees will allow a more diverse set of ideas to come to the surface, and have opportunities for savings positioned alongside (and possibly alternative to) school closures. Achieving district sustainability is a difficult learning process, and every district is different, but

there is likely much to be learned from the experiences of other school districts in our province. Such an example can be seen at <http://www3.sd73.bc.ca/FacilitiesConfiguration> -- note the semantic focus in the Kamloops District report on options, solicited feedback in addition to school community consultation, and use of inquiries related to individual schools and actions. Another example can be seen at <http://www.sd46.bc.ca/secheltschools> -- the consultation process happened before the proposal to close schools, and involved the work of a committee that included representatives from all partner groups. An interesting example of prioritizing can be seen at http://web.deltasd.bc.ca/sites/files/shared/Budget_a4.pdf -- Delta used this process to improve their teacher to non-teacher salary ratio to 1.9:1 (SD57 is 1.5:1).

44. Consider keeping the "sustainability" process and related inquiries open for three years to keep up the momentum on balancing budgets and focusing on learning. A previous (2003) district sustainability report, *Secondary Configuration in School District 57*, contained many measures, some not taken, some postponed, that would have substantially mitigated the financial challenges currently facing our district. The recent *DSC Report* also contains ideas and recommendations that, if not acted on, should not be forgotten as the district looks ahead to future challenges. This present *Supplemental Report* and other simultaneous feedback, in turn, should be collated and maintained beyond the current budget year. An example of why this is important comes from the 2003 Configuration Report. It was suggested that a detailed analysis was required to determine how amalgamations would translate into savings in the area of supplies, technology, learning resources, and other benefits due to economy of scale. Such a study, had it been conducted, would have allowed the current DSC to use more accurate figures in their impact analysis of school closures and reconfigurations. An ongoing inquiry-mindset will make sustainability decisions less shocking and more closely tied to the enrichment of students.

45. Build a diverse outreach group from district partner groups (trustees, central administration, teachers, DPAC, maintenance, clerical, etc.) for a short-term examination of how other districts in the province achieve sustainability and trade various choices in order to balance financial and educational goals. Some of the structures existing in our district are mandated, many others exist only by tradition. Use this knowledge to steer or advise ongoing sustainability in SD57; the experience in other districts may help us do more with less.

SUMMARY OF SAVINGS

<u>Category</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Estimated Cost Savings</u>
Pro-D and Travel	1. Travel Costs	\$680,400
	2. Release Time	\$334,800
	3. Catering Costs	\$161,450
	4. District Vehicles	\$109,466
Efficiencies	5. Carbon Offsets	\$60,000
	6. Copying and Printing	\$98,730
	7. Professional Printing	\$36,767
	8. Department Budgeting	\$131,640
	9. Supplies	\$341,284
	10. Use of Planners	\$87,638
	11. Plants and Landscaping	\$50,886
Leadership Structures	12. Admin Hiring Freeze	\$656,413
	13. Advanced Leadership Program	\$494,940
	14. Expressed Need HR Policy	\$2,104,848
	15. Teacher Leader Program	\$317,496
	16. POSR Grants	\$108,500
Technology	17. Technology Greening Plan	\$195,390
	18. Peripherals Freeze	\$224,280
	19. Cellphone Subsidy	\$149,491
	21. Laptop Grants	\$60,600
	20. BCeSIS Strategy	\$337,000
Facilities	22. Move DRC	\$450,000
	23. Move CAO	\$1,893,750
		TOTAL \$9,085,769

Helpful Documents

- Secondary Configuration in School District 57, 2003
- SD57 Statement of Financial Information 2008-2009
- Superintendent's Financial Challenges Powerpoint, May 2009
- SD57 Annual Budget Fiscal Year 2009-2010
- District Sustainability Committee Report, Jan 19 2010
- Superintendent's Powerpoint to Board, Jan 19 2010
- SD57 website; district and school plans for student success
- SD57 Intranet/Firstclass archived meetings & minutes
- Budget and Planning documents posted on other districts' websites

Notes on Leadership (2010)

How do choices about who leads and how affect the rest of the educational organization?

[...in progress: need to pull content from blog posting]

Organizational Models

On Networks vs Communities (Jan 2011)

A colleague of mine recently asked some questions about why certain topics that come up for staff discussion are relegated to "chat" forums or subcommittees and not looked at by the staff as a whole. She seemed concerned that we've missed an opportunity to take on the challenges of our school as a collective activity. The context for her questions is a year (or more) in which we've seen many teacher-guided processes in the school and district become the responsibility of administration. Some are relieved by the pattern (less work) but others see that they now have to deal with the aftermath of decisions they had no part in (or a reduced role).

I'm glad she asked this because I think she has tapped into three significant trends that are not confined to our school:

1. Mistaking networks and institutional structures for communities -- seen clearly when we try to solve individual and collective problems through email, digital forums, and social media.

"Community thinking" is highly desirable as a context for teaching & learning, but runs into problems when it is applied to institutional structures. As teachers we have to be able to move between network and community frequently and it is neither easy nor a good fit with the overall change in society towards indirect communication and less privacy (but more personalized mediums and a much wider audience).

2. The difficulty of collaboration and shared leadership within institutional hierarchies. Although they may share the same general mission (e.g. service to student learning in the case of education), the goals of frontline workers (and their expectation of democracy and inclusion) are often not the same as the goals of management structures (for which democracy is a limitation on decision-making, and inclusion is strategic rather than pervasive), even if both of their goals are necessary to pursue. This basic (and perhaps inescapable) discrepancy is modeled at almost every layer of society from classrooms to the federal government.

3. Confusion of educational models with organizational models. Within education, this problem is partly due to the wholistic approach taken by many modern theorists. Not content to simply suggest better ways to approach teaching and learning, they also look (understandably) at institutional reform as part of their suggestions for transformation. The issues begin when the pedagogical changes are pursued by an organization but the organization is not capable of making the institutional change necessary for the theory to make sense. This confusion is also more prevalent in organizations (like ours) where management and frontline are so close in terms of background, workspace, and focus.

I would argue that these trends share common roots and have their own peculiar manifestations at our school, but I think we are not alone. I also think they share the same basic paradox in that "working together" is crucial for success (think universal health care, American Civil Rights, United Nations, Indian Independence Movement) but "working together" usually means significant compromise when it requires vertical alignment of goals (think waste in our medical system, Stalinism, League of Nations, India's Partition). I know these examples are beyond the scale of school workplace processes/folders/councils, and contain their own internal contradictions of the paradox, but they are all understandings of how rights and responsibilities are distributed across various societies. The issue of incongruent goals also informs this paradox. We've seen what can happen when governments deny rights and are not responsible to their citizens, but we would also not have a Charter of Rights in Canada without "management" cutting corners on democracy and inclusion. If we submit to the necessity of government, we have to expect some forfeiture of freedom. Our public education system is built on the basic notion that students must give up some freedom in order to receive the ministrations of society's decision-makers. The expectations placed on teachers are never completely clear (most, in fact, are self-imposed), and so we dwell in a dynamic spectrum of rights and responsibilities that are often in tension with the system in which

we work, including the students. Personally, I don't mind the "spectrum" as it allows for individuation and the alternative seems very limiting and unimaginative.

The paradox takes on new dimensions when it is seen in our local context. Our school district has been affected by many trends in educational theory*, many of which I admire for different reasons on their own, but our schools have attempted a difficult project of combining many elements of these theories within existing hierarchical structures in order to put them into practice. While a "mashup" can be very creative, it can also result in confusion and lack of uptake. I think this flux compounds the three trends noted above and explains why they create added tension (creative or otherwise) in our workplace and are not simply part of the organizational issues that exist everywhere and throughout history. I think it is right, though, that individuals, schools, and districts experiment with educational and organizational theory, but I wish we put more thought and time into finding out the difference and realizing the limits of what teachers and students are able to assimilate given the other challenges of the classroom. I've come across some good professional resources, school organizational models, political paradoxes, and historical examples on these topics that I'll have to come back to as time allows.

* Many have been "tried" (found their way into school and district initiatives as evidenced by pro-d offerings, programs/policy, release funding, and travel expenditure). While they most often gained attention via our Curriculum & Instruction department, some were introduced from "above" (Ministry) or "below" (local educators). Others theories, like Mezirow's Transformative Learning or DeVries Constructivist Education, have simply been influential (e.g. from teacher training programs) but haven't been "sponsored." Of course, individual teachers have put a myriad of theories into practice, only some of which are/were even on the district's radar. Here's some of the theories that our district (and most secondary schools) have tried/are trying over the last 14 years; I'd be curious to know what other significant ones I've missed:

- Dimensions of Learning by David Brown and others (c.1995-2002 ?)
- Data-driven decision making or "D3M" (c.2000-2007 ?)
- Dufours' Professional Learning Communities (c.1998 ? -2009, less so after that)
- Assessment for Learning as put forward by Black and Wiliam (c.2004-2011)
- Inquiry model of the Network of Performance Based Schools (c.2006-2011)
- John Abbott's 21st Century Learning Initiative (c.2010-2011)

District and School Planning Process

What are some challenges and solutions regarding the District Planning Process from which the District Plan for Student Success (DPSS) and the School Plans for Student Success (SPSS) owe their origins?

[originally submitted to the PGDTA and elsewhere February 2011. This article was relevant for the 2010-2011 round of planning, and may still be, but should be read within the context of a particular year. I have included it here as an application of the kind of critical inquiry that I think is needed if we wish to improve public education]

The DPSS has significant problems and needs to be challenged if the school district wants to take improvement plans seriously and if it actually wants staff at schools to consider the goal. The DPSS is not without merit -- many parts simply report what is happening around the district -- actions worth celebrating, as they involve the hard work of educators who are passionate about their subjects and care about the progress of their students. Other parts, such as the preamble, have been carried over from previous plans with few edits <http://dpts.sd57.bc.ca/~gthielmann/share/DPSS_2006-2007.pdf> and <http://dpts.sd57.bc.ca/~gthielmann/share/DPSS_2007-2010.pdf>. The core of the DPSS document (the goal and what is to be done with it) has some alarming deficits. As a background to these observations, I'd suggest taking a close look at the DPSS first <http://dpts.sd57.bc.ca/~gthielmann/share/DPSS_2011-2012>, and maybe one or two of the SPSS documents <<http://www.sd57.bc.ca/index.php?id=503>>.

The District Planning Process describes the planning cycle that involves school plans and district plans for student success. It was laid out in the 2010 DPSS but was not mentioned in the 2011 DPSS. What has happened -- has the process changed? Has it been dropped as part of cutbacks (a reduced capacity to follow the process)? Has anything replaced it? Will anything meaningful be done with the new SPSS? Is it fruitful to submit a plan for which the recipient has given no indication that the plan will be used as intended? Specifically, what happened to the feedback cycle for the SPSS and its use in building the DPSS, neither of which has occurred as described or scheduled? While it may be difficult to answer all these questions, it will help to understand the context for the plans and problems with the planning cycle.

The SPSS on its own has not proven necessary to inform teacher practice or departmental collaboration, although it might serve other beneficial functions such as recording teacher practice and departmental collaboration. This was the direction taken in the last few plans at D.P. Todd and elsewhere -- to capture the dialogue among educators for the benefit of the plan's audience and the reflection of staff. These functions are not held in high esteem when they are not read or reviewed by the SBO that has asked for them as part of a Ministry requirement. Like those of most teachers I know, my own cycle of praxis draws from a deep well of professional literature and supportive colleagues at school and elsewhere; there is nothing explicit in the school plan that I need to complete this cycle. I believe there are strong possibilities for the power an SPSS can have, but when it becomes an obligation and is not useful either to the teacher or the school district, it is time to revisit individual department contributions that are a tradition rather than a requirement.

There was never any clear expectation that all departments would write a plan, nor in the absence of department plans that there should be one single school plan. The plans are also different from school to school. Some schools did not submit an SPSS last year -- Carney/ACS and Heather Park did not submit plans (understandably), but neither did CHSS. D.P. Todd, for example, started around 2004 with a few years of department-based plans, in 2006-2009 we had school-wide plans, and in 2009-present is back to department-based plans, so we have no standard model to follow. The only required aspect of the SPSS is that the principal must submit one, although administrators, too, may want to ask at the SBO why they should submit a plan that has limited usefulness for staff and what appears to be of no use at the SBO.

Our understanding of professional learning communities and the role of legitimate performance standards has come too far for us to simply disengage from critical thinking when asked to complete perfunctory exercises. Does administration have plans to address concerns with abandonment of the District Planning Process and the significant deficits of the DPSS? As teachers, we can offer a knowledgeable critique of plans and data, etc., but it is better suited for administration to ask difficult and necessary questions at the board office related to the DPSS. This is a great opportunity for administration to lead change by insisting that the SBO wake up on the DPSS/SPSS process and shorten the "knowing/doing gap" we hear about when theory does not meet with practice.

Here's what seems fairly clear to me having read the DPSS and the other SPSS documents that were posted last July, and having participated in and watched closely the district planning process for the last 9 years:

1. The DPSS contains a number of logical fallacies. The first is the inclusion of what should be two paths of inquiry in the same goal statement. Both independent learning and formative assessment are meaningful and complimentary goals, but are not mutually assured. Logical fallacies in the document also include the choice of data, confusing reference for rationale, mistaking correlation for causality, mismatching of the goal to objectives and strategies, and an unclear focus. The cover suggests the focus is independent learning, the puzzle pieces suggest a 4-part focus, the second page suggests the focus is a paradigm shift from teaching strategies to improved learning, and the footer suggests the focus is personalized learning. Again, complimentary, but not necessarily correlative. Additionally, there are some false statements in the District Strengths section such as "this distributed responsibility has led to a great degree of staff and partner group engagement in all aspects of decision making." Many of these errors could have been cleared up at the editing phase.

2. The DPSS goal is incorrectly matched to data. How should the wide-spread use of formative assessment should be measured? Uptake of concepts promoted through district pro-d (registration data)? Survey responses from teachers about their methods of instruction and assessment? External evaluation by experts in assessment? Anything qualitative or quantitative to do with formative assessment? None of the above -- the plan acknowledges how difficult this is to measure and instead displays the same statistics the SBO uses in all its reports: a panoply of summative assessments including success rates, grade transitions, FSAs, and provincial exam scores. It is ironic that while the district uses provincial exam scores to indicate the success of formative assessment, PGSS admin uses the same data to indicate the success of an attendance program, and the Fraser Institute uses the same data to rank schools and so on. Data can't be stretched like that and remain valid. One of the uses may be valid, but the others can only be curious speculations unless some more rigorous statistical analysis is done.

3. The desire to embed formative assessment everywhere is hollow. It is as productive to say "we want all of our teachers to be in the business of educating students and doing things that help students learn" -- that's not a goal, that's a condition for employment. Formative assessment has come to mean so many things, although the DPSS connects it to 5 principles, a definition of AFL, and 6 strategies for AFL. Anyone who has spent time with these ideas will recognize that assessment and instruction are intertwined and that FA, AFL, and inquiry are all tools to examine classroom practice, steer away from stoic or rigid delivery and focus on what/how students are learning -- these are very flexible ideas and are not new to the scene. When I started teaching in 1995 we called it "checking for understanding" and began our courses with "what do you know" assessments that we'd use to shape instruction. My father talks about designing his English classes and curriculum at Connaught Jr. in the 1960s around the passions, problems, and questions of his students -- virtually all of the learning was formative and inquiry-based. At most we can say that formative assessment is a gathering of various educational philosophies under a banner defined by its users. The word choice in the goal is also of note: to "embed" is to lodge something firmly in place, to make it part of the habit or environment. This will look different in every classroom (user-defined) and makes the goal more of a mantra or vision than something practical.

With a distinct area of inquiry thrown in ("create independent student learners"), this plan doesn't know what it is or what it wants.

4. The Objectives are largely unrelated to the goal itself. These include: address unique needs of aboriginal learners, increase play-based learning, using the "UDL" strategy with special-needs students, and offering joint teacher-admin pro-d (please tell me where and when this is happening). These are great objectives, but do not depend on or flow from the goal -- without a context they appear quite random.

5. The Support Structures are not really support structures. The list includes "Families of Schools" -- this is simply a rebranding of Zones as a result of school closures last year -- this is not a support structure, it is a description of catchments. The possibility for improved communication between schools as a result of changing the name from zones to families is cynical, especially given the reduced capacity for district-wide communication in the wake of "right-sizing." The second structure listed is "Learning Teams" followed by a highly arguable narrative of how they came into being. The learning teams pre-date the goal and involve a small fraction of the district; they may be useful or positive but they are not substantive instruments driving change towards the stated goal. The third structure "Working Meetings" is mysterious as it describes unknown presenters and unknown ideas and/or strategies. Maybe there will be snacks at these meetings.

6. The Strategies are simply a list of projects already underway in the district and largely independent of the SBO. Seven of the objectives relate to Aboriginal learning and inner city schools, four relate to early childhood learning & literacy, three relate to special education resources, two relate to math education, one relates to writing, one relates to teacher mentorship, one to administrator pro-d, and one relates to AFL. So, only one of the twenty objectives is directly connected to the goal; the rest are projects, highly commendable, but would probably exist no matter what the goal stated. Imagine if we set out to teach a learning outcome and chose twenty activities to do this but only one related to the learning outcome.

7. The SBO's recent track record on implementing district-wide goals is not strong. To use a relevant past example, last year the SBO (superintendent, a trustee, and the tech support coordinator) publicly committed to having and following a real plan for supporting teachers in a changing technology service scenario that included a transition to single-platform PC. Almost a year later there is no plan, no district support mechanisms (e.g. in-service, replacement specs, timeline for transition). This work has been left to schools -- perhaps as it should be -- but then why bother with the commitment for district-wide support? There is less collaboration and follow-through on tech planning and direction than at any time in the last 13 years. The disbanding of the District Tech Team was one of the final strokes, with impacts including the rejection of at least four project proposals this year involving "21st Century Learning" technologies. The lesson is that published goals are not useful if the walk doesn't follow the talk. This need not be seen as a criticism -- one of the consequences to the "right-sizing" at the SBO was surely to be some lack of capacity or even a total hiatus on goal-setting, decision-making, and follow-up. We shouldn't expect more from the SBO unless we're willing to see more money taken from school allocations.

8. It is doubtful the SBO will take its part of the DPSS too seriously when it has not done the same for the School Plans for Student Success. They have apparently not been read by SBO staff, let alone assessed using their SPSS rubric or handled according to their own District Planning Process described in the previous DPSS. I've polled the staff reps at every elementary and secondary school and have yet to find one that has received feedback of any kind on its SPSS. If some schools are extracting value from their SPSS, fantastic, because the SBO is not. Although the SPSS exists as a school growth plan and accountability contract for submission to and review by the school board (this is in the School Act), it seems that SPSS feedback was a higher priority for the previous C&I department and that there are no known plans to review the current SPSS documents. There does not appear to be any plans to align the DPSS with the SPSSs, something required as part of the District Planning Process.

9. The SPSS/DPSS model is broken. Some of the SPSS documents contain their own contradictions and comical ironies, some schools did not submit an SPSS. Around 2008, the director of school services told a meeting of "POSRs" that after 5 years of District Plans for Student Success, they had produced no measurable results -- no impact!. I had to ask her to repeat that twice, and asked if I could quote her. She said that planning was still important as it provided a chance to discuss common goals, etc., but there was no illusion about these being anything but compliance documents. To her credit, she hoped that the SPSS would become a record of what teachers talked about in schools regarding student learning ("living documents"), and not so much a perfunctory collection of goals and data. The move towards inquiry-based SPSS documents was meant to address this, although many of the inquiries in the SPSS documents are indistinguishable from the old "data dumps" other than stating goals in the form of questions (like Jeopardy responses). A survey of school plans reveals many challenges to overcome: some looked slapped together, confuse correlation with causality, mash up bits of educational ideas or data types with the hopes that they are congruent, lack editing, and use backwards-engineered goals to describe ordinary activities in the school. This last characteristic is at least close to "recording the conversation about learning at your school." Again, those schools who take inquiry seriously (e.g. they leverage the best of what the Network of Performance Based Schools offers) should be commended; what they're doing is closer to what the SPSS could have been.

10. A report is a report. Having written a few SPSS documents, I probably feel more put out than I need to be that the last SPSS was "shelved" but I should not be surprised. Didn't we have the same concerns about the Accreditation process and documents? Isn't this common in bureaucracies? We hear far often that reports and plans are a waste of time, but it behooves us to move beyond derision and either abandon perfunctory exercises or redeem the process. I think we should take the DPSS for what it is worth, a compliment on the good work done by educators and students, and an encouragement to keep thinking about how your practice can improve. Actually, if one crossed out the whole goal part, the rest of the DPSS would make more sense as a living description of what is already happening in the district. I've read some excellent SPSS and school growth plans from our district and others, and many poor ones, but sensible, inspiring district-level growth plans are quite rare. Imagine how hard it is to build a tent over the diversity of teaching and learning that occurs across an entire district. We would be better off having a wiki, forum, or annual gathering in which to share successes and challenges than we are with the present format.

These are observations and, of course, opinions, but I believe they are factual and documentary evidence for all ten of these points are widely available (as well as suggestions for improvement and alternate models). These are not blunt criticisms (which are perhaps not appropriate for an email), but they are nonetheless critical in nature, as in "critical inquiry." I believe we work in organizational contexts that produces these kind of results regularly and perhaps inescapably, and so critical inquiry is needed if wish to improve public education. Any one of these ten observations should be enough to raise questions about the District Planning Process; the fact that there are ten (which is where I chose to stop), tells me the problem is endemic to a culture for which we are all responsible as public educators. These observations centre on processes used by our SBO, but should be owned by the whole district as we are all asked to contribute to the SPSS/DPSS cycle and have many opportunities to stop the comical parts in their tracks if we so choose. I would recommend starting this by ensuring that our own school's SPSS has goals that are legitimate and logical, has data that matches the problem, and has inquiry that is worthwhile and engaging. I think we have ended up with reasonable SPSS documents in the past, but our plan needs to change if the context in which they are received no longer complies with the District Planning Process. A survey of SPSS documents shows that the confusion over what constitutes valid data and inquiry is a wide-spread problem that requires attention.

Again, I applaud the schools who use their SPSS to truly reflect the best of what they do, and I applaud the parts of the DPSS that recognize success where it is due. My motivation for sharing these thoughts is that school and district plans are published on the internet and reflect on all educators and can be linked to individual schools, administration, departments, and teaching staff. As it stands now, the contradictions in the DPSS are somewhat embarrassing. SBO staff have

talked about data-driven decisions and the knowing/doing gap; the first place these become an issue are in their own published plans. Someone better suited to bring concerns forward to the SBO, i.e. administration, needs to let them know that their plan-writing is in need of some "formative assessment" The administrators form the closest thing to a peer group for the SBO staff, and thus are in a unique position to offer support for the improvement of the district and school planning process.

Update for 2011-2012

The SBO has posted a new District Plan for Student Success <<http://www.sd57.bc.ca/index.php?id=503>>. Again, there are many achievements to celebrate, and many practices worthy of recognition, but the basic challenges from the previous plan remain unresolved. For example, in the wake of a disheartening shut-out of educators on technology deliberations over the last two years, and a similar shift in the way most decisions are made (e.g. the Math 8 directive) it is ironic to find this statement in the current Plan:

"This distributed responsibility has led to significant staff and partner group engagement in all aspects of decision making. Decentralization is considered a strength of the district." (p. 5)

Whether or not it represents a positive direction, the opposite has in fact occurred. As I've said earlier, this is perhaps a simple recognition that there have been new choices as to organizational models and an impact (deliberate or not) arising from budget cuts to organizational structures, leadership time, and personnel in 2010. It is entirely logical that one result, left unmitigated, is a reduction in "staff and partner group engagement in all aspects of decision making." Similar ironies are noted throughout the document, mainly in the form of using new jargon or combinations of data to retell the same story or announce a practice as new which is perhaps not all that new. This isn't necessarily a problem, but it does require explanation and naked honesty about what it is doing if the language is to become unproblematic.

A fundamental issue that needs to be addressed at some district level is how the current decision-making structures and organizational model creates tension between "partner groups" and how to evolve something more successful. Luckily, alternate processes and successful examples abound in similar jurisdictions¹³ and would not be overly difficult to conceive or implement.

The positive note, the silver lining, is that it is possible to detect some humour and a celebrative spirit in the document, and indeed a late emergence of some educational ideas that have been in common currency in the trenches, the classrooms. In the end I suppose it doesn't matter too much -- when a competent teacher meets a new group of students in a vibrant curricular landscape, there is some fear and joy and wonder like the start of an exhilarating journey. All the politics and jargon and plans can do is create a pause, perhaps even a rest, making the more studied and relevant horizons that much more appealing. When the dreams are big enough, they can survive

¹³ One example, mentioned in the "More with Less report" (above) involves a different way of gathering, publishing, reflecting, and acting on public feedback to district configuration plans in the Kamloops School District <<http://www3.sd73.bc.ca/FacilitiesConfiguration>>. They used course-correction as a result of feedback analysis to republish plans and win wider public support before board decisions on district configuration. This is much preferable to the system we used that saw feedback gathered but invisible and unanswered until the final board deliberation on our configuration issues in 2010.

LEARNING THEORY

Ecological Narratives of Identity (2004)

[...in progress: need to edit for length]

A New Culture in the Classroom (2012)

[...in progress: future writing project]

Reflections on Identity Research (2012)

What happens when Social Studies students explore their personal and cultural backgrounds in order to make connections to the curriculum?

[...in progress: future writing project]

Reflections on Embodied Learning (2012)

What happens when Geography students invest all of their senses and intelligences into expressions of learning?

[...in progress: future writing project]

Ecosystem Theory in Education (2012)

What can we learn from ecological classification models applied to educational contexts?

[...in progress: future writing project]

BACK MATTER

Reading and Reference List

What books have had an impact on my personal and professional development? (very hard to separate when it comes to literature... we teach who we are)

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Notes on typefaces

How do choices from various font foundries reflect the purpose of this professional growth plan?

Verdana has been chosen as the primary font choice for this publication for its simplicity and humanist qualities. As a common sans-serif typeface, it is readable and familiar, presenting a somewhat neutral characterization on which a unique syntax can be ostensibly extended by the reader. The font was created in 1996 by Matthew Carter of Microsoft to fill a demand for clarity at different scales. To some extent it is also suggestive of my own hand-printing, and thus helps complete a design circle that includes connection to identity. Part of this connection is the use of this font in most of my class handouts and lesson materials.

NOUVEAU has been chosen for headings and labels to give a bold stylization to the themes and concepts that guide the publication. The Craftsman approach to the typeface, combined with great lines at large font size, is meant to convey the sense that the publication is a deliberately crafted work. The font was created by Charles Rennie Mackintosh of Glasgow at the turn of the century. I have a deep fondness for the Arts & Crafts movement, and the Art Nouveau style of Mackintosh as seen in his architecture and furniture design. Thus the font choice is a sentimental choice, but also one that fulfills some design objectives.

Bradley Hand has been chosen for captions to convey a sense of casual observation. There is an element of risk in using any font family that employs whimsy or suggests emotion. Far from the neutrality of other fonts, this typeface commits to a certain range of expressions, much like a hastily written note or a poster inscription. Nonetheless, the quality of an off-handed comment, spoken at a particular time and hard to rescind, or a message meant to elicit pause, is exactly the warmth this font choice was meant to evoke. The font was created in 1996 by British designer Richard Bradley.

The general absence of a formal serif is also telling. A growth plan is a work in progress -- something must always be missing. The possibility of wonderful curls and wisps, ancient but often inconsequential markings, floats somewhere above the busy work on the ground. Like high cirrus clouds that bear witness to the low-level cumulus, but do not bear consequence for the now but address the distance between past and future, or at least indicate that a cycle exists in which one must be rooted to the present, to the ground beneath one's feet. The serif is beautiful thing to me, a dream not realized, but it is not welcome for fear of dwelling in some space other than the immediate.

