

EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

The BC story



**Kathy Sanford
& Tim Hopper**

Educational Transformation: The BC Story

BC Redesigned Curriculum, Volume 1

Kathy Sanford and Tim Hopper

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EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION: THE BC STORY

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Written by Kathy Sanford and Tim Hopper.

To all those in education who believe we can make a better system, can make schooling a process that all students can embrace, where all feel successful, and where teachers are allowed to challenge each learner as they develop empathy and compassion for every learner in their care.

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Foreword

This is a story of complex educational transformation across the province of British Columbia, and as with all compelling stories, interesting and important characters drive the plot. While there are many people involved in the story's creation and development, the following list of people have contributed in highly significant ways to its development, located across a spectrum of time and different educational spaces. Key to the success of the transformation was the interconnectedness of leaders from the political side, the educational side, and administrators, all who brought strengths that worked to shape education and move it forward. These characters will appear and reappear as the story unfolds. However, it is important to note that there are many other people across the province, within the Ministry, school districts, BCTF, and post-secondary institutions, who have contributed significantly to the success of the educational transformation in British Columbia. Transformation, a dramatic change, happens when we work collectively, across institutions, locations, and contexts over a significant period of time. The success of the transformation is due to the collective work of many educators from many sectors over decades to create the conditions for change.

Kathy Sanford and Tim Hopper have written this document based on accounts from conversational interviews provided by the people listed below. These interviews were transcribed and shared with them, as well as earlier drafts of this book. It is hoped that their perspectives and their voices have been respectfully represented. Below are listed some of the key informants of this story and their roles during the BC curriculum transformation:

Nancy Walt: currently the Executive Director, Curriculum and Assessment, in the Ministry of Education (2016-present), and previously the research officer for BC Public Service 1988-2003, the Manager/Director of Assessment, 2004-2011, the Director of Curriculum & Assessment 2011-present, brought a depth and breadth of understanding of both current education curriculum and assessment theories and practices and a critically-needed long-term perspective on assessment and curriculum over 25 years of work;

James Gorman: Deputy Minister of Education 2007-2014, a long-standing bureaucrat with a wide range of experience in areas such as the BC Public Service Agency, he had established a strong and positive working relationship with seconded Superintendent of Learning Rod Allen;

Rod Allen: previously a superintendent in the Bulkley Valley who was seconded in 2007 to the Ministry of Education as Superintendent of Achievement, then Superintendent of Learning. Rod became an Assistant Deputy Minister in 2015 before moving to his latest position as Superintendent of Cowichan Valley School District;

Jennifer McCrae: Communications Director during George Abbott's term as Minister of Education. She worked closely with the Minister, Deputy Minister and Superintendent of Learning to develop language for introducing and explaining the educational transformation as well as making space for strategic conversations. Jenn is a long-standing government employee who moved to Human Resources and then became Rod Allen's Executive Director; she is currently the Assistant Deputy Minister overseeing the Learning Division;

George Abbott: Minister of Education from 2011-2013, drove the transformation agenda forward, working collaboratively with Deputy Minister James Gorman and seconded

superintendent (later Assistant Deputy Minister) Rod Allen. Abbott was a longstanding BC Liberal Party Member of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, holding a range of portfolios from 1996 including Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation deputy house leader, Minister of Health, Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services and Minister of Sustainable Resource Management. His unsuccessful bid for provincial leadership in 2011 led to his highly successful position in the Ministry of Education, one he chose in the reconstruction of the Liberal government;

Maureen Dockendorf: seconded from the Coquitlum School District, was head of the important Ministry of Education initiative *Changing Results for Young Readers* and played a pivotal role in connecting Ministry initiatives and directions of the new curriculum with those working in schools. She worked with over 50 school districts to support early literacy learning and as she did so she and her team were able to connect with many educators across the province;

Jan Unwin: seconded from her position as superintendent of Maple Ridge School District to a complex but insightfully created position that crossed the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education, with a role title that indicated the complexity of the work: Superintendent of Graduation and Student Transitions with BC Ministries of Education and Ministry of Advanced Education, the goal being to create a smooth link between high school graduates and post-secondary education;

Kristin Mimick: Education Officer in the Ministry of Education whose work created and strengthened positive partnerships between educators and Ministry employees, both rural and urban, and in her work she integrated post-secondary educators in educational transformation projects;

Trish Rosborough: worked in the Ministry of Education for two years as provincial coordinator, then director of Aboriginal Education for 10 years until 2010; previously an Aboriginal education counselor at North Island College, she had been on the local school board for two terms, and served on the BCSTA provincial committee for Aboriginal Education. She was key to ensuring that Indigenous perspectives were respectfully and appropriately interwoven throughout the new curriculum;

Glen Hansman: BCTF president, completing his term in 2019, a strong advocate for indigenizing the curriculum, as well as ensuring that the curriculum meets the diverse needs of all teachers and students across the province. The connection between the BCTF executive, led by Hansman, and the Ministry of Education, was key to the acceptance and implementation of the new curriculum;

Claire Avison: worked in a range of government appointments (2001-current) including the Ministry of Health around the advancement of school health, and then in the Ministry of Education around policy alignment to support educational transformation. She then moved to the Ministry of Advanced Education where she continue to work with seconded administrator and educator Jan Unwin to provide links between K-12 and post-secondary education;

Rick Davis: Superintendent of Achievement who worked in the executive of Ministry from 2002 to his retirement in 2015, serving as the Public Sector Employers Association's chief negotiator, a role that was important to paving the way for others to move forward with curriculum transformation Superintendent of Achievement;

Pat Duncan: recently retired, Pat was Superintendent of Learning in BC Ministry of Education from 2018. Prior to that position, he was Superintendent of New Westminster School District and Deputy Superintendent of Victoria School District. He also played the important role of Professional Development coordinator for the BC School Superintendents Association for several years.

Throughout the book hyper-linked text links have been made to sources where possible and all images have been reproduced with permission of the authors or from public websites. Chapter images have been taken from natural places around BC to denote some of the ideas within each chapter. The authors have selected key quotes and highlighted them in grey text boxes. These can be read as stepping-stones through the BC story.

Chapter 1: Introduction



We have been compelled to write this story, to share with our local and international communities how the province of British Columbia (BC) on the west coast of Canada has enabled change to an entrenched system with hundreds of years of history – change that will enable all learners who go to school to be successful, enthusiastic and engaged. This is a story with many characters, all of whom have meaningfully contributed to changing our BC educational system, including curriculum K-20, assessment practices and more importantly, mindsets of educators, administrators, parents and the general community. These characters have all played a role in moving BC education into the 21st century and although it is impossible to put names to all of the players in this story, it is important to acknowledge some of the key leaders in this unique and monumental transformation. We have, over the past decade, observed and engaged with a powerful shift in our educational focus and have had conversations with many educators. We have been amazed that, despite being fraught with challenges (e.g., strike action, confrontational institutional relationships, BC Teacher Regulation Branch, rapidly changing demographics, education as a political institution) the province of BC has stayed the course, creating a sustained and sustainable pathway and ongoing responsiveness to the needs of its communities.

BC Education is strong and provides meaningful learning opportunities for many children and youth – it is a system that BC can take pride in and acknowledge as a worldwide leader.

BC Education is strong and provides meaningful learning opportunities for many children and youth – it is a system that BC can take pride in and acknowledge as a worldwide leader. However, like all systems, there is room for further development and, for some students, significant change to the system is needed. This story shares the efforts of many to shift the focus of education from an individualistic, competitive, teacher-directed system focused on test

scores and grades to one that embraces the uniqueness of each child, nurturing their strengths and talents and enabling the infinite potential of working for and with others in a common pursuit.

The 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test results reinforced what has been regularly indicated by politicians -- that BC students were performing at the top level, leading the world in reading, mathematics, and science ([BCCPAC, 2017](#); [CMEC, 2015](#)). At a time when BC could easily rest on its laurels and claim educational success, it has taken the challenge to become an international leader in education by creating a truly world-class educational system, working to meet the needs of all of its 21st century learners. However, educators are aware that PISA results only give a small slice of a much bigger picture, a picture that needs to include learning experiences of all learners, and recognize the failures in our system to enable all learners to be successful, motivated, and engaged.

This is a collaborative story; it is not an historical account of BC/Canadian education nor is it an international comparison or a story of 'improvement'... a story of relationship—a complex network of passionate educators, politicians, and bureaucrats who have put the important work of changing educational structures and mindsets before their own individual needs

This story has many unique features, one of which is the collaborative aspect of the transformation. The collaborative nature has enabled those involved to stay the course for over a decade, another almost unheard of aspect of change that involves political figures as well as bureaucrats and educators. This is a collaborative story; it is not an historical account of BC/Canadian education nor is it an international comparison or a story of 'improvement'. This is also a story of relationship – a complex network of passionate educators, politicians, and bureaucrats who have put the important work of changing educational structures and mindsets before their own individual needs, and who have collectively worked for over a decade – transcending the traditional political four-year time frames -- to transform age-old structures and expectations so as to enable rich and meaningful experiences for all children, youth, and adults involved in education. And that would include most of our society. This story shares a common desire to create learning conditions to support and sustain all learners from diverse contexts, with diverse abilities, needs and interests. BC has recognized that education underpins our future, and successful education underpins a thriving equitable and socially just future.

As mentioned above, this story has always been about transformation, that is, a thorough or dramatic change, not about 'improvement', which focuses on making something better than it was or better than something else. The main characters of this story were driven by a shared vision of education underpinned by relationships, which has challenged the competitiveness of traditional education systems caught in a modernistic cycle of continual "improvement", thinking that we were never good enough. This vision was one of supported learning and growing rather than an individualistic hierarchical system where learners had no voice in their own learning. This is, to our minds, a key aspect to the significant changes in BC curriculum over the last decade, and enables us to resist neo-liberal 'accountability' thinking that ensures that those with an advantage maintain their advantage – rather, the vision is one of equity and justice for all learners in BC schools. The account offered in this book has been created by a pastiche of many voices of educational leaders across the BC systems that have worked to transform BC education. It has also drawn on many documents, referenced below, that have

recorded the stages of this work. It shares a vision of a collective, collaborative approach to learning and to teaching, imbued with Indigenous principles for teaching and learning. This contrasts with the common competitive, individualistic, top-down approach that has been the marker of other global educational reform stories. As noted by Sir Ken Robinson in the now famous [Ted Talk “Changing education paradigms”](#) (Robinson, 2010), this outmoded nature of transmission-type educational system, suited to the Industrial Revolution, is killing creativity and perpetuates education that ranks children before nurturing their learning, and does not prepare children with the skills and aptitudes for the twenty-first century. As indicated by Maureen Dockendorf, the new curriculum has challenged teachers to shift their practices and mindsets, and has provided them with opportunities to engage in professional learning by creating curriculum allowing teachers to consider context and the needs of their students, developing an asset-based mindset, and considering their own beliefs and pedagogical practices.

Seeing Big, Seeing Small

In the late 1990s, Kathy had the opportunity to read Maxine Greene’s seminal work *Releasing the Imagination* (1995). Early in the volume she encountered an idea that has remained with her throughout her career -- Greene talks about the need for educators to see the world both small (from a distanced perspective, as a superintendent surveying an entire school district, or a policy-maker surveying the provincial political landscape) and also big (close up, in the midst of the fray, as a teacher in the classroom) – and to be able to move between these positions and understand how the local impacts the global, and the global impacts the local. The characters in this story have been able to move fluidly between positions, understanding the uniqueness of individual contexts while also understanding the broader landscape – this positioning has enabled the educational transformation team to listen to each other respectfully, move forward with understanding and consideration, and to draw on each others’ expertise, regardless of position or status – realizing that every decision is an important one and impacts on every other decision and change.

The characters in this story have been able to move fluidly between positions, understanding the uniqueness of individual contexts while also understanding the broader landscape

Systems Design

The essence of BC’s redesigned curriculum is that “curriculum” is no longer at the centre, rather, the learner and the activities they engage in are the focus of education (Dockendorf, 2018). The process of curriculum transformation has drawn on principles of systems thinking, beginning with the fundamental concept of relationships. As the story will show, elements of interconnectedness, cyclical processes, emergence, and holistic thinking are evident throughout. Also key is the focus on the learners in BC, with everyone involved in the curriculum transformation working to enable success for *all* students. Providing children and youth with skills, mindsets, and tools to shape their educational journeys is fundamental to the reasons behind the curriculum redesign and is demonstrated by the deep commitment of the many educators involved in the transformation. Educational leaders in the province knew what the data was saying about recurring low graduation rates for particular populations, lack of

engagement of youth, and the growing needs of special populations, recognized that the education system needed to change. This realization was despite overall positive results published by the Organization for Economic Co-operation & Development promotes (OECD) through their Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), where Canada, and in particular BC scored very well in international comparisons. The complexity of education needed to be reflected in the curriculum. As noted by Knaack and Fisher's (2018) diagram in Figure 1, learning is not linear but complex, cyclical and interconnected. In personalizing each child's learning journey, assessment also needs to be reconsidered so as to match and support a competency-based curriculum (Fu, Hopper, & Sanford, 2018). Addressing the outmoded nature of transmission-type educational systems is, of course, not without challenges. In BC particularly, there have been significant political, ideological, and system challenges to address and overcome.

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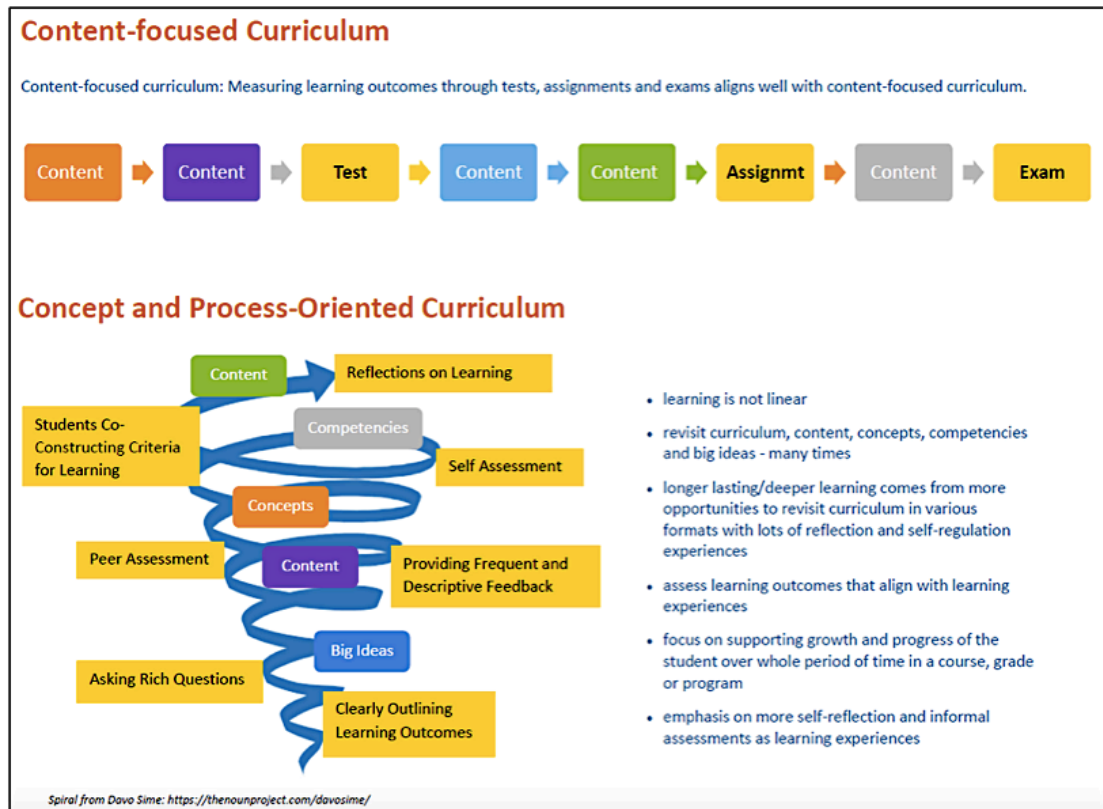


Figure 1 Content v conceptual curriculum by Knaack and Fisher

Challenges

One of the significant challenges facing the BC Ministry team in supporting a transformation of curriculum and assessment was the tumultuous events and relationships of the past several decades – educators still recall, some with considerable emotion, previous educational initiatives that were imposed on them by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Building trust between MOE transformation leaders and the BC Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) and their teachers required a decade-long process and is still ongoing. This process required patience, commitment, and collaboration, gradually resulting in the development of positive relationships and the demonstration of the integrity of intentions and approaches advocated by the Ministry innovation team. Educational systems are a challenging mix of political and practical perspectives. The BC educational transformation balanced politics and practice in informed and intentional ways that built on respectful relationships and was informed by multiple perspectives – of bureaucrats, politicians, educators, administrators, parents, students, and the broader community.

However, the work was difficult and fraught with the aura of past tensions and mistrust. As noted by Glen Hansman, current British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) President, “a quick scan of education change in BC shows many educational initiatives arriving with great fanfare, but then falling flat, or ending up partially implemented. Teachers have witnessed the pendulum swing in education before, so it is no surprise that ideas once in favour are re-emerging. While the BCTF supports some of these initiatives, it will be interesting to see what actually sticks a decade from now.”

Gacoin (2017) referenced the “Year 2000” plan, a response to the 1988 Sullivan Commission that pointed to the much needed and dramatic social and economic changes. He commented that “the Ministry propose[d] a wide ranging of educational reforms known as the Year 2000”, the aim of which was to “enable learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy (Year 2000 document, 1990). However, as Novakowsky commented the Year 2000 “came across as a very progressive document, but the substantial issues that we eventually ended up having with it, had to do more with implementation, and support for the process” (Gacoin, 2017, para. 18). The Year 2000 initiative proved not to be appropriately supported and was not generally viewed favourably by educators.

The Ministry of Education curriculum transformation team recognized the need to improve relations with the BCTF and garner their support in changing the educational system. George Abbott, Minister of Education from 2011-2013, saw the need to mend bridges with BCTF, noting that the government always seemed to be “slugging it out with BCTF”. If the province was ever “going to move an exciting and expansive agenda forward,” he said, “it would be important to get ourselves on a more professional functional basis.” Abbott commented, “Literally the first phone call I made in my new role was to Susan Lambert, who was BCTF president at the time. Relationships, in my experience, are the critical element in moving systems forward so I invited her and her team to sit down for a ‘blue sky,’ open agenda discussion of what was on our respective minds. I also provided my cell phone number to air immediate concerns and the promise of an open door for further discussions.” Although the early discussions between Abbott and Lambert didn’t necessarily break down the walls that had grown up across time, it allowed more success in working together through difficult times, and subsequently provided the groundwork for wide-ranging discussions on the BC Education Plan.

...significant challenge in BC's educational transformation was moving from conceptualization and creation of curriculum documents to implementation

It is true that we all come to the world and our understanding of it with different visions, expectations, and hopes. It is true that we all have differing aspirations for the future, the state of knowledge, and how we interact with our students. Political systems don't always interact smoothly with educational systems, but extensive consultation can bring different perspectives to conversations, where understanding can be fostered and greater empathy developed.

It is ironic, and amazing, that despite the turmoil on the surface (as indicated in newspaper headings such as “History of bitterness between BC’s teachers and governments”, 2014; “Teachers’ job action starts with threat of escalation”, 2014), the players in this story have remained true to the cause of creating an educational system that serves the needs of its future members of our communities.

And as lofty as this imagining seemed, or seems now, the past several years have seen a steady movement towards this vision, where choice, interactive learning, cross-disciplinary project-based education supported by multiple people interested in being part of shaping this vision – parents, teachers, administrators, and of course the students themselves. A second significant challenge in BC’s educational transformation, still to be fully realized, is in moving from conceptualization and creation of curriculum documents to implementation.

What was the vision? – Articulating the Vision

The transformation vision for the BC curriculum, not new and not unique, was held by many educators around the province (and beyond) for many years, before the formal transformation process began in 2010. The vision informed the Year 2000 initiative and described many teachers’ practices as they worked to support their students in positive ways. As noted by Kristin Mimick, Education Officer on staff at the BC Ministry, in the early 2000s, ministry people were starting to talk in terms of a bigger provincial change, recognizing that the curriculum was too detailed and too tight, with many many prescribed learning outcomes in each curricular area. The vision was asset-based rather than deficit-based, asking the questions, “What can students already do? How can further learning be supported?” rather than “What needs to be fixed? What can’t students do?”

The vision of the Ministry in 2010, however, had shifted from previous Ministry views and goals, from an ‘improvement’ agenda to one of transformation. As noted by James Gorman, Deputy Minister of Education from 2010-2013, the previous deputy ministry Emory Dossdall had envisioned a flatter kind of organization led more by educators. That was an important move, to be sure, but Dossdall’s vision was about visiting districts with an evaluative lens, to determine problems (and strengths) and share these in public ways. The approach implemented by Rod Allen and Maureen Dockendorf, former superintendents hired by the Ministry to support educational transformation, was to connect individually with districts and determine their needs and next courses of action – they felt it was important to determine what was working and what

was not working and use that information to inform the change/transformation process depending on the needs in each context.

The educational transformation vision was articulated and presented at a conference by Rod Allen early on in the transformation process, in October 2010. The presentation consisted of two particular slides: 1) an imagination of a new education system in Figure 2; and 2) a view of learning as it currently exists and how it could look in a transformed system in Figure 3:

Imagine an education system that...

- **Recognizes and responds to the uniqueness of every single learner**
- **Is flexible in where, when, and how learning takes place**
- **Effectively engages parents in their child's learning**
- **Shifts the role of teachers to facilitators of learning**
- **Supports teacher and students with technology**
- **Focuses on student outcomes rather than system inputs**

Figure 2 Imagine slide from Rod Allen (2010) visioning presentation, Niagara Falls

The second slide began to articulate a vision in which students had more voice in their education earlier on, and teachers had autonomy to make educational decisions in the best interests of their students. The “CORE” aspect of the curriculum had in the past been determined by a listing of courses for graduation as determined by the Ministry; the shift suggested in this slide allows teachers and their students to have more choices of courses and pathways to graduation. The ideas in these slides formed the basis for the thinking of both James Gorman, Deputy Minister at the time, and Rod Allen, Superintendent of Learning. Rod and James were able to develop a strong relationship because they had developed a common understanding and articulated vision of what was needed in an educational system for the 21st century. This vision saw teachers and students co-creating their learning pathways in more personalized and responsive approaches, enabling success and graduation completion in multiple different ways.

...articulate a vision in which students had more voice in their education earlier on, and teachers had autonomy to make educational decisions in the best interests of their students.

CURRENT		
CORE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundational Skills (3Rs) • Teacher-driven set courses 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice (Electives) • Student chooses from menu of courses (Supplemental) • Possible Independent Study
Kindergarten	← →	Grade 8 ← → Grade 12
21st CENTURY		
CORE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundational Skills (3Rs and competencies) • Teacher-initiated 	← CORE: → Choice (Electives)	CORE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-initiated, self-directed, interdisciplinary learning • Teacher-facilitated; co-planned with parents and teachers
Early Years	← →	Intermediate Years ← → Graduation Years

Figure 3: Slide from Rod Allen Presentation (2010), Niagra Falls

Through both personal and professional lenses, James Gorman was interested in changing the educational system and the ways in which the Ministry worked with people. Together Allen and Gorman learned and developed a common language and common understandings about the needs of educational change, attempting to get out of ‘education speak’ often used by government officials. They used the PowerPoint slides shared above as a starting point in speaking with educational communities -- “Can you imagine a system where every child is treated fairly?” Recognizing the need for ‘straightforward language’, James Gorman listened to educators, considered his respective audiences, and with the help of Communications Director Jenn McCrae, transformed the language they used so that publics, parents, and students could understand and embrace the need for change. Articulation of the vision for all of BC was important and necessary in developing common understandings and shared goals.

Rod Allen drew on his belief in a constructive approach to learning that was developed over his time as teacher, principal and superintendent, where students were fully engaged in their learning and were in charge of their learning. Teachers become facilitators of their students’ learning rather than imparters of knowledge, where students learn to scaffold their learning and build their abilities over time, recognizing their strengths and how to develop areas of challenge. Allen commented that, “Education needs to be relevant, flexible, not a one-size-fits all approach, connected to the world, and fluid enough to do that.” Rather than teachers being seen as transmitters of information, students would engage in inquiry-based, land-based, project-based learning; assessment and teaching approaches were interconnected and considered as two sides of the same coin.

Teachers become facilitators of student learning rather than imparters of knowledge. Students learn to scaffold their learning and build their abilities over time, recognizing their strengths and how to develop areas of challenge.

The developed vision of BC’s educational transformation considered earlier experiences and drew on prior understandings, documents, and mistakes. One document that the transformation team reviewed and decided to include was the 1989 “BC Educated Citizen”, a document that had stood the test of time over two decades (see Figure 4 below). This statement of principles for BC graduates was foundational in providing a framework for the competency-based curriculum development work.

Another key document that underpinned the competency-based curriculum was the [First Peoples Principles of Learning](#), initially created by the [First Nations Education Steering Committee \(FNESC\)](#) and the [Ministry of Education in 2006/2007](#) to guide the development and teaching of a newly developed English 12 First Peoples course (see Figure 5 below). As noted in Jo Chrona’s (2014) blog, “the value evident in First Peoples knowledge has also now been more formally recognized in the revisions of the BC curricula.”

Conditions for Transformation

It is important to recognize that this educational transformation, as all major transformations, require shifting mindsets and understandings. These shifts take time and significant energy, building so that when the conditions are right, a major movement can take place. We have identified several conditions that enabled this transformation to take place.

As some will remember, the Year 2000 plan, that was underpinned by the “Educated Citizen” document (Figure 4) and initiated by the Social Credit government in the early 1990s, suggested some fairly radical ideas about student readiness for school, different ways of communicating and reporting to parents, and creating a common grades 1-10 curriculum, to name a few.

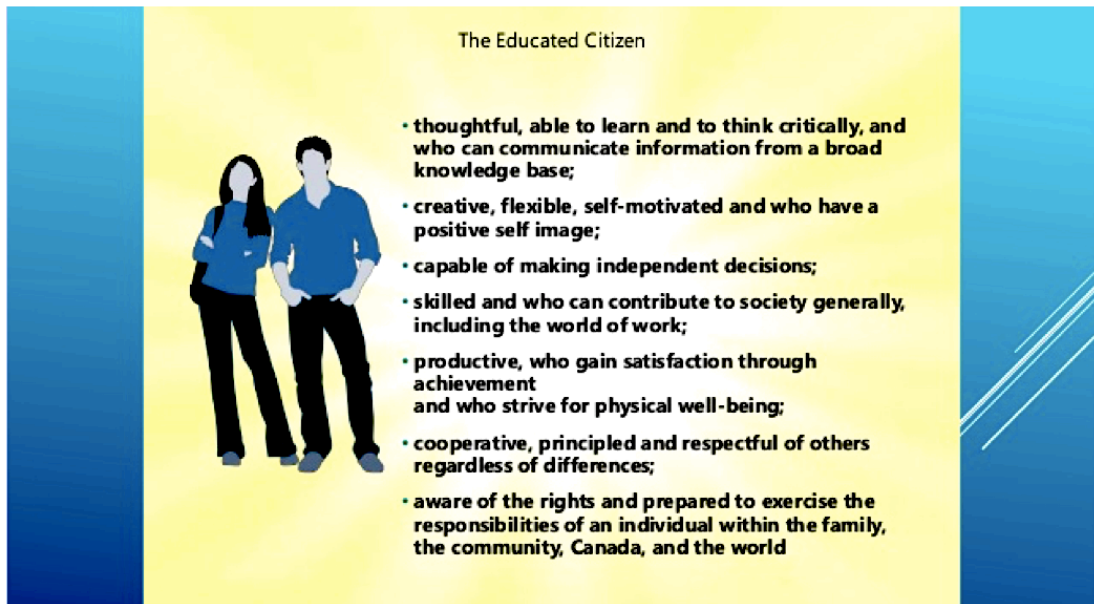


Figure 4 The Educated Citizen slide from 1989 BC ministry report

While these ideas were not very well received by British Columbians at the time, they were ideas that remained in circulation. Later in the 1990s, the First Peoples Principles of Learning document significantly influenced BC's thinking about education in the province.

As the new millennium unfolded, even as the relationship between the government and the BC Teachers Federation remained strained, recognition that education needed to change to better serve students in the 21st century continued to develop. Educational leaders ruminated over ideas about shifting educational thinking and practices, acknowledging the need to better meet the needs of increasingly diverse student populations. Educational leaders in the field were seconded to the Ministry of Education, creating links across sectors, challenging and shifting Ministry thinking and providing new models of educational practices.

The complexity of education for diverse groups of learners was more readily acknowledged and consideration was given to ways in which students could be better prepared for these complexities. Partnerships between Ministry, school districts, and post-secondary institutions, reflecting complexity principles such as adaptability, emergence, and distributed leadership, developed and were supported by the Ministry of Education.

All of these early initiatives began to take root in discussions, increased field-based secondments, and growing partnerships, culminating in a focused plan to reimagine and transform curriculum and assessment in BC.



Figure 5 First peoples Principles of Learning poster

Summary

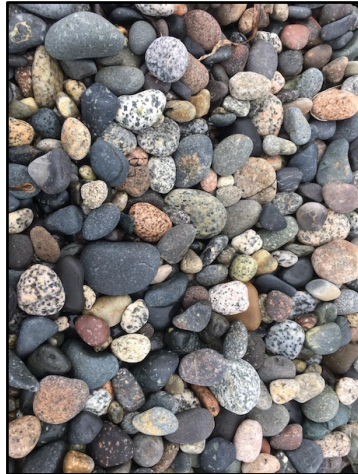
The BC Curriculum transformation demonstrated a deep commitment on the part of the Ministry of Education (MoE), educators, educational leaders, community and parents to transforming the educational system in order to better serve all students in the province. A cultural shift was needed and the formal curriculum shifted to recognize and articulate the moral imperative for recognizing children and youth first and for supporting all students' intellectual, physical, and emotional needs. In addition, the educational transformation included ensuring that all learners had equitable opportunities for successful school careers that set them up for healthy and successful futures.

The BC Curriculum transformation demonstrated a deep commitment on the part of the Ministry of Education, educators, educational leaders, community and parents to transforming the educational system in order to better serve all students in the province.

Why change? As Fillion and Martelli (2017) noted, "In the words of then Minister Peter Fassbender, the reform was premised on the fact that BC has 'one of the best education systems in the world,' but that 'it's a world that is changing rapidly and we owe it to our students to keep

pace' (citing: MOE 2015, p.1)." The guiding principles for preparing an educated citizen and the growing understanding that First Peoples Principles were both key documents influencing ways in which education was imagined and shared, shaping the new curriculum documents. The principles that were reiterated in the 2011 BC Education plan (BC Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 56) of the Ministry of Education, while not unique, articulated the direction and vision of educational change for the province and signaled significant change to come. As noted above, the idea of 'an educated citizen' was a driving factor in curriculum transformation – from one of 'content' driven to one of a 'competency-based' framework.

Chapter 2: Cast of Characters



As with all good stories, the characters involved have been pivotal in moving the BC educational transformation forward. The cast has been large and some characters have had more lines and more time on the stage. However, a significant aspect of this story, we have come to realize, is that everyone who participated was important. Their ideas, curriculum writing, and questions ripple forward and spread, helping the transformation to take hold and grow. The cast of characters is complex but very important to the story, as it is relationships that drive everything. The players realized the importance of strong relationships and through collaboration and dialogue have worked to develop and maintain their connections. As in all complex systems, the networks cross, intersect, and connect in ever-increasing ways and ever-expanding ways. Because networks are comprised of relationships, they are always shifting in response to their participants and how their participants are working and learning together within the transformation process. This chapter describes the main characters in this story and their roles in the BC curriculum redesign project.

The characters of this transformation story, while coming from diverse background and experiences, all had a genuine interest and commitment to educational change. As they spoke about their individual and collective roles in this unfolding transformation, they shared their passions and personal interests in moving forward. Their vision for a better future for all students in BC was framed in feelings of joy, interest, engagement, and commitment, but also in feelings of frustration with the bureaucratic and systemic structures that impede progress. Their values were grounded in the practical, and their practical realities were grounded in values, theory and research. Many voices -- representing children and youth, teachers, administrators, bureaucrats, superintendents, directors, special education, First Peoples – were heard. Direction was provided from within the Ministry of Education, but also drew on expertise gained from the Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED) with people like Claire Avison and Jan Unwin, and experiences gained in other ministries such as the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) (James Gorman) and the Ministry of Health (George Abbott). Jenn McCrae's role as Communications Director was important in linking the many voices, creating a clear, consistent, and informed message that would be shared with educators, Ministry personnel, and the public.

Overall, the willingness of educators, bureaucrats, and politicians to trust, support, and share with each other has been a refreshing change from previous Ministry interactions.

Overall, the willingness of educators, bureaucrats, and politicians to trust, support, and share with each other was noted by the contributors to this book as a refreshing change from previous Ministry interactions. That this willingness was maintained throughout the decade-long change makes this a truly remarkable story. This comes, in part, from the leadership team and the leadership style they implemented throughout the transformation process to support, in Dockendorf's terms, a "whole cadre of people".

As noted earlier, the transformation had been quietly developing prior to 2010. The Year 2000 initiative, while not successful, had laid the seeds of change in BC's educational conception and goals. Many people such as Nancy Walt (Executive Director, Curriculum and Assessment), Trish Rosborough (Director of Aboriginal Education) and Kristin Mimick (Education Officer) had been working throughout those years to move a progressive educational agenda forward, as Ministry of Education personnel who understood the need for educational change and were part of the vision.

However, it took an "alignment of the stars" to develop the powerful momentum of this transformation. Emery Dosedall was Deputy Minister in 2008 and he hired Rod Allen as a 'Superintendent of Achievement'; Dosedall subsequently left the position. At the same time in 2008, James Gorman was assigned as Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Education. Rod was an educator and Superintendent from Bulkley Valley, and James was an experienced bureaucrat who had previously worked in the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Fortunately for both James and Rod, and for the education transformation in BC, they developed a strong relationship – James became interested in educational conversations and Rod guided his learning. Rod had agreed to take up the position of Superintendent of Achievement because he saw the possibilities of such a position and the needs of the province. "For me," Rod said, "it wasn't an academic exercise, it was dealing with kids – and I think many teachers in similar situations would have the same vision." Rod had the ability to tell stories about education, and James had the ability to listen and guide the system changes.

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Interestingly, the premier at the time, Gordon Campbell, was very interested in education and saw the need for change – change to the relationship with the BCTF, and to the focus on student learning. He had been a teacher for a time and his wife was also an educator and school principal. He had a very strong literacy goal – to become the most literate jurisdiction in the world – but despite his educational interests, his vision didn't align with that of the innovators taking responsibility for educational change in the province. Campbell's interests focused more on early literacy, wanting BC to be recognized as the most literate jurisdiction on the international scene. Although having a different understanding of education – from a distanced

perspective – he did shine the light on education as a political focus. Campbell wanted something different from the current educational approach but wasn't ever satisfied with the progress and he was working in a much shorter political timeframe. Rod and James realized that the idea of systemic change that they were embarking on was not something that could take place exclusively within the MoE. That was a real challenge for a Premier Campbell who was considering how to make education a viable political issue, how to improve relations with the BCTF, and focus on increased literacy for children.

In 2011, however, the political machine shifted leadership – Christy Clarke replaced Gordon Campbell as Premier. Despite being Minister of Education at one time she had little interest in education, but that turned out to be a benefit to those who were invested in educational transformation. Education was not in the spotlight for Premier Clarke. Another important turn of events in 2011 was that George Abbott, long-term politician and runner-up of the leadership race, was given the portfolio of Minister of Education.

What was formed, then, was a sturdy three-legged stool: politician, bureaucrat, and educator.

So, in 2011, synergy was developed between Rod Allen, educational leader with vision (whose position as Superintendent of Achievement was not clearly defined), James Gorman (experienced bureaucrat) as Deputy Minister, and George Abbott (experienced politician who chose to be minister of education). What was formed, then, was a sturdy three-legged stool: politician, bureaucrat, and educator. Abbott had in-depth political knowledge, he was personable, caring about education, and committed to making and sustaining positive personal relationships – he had positional power and was a different type of politician. Gorman had experience and the knowledge of a bureaucrat; he also brought a different perspective to the position, one in which relationship was important and worth sustaining. Allen had extensive educational knowledge as a teacher, principal and superintendent, as well as a vision for education, passion to make change, and ability to connect with people. Allen had the ability to tell stories to the field about how the MoE was supporting an innovative educational vision that enabled those in the ministry to start speaking differently – with more confidence, knowledge, and connectedness. His position was still not clearly defined, but Gorman was comfortable with the lack of specificity around Allen's position and was, both personally and professionally, convinced that change needed to happen in education.

Gorman commented, “we were a high-performing system, but we needed to ask two questions: 1) were we measuring the right things?, and 2) does what we're doing today really put us on a great footing for what we might need tomorrow?”

The relationship between Allen and Gorman developed; James saw that “if you're going to change anything you have to have a burning platform -- I think what we inherited was a system that nobody thought was broken, so if nobody thinks its broken how do you get a mandate to fix it?” Gorman commented, “we were a high-performing system, but we needed to ask two

questions: 1) were we measuring the right things?, and 2) does what we're doing today really put us on a great footing for what we might need tomorrow?"

That was a very hard educational agenda to take forward to the premier and the cabinet. However, it was an agenda that was taken forward, shaped for effective communication by the Communications Director Jennifer McCrae, and with the significant assistance of the new Minister of Education George Abbott. As Gorman noted, "When George came, he was part of a really good educational vision idea about where to go and that came from Rod Allen; we had a minister who could actually have influence in cabinet and was an outstanding communicator both internally and externally – there was a 'double word score' happening that made communication work." George Abbott was a unique Minister, interested in getting into the community, listening to his constituents and working collaboratively with his Deputy Minister and other colleagues. He was very personable, had a sense of humour, and never took himself too seriously. He was well known for his pop culture references in PowerPoint presentations, using the Simpsons, the Beatles, and other iconic characters to communicate an idea and 'lighten the mood.' Claire Avison commented about the newly appointed Minister of Education that "he had a kind of folksy way about him, a bit self-deprecating" which he was able to use effectively to build a more positive relationship with the BCTF. He was also, she noted, "a very knowledgeable and savvy politician, giving longtime service in the Ministry of Health and used to dealing with difficult relationships."

George Abbott was a unique Minister, interested in getting into the community, listening to his constituents and working collaboratively with his Deputy Minister and other colleagues.

Rod Allen had begun in the Ministry in a time of transition between Deputy Ministers, and there was the opportunity to recreate a new vision of the position, moving "Superintendent of Achievement" to "Superintendent of Learning", a title that was more appropriate to the work he imagined himself doing with Gorman and Abbott. When George, James, and Rod came together, as "three legs of the stool", the leadership model that often exists in bureaucracies changed. Each of these leaders could individually see the big picture, the broader educational and political landscape, as well as the particularities from their own positions as educator, bureaucrat, and politician. However, they were able to share these perspectives and use each other's strengths to the best advantage of the educational transformation agenda. The network of relationships that formed between these three was at the heart of the change; leadership became shared by the growing team where commitment, knowledge, respect and fun existed -- underpinning these relationships was people who cared about each other, trusted each other, talked to each other from different sectors, and had a similar understanding and goal that created the vision. The model of leadership changed from one that was top-down and dictatorial to one that was collaborative and shared – a network formed between and around this group of other dedicated and talented people who were committed to creating a different type of educational system.

At the time when Rod, James, and George were working to introduce an alternative educational vision to BC, Rick Davis was working as a Superintendent of Achievement to look after the less positive work – managing the ongoing legal issues as a result of bargaining, job action, and

teacher dissatisfaction with contract and working condition decisions. Because Rick was skilled in this arena, he was able to take the negativity away from visioning and manage it himself. This was incredibly important because it enabled George and Rod to maintain relatively positive relationships with the BCTF even as there was turmoil in negotiations and contract talks.

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Also very significant to enabling the BC transformation agenda to be supported around the province was the work being done by Maureen Dockendorf with the Changing Results for Young Readers (CR4YR) initiative. Through CR4YR, Maureen connected with over 50 school districts around the province, working with educators on early literacy initiatives but at the same time talking about the new curriculum ideas. The ongoing connections she had with many educators and administrators created positive and supportive relationships in rural and urban districts that reached across the province.

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Several other key people playing different roles in the transformation were critical to its success and duration. The Ministry staff was instrumental in providing context and transition from one framework (Prescribed Learning Outcome-based) to another (competency-based). Nancy Walt, as Executive Director, had begun in the Ministry of Education focused on large-scale assessment and through the transition took up the role of Curriculum and Assessment Director, enabling the melding of Ministry divisions to be unified. This was critically important in the ongoing work to ensure that assessment practices aligned with curriculum changes. As Walt and others realized early on, competency-based curriculum would not take hold if appropriate assessment practices did not shift to reflect competency-based processes. In addition to the work Walt was doing, there were other Ministry of Education staff who played instrumental roles in supporting the work. Trish Rosborough, then Director of Aboriginal Education in the Ministry, played a key role in shifting thinking to be inclusive of Indigenous perspectives and she was part of the team developing the English First Peoples 12 and then the First Peoples Principles. Partnering with FNEESC, they developed the English First Peoples 12 course which then led to the development of the First Peoples Principles which was a pivotal point in the transformation – these principles, developed alongside the First Peoples English 12 course, were taken up by teachers, by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNEESC), and by the curriculum developers who came along later. Essential to this work was FNEESC's leadership in bringing Indigenous educators to the development team. The First Peoples Principles informed how

curriculum was written and how practice began to shift. Kristin Mimick, in her role as Education Officer over a period of many years, provided connection between ministry initiatives and the field through various initiatives focused on rural and urban learning partnerships. Prior to the formal curriculum development, Dean Goodman had worked to develop the BC Education Plan (see p. 56) that signaled to the field the significant changes that were coming. These long-term MoE Directors provided an inside understanding of the ways in which Ministry worked and were instrumental in moving changes forward.

Seconded educators provided leadership for the educational transformation and connection between Ministry work and the field, writ large. As already mentioned, Maureen Dockendorf became the head of CR4YR, connecting with over 50 school districts around the province -- in that role she was also able to bring ideas about the new curriculum to a wide range of educators, including teachers, administrators, and superintendents. Maureen also worked closely with Rod Allen to consult with education communities and present the unfolding curriculum change to diverse audiences including teacher education candidates, teachers, and superintendents. Jan Unwin, hired in 2013, claimed a unique and pivotal role in the educational transformation, working across two ministries (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Advanced Education) to align the K-12 curriculum changes with post-secondary expectations and understandings. Jan had deep informed educational knowledge; her career spanned roles as teacher, counselor, elementary and secondary principal, district leader, curriculum developer for the Ministry, and Superintendent. She therefore had the requisite understanding and knowledge to have challenging conversations with discipline-focused secondary teachers and with discipline-focused post-secondary educators. With this broad background, Jan had a “good view of kids taking the educational journey, and lots of kids were not being served well, so wanted to adjust the system to give them what they needed.” Jan saw the changes that were taking place in the province in alignment with her own desire to do something different in education, something that would enable learning opportunities for all students.

Jan Unwin...working across two ministries (Ministry of Education and Advanced Education) to align the K-12 curriculum changes to post-secondary expectations and understandings.

With a strong and connected team in place, it was also important to garner support from the politicians. What would catch the attention of cabinet, Rod and James wondered, to support the BC educational vision? They recognized that an external voice, clearly articulating a new vision of education, would possibly provide incentive for the government to support the innovative vision of education that was brewing. Valerie Hannon was the person identified to the current Minister of Education by the current Superintendents of Achievement as offering a powerful and credible message – as co-founder of the “Innovation Unit” in the United Kingdom; she had supported education change programs in countries around the world. She was also a founding member of the Global Education Leaders Partnership (GELP) that would prove to be an important international community for BC. She had also been an OECD education advisor for many years and as such was an excellent candidate to present a new vision to the BC Cabinet. Valerie was a catalyst for the change. The vision for the new curriculum took off with more power after her visit. Over the next several years, she was followed by other international educators, including Tony McKay (OECD), David Albury (Co-chair Innovation Unit), Yong Zhao (international scholar), and John Abbott (Director, 21st Century Learning Initiative). These voices both highlighted BC’s transformation journey across the globe, and also supported the

local initiative, enabling everyone involved to understand and respect multiple perspectives – seeing both big and small, to quote Maxine Green (1995).

Jan had a “good view of kids taking the educational journey, and lots of kids were not being served well, so wanted to adjust the system to give them what they needed.”

Chapter 3: Unique features of BC Transformation



Several features of the BC Educational transformation story are unique.

Several features of the BC Educational transformation story are unique. First, the depth and breadth of consultation across the province, from 2010 until 2014, far exceeded what Ministries had previously engaged in. This ongoing and broad consultation enabled greater awareness of different perspectives, development of trusting relationships, and the possibility for maintaining momentum for the change. A second unique feature was the prominent role of [First Peoples Principles \(FPP\)](#) and perspectives infused in the curriculum documents. The FPP, created in 2006/07, provided a guiding framework for the curriculum developers and shaped the curriculum in significant ways. A third feature was the attention to diversity as social justice and the spaces provided by a competency-based curriculum to enable teachers to guide all their students on a pathway of success. These key features exemplify complexity thinking that draws on the complexity sciences used to understand how life forms and have planets create the conditions for life (Capra, 1996; Capra and Luigi Luisi, 2014). Complexity thinking refers to a cluster of concepts popularized in several branches of science and is being increasingly applied in the social sciences to understand how human systems evolve. As such, complexity thinking offers an overarching description of ways in which ideas and concepts interconnect to form a strong and resilient framework to support emergence and adaptability.

The Complexity of modern day society

The foundation or roots of the BC redesigned curriculum is based on the idea that we are each complex learning systems that operate within a complex human system (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008). As noted by Johnson (2001), we can consider systems as ranging from

large-scale economies to the human brain, each making up a collective of interrelated, dynamic systems that cannot be reduced to discrete parts. Traditionally we have designed our school curriculum on the basis of sorting students into categories that rank them. In theory this motivates them to complete and attempt to outperform their peers in order to achieve high-ranking places. The compelling narrative that underpins a system of competition is that the higher a student is ranked, the more choices they have in the future -- or at least they will be encouraged try to do well to ensure some benefit from this structure. However, in our modern society, characterized by rapid change within dynamic local and global networks, the skills that come from achieving through students beating their neighbour is counter-productive. The key skills required for successful futures for our students are the ability to problem solve, adapt, work with others and develop creative solutions to recurring challenges (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). These are not the type of competencies that emerge in our traditional high-stakes testing system.

...complex learning system. A system that enables teachers, students and their communities, to become connected to each other and learn through those inter-connections.

In essence, what is needed in today's society is an educational system that is itself a complex learning system, a system that enables teachers, students and their communities to become connected to each other and learn through those interconnections. In essence the complexity of the curriculum generated by an educational system has to be able to adequately connect to the complexity of the environment that it finds itself in. As noted by Waldrop (1992), complexity thinking suggests that a complex learning system works on the basis of self-organizing around common interests and goals, things that members of the system want to address and need to solve. A complex learning system forms, and as it becomes more inter-connected, adapts to emerging challenges by drawing on the diversity within its forming structure. This bottom-up emergent process creates networks of connections between different groups within the system. Using relationships, information within a complex system is exchanged between close neighbors, meaning that the learning depends mostly on members' interactions within and between groups that have formed around a common vision or goal. The interactions between individuals and groups enable new ways of thinking and moving forward. For such a social system to grow and thrive at both the local level and the broader system level, individuals and groups within it need to be open to new ideas and opportunities, continually exchanging perspectives and possibilities, adapting to feedback from others in the system. Ideally this creates a clear structure that fluidly adapts to challenges and opportunities. This means that in regards to educators and students within the system they need to be able to collectively shape new ideas about the curriculum and classrooms. Complexity thinking helps to better understand systems that are complex, such as the education system.

Complexity Thinking

Complexity thinking is based on several fundamental concepts and requires a shift in thinking – from a 'fixed' mindset to a 'growth' mindset (Dweck, 2006). Key principles of complexity thinking are the initial conditions that enable interconnectedness, circularity, emergence, holism, synthesis, and evolving relationships. As described above, everything is connected or networked, which strengthens the fabric of the educational system. We are all reliant on each

other and the world around us for survival, growth, and ultimate success in life. As we connect ideas together, we synthesize to create something new and shared, enabling us to see interconnectedness – the extensive consultations, collaborations and connection between curriculum development and assessment processes have facilitated the interconnectedness needed in a competency-based curriculum such as the new BC transformed curriculum. This complexity thinking process allows change to inform a system wide perspective to decision making.

Key principles of complexity thinking are the initial conditions that enable interconnectedness, circularity, emergence, holism, synthesis, and evolving relationships.

“From a systems perspective”, notes Acaroglu (2017), “we know that larger things emerge from smaller parts: emergence is the natural outcome of things coming together.” (p.4). The flexibility and fluidity of the MoE transformation team led to sharing ideas, expertise, and insights - enabled emergence of something new – the competency-based curriculum framework. This in turn was key to the possibility of developing systems wide thinking as relationships formed and grew, allowing these relationships to fundamentally drive the curriculum transformation.

Commitment to Collaboration

A unique feature of the BC transformation story is that there was wide consultation over a long period of time, which enabled ongoing adaptations and developments to the documents and the processes.

In 2010, the Ministry of Education and stakeholders throughout the province began a process to help transform education in BC to better meet the needs of all learners. Transforming a system as complex as education takes time and to do it well involves extensive consultation, thorough research, thoughtful decision-making, and detailed planning. *Enabling Innovation, 2012, p. 2).*

As Rod Allen noted, “We didn’t take a typical approach, we didn’t take an implementation approach, it wasn’t a classic change.” A typical approach would have been completed in a much shorter timeframe, one that aligned with political processes. However, this change has continued through challenging disputes, job action, and tension between educators and Ministry.

The Province used a variety of processes to consult broadly and gather advice about the best direction to take. There [were] formal and informal consultations with provincial partners, school district-hosted sessions with local stakeholders, provincial and regional conferences and meetings, conversations with international experts, and online dialogue. (*Enabling Innovation, 2012, p.2).*

These stories helped those for whom the traditional system worked well to see behind the scenes, and to understand why we were transforming the system and how it would affect kids who were mid-stream in their education

The size of the ministry, small compared to other provincial Ministries, could be seen as challenging given the monumental size of the tasks, but was seen by Kristin Mimick as a positive factor “because people had the space to talk to each other as it was coming together or as they were shifting across jobs.” The movement of individuals from one division to another, while sometimes making it difficult to maintain continuity, enabled relationships to form – people started to create friendships and alliances and would support each other across divisions. Claire Avison commented that the “ministry was much smaller than others, which requires you to work more collaboratively, which is probably a good thing, and is part of the relationship-building, lots of back and forth with superintendents who were actually seconded to the ministry who were helping to guide the process.” Bureaucrats such as Avison were sitting at the same table as educators and having conversations about how to advance the educational transformation, what was needed – “this really helped us avoid some of the pitfalls, and I never tired of hearing the stories about why we needed transformation. These stories helped those for whom the traditional system worked well to see behind the scenes, and to understand why we were transforming the system and how it would affect kids who were mid-stream in their education.” Stories from other ministries were also helpful in understanding the big picture. For example, Claire Avison worked in the Ministry of Education but eventually worked in different ministries (Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education). People started to realize that there is nimbleness in working together, sharing insights and experiences. Relationships were formed that created the power to make decisions in a timely way; communication became more effective and everyone saw themselves as an integral part of the development.

People, working in trusted relationships, let go of individual ego and realized the power of learning from others, working collaboratively and sharing ideas and labour; interconnected stories of educational transformation across Ministry sectors developed. There was lots of negotiation, give and take, consultations out in the field, and in the ministry offices; everyone could see their feedback reflected in the next iterations of the curriculum. The ministry shifted from delivering curriculum documents to consulting -- really consulting -- and not just for show. There were many events where sharing across sectors happened, such as the BC Educational Day events where panels of teachers and students addressed Ministry workers, meetings organized by Jan Unwin to share progress, and attendance by ministry personnel to post-secondary events such as Gallery Walk (University of Victoria). PowerPoint presentations were shared, which enabled a continuity of messaging and a common language to be used to articulate the vision and direction that the transformation was taking.

As Rod Allen noted, “this was about relationships and not about curriculum, encouraging teachers to forge personal relationships with every kid in class” rather than teachers relying on their position of authority to dictate to their students. As a transformation leadership team, the Ministry began to operate in different ways, with more openness for all to speak and share their ideas, not bureaucratic and hierarchical as experienced with previous (or future) governmental administration. Rod felt that “when people own it and they build it we didn’t need an

implementation phase like we traditionally do because the implementation phase was actually the construction of the curriculum.”

...this was about relationships and not about curriculum, encouraging teachers to forge personal relationships with every kid in class

Rod Allen

Nancy Walt, Executive Director of Curriculum and Assessment in the Ministry, recognized that significant relationships were with the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF), Federation of Independent Schools Association: The Voice for Independent Schools in BC (FISA BC), and the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) – maintaining communication with educational systems around the province were key to moving forward with a common educational agenda. Nancy was also part of the consultations that were happening around the province, including the BC School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) and the Principals and Vice Principals Association (PVPA) – superintendents and principals were key players in the transformation and they needed to be kept in developmental conversations. The goal in developing a new curriculum framework was for everyone to feel part of the changes and to feel that the changes were right for students in BC. Nancy also made connections with educational leaders in the Yukon, who are closely tied to BC Education and use the same curriculum. She recognized that the consultation needed to be frequent, ongoing, and province-wide, and that she needed to be part of all of those conversations so as to authentically connect to community and have the curriculum documents reflect the perspectives of educators. Early in the transformation process a Curriculum and Assessment Framework Advisory Group was created, including Nancy as well as seconded former superintendents to facilitate effective consultation meetings. Jan Unwin, former Superintendent of Maple Ridge SD and Maureen Dockendorf, former Associate Superintendent of Coquitlam SD, both seconded to the Ministry of Education, joined Rod Allen, who was at the time the Superintendent of Learning in the Ministry, to hold regional information sessions across the province – fifteen in all – where district educators were invited to participate and listen. They were part of a team, and the regions determined who would attend the sessions. The relationships that developed through early consultations sustained the process, through bumpy times and smooth times, and really started to frame the directions for curriculum shifts. Early Ministry information documents such as “Enabling Innovation (2012) and “Defining Cross-Curricular Competencies” (2013) show the developments of the curriculum framework, and although the first draft was revised in response to consultation and feedback, somewhat surprisingly there were few major changes to the initial draft.

...the consultation needed to be frequent, ongoing, and province-wide

Fillion and Martelli (2017) wrote a paper entitled “Overview of Critical Thinking in the BC K-12 Curriculum Revisions” and commented that the “consultation process that led to the [current curriculum design] thus sought to harmonize the realities of 21st century education in BC with the Mandate for the School System (MoE 1989), according to which the education system aims

to develop Educated Citizens “who have the ability to think clearly and critically, and to adapt to change.”

Many discussions and consultations led to the development of a set of principles for the redesign of provincial curricula. These principles, captured in a 2017 document entitled “BC’s Redesigned Curriculum: Theoretical Underpinnings” described a curriculum that supports the development of educated citizens, is inclusive, and is concept-based and competency-driven:

- Ensure Core Competencies are explicitly considered in the renewed curriculum to support deeper learning and the transfer of key skills and processes to new contexts.
- Give close attention to the important concepts and big ideas in each area of learning to support the application and transfer of essential learning.
- Limit the amount of prescription while ensuring a solid focus on essential learning.
- Stress higher order learning, giving emphasis to the key concepts and enduring understandings (big ideas) that students need to succeed in their education and their lives.
- Allow for flexibility and choice for teachers and students. Respect the inherent logic and unique nature of the disciplines while supporting interdisciplinary approaches.
- Integrate and embed First Peoples Principles of Learning and Aboriginal knowledge and worldviews.
- Align assessment and evaluation with the redesign of the curriculum.

(Walt, Toutant, and Allen, 2017,

p.4)

These principles guided the work from the beginning of the transformation work and now provide a clearly articulated foundational set of curricular and assessment goals and principles.

Connected Communication

A fundamental aspect of transformation, particularly as it relates to complex systems such as education, is clear, informed, and connected communication. As Communications Director, it was Jenn McCrae’s job to ensure that all public statements from the Minister of Education, the Deputy Minister, or the other people connecting with the community, were coordinated. It was also important the Communications Director understood the intents of the transformation, the public communities that were being addressed, and ways in which social license could be build within the communities. Jenn was part of many strategy meetings about how to move the transformation forward, how to keep government involved, and how to keep the educational field moving forward. Her role was integral to the process as she created spaces for sharing the messages and celebrating occasions where the messages were shared in meaningful ways. She was continually in strategy meetings where she listened, encouraged clear articulation of the vision, and then translated the vision into understandable messages that could be understood by both the politicians delivering the messages and the communities who were listening to the communications.

Communications work was not always easy to manage. With the increased use of Twitter and other social media, messages about BC’s educational transformation proliferated and changed

the landscape of ways in which government communicated with different public groups. Jenn used social media as much as possible to prepare people for communications that were coming later at formal events. When George Abbott became the Minister of Education, he supported the work that had been done by Jenn with James Gorman and Rod Allen, recognizing that the transformation was the right thing and it was time to make it public and informed about the changes.

Communications work needed to be timely, as Jenn commented, “It was always layering... we did a lot of strategic communications around back to school.” She and the team wanted the public to be informed with accurate messages, and choosing the right time to release information was important.

Indigenous-informed

Glen Hansman, current BCTF President, commented that the real transformation in BC’s curriculum is seen in the attention being paid to Indigenous learning and teaching, which had been developing in BC Education over the past two decades. The First Peoples Principles, jointly created by FNEC and the Ministry of Education, really laid the groundwork for informed understandings of Indigenous perspectives and ways in which curriculum needed to be reconceptualized and rewritten. “The things that have been added to the curriculum, those are the transformative things, like the Indigenous knowledge and ways of seeing the world – that’s the transformative piece.” Trish Rosborough, former Director of Aboriginal Education in the Ministry, agreed, noting that Aboriginal/Indigenous education is definitely part of the educational transformation story in BC. “Creating curriculum for First Nations students and developing the First People’s Principles of Learning – which are now part of the BC curriculum – that was a pivotal point in the transformation”, Rosborough commented. Including First Peoples Principles and concepts in the curriculum has guided curriculum development teams and teachers themselves to change their practices. As she noted, “Aboriginal education changes led to more comprehensive changes.” Rather than focusing on Aboriginal children, the focus was changing – Aboriginal communities didn’t want their children pulled and didn’t want services just for Aboriginal children – the way to improve outcomes for Aboriginal students was to improve outcomes for everybody. “It was about that time,” Rosborough noted, “when curriculum change began to be talked about, that we started to hear the phrase ‘Aboriginal education is for everybody’ and we started to articulate how the system needed to be re-educated and that everybody needs a better education in what Indigenous BC is, misunderstandings and misinformation needs to be corrected, and people need to work together to better understand Indigenous pedagogies”.

Creating curriculum for First Nations students and developing the First People’s Principles of Learning – which are now part of the BC curriculum – that was a pivotal point in the transformation

Glenn Hansman

As noted by Knaack of Vancouver Island University, “Aboriginal history, culture and perspectives have been integrated in all the new BC K-12 curricula. The authentic and respectful inclusion of Aboriginal content, culture and knowledge has been an important part of the

curriculum transformation process. Schools are engaging students in a variety of learning experiences focused on Indigenous ways of knowing to develop empathy, respect and good citizenship in student.” Her blog post continues, “An important component of integrating Aboriginal perspectives is to ensure all learners have learning opportunities to explore and experience Aboriginal content in their entire learning journey (and not just in specific courses or grade levels). This means that from Kindergarten to graduation, BC students will have a more fulsome experience of Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge in whatever grade, subject or class where they are learning” ([Knaack, 2017](#)).

“We want to make sure the transformation is done right this time”, commented Hansman. “Things that have been added or changed in the curriculum, those are the transformative things, like the Indigenous content and perspectives.” It is the curriculum that will support transformation, he continued, and “we need to attend to the practical realities in the classroom, so that things are developed locally in partnership with teachers and local First Nations.”

Commitment to social justice/diversity

Early in the process, recommendations from the Curriculum & Assessment Framework Advisory Group (2012) included statements related to the need for creating positive educational experiences and opportunities for success for all students. One of the design principles included the importance of paying attention to “flexible instructional design, vulnerable learners, First Peoples, and equity” (p.3). The document continued, “we need to attend to the needs of the full range of students in BC schools, not just capable students whose social, economic or geographic contexts enable access to valuable learning opportunities outside of school” (p.4). The new curriculum, while paying particular attention to First Peoples principles, articulates the need to be inclusive of all students, recognizing both their talents/contributions and their needs.

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Chapter 4: Relationships



As mentioned previously, this transformation story is about relationships – without strong and trusting relationships it is unlikely that the BC curriculum could have shifted in the ways it has. Partnerships signal meaningful long-term relationships that are mutually beneficial, and strengthen appreciation and understanding of different perspectives. Partnerships provide opportunities to continually learn and improve, solve problems and share insights. Through partnerships, such as the ones developed through the BC educational transformation, relationships – to local and international colleagues, across sectors, and with ideas – have strengthened and supported some of the hard work that is required in any significant change. Based in complexity thinking, relationships form networks of collaborators and partnerships, beginning with individuals and small groups, blossoming to larger connections across the entire province and beyond. The partnerships that developed throughout the transformation process, built from trusting respectful relationships within and across institutions, enabled the leveraging of resource and support for public understanding that allowed transformation ideas to grow – without relationships, partnerships are artificial and destined to crumble.

Based in complexity thinking, relationships form networks of collaborators and partnerships, beginning with individuals and small groups, blossoming to larger connections across the entire province and beyond.

Relationships matter. The unique BC curriculum transformation would not have happened in such a sweeping successful manner without strong positive relationships. During the years when this transformation was beginning, relationships were the key. People working on the transformation were open to conversations, sharing different perspectives and, as Jan Unwin commented, “this was a powerful opportunity because we were all working in the same direction, we were all in the same conversation.”

Relationships matter.

“The power and currency of the transformation has been based in relationship; some relationships were strategic, and some were outside of similar orientations to education,” observed Kristin Mimick. “It was a great thing when different organizations started to be in the same conversation, with a mindset of being willing to learn and shift in response to what was happening around them, both in education and in society, being critical and reflective practitioners and leaders.”

Key factors in forming a complex learning system are inter-connections, the relationships between different individuals and associated groups. Several types of relationships developed during the early transformation years – some drew on prior connections, others were newly forged, but they were all critical to the overall agenda. Relationships within the MoE developed and strengthened, spreading influence across the related Ministries. Relationships across staff and directors within the Ministry, many with long years of expertise and knowledge, were recognized as key to the process. Seconded superintendents were vital to strengthening relationships with the field. New relationships with government were developed in ways that had not before been seen or thought possible. Other organizations were brought into the conversations, such as BC School Superintendents Association (BCSSA), First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), and the Principals and Vice Principals Association (PVPA), as well as international organizations such as Global Education Leaders’ Partnership (GELP) and particularly more collegial relationships with the BC Teachers Federation were sought and reframed in more positive ways than had previously been experienced.

Additionally, relationships with ideas (from local educators, past experience, research, and international consultants) and previous initiatives (First Peoples Principles, and even Year 2000 ideas) were encouraged and used as building blocks for the redesigned curriculum.

A Dynamic Trio: Deputy Minister/Superintendent of Learning/Minister of Education

“The transformation got traction when James Gorman arrived as DM in the Ministry of Education, he was a career bureaucrat who had expertise and knew how to get social license”, observed Claire Avison, who had worked with Gorman as Assistant Deputy Minister. “He knew how to get decisions and support from government for the kind of change that ultimately resulted.” The Deputy Minister and the newly named Superintendent of Learning (Rod Allen) worked together through 2010, developing a positive working relationship and teaching each other – about education and about politics. “James was happy for me to get up and talk to groups where often deputy ministers weren’t”, commented Rod, noting that although it was usual for the Minister or Deputy Minister to take the lead, their relationship shifted that dynamic. As a strong relationships formed between the two, hierarchies became flatter and more responsive. “Two unlikely characters formed an informal alliance,” commented Rick Davis, “Gorman who was a seasoned bureaucratic deputy minister, and Rod Allen who connected with the field of international characters that became and broader and broader because of Rod’s ability to connect.” It was Rod’s ability to maintain relationships, even in the face of conflict, that made him successful. “He didn’t force anybody’s hand, didn’t force people

to object, “Davis noted, “he was invitational and that made a real difference – he gave an invitation that you couldn’t turn down!”

This alliance between Gorman and Allen proved to be successful in battling the cynicism, suspicion, and tension that had continued as a result of difficult negotiations with the BCTF and the effect of the failure of the Year 2000 initiative back in the 1990s. Davis saw that “we were fighting an uphill battle all the time, and an ‘oh well, this too will pass’ notion” in relation to ideas about educational change. However, Gorman and Allen worked to shift this sentiment, taking the time to listen to diverse perspectives, create social license, and prepare educators, educational leaders, and the public for coming changes. As Jenn McCrae commented, “Rod’s conversations were about the learner, not about school buildings, budgets, systems, or simplifying the work, but about the learners.” Working with Deputy Minister Gorman and later Minister Abbott, as well as the BCTF whose members were working on the curriculum, decisions were being made by consensus and consultation.

“It’s the greatest team I’ve ever worked with, I don’t know how I ended up with this super team; seven or eight ADMS, we’d walk across hot coals for each other, a super strong team and everyone was excited, we were living the dream – this is why you spend a lifetime in government for these moments when stuff comes together and it did!”

George Abbott

In 2011, when George Abbott became Minister of Education, the process speeded up. Abbott commented, “It’s the greatest team I’ve ever worked with, I don’t know how I ended up with this super team; seven or eight ADMS, we’d walk across hot coals for each other, a super strong team and everyone was excited, we were living the dream – this is why you spend a lifetime in government for these moments when stuff comes together and it did!” This enthusiasm and excitement was contagious and felt across the Ministry and out into the field. Rod said, “We got a triple word score, with Abbott, Gorman, and myself working together, starting with a minister who could really articulate a vision, and transform it into language that politicians could easily understand.” There were three types of acumen – educational vision, political wisdom and bureaucratic expertise – working together. Gorman’s role as deputy minister was key to understanding “how to manage a system in the ministry and get people doing the right things in the right ways at the right time”, able to get resources to the right people at the right time, something Allen as an educator was not familiar with.

The individual expertise each of these three individuals brought to the Ministry was important, but the openness each demonstrated to learning from each other, from the staff, and from the field, was also important. They all had a similar vision but not with the same level of detail – “Gorman had the compass direction but not the roadmap; we still had to negotiate the route between ourselves and others about exactly how were we going to get there” as Allen commented. Abbott wanted to work in the Ministry of Education because he saw some interesting challenges and wanted to be part of the transformation, to lead it, it was “one of the rare times when there was a lot of magic happening and it was because of the confluence of those three streams bringing together knowledge needed to make changes, we believed that anything was possible.”

Over the next two years, 2011-2013, Abbott, Allen, and Gorman worked together and really laid the seeds for next steps. There was huge trust, and Allen commented, “we had to have trust – it was a bit scary!” He continued:

There was gathering momentum in the BC community, there was a window open and we had to go through it then. It challenged us to keep accelerating and keep accelerating, knowing that it would close at some point. We did move off the sweet spot, but there was enough momentum going that we could keep moving to where the vision and the context was set.

During the two years of working together, there was lots of action. “We brought in the business community, and the Aboriginal community, and we had a series of six sessions, with artists like Roy Vickers, and we had a set of ‘nested’ conversations”, commented Allen. “We asked Abbott, as Minister, to manage these conversations and they worked out – rather than Abbott being a figurehead, we worked together.” The Minister introduced the sessions, and then Gorman and Allen did the substantive pieces, and then Abbott finished conversation. Allen said, “We worked to support each other in these events, together we determined who would play what role. George would ask how we wanted him to play it, out in front, or quiet... whether we wanted to gather more momentum or whether it wasn’t a good time to go out.” They had these types of conversations frequently, and Abbott didn’t need all the limelight, rather they determined what they all needed to do collectively to get the community support. Working together, they negotiated their roles and responsibilities. They were convinced there was the potential for lasting and significant change if they could get it off the ground.

Abbott commented, “Lots of times it was team efforts – generally relationships aren’t important in government and in politics they are everything – you don’t move an agenda down the tracks in government and in politics without having a series of relationships that empower you to do that. Part of the magic here right from the first day was we made it fun, from the first day when Rod and James came in with their briefing books – we were comfortable, they didn’t come into my office and feel intimidated.” “But,” Rod chimed in, “You had to be ready for a free-for-all, which was possible if you had positive relationships and everyone was genuinely interested. The intentions and aspirations matched for all three of us – we were all interested in taking the opportunity to do something exciting.”

Gorman added, “We had a variety of ways that you have to go about building that momentum. George had to be out there talking to school trustees; they had to feel like they were part of the architecture of this vision – together we are going to achieve this change. We needed to listen, respond, come back to talk with them again – and there were 60 districts, more than 300 trustees!” Abbott was the person in the right position to communicate with the trustees; educators were brought along by Allen, who was talking to teachers and principals as co-builders; and Gorman was teaching public servants to feel like things were different (e.g., knocking down the ministry walls) and that there was momentum happening and we are going to do things differently. The changed structure of ministry offices was intended to signal a change in the way people worked together, to enable curriculum people to sit with assessment people, to have conversations, to have executive meetings in an open board and everyone was able to come and watch. Gorman, in his role as Deputy Minister, saw that there were too many people not supportive, which is why he changed the structure of the working environment, to encourage everyone in the system to try things that are not comfortable, have them talk to new people, think differently, and approach common problems in a different way. “How,” he asked,

“can we ask educators to work and think differently if we’re not working and thinking differently ourselves?”

This team were happy with, as Jenn McCrae called them, “crunchy conversations” – they wanted to be challenged, they wanted “the best of the best experts critiquing their ideas in order to build better, and also all believed in the investment of international experts to help with the transformation.” They were looking for ‘critical friends and friendly critics’, wanting dissident voices at the table in order to hear their perspectives, respond respectfully, and move forward. McCrae recalled, “Rod could see that the more people the better the outcome was going to be – because at the end of the day we all have to stand behind the work, but the government needed to get out of the way” so as to give space for changes to be taken up appropriately depending on context and community needs.

The leadership model of the team (Abbott, Gorman, and Allen) was different. Allen commented, “When James met with the BCTF folks, rather than a ‘woodshed’ scenario, he would go in to a meeting with a growth mindset, trying to listen, respect, and then act.” Briefings with George Abbott were different from briefings with other ministers: “George had a genuine interest in policy, and most ministers don’t, most ministers have an interest in politics but not policy, so what he encouraged us to do from early on was to be part of finding the solutions, and that’s not typically the way it works inside the public service. In the past we would talk about problems together but would go away and come back with options for solutions and the Chairman of the Board would make a decision and implement it. This way was a new approach to moving forward together, not top-down decision-making.” Abbott agreed, “I loved the sessions in my office. Previously there would be a deputy and three ADMS or executive directors and they thought everyone had to agree. With our team I would encourage Rod and James and others to share different pieces or angles, to think things through – I always encouraged people to debate – it sets up the answers to those kinds of questions in your mind before you really had to deal with them – I loved my time in education!”

The changes were evident to people working inside of the Ministry. Rosborough observed, “In the ministry we had really changed things, physically we had knocked down walls, created open space with the idea of more collaboration between people who were doing curriculum, people who were doing legislation, people who were doing finance, so there would be more collaboration and through-lines.” She continued, “I was on the leadership team with Rod Allen, and even our concepts of meetings changed, we met in open spaces where people were invited to come and join.” It was a time of change process, so that openness in leadership was really important because for Rosborough as head of Aboriginal education at the time, there were more possibilities for her to bring her voice to the table. The hierarchies, as noted earlier, had changed, and changes were observable in the inclusive leadership table being created so everyone could talk about education matters, curriculum change, principles of learning, and pedagogy.

Relationships With Government

Premier Campbell, who was in office when Rod Allen and James Gorman came to the Ministry of Education, was focused on education. His wife was an educator and although he was very results-driven, he believed that “funding should be spent on Education because people would take better care of themselves if they were educated” as Rick Davis, Superintendent of Achievement, noted. Campbell took his ideas to Cabinet and shared his views, wanting to change the very confrontational and non-productive longstanding relationship with the BCTF but not knowing how. Rick Davis and Rod Allen suggested bringing in an outside voice to

speaking with Cabinet, someone who had a vision of how education could be different; they encouraged an invitation to Valerie Hannon, head of the Innovation Unit in the UK. The planned 50-minute meeting for her keynote address to Cabinet was very well received and provided the caucus with new ideas. Hannon talked about what kids need today and what kids today can do – it turned into two hours with caucus questions, and that was a kind of turning point that gave Campbell the license to move ahead and gave Gorman the ‘door opener’. After that time, Rick moved on to group results data and negotiation work and Rod Allen began to work in earnest with James Gorman on educational transformation. Allen also began to develop strong relationships with Hannon’s newly developed Global Educational Leaders Partnership (GELP) group.

“Together we were developing different types of relationships with government, and flattening out the way things worked.”

Rod Allen

Commented Rod Allen,

Together we were developing different types of relationships with government and flattening out the way things worked. When I went in for a conversation with George he would throw a curve ball, he got a conversation started, got past the ‘briefing’ and into a ‘let’s create something new’ conversation, and you knew if you’re talking about transformation you’re talking about co-construction; you have to do it, not just use the words – it was very much a co-constructed process from the beginning with teachers writing curriculum, and in George’s office you started trying to figure out what to do.

This team approach described by Rod was unique in working with Ministers of Education, or with the Deputy Minister; rather than a top-down directive, George as Minister would initiate conversations, share ideas, and try to shake things up. In this role, George was able to take ideas to Cabinet, have conversations with government officials in a way that others had not been able to do. He took up this role but also stayed connected to the ongoing dealings with educators, administrators and the public.

Relationships With Ministry Directors and Staff

As George Abbott was having ‘what if’ conversations with the Deputy Minister and Superintendent of Learning, they were also connecting with Ministry directors and staff in the same way. Trish Rosborough commented that, “I felt my role in Aboriginal education was important and that my voice – and the voices of others -- was respected.” She saw Aboriginal/Indigenous education as definitely a part of the educational transformation story and, working with the knowledge keepers and community, there was a growing belief that Indigenous pedagogy and content needed to be integral to everything. This relationship with Indigenous leaders, wisdom keepers, and educators was key to the transformation and an important relationship for the curriculum redesign – one “that happened in the curriculum process”, she commented, in agreement with BCTF President Glen Hansman.

Positive relationships also grew between the Superintendent of Learning and the Ministry staff/directors. Nancy Walt, currently Executive Director of Curriculum & Assessment, provided extensive knowledge of Ministry operations as well as curriculum development. As

Walt commented, Allen soon noticed that the curriculum area and the assessment area were separate and recognized that they needed to be in the same conversation. Prior to coming together they had really different orientations; i.e., the assessment focus was on large-scale tools and curriculum was developing a competency/personalized framework. Clearly there needed to be lots of internal conversations across Learning Divisions, and Nancy stepped up to lead the new combined Division and also to take responsibility for her own learning – she developed a strong theoretical base and understanding of curriculum, and, as Allen noted, she played a big part in bringing theorists into the process. Rick Davis also observed, “Transition for Ministry staff like Nancy Walt, who had been entrenched in the learning outcome measurement world, was a big shift, and she had to go through a big personal transformation, which showed personal vulnerability and courage.” Rod also commented on the major educational transitions undertaken by Nancy as she expanded her focus to connect assessment and curriculum. The commitment it took to make these leaps and develop new expertise came about through positive and trusting relationships, where everyone involved respected the expertise of others, listened, and responded. For example, the big ideas grew out of understanding learners really deeply, and consulting curriculum models and theorists; this work was led in large part by Nancy. Nancy and her team were a really important part of this meaningful work, shared a common vision, and were totally committed to the work. As Rod noted, “Everybody could see themselves in the work, the curriculum was knitted horizontally and vertically, the same writing teams were used for continuity and consistency – the Ministry had never been more on fire; we had a mission and it was really exciting times.”

“I felt my role in Aboriginal education was important and that my voice – and the voices of others -- was respected”.

Trish Rosborough

Some of the Ministry staff were involved in field-based work and Rod encouraged that work to continue. Kristin Mimick commented, “Rod saw that the work we were doing with field partners, with faculties of education and school districts, in relation to the various learning partnership initiatives -- the type of focus that engaged educators of all kinds to work and learn together across their organizational roles, so these partnerships began to expand. Although these weren’t necessarily coordinated efforts, there was an emergent focus on field-based projects, and an attempt to create more political initiatives such as the Innovation Partnership project with the BCTF.

...the big ideas grew out of understanding learners really deeply, and consulting curriculum models and theorists.

“The flattened, non-hierarchical relationships were much more networked, respectful, trusting, thoughtful, and enjoyable”, noted Kristin Mimick, Education Officer. “There were visible relationships, but there were lots of others behind the scenes who were part of the flow of change -- not everyone was excited about making changes to their work, but there was fluidity in the ways many people worked together within and outside the Ministry.” And while shifting positions within the Ministry structure can sometimes be disempowering, it also enables the sharing of knowledge and experience from one division to another, and creates further networks. This is useful and positive in a complex system such as the Ministry and the educational system

more broadly. Rosborough noted, “there needs to be feedback loops to make sure things are working well to re-guide and move things as they need to happen.” She saw the danger that if we don’t have these systems, it would be easy to revert back to the status quo, where Indigenous perspectives weren’t considered, where competencies weren’t structuring the process and where assessment wasn’t being considered.

“Everybody could see themselves in the work, the curriculum was knitted horizontally and vertically, the same writing teams were used for continuity and consistency – the Ministry had never been more on fire; we had a mission and it was really exciting times.”

Rod Allen

Relationships Across Ministries

Both George Abbott and James Gorman brought expertise from other complex ministries when they came to the Education. George Abbott brought extensive background from the Health Ministry, serving as Minister of Health from 2005-2009, and prior to that Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women’s Services, and Minister of Sustainable Resource Management. James Gorman, prior to taking up the Deputy Minister position in the Ministry of Education, held the Deputy Minister position in the Public Service Agency from 2005-2007. As a result, both the Minister and Deputy Minister understood the complexity of working in people-centred environments and used their understanding in their Education work.

Jan played an extremely important role in enabling secondary administrators and educators and post-secondary institutions to shift their thinking about preparation of high school graduates and postsecondary admissions processes

In a stroke of innovative creativity, Jan Unwin was hired by Rod Allen to work across two Ministries, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education, in a new role that was entitled Superintendent of Graduation and Student Transitions at Ministry of Education and Ministry of Advanced Education. This position is unique to BC, and Jan played an extremely important role in enabling secondary administrators and educators and post-secondary institutions to shift their thinking about preparation of high school graduates and postsecondary admissions processes. In this position Jan was able to link the work of two ministries, particularly through Rod Allen and Claire Avison, who had transitioned from the MoE to becoming the ADM of Advanced Education. The fluidity of these positions again enabled sharing of expertise and connections that would not have been possible if people continued to work in silos; the ADMs became strong allies in the educational transformation process. As Avison noted, “as a result of hiring Jan Unwin, shared across AVED and MoE, stronger relationships grew across the ministries and with the people within each of these ministries.” She worked with Rod and Jan to make connections, so people in AVED cared about education – they connected with Deans of Education, through Jan, and Jan got onto the regular

agenda for different associations such as BCSSA and PVPA, as well as the agenda of VP Academics of BC universities.

“Key people in the transformation, who held key positions, like Rod Allen, Jan Unwin, and Maureen Dockendorf, had great relationship skills,” commented Kristin Mimick, who worked regularly with all of these people in her Ministry role. “They had been in the field of teaching and learning for most of their careers, had built relationships and had become leaders in their districts.” Their extensive backgrounds and skills at leading educational systems enabled the softening of some of the more difficult political relationships. The rhetoric around leadership in these organizations was shifting because there were positive relationships being built – the atmosphere was one of collegiality and collaboration rather than directives and hierarchical communication.

Relationships With Seconded Educational Leaders

Two people who played significant roles in connecting work in the Ministry to the field were Maureen Dockendorf, former Associate Superintendent of Coquitlam SD, and Jan Unwin, former Superintendent of Maple Ridge SD. Maureen was asked to join the Ministry team in 2011, to fulfill what former premier Gordon Campbell saw as a need to increase literacy across the province. Deputy Minister Gorman took the lead on this initiative, and supported Maureen to create the Changing Results for Young Readers (CR4YR) initiative. The Ministry launched this initiative in 2012, the major goal being to increase the number of BC children who are engaged, successful readers. Maureen used current research with school districts around the province (over fifty out of sixty districts participated) and brought a deep understanding of what fosters children’s success in reading. Somewhat unintentionally, but very significantly, this CR4YR initiative supported communication around the province related to the curriculum transformation. As Maureen and her colleagues were visiting school districts in all parts of the province to support children’s literacy learning, they were also bringing deeper understandings to the districts about the overall curriculum change. Maureen’s relationships with educators in many school districts, and her ability to connect to many different audiences, supported meaningful communication for the consultation process in the new BC curriculum.

The seconded educational leaders were very helpful in ‘translating’ Ministry-speak or ‘edu-babble’ into understandable terms for practicing teachers, parents, and the students themselves. As Gordon Campbell once commented, says Rod Allen, “If I ever hear the word ‘pedagogy’ again I’m going to hold you personally responsible!” Appropriate language was needed for political buy-in from politicians and bureaucrats outside of the educational field, but also for the larger BC community, including the business community, the arts community, the post-secondary community and the general public. Both Jan and Maureen excelled at speaking to their many diverse audiences in meaningful ways.

Appropriate language was needed for political buy-in from politicians and bureaucrats outside of the educational field, but also for the larger BC community, including the business community, the arts community, the post-secondary community and the general public.

Jan Unwin shifted roles from Superintendent in Maple Ridge SD to Superintendent of Graduation and Student Transitions at the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Advanced Education in 2013. This was a big title, with major responsibilities to help communicate the intent of the change. In the five years Jan worked in this role she spoke with many groups around the province, including high school teachers and administrators, parent groups, post-secondary Deans of Education, post-secondary Admissions administrators, teacher education candidates, and other interested communities. Not all received her presentations positively, particularly at first – the challenges of significant change to curriculum and assessment conceptions was particularly daunting to secondary and post-secondary educators and administrators, particularly in relation to assessment and post-secondary admissions (see assessment discussion in Chapter 9). However, building on existing relationships with superintendents, educators, and then with postsecondary and secondary educators, her message about the potential and possibilities for new curriculum and assessment became heard. Kwantlan Polytechnic University and Simon Fraser University began to explore possibilities for new entrance requirements to their institutions using digital portfolios and other post-secondary institutions started to reconsider some of their assessment and admission practices.

Rod, Maureen, Jan, George, and James provided many, many presentations to groups around the province, attended BCSSA conferences, and conferences elsewhere around the world. Their message and vision about was consistent, innovative, and progressive, and connected to practices many teachers across the province had already begun to adopt. These innovative practices were supported by forward-thinking superintendents who played important roles in their school districts and around the province, such as Chris Kennedy (West Vancouver), Mike McKay (Surrey) and Jeff Hopkins (Gulf Islands, later [Pacific School of Innovation and Inquiry](#)).

Their message and vision about the curriculum redesign was consistent, innovative, and progressive, and connected to practices many teachers across the province had already begun to adopt.

As Nancy Walt observed, there was “lots of regional consultations, the team went and presented the framework widely throughout the province. People generally seemed to be excited about change, although some educators didn’t think we’d gone far enough – there were educators who were very innovative and pushing to go further, we had parents at the sessions, some students, sometimes a trustee – the groups were really mixed, as were the responses.” Following the initial consultations, some embraced the proposed changes, some were somewhat reticent, and some were skeptical. The team came back from the fifteen regional consultations and then adapted the framework in response to the feedback. There was lots of feedback with varied views, but in Nancy’s perception there was general support for a flexible personalized curriculum, and this message came out loud and clear. After the initial iteration of the changed curriculum, there was a move to “Big Ideas” and this model was the one that stayed. The curriculum writing teams, comprised of members of the BCTF from across the province, began to flesh out each curricular area. The team worked on the BC Education Plan that was then launched on the Ministry website in 2014 (see [BC curriculum video](#) and p. 56).

Relationship With Ideas

One of Jan Unwin’s proposals involved utilizing a portfolio-type approach to document students’ growth and change (see Figure 6). In this prototype, she was suggesting that secondary

teachers develop a visual relationship between curriculum and assessment by way of a portfolio. And while this was slow to get take-up, in recent years more and more schools are utilizing a digital-based portfolio system.

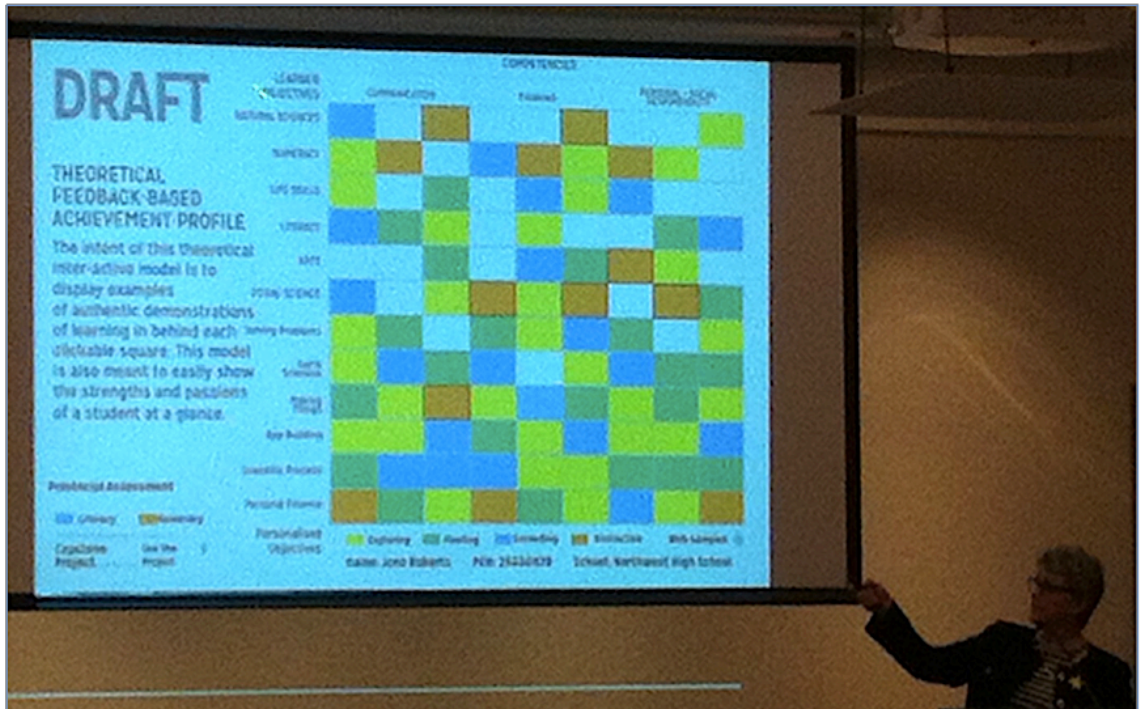


Figure 6 Jan Unwin envisioning a possible digital evidence matrix for a student

There were efforts made to re-conceptualize the role of disciplinary knowledge in relation to competencies and to each other, drawing on a cross-curricular framework (see Figure 7 below).

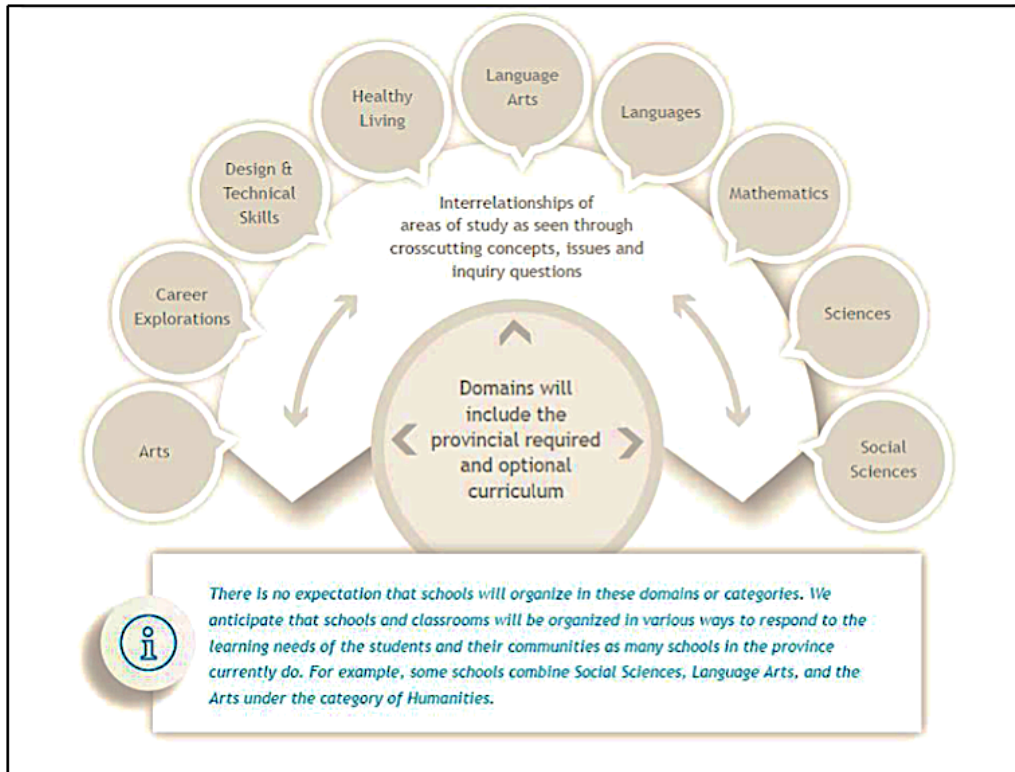


Figure 7 Outline of the inter-relationship of the areas of study

The disciplinary knowledge domains also connected to a Know/Do/Understand (KDU) (BC Ministry Education, 2019), framework reproduced in Figure 8, supporting the need for all students to be actively involved in their learning, cognitively, emotionally, and physically. The KDU framework showed interrelationships between these domains.

These models and frameworks led to conversations about alternative approaches to curriculum development and delivery (cross-curricular, inquiry, problem-based), to assessment (performance assessment, portfolios) and to ongoing professional learning (mentorship programs).

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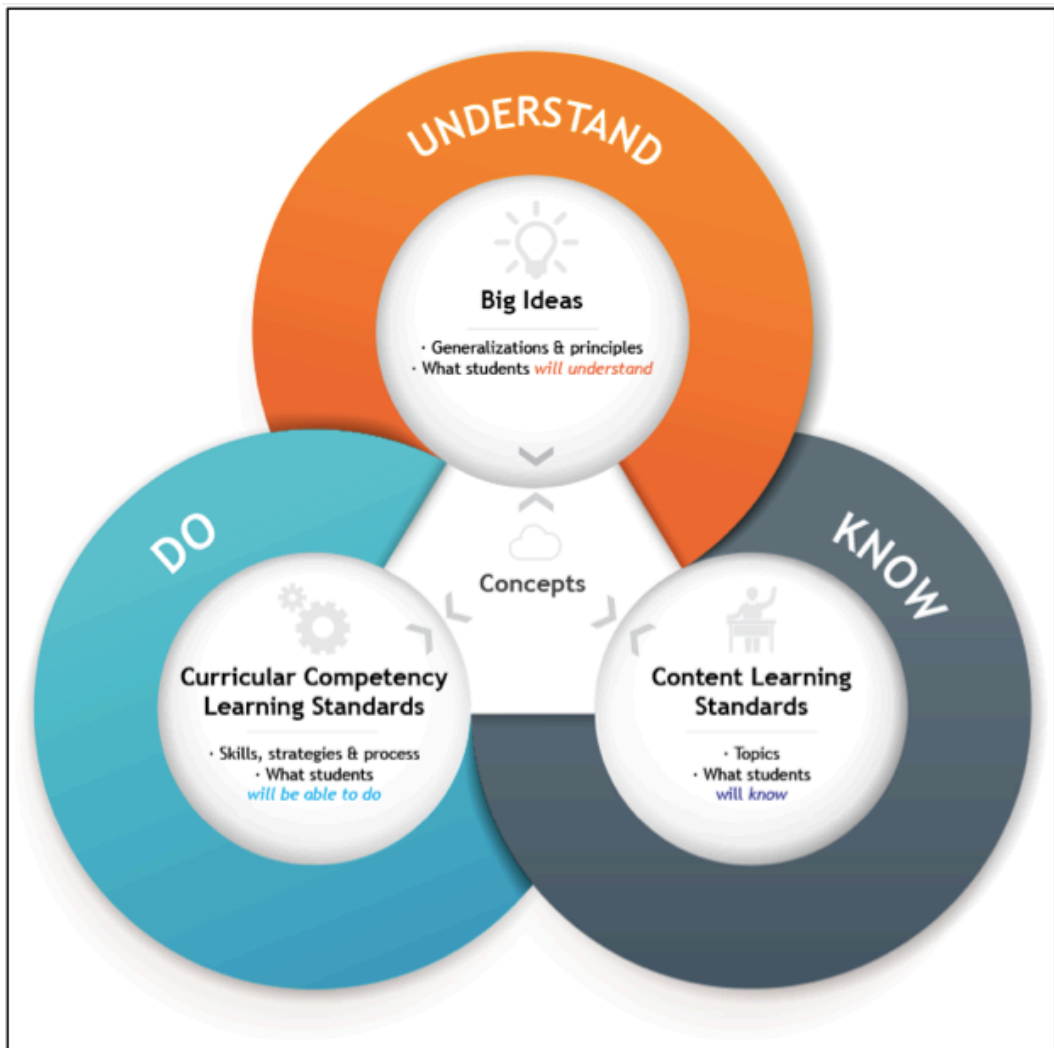


Figure 8 Know, understand and can do model for the redesigned BC curriculum

As described by Knaack (2017), “the entire K-12 system has been redesigned on a new concept-based competency-driven approach to learning. Three key areas form the foundation of the framework:”

Know (referring to Content Learning Standards), essential knowledge that students need to know in order to successfully complete their courses and grade. These are the “what” of the curriculum, essential topics and knowledge at each grade level that students need to know.

Do (referring to Curricular Competency Learning Standards): the “how” of learning -- subject/discipline specific skills, strategies and processes that students will develop over time, but that also overlap and connect to core competencies.

Understand (referring to Big Ideas), the “why” of students’ learning, including key concepts and principles in a specific area of learning, also connecting in iterative ways to other discipline areas and prior understandings.

International Perspectives Shared

Valerie Hannon's visit to BC to address the Cabinet in 2010, early on in the transformation process, enabled Rod to connect to her newly formed Global Education Leaders Partnership (GELP). This provided a provincial connection to other international education leaders and Rod became an active member of this group. Other educational leaders belonging to GELP also visited BC to share their ideas, including Tony Mackay (OECD), David Albury (Innovation Unit), and David Istance (OECD's Innovative Learning Environments). These voices supported BC's transformational directions, and were also joined by Yong Zhao (international scholar and author of *World Class Learners*) and John Abbott (Director, 21st Century Learning Initiative). "It was really engaging," commented ADM Claire Avison, "listening to Valerie Hannon and Tony Mackay – most of us in our career don't have that many opportunities to point to initiatives we've been involved in. BC got a chance to talk to others around the world and there was interest around the world in what we were doing."

Relationships to previous work

As noted previously, the BC transformation sparked by the Rod Allen, James Gorman and George Abbott connection had been building for years before it began to ignite in the early 2010s. The Year 2000 initiative, it could be argued, introduced similar conceptions, as noted by Emily O'Neill (2010) in the BCTF Newsmagazine. She reflected on the initiative:

Interestingly, much of the language surrounding these 21st century learning plans is not new to BC. Most recently, the Ministry of Education's Year 2000 Program, which emerged from the recommendations of the Sullivan Royal Commission on Education in the late 1980s (add footnote), called for major education reforms in British Columbia. Parts of the 1990 ministry paper, "Year 2000: A Framework for Learning," sound as though they could have been written today. According to the ministry in 1990, major social and economic changes in BC were placing new demands and expectations on schools:

These changes include an explosion in knowledge, coupled with powerful new communication and information processing technologies. The structure of the economy is shifting from being primarily resource-based to becoming a mixed economy with increasing emphasis on the information and service sectors. As society itself is changing and becoming much more diverse.

The new competencies required for BC students are elucidated in another paragraph from the Year 2000 paper, which sounds remarkably like the 21st century learning language that is floating around today:

In view of the new social and economic realities, all students, regardless of their immediate plans following school, will need to develop a flexibility and versatility undreamed of by previous generations. Increasingly, they will need to be able to employ critical and creative thinking skills to solve problems and make decisions, to be technologically literate as well as literate in the traditional sense, and to be good communicators. Equally, they will need to have well-

developed interpersonal skills and be able to work co-operatively with others. Finally, they will need to be lifelong learners.

Although O'Neill's tone in 2010 was skeptical, the change process of systems as entrenched as education takes time to take hold – and as can be seen by this account, had been in progress since the 1990s. A hopeful sign is that the transformation work today is consistent with the work begun two decades ago.

What was not included in the Year 2000 vision, however, was recognition of the place of Indigenous education in all curriculum documents. That work had been going on for over 15 years, in the form of Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements, directed by Lorna Williams, Trish Rosborough, and then Ted Cadwallader. As noted on the BC ministry website Aboriginal Education (2019),

For over 15 years, the Ministry of Education has supported the development and implementation of [Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements \(EAs\)](#) as a primary tool to increase student success and to bring Aboriginal learning to all students. This tool is well established as a way to include Aboriginal people in decision-making and focus on measurable student outcomes. Commencing in the fall of 2016, the Ministry will no longer be involved in the development of EAs, believing that school districts and Aboriginal communities understand their value and no longer need Ministry support.

The Aboriginal Education directors oversaw Aboriginal education around the province, engaging with communities and school districts to implement the enhancement agreements. Rosborough remembered, “The teams would visit districts to support them and build relationships, to bring the voice of Aboriginal communities to determine what they wanted for their children.”

“The relationships formed from enhancement agreement work was”, Rosborough noted, “very helpful. I knew the members of the team and knew districts really well.” She continued, “Even earlier, in the 1990s when there were Ministry-driven ‘district reviews’, we used a team approach and developed relationships. Even though the work was data-driven and somewhat problematic, the teams of ministry, superintendents, educators, and community folks developed relationships that were very helpful later. The district reviews were a way to begin to connect with districts that hadn’t happened before that, getting to hear the voices of a variety of people, getting an understanding about changes that could improve outcomes for kids.”

As Rosborough described, these reviews were not specific to Aboriginal students but were “considering changes that could improve outcomes for all kids, were happening before the curriculum transformation started, but was laying the groundwork for what happened – we knew we needed to make changes.”

“Under Rod Allen’s leadership,” Rosborough said, “we did things like having young people come in to ministry meetings and inform us about their education experience, and to sit with knowledge keepers, to talk about Indigenous ways of knowing and being and what they thought was important to include in the education system and how the curriculum could help to do that.”

The Changing Results for Young Readers (CR4YR) initiative directed by Maureen Dockendorf was building around the province and in some ways had paved the way for discussions about

curriculum and educational change. The CR4YR program was highly successful all across the province and brought many educational voices together. It stimulated new ways of thinking about learning and education, as well as contextual needs of students in the province. The Ministry team also connected, through presentations about educational transformation, to other organizations. GELP as an international organization has already been mentioned, but the team stayed connected and fostered relationships with the First Nations Educational Steering Committee (FNESC, the BC School Superintendents Association (BCSSA), BC Principals and Vice-Principals Association (BCPVPA), Freedom Involves Secure Alternatives (FISA BC) and continued to work to improve relations with the BC Teachers Federation (BCTF).

Relationships with BCTF

As mentioned earlier, during his time as premier Gordon Campbell recognized the need to forge improved relationships with the BCTF, which had fallen apart with contentions about contract, including salary and class size and composition issues. Externally these issues raged through the first decade of the 21st century. When George Abbott became Minister of Education in 2011 he wanted to develop better relationships with the BCTF president to see if a ‘relational resolution’ would be possible. Abbott spent many hours in face-to-face meetings with the BCTF executive, talking and debating, attempting to move to a less cynical position, encouraging the BCTF to be less harshly critical of the BC Education Plan. Both Rod Allen and George Abbott worked to mend fences with then BCTF President Susan Lambert, and continued to develop more positive relationships with Jim Iker and then Glen Hansman, recognizing that they were critical as partners in the uptake of curriculum redesign.

“Our big ideas all grew out of understanding kids really deeply,” commented Rod Allen, “and consulting about curriculum models and theorists.”

Rod Allen

“Our big ideas all grew out of understanding kids really deeply,” commented Rod Allen, “and consulting about curriculum models and theorists.” He recognized that the Ministry would have broken trust with the BCTF (and all their other partners) if they had not consulted and responded in an ongoing way.

As Glen Hansman commented, the “BCTF were in on the conversation from the outset when George Abbott introduced it – we were very interested – a lot of what was being proposed were things we had been promoting as an organization for a long time – constructivist approaches, sort of a little personalized learning thing; a lot of that sort of language, from our perspective, only started to begin getting floated when the premier’s office and the communications team from the premier’s office tried to get involved, and we were trying to find ways of framing this for the public and saying ‘yay’ as a government.” However, Hansman noted, it was “problematic when, for example, [Minister] Fassbender spoke, when the first K-9 documents went live on the website.” Apparently “they hadn’t lined up their communications around it – I had to explain to public/reporters what the philosophy was behind this – it was just beyond that Minister to explain what the philosophy was.” Recognition of the importance of Ministers and Deputy Ministers who were able to speak articulately about the vision was noted when that knowledge and ability no longer existed. Kristin Mimick, having a long history with the Ministry of Education, observed that, “this ministry aimed to communicate the transformation process.”

“Relationships in and around the ministry during the times of transformation gave space for people to adapt, at a pace they needed,” suggested Kristin Mimick. “This is still going on, encouraging everyone involved to feel part of the transformation story.”

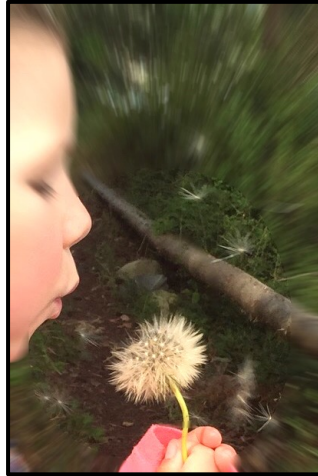
She noted that “some of the key people in this transformation story had power and shared it and collaborated, powerful people with budgets and decision-making power shared it among each other”; they were the people who were needed at a systems level to create space for change; people who had a vision, a sense of confidence, so they weren’t covering up or trying to climb the political ladder. They also intuitively or through experience knew that the field of teaching and learning was a relational field. Some, like George Abbott and Claire Avison, had come out of Health ministries, others like James Gorman had background in Public Services – areas that are messy, organic, grassroots – these were people comfortable in complex systems, people who didn’t rely on flowcharts or timelines, but wanted to make it happen!

“Relationships in and around the ministry during the times of transformation gave space for people to adapt, at a pace they needed.”

Kristin Mimick

Hansman commented, “I would say there’s a partnership between the Ministry and the BCTF – partnership is critical, but I wouldn’t see us being partners in the end product, that’s the Ministry’s jurisdiction.” In regard to the importance of relationships, he noted that “the degree to which the curtain has been pulled back or will close again is dependent on which strand of this we’re talking about and it is dependent upon which deputy minister is in the position.” The BCTF’s feeling that they had full access to everything was unprecedented, in a positive way, and the fact that teachers who have been responsible for writing the curriculum and that decisions about teachers on the writing teams came from the BCTF was very important. They had the ability to find people from all regions of the province, strove for regional representation, and worked to have Indigenous representation.

Chapter 5: Rolling out the New Curriculum



The legacy of Deputy Minister Emery Dossdall (2002-2007), as Rick Davis recalls, was to hire Superintendents of Achievement such as Rod Allen, Sherry Moharuk, and Rick Davis. Dossdall's vision was for the Superintendents of Achievement to visit schools and discuss their progress, i.e., their test results. This, however, morphed into a new direction with Rod Allen, James Gorman, and later with George Abbott. Rod didn't concern himself too much about his title, whether it was Superintendent or ADM – what he did ask, however, was “Do you care about me? Do you care about this project? Are we going to build a relationship?” From 2008-2014 Rod worked in a loosely described position, which began as Superintendent of Achievement and then become more appropriately named Superintendent of Learning. The lack of articulation about this position enabled Rod to work across sectors, work in community, and shape the role as needs emerged.

However, much as the position wasn't clearly articulated, Rod's vision was quite clear – to make education better for kids. Gorman came to understand Rod's vision, first through personal connections and then in more general terms for all children. Gorman was able to navigate bureaucratic systems so that Rod could do the educational work and move the vision forward. He asked Rod, ‘what do you need?, what are the next steps?’, which helped James to clarify and articulate the steps and the vision, ultimately leading to the BC Education Plan. A great deal was accomplished with the Gorman/Allen duo, which in 2011 became a trio as George Abbott joined as Minister of Education. Their team of three was quickly formed, underpinned by two goals: 1) to create a team who stayed ‘home’ in the Ministry to write and research and to articulate the vision, with Nancy Walt and James Gorman at the helm, and 2) to create a team to travel the province, with Allen at the helm, talking to everybody, including parent groups, school boards, teacher groups, everybody – trying to build a collective vision, then go back for more consultation with the team in the Ministry. Gorman had a small team, including Rick Davis and Sherry Moharuk, and didn't have to manage finances or a large group; he had time to work with audit folks to understand how things worked, why they worked, and how things could be changed – Gorman felt that he had a license to be a ‘free agent’. Allen's team of educators, including Maureen Dockendorf, then Jan Unwin and other seconded educational leaders such as

Larry Espe, was joined by George Abbott when he became Minister of Education. Allen's position wasn't clearly understood by those working in the Ministry but they knew it didn't fit into the existing structure or hierarchy, and Gorman did not seek to control Allen or his work. As Allen and his team embarked on their province-wide journey, they began to think about learning differently and their role in it, wondering if Ministry representatives were the right type of organization to do the work of curriculum transformation, wondering if they were really a learning organization and how to support change to become truly a learning organization.

In social change and cultural change, and getting social license, it's not about the holding of the vision as much as it is about the sharing of it and the building of it together.

Allen and Gorman began to imagine what a new structure in the ministry would look like, and the Learning Division was created. They had talked with other Assistant Deputy Ministers and recognized that curriculum staff reported to one ADM and assessment staff reported to another ADM – “it didn't make sense,” Allen recalled, “so we sat together and talked about what needed to change, and what staff needed to have together to support educational change.” He noted that opening up conversations about change was sometimes difficult and painful, but needed to take place. In order to bring the educational transformation vision to life, Allen needed curriculum, assessment, French programs, special education, Aboriginal education – previously all separate entities -- all in one place, and he eventually became the head of the Learning Division that encompassed all those areas. Allen developed a series of “shirtsleeves” or “elbows on the table” sessions with the groups who now formed the Learning Division, and with members of the Aboriginal community, business, and postsecondary communities, held lots of initial consultations, asking questions like “How are we doing as an education system? What do we need to change, to pay attention to? Are we meeting your needs?” One of the important responses from these teams was that the language was good but that the actions didn't match – they weren't doing what they said they were doing.

These early consultation sessions, once the Learning Division had formed, were important first steps. As Allen noted, “In social change and cultural change, and getting social license, it's not about the holding of the vision as much as it is about the sharing of it and the building of it together.” So the team set out to build new curriculum in a consultative, collaborative way.

Where did the ideas come from?

The ideas and the vision did not materialize from the imagination or experiences of any one person. As Gorman noted, “There were trends happening, in management and in the business world, and we cherry picked things that we thought would apply in this context -- where everyone had been in the ministry for sometimes decades, we wanted different, fresh ways of thinking and approaching things – not because they weren't working well, but because we thought we could do better. We needed to change inside the ministry as well as school districts.” So restructuring of the physical space and restructuring of operations took place.

“Big ideas don't occur in one day,” Gorman said, “but get morphed and become a bigger idea, then a vision – starting with little germs, these things knit together and then over time we got to a place, it took a year or more, but it came from challenging the educational site. We were

committed to co-construction and knew we were dead in the water if we didn't pay as much attention to the process as the document." So the development was an iterative process which took time and courageous patience, but the process approach was reflected in the emergent documents that showed ongoing movement forward, adaptation, adoption of ideas gained through consultations, and then through the teacher-driven curriculum writing teams.

Ideas also came from consultations with diverse groups of people including artists, social workers, business people, and academics, eclectic groups from every walks of life, who were encouraged to talk about BC's education system and what they thought should be happening in education. Listening and responding to different perspectives stimulated new interdisciplinary ways of thinking. An artist was asked to think about how his educational journey would have been different if he had learned math and physics through the arts. Influential and highly respected individuals in the BC community pushed government on issues as they asked important questions and made suggestions.

A Different kind of Minister

As Jan Unwin commented, "The right people were in the right places at the right time – the Minister of Education at the time, George Abbott, was interested in kids and their engagement." The Ministry was wanting to change," noted Claire Avison, "to utilize technology more effectively for children's education, wanting to support teachers to teach differently so that kids could learn differently." The ministry listened to external education experts who suggested ways to change direction and change thinking. They paid attention to data about how student engagement decreases in direct proportion to going up the grade levels, and began to consider why kids come in curious and confident and excited about learning but go out disinterested and disengaged. They focused on the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, gaps between boys and girls – "we had data," noted Jan, "and started to listen to people like Ken Robinson and Yong Zhao who were asking what educators thought they were doing, and how they were getting kids ready for a changed world."

Ministry leaders also listened more intently to business communities who were saying that education was "not preparing youth with the skills that were useful in their world, and post-secondary institutions who were saying that students weren't appropriately prepared for the future – It was a perfect storm!" exclaimed Jan. The timing was right; "this became not just a thing the ministry did but became an open and transparent adventure that had all sorts of opportunities to co-create the pieces of it, including the curriculum and the assessment."

"I started to feel really confident about getting some good stuff done when I attended my first meeting with the BC School Trustees Association – it was a big gathering of about 600 people," noted George Abbott. "I tried to get people to laugh at things on my PowerPoint but also started introducing some of the themes like "no child is a failure and if a child fails, it's not the child who has failed but the system that has failed the child"; I used Curious George, speaking through pop culture characters." Abbott's presentation to the trustees was out of the ordinary; Ministers before him had not always taken the time to meet with them, let alone through Curious George, but he had the charisma and the knowledge of the education system and ongoing transformation to be able to meet with them. "It was fun doing the presentation to the trustees, and they asked, 'Can you stay to take some questions, Minister?', and I said 'I'll stay and take questions until you tell me to leave', and it ended up way over time, but the dynamic discussion was really good, and that was one of the ways in which the educational partners started to get warmed up and kind of confident." The trustees, and then other groups, realized that the Ministry was operating differently and that they were being listened to. George Abbott

enjoyed giving presentations, and gave as much time as was needed to continue discussions, with trustees, with the BCTF, with administrators. He was willing to get out of the office, discuss difficult issues, listen to others, negotiate and work things out; his message was that he was interested in what they had to say, he was serious, and that he cared about education. Abbott was able to have conversations because he could respond with understanding and knowledge and he had things to say about education -- he was confident, understood the issues, had talked extensively with others (superintendents, trustees, his deputy minister and Superintendent of Learning) – he, like Curious George, was inquisitive and engaged. “There’s a reason why these were my favourite years,” George commented, “because there was lots of excitement, lots of stuff going on, we were working as a team, we weren’t afraid to say ‘I don’t know, but there are other people here who probably do know the answers’.”

For example, Figure 9 shows a powerpoint slide used by Abbott, with curious George asking the Treasury Board how money is spent in Education and who decides.

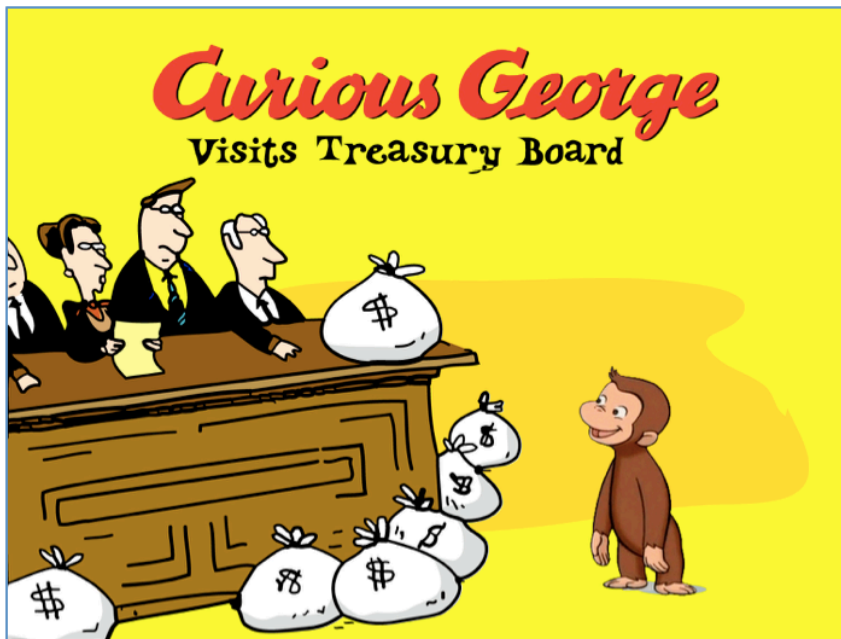


Figure 9 Curious George at Treasury to see where all the money goes in education

In Figure 9b, Abbott offers a visual to capture the challenge of being the Minister of Education.

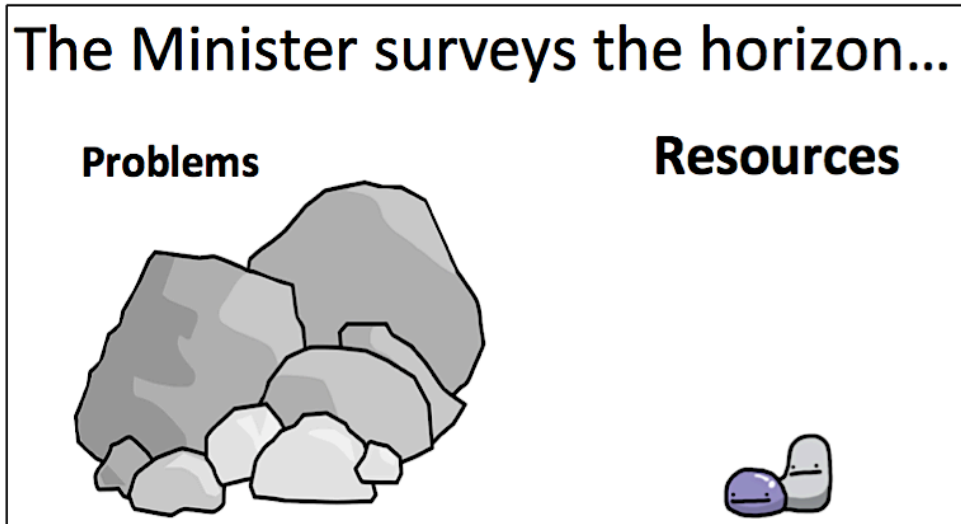


Figure 9b Reflection from the Minister of Education on BC Education system

In 2011, the Ministry realized the need to formalize some ideas from the conversations that had been happening across the province and released the BC Education Plan, including the following opening statement by the Minister of Education:

“This is an exciting time of change for education in British Columbia. We’re starting from a strong position: motivated and talented students, outstanding teachers, committed parents, skilled administrators and dedicated education partners.”

George Abbott

This is an exciting time of change for education in British Columbia. We’re starting from a strong position: motivated and talented students, outstanding teachers, committed parents, skilled administrators and dedicated education partners. We are also fortunate to live in a province that values education and gives young people opportunities to excel. And yet our education system is based on a model of learning from an earlier century. To change that, we need to put students at the centre of their own education. We need to make a better link between what kids learn at school and what they experience and learn in their everyday lives. We need to create new learning environments for students that allow them to discover, embrace, and fulfill their passions. We need to set the stage for parents, teachers, administrators and other partners to prepare our children for success not only in today’s world, but in a world that few of us can yet imagine. Inspired by innovative change already taking place in B.C. communities and developed through many months of consultation with educators, students, parents and other

British Columbians, BC's Education Plan responds to the realities and demands of a world that has already changed dramatically and continues to change.

Before us lies a tremendous opportunity. We know more now than we've ever known about how children learn. It is time to use that knowledge to change what we do so students can realize their full potential. As both a parent and grandparent, I want an education system that gives all children the best opportunities to be successful in whatever career they pursue. I'm sure every British Columbian feels the same way. By working together, we can take what we know is a good education system and make it great. That's what BC's Education Plan is all about.

*George Abbott
Minister of Education*

This statement was accompanied by a brief document outlining the five key elements identified as a way to “[move our education system from good to great](#)” and a short video created in the Ministry. The key elements identified included: 1) personalized learning for every student; 2) quality teaching and learning; 3) flexibility and choice; 4) high standards; and 5) learning empowered by technology. Although these were relatively general goals, this document signaled to the BC education community that change was on the horizon.

“I was also in Fort Nelson, seeing the improvement in graduation rates of Indigenous student – this gave me specific examples and stories, and hopefully showed my connection to and interest in education.” George worked to shift the educational narrative from one of an impoverished education system that wasn't serving students well to one that was articulated in the BC Education Plan.”

George Abbott

Following the release of the BC Education Plan, Abbott was out on the road regularly – which was a significantly different approach from previous and subsequent Ministers. Abbott recalled a visit, “I was in Quesnel with their Teachers' Association, to take the time to talk and listen to the folks in that community, not just one hour but two or three. I could see their body language change from frustration to interest and engagement.” He continued, “I was also in Fort Nelson, seeing the improvement in graduation rates of Indigenous student – this gave me specific examples and stories, and hopefully showed my connection to and interest in education.” George worked to shift the educational narrative from one of an impoverished education system that wasn't serving students well to one that was articulated in the BC Education Plan. He used humour, lots of pop culture references (The Beatles' *Can't Buy Me Love* came up on more than one occasion!). He talked about social license and offered a more compelling vision that was worth fighting for, trying to steer the discussion away from funding (“more money doesn't necessarily buy better education”), a contentious issue which was and continues to hold ongoing tension – for obvious reasons! George and the team tried to shift attitudes about education, the redesigned curriculum, and education more generally, moving mindsets from fixed to growth (Dweck, 2006). For the same reasons, Abbott also attended the BCTF conventions to discuss the

curriculum changes in that forum. These were sites of tough questioning but Abbott stayed and was prepared to respond – with knowledge and conviction as he worked to reframe relationships.

The people who were presenting the transformation ideas across the province reported back to Abbott and Gorman, telling stories of what teachers were saying, and also of teachers' work and how they needed to be supported in the field. Dockendorf collected rich stories through her CR4YR that she shared with the Ministry community. As it is the Minister who sets the agenda and provides direction, and the Deputy Minister's responsibility, along with the ADMs, to ensure the agenda is carried out, to secure the time, the support, and the funding, it was important that the leadership team was willing and able to listen and that there were many significant educational stories to tell. It was also very helpful that the Ministry executives had trusting relationships with the seconded superintendents, to enable the local contexts and stories to be connected to the bigger provincial picture.

The PowerPoint presentations that Abbott, Allen, Dockendorf, Unwin and others presented to groups around the province were shared and enabled a consistency of message. This was important to demonstrate that everyone was working to make change together. The BC Education Plan, then, became the initial formalized version of these presentations.

The BC Education Plan, with George's visioning introduction, provided a roadmap for the next stages of the curriculum design. It was originally presented as a flip-book where students of different ages and backgrounds could tell their stories, although this is no longer available for viewing. The BC Educational plan process took a lot of time -- the Minister didn't just come up with a plan and present it, but engaged in lots of consultation with the strong leadership team. The intention was to garner support and social license, not use the normal political approach; the team wasn't as concerned with getting it completed before the election cycle as getting it right. This directional vision, as well as the development of common language and having the vision clearly articulated, connected people in the Ministry to each other and to the broader community, enabling the vision grow and spread with a unified focus. The process was both slow, taking time for many consultation meetings and gatherings to hear from the Ministry's educational leaders, but then quick, as curriculum started to be developed.

"We invested a lot of time and began to pull together," noted Abbott, "showing that the Minister was actively engaged in the educational transformation process." Gorman added, "it was the first genuine effort by the government since 2000, and George was the first minister to engage in the education conversations." "Part of the reason we were able to take time," Gorman noted, was that this wasn't a political issue. "No government is going to run on a curriculum change – this wasn't something to win or lose and election over."

The development of relationships was key. The learning partnership initiatives were becoming more and more sustainable because authentic individual and organizational relationships were gaining strength and momentum in the collaborative and trusting ways they worked and learned together. Therefore, Rod Allen was supportive in providing financial support to initiatives such as the [3Campus Partnership Project](#), [6Campus Learning Partnership](#), Rural Education Advisory and Growing Innovation, Networks of Inquiry and Innovation, and Vancouver Island University Research Partnerships, several of which continue today. For example, the 6Campus Partnership continues to meet to create networks, collect stories, and support the curriculum transformation, a group consisting of educators from the Ministry, school districts, and teacher education programs; this project drew on existing relationships and build networked communities. "People are interested in connecting to partnership work," Kristin suggests, "because they are interested

in shifting their practice and making changes for their students in order to enhance engagement in their own learning as educators, faculty members, and ministry staff.” Networked communities were really important as everyone shifted and changed their own roles, practices, and thinking about what it meant to be an educator and an educational leader.

“The premier at the time didn’t always have a vision of where things were going,” noted Abbott, “but the beauty of the period we were in with a new premier who was busy with lots of issues was that she was not consumed with the details of what everyone was doing. I had leadership opportunities, which is not always the case.” Sometimes Ministers are caught up in “shiny bobble” initiatives, as Abbott called them, such as coding classes for all students, or Mandarin Immersion. However, Abbott did spend considerable time in hours of meeting with the BCTF, an important focus for him in creating more positive relationships with the BCTF executive. He found that it was easier to disagree on issues if the conversations began from a place of trust and respectful relationships. It was really important, Abbott thought, for him to spend time as the Minister working with the BCTF rather than sending out a deputy if they were really committed to educational transformation. The team also spent considerable time educating the rest of government, and the presentations by international educational leaders such as Valerie Hannon was helpful in moving thinking and having everyone understand and buy into the same vision.

Balancing internal opportunities for discussion and dialogue with external voices was key to the process, and over the course of the transformation years several international educators were invited. “It was a great thing,” noted Mimick, “when the rationale for change became stronger and was communicated in a way that made sense to the people listening, when the reason to change became aligned with shifting mindsets of willingness to learn and shift, to be critical and reflective practitioners, to adapt in response to what was happening around them.”

External Voices

“We gained social license from being able to connect with international educators and capture their attention. The [BC Education Plan](#) took the stage in international arenas.”

James Gorman

The invitation to Valerie Hannon from the Innovation Unit in UK, in 2010, was a key catalyst for moving education forward. Her comments inspired interested in the Cabinet and convinced them of the merit of educational change. Valerie’s development of the Global Education Leaders Program (GELP) helped to stimulate international interest in BC’s transformation project – BC was beginning to be an interesting educational story. Tony Mackay, from OECD, also spent time in BC talking with the educational leaders and offering presentations to educators. Others who joined the community were, as previously mentioned, David Albury, Yong Zhao, and John Abbott. And, as James Gorman noted, “it was important to have Rod involved in international conversations as well as gaining internal and local perspectives.” Gorman also noted, “We gained social license from being able to connect with international educators and capture their attention. The [BC Education Plan](#) (see Figure10) took the stage in international arenas, which was really important to counterbalance local, sometimes negative narratives.

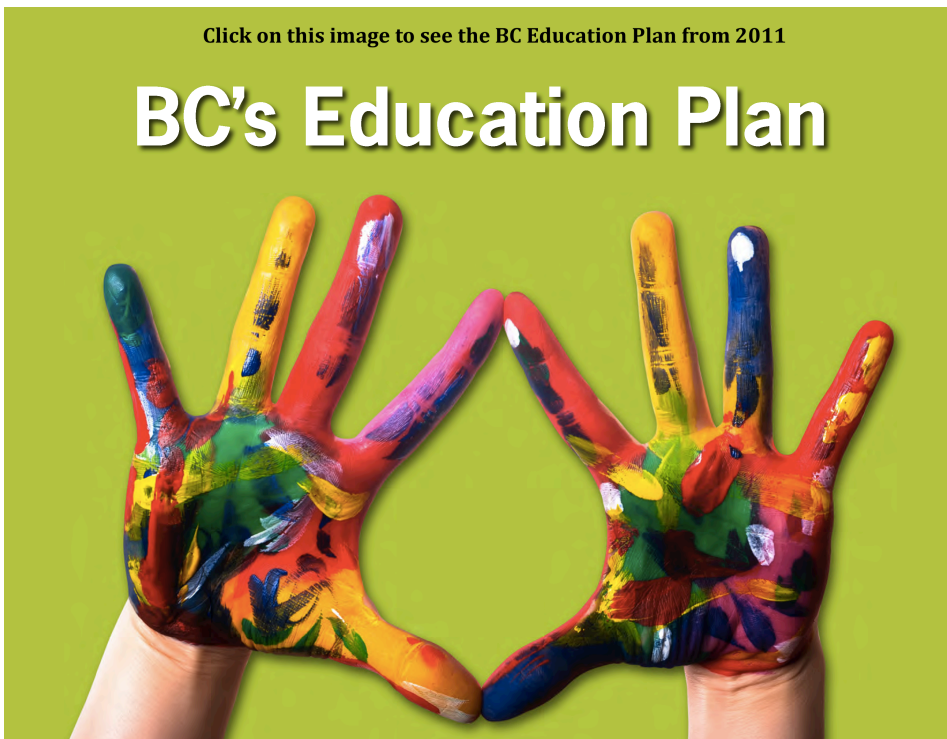


Figure 10 The BC Education Plan

We could stand up proudly and note the recognition we were receiving from around the world.” The professional development committee of the BC School Superintendents Association also supported forward-thinking educators to visit BC and speak at the BCSSA conferences to challenge current thinking, rethink our educational goals and missions, and offer a new vision. It was important, and helpful in garnering community support, for BC to be seen as one of the leading educational jurisdictions in the world – that really helped to motivate the transformation. The motivation was not, as in some countries, to have the best PISA results, or to be in competition with Finland or Singapore, but to offer opportunities for each BC student to experience success in education, to transform the system.

“We didn’t need an educational guru to come in and lead a change; we didn’t line up our change with one concept or individual. Rather ours was an emergent model. We didn’t need someone to ‘fix’ the situation; instead, we used teamwork and local expertise and knowledge.”

Rod Allen

It was comforting to have the support brought by outside educators, who also wanted to be part of BC’s interesting work and to engage in the local conversations. As Rod noted, “We didn’t need an educational guru to come in and lead a change; we didn’t line up our change with one concept or individual. Rather ours was an emergent model. We didn’t need someone to ‘fix’ the situation; instead, we used teamwork and local expertise and knowledge.” To that end, the education team involved local Deans of Education such as Kris Magnusson (SFU), Blye Frank (UBC) and David Burns (KPU). Magnusson and Frank headed up a Ministry-initiated *Advisory Group on Provincial Assessment: the Graduation Learning Years* whose mandate was to better

“align assessment and evaluation practices with the new vision for learning in BC.” (AGPA, p.1).

Another piece of the conversation was enabled by Mike McKay, Superintendent of Surrey SD, and Stuart Shanker, a researcher and successful author, both who were focused on self-regulation and success for all learners. Their ideas were consistent with the message from the BC Education plan and aligned with the vision. They facilitated conversations with 300 teachers who came to talk about special needs students in their classes and express their concerns. “It was important,” suggested Rod, “that we talked about the shifting narrative, not shirk the questions but have credible experts talk about the issues,” not trying to cover up or coerce, but addressing the big issues – inclusion and special needs education, in this case – openly and have conversations head-on. Issues around ways to manage and support classrooms differently as part of the curriculum change needed to be addressed openly – and still do!

Other voices who brought in ‘big picture’ perspectives were those engaged in Indigenous work. “People like Lorna Williams, Joanne Archibald and Jeanette Armstrong who created curriculum for First Nations students, helped create the First Peoples Principles of Learning (which is now part of the BC curriculum) and I see that as pivotal,” commented Trish Rosborough. “These ideas were picked up by teachers, FNESC, and now by curriculum committees as a way to inform how we would change practice.” Trish noted that the world-renowned educators and leading scholars, brought to BC by Rod to talk with Ministry staff, administrators and educators, “started us thinking about new ideas, that was really different from what I had experienced previously, where policy analysts, for example, knew only their piece of the work” and didn’t have a broader perspective.

Complexity, Networks, and Prior Educational Work in BC

As noted earlier, “starting out” wasn’t with a blank slate. Considerable work had been done over the previous decade (or two) that provided the basis for the transformation thinking and enabled it to take root. Consultations that began in 2011 were built on relationships and networks that had been built previously. The consultations began to build social license, a common and collective vision for education, and recognition in BC that education needs to move forward. Educators in the process, including Rod Allen, Jan Unwin, and Maureen Dockendorf, had long established relationships with superintendents, principals, teachers, and community and they used these connections to strengthen networks of transformation as they built alliances and shared goals for educational change in BC. Nancy Walt, as Curriculum & Assessment Director, built on her long-standing relationships with educators, curriculum developers and political figures to create momentum.

The work of the Aboriginal Education team in the Ministry also provided an important foundation, through curriculum development of courses such as English First Peoples 12 and the First Peoples Principles, to the overall curriculum redesign. Negotiation agreements and Enhancement agreements of the 1990s provided beginning places for conversations and curriculum development that has connected to all curriculum areas – the work of this team gave the curriculum new direction.

“...this will live or die based on the collective will of the educators in this province – working together differently”

Rod Allen

When Abbott joined the team, these networks were further mobilized and energized. The team became superintendents, senior Ministry staff, trustees, administrators – “we built a ‘we’ from the government with allies in the field”, commented Allen. Together “we created a belief of possibility and hope – we believed anything was possible in learning” and this belief ignited imaginations of educators in diverse roles across the province – excitement began to grow. The Ministry team worked strategically, Rod, George, and James utilizing each other’s strengths and others in the Ministry, such as Rick Davis, enabled the movement forward of this work by taking up other activities that had been percolating in the public sphere (i.e., job action.) People who worked within the Ministry walls enabled others to visit school districts and communities to encourage people to consider alternatives. The Learning Division personnel recognized the complexity of what they were trying, of building social capital with many different groups and individuals in organic and holistic ways, to be inclusive of all voices and perspectives, to consider ways to personalize, to Indigenize, and to provide an inclusive curriculum. Everything was on the table at the same time. Allen noted that “the transformation leaders saw this as a “social movement, a real cultural change, not implementation – this was not like building a bridge or a highway. Everyone was in the same conversation and shared the same goals.” As he stated, “During these years (2011-2013) the ministry was alive and excited and there was discussion about where BC sits in the world of educational achievement and where we wanted to go.” He further commented, “We had discussions about how we could make ourselves a great education system and what that would look like, recognizing that it was good but could be better. That type of excitement invited conversations with trustees, BCTF, BCPAC, and other groups – the goal would be that no child would be a failure.” Rod Allen believed in the need for change and for a collective will saying, “this will live or die based on the collective will of the educators in this province – working together differently.”

“This work was so interesting and everything seemed to line up”

Rod Allen

Working collaboratively with a group of people who had different roles and strengths was a different model for the Ministry of Education, one that proved to be powerful and successful in making change. Rather than being tightly positioned in one role, people were willing and able to shift positions – sometimes they took the lead, sometimes they were lead by others. Avison, ADM in the Ministry of Education at this inspirational time, commented that “seldom do you ever get to look at your work from a systemic or a holistic kind of perspective – my work wasn’t always transformation but these years were a career highlight for me.” Avison had joined the Ministry of Education from the Ministry of Health, when Deputy Ministry Gorman asked her to do policy alignment to support the transformation. “This work was so interesting and everything seemed to line up” when she was working with this visionary leadership team. Avison’s work during this transformation time called for her to write cabinet submissions and translate them

into language that would make sense for government, to get social license from the politicians and support for the decisions they needed to make. Avison noted that “Gorman was interested in a systems approach around how you could use all of the levers to support the transformation – to address barriers to the work and ways to change the dialogue with the BCTF so that we were all focused on something different that we could all get behind, rather than battling over the collective agreement. It was 2011, and everyone wanted a change and a more positive relationship!”

“What BC was trying to do was unique in so many ways, it was hard for the government. Governments don’t like to be on the leading edge, they get nervous and want to know how we compare to other jurisdictions.”

Claire Avison

One of the challenges was how to maintain collaborative efforts. “Where Gorman was effective,” noted Avison, “was in recognizing what levers were available to us – if we’re going to turn this big ship of a system, we need to pull all the levers, to work with those who are behind us, and not fuss about someone who isn’t.” Avison described the challenges in maintaining government support. “What BC was trying to do was unique in so many ways, it was hard for the government. Governments don’t like to be on the leading edge, they get nervous and want to know how we compare to other jurisdictions.” This transformation needed ongoing leadership and support from the field, administrators, teachers in their classrooms, as well as support of the government to provide the necessary funding. Cross-sector perspectives, connecting to discussions in other ministries such as Health, were also valuable in supporting the complexity of this transformation and recognizing the need for change.

“Rod Allen become more and more engaged in the transformation,” observed his colleague Rick Davis. “He was talented at engaging people in the conversations and could see a light at the end of the tunnel. We had a conversation about the unwieldy Social Studies 7 curriculum, and as we were talking I put it all on a page – Rod looked and said, ‘that’s exactly where we need to go, with big ideas’ and he was just off with creating the curriculum framework.”

Complexity – Emergence, Adaptability, Distributed Leadership

“We’re not going to get any better at the current game than we already are if the rules stay the same,” stated Allen. “We need to change the rules and the structure, not work harder and harder and get no more out of the system.” Allen talked about the “double S curve of change” (see Figure 11) describing how innovation happens.

“We’re not going to get any better at the current game than we already are if the rules stay the same.”

Rod Allen

Gorman referred to some incubators, projects, and pockets of innovation he knew of that helped create the architecture for transformation. He noted Jeff Hopkins, of Pacific School of Innovation and Inquiry (PSII), and Chris Kennedy, Superintendent in West Vancouver SD, as leaders who were shaping the way educational change could look. Gorman was also aware of

panels of local teachers and students who, initiated and organized by Jenn McCrae, spoke to all Ministry of Education employees at BC Education Days about what they needed in a school experience. These teachers and students represented diverse segments of the population. Gorman remembered a story told by a student who was a boat builder who had to take a PE credit because his interests didn't fit into the system. The student expressed his frustration with a system that didn't have a place for his interests or talents but had to fit in to the rigid structure of the graduation requirements; the student very eloquently showed how rules need to change for students, teachers, and administrators. These moments and stories spurred the transformation team to talk with more students, to share their insights, their needs, and their hopes for education.

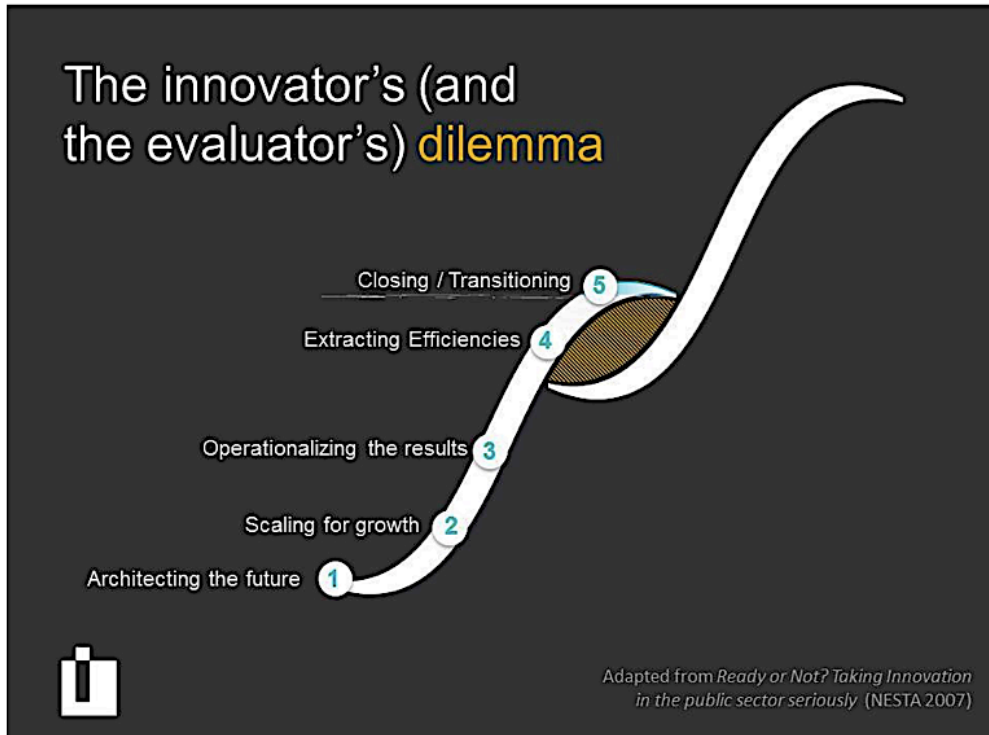


Figure 11 The “S” curve of change

In her role as Superintendent of Graduation and Student Transitions with BC Ministries of Education and Ministry of Advanced Education, Jan Unwin developed relationships with all areas of the ministry and continually brought them together. After Allen had brought the two divisions -- curriculum and assessment -- together to make connections, and Gorman had taken down walls (figuratively and literally), there were opportunities for the entire workforce of government employees – who had previously known their jobs very well – to develop new relationships and network with people in different areas.

“There’s been an evolution of Indigenous education in BC, trying to serve our kids better.”

Trish Rosborough

This enabled lots of internal debate, lots of dialogue, and meetings across groups to be able to navigate changing structures and different systems. Everything started to creak and stretch. Divisions that were formerly separate systems began to come together to collaborate and work together; people like Nancy Walt, Kristin Mimick and others who had been working in the Ministry for years were the connecting threads throughout the changes.

“...there was room for all of us to talk about things like alignment of First Peoples Principles, assessment and curriculum. There were finance people at the table, so we were able to see the big picture better; people could not just to talk about their own agendas but about everything in interconnected ways – it changes people’s thinking.”

Rod Allen

Another element of complexity that enriched the process was the authentic integration of Indigenous ways of knowing and learning. As Rosborough noted, “There’s been an evolution of Indigenous education in BC, trying to serve our kids better.” She continued, “People pointed to the First Peoples Principles often, and the leads of curriculum writing teams came to understand them, shaping the curriculum in really new ways. Every writing team operated with an understanding of the First Peoples Principles, it was part of the common framework from which everyone worked.” Rosborough was part of the leadership team that Rod Allen led and she noted, “there was room for all of us to talk about things like alignment of First Peoples Principles, assessment and curriculum. There were finance people at the table, so we were able to see the big picture better; people could not just to talk about their own agendas but about everything in interconnected ways – it changes people’s thinking. For example, I talked about square footage for schools because one of the things we know is our language and culture programs often aren’t allotted space, so we have language teachers who are hired but don’t get space or resources to do their work.” Issues such as allocation of space, ways in which students are treated, how all students needed to have access to content, the right of all students to graduate, all became important aspects of developing and shaping the new curriculum framework. Aboriginal education, described in the First Peoples Principles, became recognized as ‘good for everyone’, and the principles that underpin the curriculum as it now exists were influenced by Aboriginal education concepts, and there has been a change in the BE educational system as a result. Rosborough noted that FNEC and other Indigenous scholars such as Lorna Williams, Joanne Archibald, and Jeanette Armstrong were important to the creation of the principles that have become a foundational element of the curriculum framework.

Chapter 6: Out on the Road – Change through Consultation



As described previously, in preparation for redesigning a new curriculum framework following the release of the 2011 BC Education Plan, the Ministry transformation team thought it was important to understand what was going on in the province, to get educators' perspectives from the source, and to investigate current research. It was important that everyone needed to feel part of the conversations as the transformation got underway.

In preparation for sharing curriculum and assessment ideas more widely around the province, a [Curriculum and Assessment Framework Advisory Group \(AGPA1\)](#) was established in the fall of 2011. This group, comprised of individuals from several partner groups and academic institutions, was established “to provide advice on directions for curriculum and assessment. “In the spring of 2012, the province held 12 regional working sessions to present ideas from the advisory group” (Enabling Innovation, 2012, p. 2). Highlights from participants' responses from these regional working sessions focused on three main issues:

- 1) competencies – in curriculum, assessment, reporting, and graduation (as identified as cross-curricular competencies);
- 2) curriculum – reducing amount, focusing on key concepts and big ideas; reporting – reporting on cross-curricular competencies, use of performance-based language, shifting from the term ‘reporting’ to ‘communicating student learning’;
- 3) graduation requirements – demonstration of competencies, readiness not age; other suggestions about changes (Enabling Innovation, 2012, p.8-9).

An extensive and comprehensive list of recommendations from this group offered several important directions, including the need to:

- address competencies that were implicit in the description of The Educated Citizen (Enabling Innovation, 2012, see p. 10)
- mandate learning standards; there should be fewer, they should be rigorous, and emphasize higher-order concepts over facts to enable deeper learning and understanding

- ensure that curriculum offers increased flexibility to allow students to pursue their passions and interests and enable different and individual ways of learning
- focus on development of cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies
- support creative approaches in instructional design, including integrated or thematic units, project-based learning, inquires, areas of learning and competencies
- offer support materials that would be developed to support curriculum implementation, developed locally by educators or by the Ministry to guide student-initiated, self-directed, inquiry-based and interdisciplinary learning opportunities
- include considerations for vulnerable learners, including ways to make curriculum simple, elegant and deep while ensuring there are no major gaps, avoidance of repetition, and adequate support for beginning teachers (mention Mentor project funded)
- consider First Peoples principles in all curriculum
- attend to needs of a full range of students in BC schools, not just capable students whose social, economic or geographic contexts enable access to valuable learning opportunities outside of school (Enabling Innovation, p. 3-4).

“...they were all keen to facilitate conversations, to facilitate dialogue, to listen deeply, to ask questions and to build on the expertise of BC teachers.”

Maureen Dockendorf

Following the report of the Curriculum and Assessment Framework Advisory Group¹, field-based consultations began in earnest. Fourteen regional consultations were held across the province to garner feedback in response to the BC Education Plan, led by Ministry-based educators such as Rod Allen, Maureen Dockendorf, Jan Unwin, as well as Ministry staff, including Nancy Walt. As noted by Maureen Dockendorf, “they were all keen to facilitate conversations, to facilitate dialogue, to listen deeply, to ask questions and to build on the expertise of BC teachers.” As previously mentioned, Deputy Minister James Gorman and Minister George Abbott also attended sessions to hear what was being said and provide responses/answers to questions from educators, community, and other stakeholder groups. They recognized that, as Dockendorf commented, “If people feel part of change, they’re not as afraid of it.” The change, if it was to be accepted and embraced by educators around the province, needed to be done with them, not done *to* them.

“If people feel part of change, they’re not as afraid of it.”

Maureen Dockendorf

The big question to be answered in these public discussions was “Why transform?” Beyond considering that graduation rates were up, it was important to get the broader community to recognize that, as Unwin said, “too many kids sleepwalk their way through high school even though we count them as a success”. She noted that “when I talk to kids they are just compliant, they want to get their education done, so for me engagement has always been more important

than getting them out the door. We needed to recognize the importance of social as well as academic success.” Unwin continually engaged educational communities with these ideas – that the need for educational transformation is about much more than increasing graduation rates but about providing opportunities for educational success for all students.

“We needed to recognize the importance of social as well as academic success.”

Maureen Dockendorf

As noted in the first [AGPA report](#), *Enabling Innovation*, the Province used a variety of processes to consult broadly and gather advice about the best direction to take. There have been formal and informal consultations with provincial partners, school district-hosted sessions with local stakeholders, provincial and regional conferences and meetings, conversations with international experts, and online dialogue. (p. 2)

The document also noted that, “These consultations have been complemented by inquiries into best practices in BC as well as a review of transformation plans from other parts of Canada and the world” (2012, p. 2), recognizing the value of looking outwards from BC as well as inwards for ways forward.

These extensive consultations, (Dockendorf suggested that over 200 presentations had been given) in a short space of time by experienced field-based educators joined by politicians and bureaucrats, marked a changing approach to leadership. Everyone needed to feel part of the transformation, as it was a considerable departure from the then-current curriculum and assessment structures. As noted earlier, community members from business, art, and local politicians were included as well as the BCTF, BCSSA, FNESEC, and post-secondary institutions. Jan Unwin’s unique position that straddled the Ministry of Education and Advanced Education was the result of visioning of Gorman, Allen, and Avison, transformational leaders who recognized that, as Unwin stated, “if we try to transform K-12 education and don’t involve post-secondary institutions, we’ll blow it, we’ve seen that happen before”, where parents didn’t understand the need for change and opposed it, putting pressure on their local MLAs to stop changes. Unwin was the right person for the job, as she had an extensive and deep understanding of the current school system from within which was important in moving the transformation conversations forward. The big idea behind all these consultations, noted Unwin, was to,

promote the transformation agenda, K-12, have a face and present what it is we are doing so that everyone is on the same page -- for post-secondary it was awareness, and I tried to get invited to as many places as possible, to get folks to pay attention to the changes coming. I invited people to talk about how it will benefit kids in a new generation and to consider the impact on post-secondary, ultimately seeing this as a K-16 or K-20+ journey. It would have been at our peril if we had not started involving post-secondary institutions in the transformation conversations early on, and that was my job.

“We needed to ‘re-educate the system’”

Trish Rosborough

These broad-ranging consultations, championed by Unwin, were important in shifting the narrative from a knowledge transmission focus to the competency-based curriculum that was outlined in the BC Education Plan, and to begin to articulate a vision and a plan. The transformation team, traveling the province and talking to everybody, aimed to build a collective vision. “The ‘we’ of the team,” noted Allen, “became me with superintendents, senior staffs, trustees, and the seconded folks now in the Ministry, we build a team from government with allies in the field.”

The transformation team kept growing and growing, a key aspect of complexity thinking and networking. The consultations created social license and, suggested Unwin, “it was important to shift attitudes, talk together about how to better align our practice – it was an iterative process, recognizing that we will continue to get better and better, and that’s the way it should be in a rapidly changing world.” We needed to provide a clearer articulation between kindergarten through graduation to post-secondary education, and align our values and practices. Rosborough noted that we needed to “re-educate the system” and prepare post-secondary for a new kind of learner, to consider how universities and colleges could become more nimble and flexible with admission requirements. This implies a self-organizing system that is based on meaningful feedback loops that continually inform adaptation and change.

As consultations around the BC Education Plan were ongoing, Dockendorf continued to connect with school districts across the province through her Changing Results for Young Readers program (CR4YR). With 57 out of 60 districts involved at the outset of this program, Dockendorf used every opportunity to discuss curriculum transformation while working on CR4YR, weaving together conversations about early literacy and competency-based curriculum. As the CR4YR program was provincially well funded, Dockendorf utilized this support using the facilitators of the CR4YR program to make connections to the curriculum redesign.

“Educational leaders had a moral imperative to improve the system, to be student-centred, provide an educational journey that matters and is important to students, and connects them to a more systematic approach to education.”

Jan Unwin

As Unwin noted, “Educational leaders had a moral imperative to improve the system, to be student-centred, provide an educational journey that matters and is important to students, and connects them to a more systematic approach to education.” From these early in-depth consultations, a clear goal emerged, that “the Province needs a more flexible curriculum that prescribes less and enables more, for both teachers and students. It is clear that an education system redesigned with 21st century priorities in mind must remove the barriers that limit teachers’ ability to innovate and personalize learning based on students’ needs and the community context” (Enabling Innovation, p.2).

“...we didn’t have to wait for it to be perfect, we could start getting the ideas out in draft form, we talked about it in beta which was very different than most ministers and governments who needed it to be perfect before it could go out the door – but it was getting better and better and better, and people could really see that.”

Rod Allen

Gorman recognized that they had to be able to answer questions asked by parents, or politicians who had nothing to do with education, be able to articulate how the curriculum was going to be different, how the experience would feel different for the child, for the teacher and for the parent. “We need to be able to articulate it,” he said, “so that people could keep their temperature and feel comfortable.” Gorman recognized also that they needed to be able to articulate the vision, as it aligned with the BC Education Plan, in meetings with trustees and superintendents, “to know where we were going even as we built it.” “But,” explained Allen, “we didn’t have to wait for it to be perfect, we could start getting the ideas out in draft form, we talked about it in beta which was very different than most ministers and governments who needed it to be perfect before it could go out the door – but it was getting better and better and better, and people could really see that.”

Overcoming Challenges

As noted previously, the way was not smooth for educational change, due in part to the long history of education, multiple perspectives related to education, and the tumultuous relationship the BC government had with the BCTF over a long period of time.

Government Relations with BCTF

As with all change, particularly change as wide-sweeping as the BC Curriculum change, there are challenges and issues that need to be considered and addressed. One of the major challenges, as noted earlier, was the ongoing tension between the BCTF and the government – over the years this relationship had become adversarial and often confrontational, and not without reason. Teachers had been seeking equitable working conditions and salaries since the early 1990s. Strikes, rotating strikes, walkouts and job action had been ongoing as well as government legislation limiting teachers’ ability to strike. Unrest and acrimonious relations in educational sectors had marred BC’s history. The accomplishments of this transformation team, then, despite the difficult relationship between government and BCTF, are notable. In 2016, amidst the launch of the new curriculum, a landmark Supreme Court ruling found in favour of teachers that returned their 2002 contract conditions related to class size and composition. This ruling, then, required the government to supplement the budget to pay for the hundreds of teachers that would be hired to respond to the ruling as 2002 contract language was reinstated. Throughout the conflicts with the BCTF, the litigation on bills from the 2000s eras, Rick Davis worked to clear the way for Rod Allen, trying not to stir the dust but rather to run interference – Davis, in his words, was the ‘heavy’ while Allen was the ‘innovator’.

While these were difficult times, it was good news for education, as many teachers on temporary contracts gained more security, and many new teachers were hired. And despite the media-reported acrimony, the curriculum changes continued.

Teachers, understandably, were somewhat suspicious when the BC Education plan was launched in 2011. Government and BCTF had not been allies and did not have a trusting relationship. Some teachers saw the curriculum transformation as just another government-imposed change that would not remain. However, many teachers also saw the curriculum changes as needed, recognizing that the curriculum documents were not supporting their innovative work to meaningfully engage students in their learning.

“If we’re going to do this, we need to make sure that educators in the field support it.”

Glen Hansman

Funding

Funding had been, and would remain, an issue. “Some people liked the curriculum,” noted Rod Allen, “but not the funding formula, so that had to be discussed. There were specific social issues in different jurisdictions, and there was, whether real or perceived, lack of equity between districts. All of these issues needed to be addressed while still keeping attention on the vision.” Clearly, the relations with the BCTF were an ongoing challenge to negotiate.

“It’s not simple!”

Glen Hansman

Glen Hansman, current BCTF president, recalled talking with Minister George Abbott and saying, “If we’re going to do this, we need to make sure that educators in the field support it.” He noted that the budget had become really tight with the government and queried how to make professional learning opportunities available to support the new curriculum, how to add Aboriginal content and knowledge, how to support the changes to PE curriculum where sex education was added. The BCTF wanted to ensure that teachers developed skill sets needed for competency-based curriculum in ways that were accurate, up to date, and inclusive. With each ministerial change, “We’ve had to reboot the conversation, to ensure that all teachers had reasonable access, in-service, and professional development opportunities relevant to their grade level and subject area, developed in concert with the local First Nations’ population to make sure we do the Aboriginal content right – it’s not simple!” Hansman wanted to ensure that Aboriginal content was included appropriately into all content areas, including math and science, and to do it responsibly, not having teachers “relying on the internet for information”. As an educator, Hansman was aware of the resources teachers needed to effectively implement the new curriculum with up to date materials, access to technology, and ongoing professional learning opportunities. “We need tangible resources, not just textbooks but basketballs that actually bounce, Bunsen burners that burn, beakers that aren’t broken, books that are actually current, and technology that not just works but is then serviced and supported by the school districts – and to have equitable distribution of funds to all school districts and schools.” Pat Duncan, former superintendent of New Westminster School District, reiterated Hansman’s concerns and noted that, “teachers need to be supported to innovate and change. The ministry’s role is to provide the license to change and take risks which is why it is important to change the assessment and reporting structures as well as the curriculum – without assessment changing, it’s difficult to implement the curriculum”. Further discussion can be found more about assessment in later sections.

Changing Ministers of Education

“...teachers need to be supported to innovate and change. The ministry’s role is to provide the license to change and take risks which is why it is “important to change the assessment and reporting structures as well as the curriculum – without assessment changing, it’s difficult to implement the curriculum”

Pat Duncan

Also, it was important to stay the course when James Gorman and George Abbott stepped down in 2013. Navigating new relationships with the Minister of Education who followed George Abbott, Peter Fassbender, was important and time-consuming. Hansman recalled that “It was problematic when Fassbender spoke after the first K-9 curriculum documents went live on the website. They hadn’t lined up their communications around it, and I had to explain to the public and reporters what the philosophy was behind the change, to explain what the philosophy actually was. It was difficult for Minister Fassbender to understand or articulate the changes,” being new and not from the education sector. And Hansman noted, “every time there’s a new deputy or a new minister, there seems to be a restart in the graduate requirement conversation – which is frustrating!”

When Gorman left the position of Deputy Minister in 2013, he recognized that Allen needed to be able to navigate the political structure, so made efforts to help him learn government structure and how government works. In 2014 Allen became Assistant Deputy Minister, moving from his previously-held position of Superintendent of Learning.

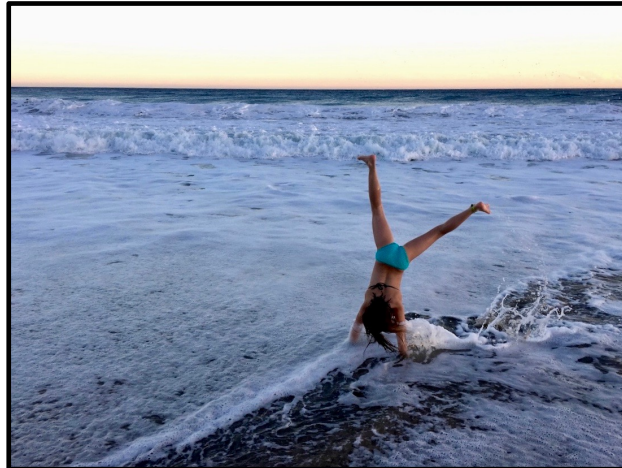
Creating and Maintaining Positive Relationships

“There were good attempts to weave in the First Peoples Principles into the curriculum,” observed Rosborough, “but a lot of people didn’t trust the integrity because of course you’re mixing politics and practice.” Teachers realized that education needed to catch up to the changes in the world, needed to be a process of enabling young people to be good critical thinkers, to be creative, to exercise their own volition over their own education – the world was changing and curriculum needed to respond to that. However, as Hansman commented, “these conversations have been going on for decades” and some saw this as just a rebranding to 21st Century Learning, with a bit of technology added. He suggested that what was needed was a consistency of direct partnership across the province, ongoing dialogue around assessment, providing feedback on the curriculum, advice on inclusion. The BCTF was looking for a multi-year plan to address professional development supports, ways to get resources into the hands of all teachers - - the slow pace of change in large institutions can be frustrating.

The pace of change was definitely frustrating for many advocating for curriculum transformation, but it was important to navigate the skepticism and suspicion surrounding the changes. Allen noted, “It wasn’t just relationships with teachers, it was parents who also have to trust us that we’re on the right path.” Education is traditionally very conservative, and it was challenging to navigate the narrative of “it’s not broken” with the belief that change was needed to better support kids. “We need to constantly maintain relationships,” he said, “with Parent

Advisory Councils (BCCPAC), with BCTF, with BCSSA, FNEESC, etc.” It was challenging and ongoing work.

Chapter 7: Finding Common Ground



“Can we jump?’ that is, have we reached the tipping point when the system itself is ready to embrace a shift?”

Rod Allen

All members of the educational transformation team continually navigated relationships. This ensured that there was common understanding and support of change by as many individuals, communities, and organizations as possible. At some point, said Allen, “We needed to ask the question, ‘Can we jump?’”, that is, have we reached the tipping point when the system itself is ready to embrace a shift?

Curriculum teams were formed in 2013, following a year of curriculum exploration and prototyping with educators, after agreement about formation of the writing teams was made between the Ministry and the BCTF. Allen and the BCTF realized that they needed to trust each other; the Ministry needed to trust that the teachers selected for writing teams would be knowledgeable and experienced and the BCTF realized that the curriculum framework needed to change. An agreement between the Ministry and the BCTF about selection of teachers for curriculum development was reached: Allen suggested the criteria for the type of expertise curriculum writers would bring and the BCTF developed a selection process that was representative of teachers from across the province and with a range of expertise. In order to maintain momentum, agreement to this was reached informally and relationally, both parties recognizing the need for agreement and to keep the process moving forward. The curriculum development was directed by educators in the Ministry and in the field rather than by politicians. The Ministry representatives included people in the Learning Division who had expertise in curriculum, assessment, Aboriginal Education, special education, French

programming, distributed learning; teachers and Ministry representatives all came together for the first time to talk about the curriculum in connected ways.

“I’m not sure where that idea came from but it was probably the best thing we ever did – everybody could see themselves in the work, curriculum was knitted horizontally and vertically, and there were the same writing teams for continuity and consistency. Writing teams had never been more on fire, they had an important mission – it was exciting times!”

Rod Allen

There were two unique features to this curriculum writing that had not previously occurred. First, the curriculum was all transformed at the same time, using the same framework (see p. 88 below). Writing teams came together to develop each disciplinary area from K-9, and all disciplinary areas were developed simultaneously. This approach enabled a common language to develop and common goals to be recognized and achieved, allowing for interdisciplinary connections between and across grade levels and subjects. Allen commented, “I’m not sure where that idea came from but it was probably the best thing we ever did – everybody could see themselves in the work, curriculum was knitted horizontally and vertically, and there were the same writing teams for continuity and consistency. Writing teams had never been more on fire, they had an important mission – it was exciting times!” The second feature was that assessment approaches were changed to align with the curriculum changes. Currently this ground-up approach is a unique feature around the world, and one that will enable the competency-based curriculum to take root. With this approach to curriculum and aligned assessment, teachers are given space to utilize their best skills to develop the best in their students, both individually and collectively.

“This new approach to curriculum provides space that allows students to find their passion, that’s a key principle, so if they really want to dive deep into an area, they can.”

Nancy Walt

Nancy Walt commented, “This new approach to curriculum provides space that allows students to find their passion, that’s a key principle, so if they really want to dive deep into an area, they can.” The multiple pathways enabled by the new curriculum supported teachers to approach their students’ learning in different things, in different ways and at different times. The curriculum made room for teachers and students to delve deeply into issues and ideas that they were invested in. “The goal of the competency-based curriculum was to support the goal of students developing as great creative and critical thinkers, great communicators, with the ability to be socially and personally responsible,” noted Walt. Weaving ‘core competencies’ into the entire curriculum enabled teachers to make use of the framework to guide them in building learning activities and to build them into the assessment they were using. Walt continued, “enabling students to be self-assessing with those competencies – that’s really the link to 21st century skills and to the educated citizen.” Walt and her teams of curriculum writers, who were BCTF-appointed teachers, were vitally important to the development of new curriculum using a

competency-based Indigenizing framework, sharing a common vision and totally committed to the work. Teachers had gained a sense of new curriculum directions from the BC Education Plan and were interested in seeing the developing curriculum and directions it was taking.

“At first I had no ideas how many pieces to the puzzle there were and how really hard it would be because there are so many systems and structures that were built for a different time.”

Jan Unwin

“Curriculum writing teams were diverse and represented different voices and regions of BC,” noted Hansman. “We had an unprecedented number of BCTF members appointed directly through their union to these writing teams, and BCTF didn’t veto things, just provided feedback and solicited feedback from the field that we sent to the Ministry.” The BCTF had the ability to contact teachers around the province, something the Ministry was not able to do. Hansman noted, however, that it was dependent on who was Deputy Minister as to whether the feedback was taken seriously or not.

Unwin, who had been involved in many of the consultation meetings across the province, commented, “At first I had no ideas how many pieces to the puzzle there were and how really hard it would be because there are so many systems and structures that were built for a different time. For example, funding models that drive a system of blocks of time for schools – we recognize now that that’s not how learning happens. Exam schedules, as another example, so when you’re looking at introducing assessments that are ‘for learning’ the changes align and become more nimble – but the current systems and structures are saying we can’t offer that many choices, we have to do exams at particular times, and there are mindsets about how schools should look and teachers’ mindsets about how and what they teach.” These take time to change, despite the significant numbers of consultations that had taken place. The transformation team was looking at shifting from a fragmented to a more holistic approach to education, moving from teacher-directed to including learner-centred approaches as the chart below describes (see Figure 12). As Trilling and Fadel (2009) outline, a new balance is being sought between the learning that happens from teacher directed tasks focused on covering content, managing learners through one-size-fits-all activities, utilizing textbooks to prepare students for competitive testing systems and activities that are learner-centred, aimed at engaging students through interactive tasks, problem solving, personalizing the learning, and encouraging collaboration and life-long learning.

Teacher-directed	Learner-centred
Direct instruction	Interactive exchange
Knowledge	Skills
Content	Process
Basic skills	Applied skills
Facts and principles	Questions and problems
Theory	Practice
Curriculum	Projects
Time-slotted	On-demand
One-size-fits-all	Personalized
Competitive	Collaborative
Classroom	Global community
Text-based	Web-based
Summative tests	Formative evaluations
Learning for school	Learning for life

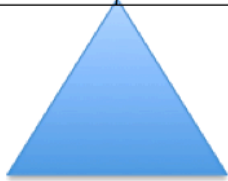


Figure 12 A new balance - Adapted from Trilling and Fadel

Feedback collected through the extensive consultations was summarized by Ministry staff and used to adapt the framework. Walt noted that there was general support for a flexible personalized curriculum – that came out loud and clear. She said, “From the first iteration we moved to ‘big ideas’, a different model, and that’s where we stayed, and then moved forward with fleshing it out.”

“...it was a ministry facilitated collaborative transformation”

Jan Unwin

“It was an exciting time,” noted Unwin. “Teachers were coming, creating and then having it go out for response and co-creation so everyone who wanted could give feedback -- all the feedback starts to create the curriculum and started to create the assessment – it was a ministry facilitated collaborative transformation,” a unique and innovative approach to curriculum redesign.

“...a good impetus for reimagining collaboration, cooperation and learning together with teachers as coaches and mentors – flipping the role of the teacher from transmitter of content to guide.”

Jan Unwin

Unwin saw the need for a culture of collaboration, one that had not been built into our education system up to this point. However, she recognized that the new curriculum was “a good impetus for reimagining collaboration, cooperation and learning together with teachers as coaches and mentors – flipping the role of the teacher from transmitter of content to guide.” This was, she recognized, “not an easy task when you’ve been teaching one way throughout your career, but there were pockets of innovation everywhere, teachers shaping their practice to better align with the increasingly diverse needs of their students.” She described the curriculum redesign as a validation of what we know to be good pedagogy and as permission for teachers to stop covering content and to start uncovering it. The competency links (later named core competencies) Unwin saw as the main thing, “so you can think critically and creatively, communicate in all different forms and so you are learning personal and social responsibility”, gradually shifting educators’ mindsets in regard to the role of ‘content’. Shifting mindsets is not easy, and she saw her job as helping early curriculum adopters to connect and keep the momentum going, staying passionate about education and the transformation, as well as supporting those who were ambivalent or pushing against change.

The changes based on a new competency curricular framework were major changes and required knocking down walls, both physically and metaphorically. This was true of the shift from content to competency focus, and also true of inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing and learning, suggested Rosborough. Outside perspectives, introduced by transformation team members who had come from the educational system, were important in supporting the changes and moving them forward. Unwin recognized the importance of outside perspectives as she began to learn the Ministry system – connecting the two (school districts and Ministry) was an emergent process, much the same as the curriculum development. As a member of the transformation team, she could give perspectives as an educator, which was an important piece of the puzzle, adding to the pieces (policy, funding models, structures) that were operating and being considered in the background. One of the strengths of all the members of the transformation team was that they were able to allow their roles to emerge and adapt to the process, knowing how to work both inside and outside the Ministry system, able to listen to multiple sometimes conflicting perspectives before making informed decisions.

A key consideration in creating the curriculum was captured in a quote from the [GELP website](#):

If passion, a love of learning and curiosity are essentials in the new world of work, how do we ensure that passion stays on the table when we’re talking about learning in schools? How do we connect what young people are passionate about in the rest of their learning and lives outside school?

In 2012 a draft prototype (see Figure 13) was released that worked to shape the future curriculum documents, focusing on creating space for learners to become engaged and develop around their own passions. The draft was shared with the broader educational community to

illustrate how curriculum would be structured, which included “Big Ideas” as well as Competency Links and Implementation Links. The learning standards for each course, as can be seen by the prototype, were significantly pared down. The development of the curriculum was still in progress, with content and interactive features being developed and refined through consultations with subject-matter experts and other educators in the field, but it was taking shape, a shape that was very different from the then-existing curriculum.

DRAFT PROTOTYPE: Science – Year 7					
CURRICULUM ORGANIZERS	Scientific Inquiry	Life Science	Physical Science	Earth Science	
BIG IDEAS	Scientists investigate the world around them in order to describe it, classify it, and test their ideas about it.	All living and non-living things are interconnected in ecosystems and all ecosystems are interconnected.	Matter has observable and measureable physical properties and those properties determine how matter is classified, changed and used.	The surface of the earth is constantly changing and no feature on earth is permanent.	
LEARNING STANDARDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> test a hypothesis by planning and conducting an experiment that controls for two or more variables create models that help to explain scientific concepts and hypotheses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assess the roles of organisms as part of interconnected food webs, populations, communities, and ecosystems assess the requirements for sustaining healthy local ecosystems propose solutions to reduce human impact on a given ecosystem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> examine properties of matter and communicate observations in a variety of ways classify substances as elements, compounds, and mixtures measure substances and solutions according to pH, solubility, and concentration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> analyse the dynamics of tectonic plate movement and landmass formation predict how given natural events help scientists understand earth's structure propose solutions to technical problems (e.g., seismic upgrading to buildings near fault lines) 	
COMPETENCY LINKS	Communication	Critical Thinking	Creative Thinking and Innovation	Personal Responsibility	Social Responsibility
IMPLEMENTATION LINKS	For Students (Self-assessment)	Assessment Demonstrations	Inquiries, Cross-curricular Integration	K-12 Science (Goals and Rationale)	Learning Resources

Figure 13 Draft prototype for Science year 7

As Fillion and Martelli (2017) noted, “the general structure of the new curriculum has been determined following extensive consultation with stakeholders”; a ground-up approach that aligns with current theories of learning and student success. The K-9 curriculum reached implementation in 2016, Grade 10 implementation was seen in 2018, and full implementation happened in 2019.

Cross-Appointment with AVED

“...if we want to change the system, we need to prepare our teachers to be able to have a different teaching and learning experience.”

Claire Avison

As the curriculum transformation was unfolding, the Ministry team recognized the need to communicate with post-secondary institutions in BC, all of whom would be affected by the K-12 curriculum changes. Claire Avison had moved to the Ministry of Advanced Education as

Assistant Deputy Minister in 2013 and in that role attended many meetings (with BCCAT, post-secondary institutions) “talking to them about what we were trying to advance and seeking their advice.” Avison was well positioned in this role as she had already spent time as ADM in the Ministry of Education working closely with Allen, Gorman, and Abbott and understood the redesigned curriculum well. She also recognized that “if we want to change the system, we need to prepare our teachers to be able to have a different teaching and learning experience.”

“ it was a unique role, working with Jan Unwin across ministries, and including post-secondary in the transformation process and conversations.”

Claire Avison

Teacher Education programs were beginning to work with the new curriculum to prepare teacher candidates for the upcoming changes. It was the cross-appointment of Jan Unwin to the Ministry of Education and Advanced Education (AVED), with the title ‘Superintendent of Graduation and Student Transitions at Ministry of Education and Ministry of Advanced Education’ that was a unique and challenging position, but also an important stroke of creativity. As the title suggests, this was an extremely complex position, and Unwin spent five years, from 2014-2018, championing the curriculum transformation to administrators, parents, post-secondary institutions, and teacher education students, other educational organizations and the general public. Her ability to share her deep knowledge of the education system and the Ministry system, to integrate and articulate the two, and to connect with a wide range of audiences, attests to her strength as a communicator and leader. Avison noted that, “it was a unique role, working with Jan Unwin across ministries, and including post-secondary in the transformation process and conversations.” Avison noted that AVED didn’t pay as much attention to the curriculum redesign as she would have hoped, and noted that more conversations should have happened with AVED about teacher education and currency, “which could have played into bargaining because teachers need to be supported in the classrooms and there was lots of change about teachers were doing their work.” The government, Avison explained, “with their political language and thinking, wanted to know that the money they were spending on education every year was making a positive impact, whether BC was losing ground, how BC was faring on international assessments, whether we were happy with the educational attainment and skills that our students come out with.” It was this type of thinking that Claire and Jan were trying to transcend in AVED, with mixed success. This work is ongoing.

Field-based interconnected partnership work, supported by Allen in his role of Superintendent of Learning and then ADM, was important work to continue growing the transformation ideas across the province. Mimick noted that “space was made for this work and it was supported; networks started to grow organically and were field-oriented.” It is when the transformation work becomes political, as Avison’s comment above suggested, that it gets away from connecting with people who are learning and committed to learning in their own contexts. Work such as the 3Campus Partnership, Rural Education Advisor, and CR4YR, supported by Ministry funding, was important to maintaining the momentum of transformation.

Chapter 8: Can we jump?



“...help create a system where kids can be coached and mentored through their journey, have it be more of a personalized education – we need to change mindsets and understandings of the role of teachers, one person at a time.”

Jan Unwin

Courage and Patience to Maintain Momentum

Through ongoing consultations, many meetings, presentations, and discussions, the transformation team saw the momentum growing. “Courageous patience,” Rod Allen called the team’s attitude, “we were investing time and resources upfront, which hopefully reduces the time and resources needed later – we were all helping each other through the transition.” Jan Unwin was willing to put in the enormous effort of engaging with many groups to, as she described it, “help create a system where kids can be coached and mentored through their journey, have it be more of a personalized education – we need to change mindsets and understandings of the role of teachers, one person at a time.” It was important to implement the changes with deep understanding of ‘why’ and ‘how’, not implement a superficial change of practice without really understanding it.

“We need a deep commitment, not compliance and superficial allegiance.”

Rod Allen

Allen commented, “We need a deep commitment, not compliance and superficial allegiance.” Teachers needed to trust that the Ministry was not going to ‘leave them hanging’, and the Ministry needed to attend to all aspects of the change, like bus schedules and funding models – seeing the big picture but understanding all the complexities in each individual context. The goal was, according to Unwin, to “help kids find their passion, cultivate their passion, and ensure that what they are learning has purpose for the individual and for their community.” It was important that educators also understood the nature of change – it’s uneven, bumpy, and has no guarantees, but is always what’s best for students. As Allen described, “teachers could be transforming in one area but still working to improve on another”, allowing for networking across subject areas.

“It was important that educators also understood the nature of change – it’s uneven, bumpy, and has no guarantees, but is always what’s best for students.”

Jan Unwin

The transformation team’s courage and commitment needed to be recognized and supported. Early on it was bolstered when the BC Education Plan was released. Abbott commented, “It was pretty cool the day we unleashed the education plan and it was with students, in a hotel in Richmond, it wasn’t presented as a fully articulated road map to the future, again it was a lot of high level concepts that, if you could get the concepts right the details would fall into place; it was perfect to kick off a web-based consultation, saying, okay, here’s where we want to go, is this the right place to go? And if yes, how do you think we ought to get there? So it posed provocative questions but it was sort of beacons -- why do you want to have it perfect when you’re going into a consultation?” The BC Education plan allowed people to say ‘yes, I agree with this overall but there’s one piece I’m concerned about’; often responses were entirely valid and the team shifted their approach somewhat. It was important at the beginning and throughout the whole process for everyone to see that they were all contributing to the implementation and creating the overall direction.

Allen noted, “We never drifted off the big picture, from the original 2011 thinking. We didn’t define ‘personalized learning’ and people appreciated that because it gave us all space to define it ourselves. Everyone knew what the big ideas were but there was space for everyone to understand it in their context – that’s not typical of government, but it shows the courage of the Minister.”

Nancy Walt, as Director of Curriculum & Assessment, had to realign her thinking and shift considerably throughout the process. She commented that she did lots of reading on learning development, shifted her orientation from psychology, and had to learn about curriculum. This

was, for her, an emergent process, and a courageous step, but she was also able to bring in perspectives from her Ministry work in evaluation/assessment. She recognized that she “definitely didn’t come with the end in mind, but was willing to engage with the emergent process that was unfolding.” She recognized that the Ministry team had a good conceptual model for curriculum and that the assessment flowed out of that; the curriculum and assessment had to align. This recognition that she brought built on her [Performance Standards work of the late 1990s](#) and rippled through the new transformation work. Walt commented, “I saw how a ground-up approach can be really strong, drawing on relationship-building rather than government dictating what will be done. James Gorman and Rod Allen paved the way for the innovative approach to curriculum development, they said, go forth and innovate – and we did!”

“These jobs are a great privilege, you have this moment in history where you’re able to invest as much effort, as much intellectual capital as you can invest, and then your time is gone, so what you choose to do with it matters. We were willing to work long and hard and were determined to make a positive contribution.”

James Gorman

Reflecting on the curriculum work done at the time, Gorman commented, “These jobs are a great privilege, you have this moment in history where you’re able to invest as much effort, as much intellectual capital as you can invest, and then your time is gone, so what you choose to do with it matters. We were willing to work long and hard and were determined to make a positive contribution.”

Peter Fassbender replaced George Abbott when he left the position in 2013. After Fassbender’s appointment, he held a large gathering at the Wosk Centre in Vancouver to announce the curriculum changes to a wide community, to celebrate how well BC was doing in education, and to ensure ongoing social license from the BC community to continue moving forward. “There was some political risk, putting a large diverse group of people in a room to have an educational conversation,” noted Allen, but there were some international educators such as Yong Zhao present to support and speak about the transformation. This much-publicized gathering built on George Abbott’s work of going out and talking with people, continuing to gather momentum and support.

“When we got discouraged, we would cling to those things where people supported you, go back to those moments that you realize you can act and actually know that the vision has merit.”

Rod Allen

“There were some very brave teachers throughout this process, during a time when the Ministry was in negotiations, disputes, and some ugly situations with the BCTF -- everyone had to have two sides of their brain working,” noted Rick Davis. It was sometimes challenging to separate out difficult labour negotiations one hand and curriculum development on the other. Teachers

stayed the course, despite unrest and tension, seeing better outcomes for kids, but also better teaching jobs developing as a result of new curriculum, allowing them to do their best teaching.

“When we got discouraged,” Allen recalled, “we would cling to those things where people supported you, go back to those moments that you realize you can act and actually know that the vision has merit.” The Global Education Leaders Program (GELP), first in Seattle and then other places around the world, helped with the realization that people internationally were talking about BC and looking at what was going on – Allen and his colleagues could bring back that information and start working with superintendents on activities that were learned at GELP. These discussions about our transformed curriculum put BC on the world stage -- people wanted to know how BC has accomplished the significant transformation that it has.

Release of Core Competencies to BC Educational Community

In 2011, the latest iteration of the Core Competencies (Figure 14) was presented on the BC MoE website.

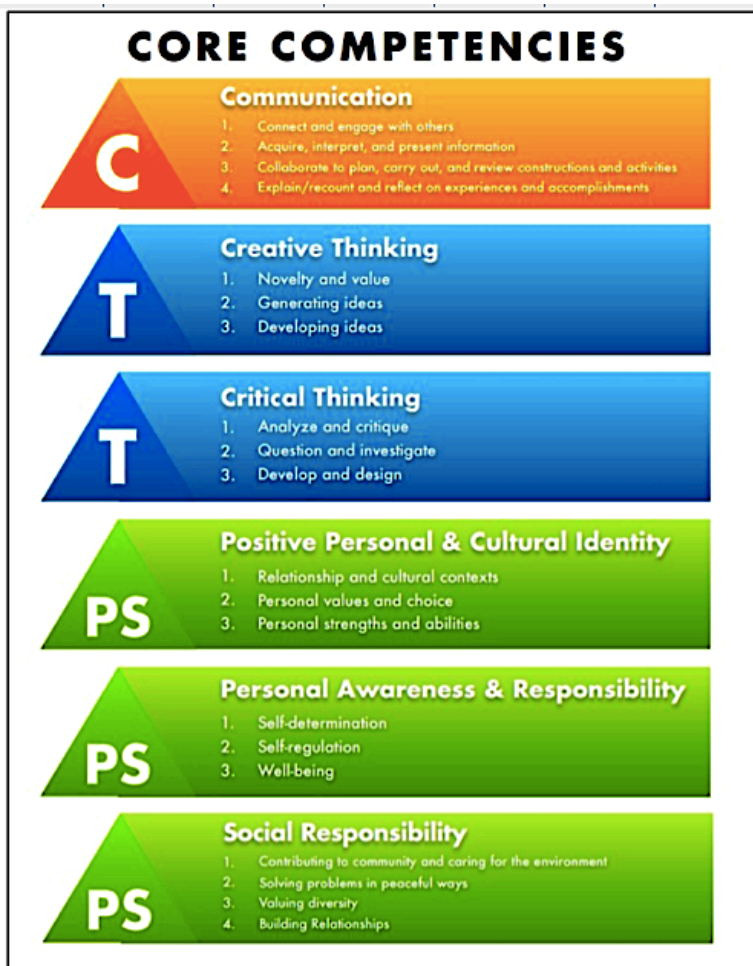


Figure 14 Core competencies

As Knaack (2017) noted, “The introduction of “Core Competencies” are front and centre to the new K-12 curriculum. They are to be integrated into all subjects and grades. The competencies are sets of intellectual, personal, social and emotional proficiencies that all students should develop to engage in more meaningful and life-long learning experiences.” As shown in the example in Figure 15 from the Science grade 9 curriculum, these are the skills and competencies that learners need for success throughout life. Through provincial consultations, three core competencies were identified (Communication, Thinking and Personal/Social).

“The introduction of Core Competencies are front and centre to the new K-12 curriculum.”
Liesel Knaack

The current version of the Core Competencies was shared on the Ministry of Education website; they are similar to the earlier version of 2012, but with some modifications.

The screenshot displays the Science grade 9 curriculum website. At the top, there are navigation links: Introduction, Goals and Rationale, Curriculum Overview, Supports, and a Download Curriculum button. Below this is the 'Core Competencies' section, featuring three triangles labeled C (Communication), T (Thinking), and PS (Personal & Social). The 'Big Ideas' section consists of three circles. The first circle contains the text 'Cells are derived from cells.' The second circle contains the text 'The electron arrangement of atoms impacts their chemical nature.' A callout box points to the second circle, containing the text 'Sample questions to support inquiry with students:' followed by two bullet points: 'Which patterns are shown on the periodic table?' and 'How can the periodic table be represented in a different form?'. Below the Big Ideas is the 'Learning Standards' section, which is divided into two columns: 'Curricular Competencies' and 'Content'. The 'Curricular Competencies' column lists 'Questioning and predicting' and 'Planning and conducting' with specific student expectations. The 'Content' column lists 'asexual reproduction' (mitosis, different forms), 'sexual reproduction' (meiosis, human sexual reproduction), 'element properties as organized in the periodic table', and 'The arrangement of electrons determines the compounds formed by elements'.

Figure 15 Organizing model of the Science subject area grade 9

Using this model, each grade and subject level of the new BC curricula is laid out in this same format with the ‘big ideas’ at the top of each page, along with what students should be able to ‘do’ on the left side and finally what students should ‘know’ on the right side. See: <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum>

The new curriculum has a greater emphasis on personalized learning (the design of learning experienced to address the diverse needs and interests of students), along with more flexible learning environments (allowing for teachers to create relevant, engaging and novel learning environments). These two distinct but related components of education are embraced in BC’s K-12 curriculum, allowing for teachers and students to explore local contexts, place-based learning and utilize technology to allow for more choice in demonstrating learning. This allows teachers to take the Know-Do-Understand Framework and make it work for localized issues and content, including designing a variety of new and integrated learning experiences for students.

Chapter 9: Removing Barriers and Moving Forward



“The transformation of education supported our moral imperative to offer students a different kind of education”

Jan Unwin

As the transformation journey continued, the Ministry transformation team kept up their relationship building with teachers, the BCTF, trustees and other groups, sharing the progress that had been made around the province. Postsecondary institutions began having different conversations and considering ways in which the curriculum transformation would impact them (see Knaack, 2017). Postsecondary institutions began to recognize the new curriculum which focused on personalizing learning using a competency-based framework with rich assessment that aligned and supported learning. Course curricula, developed by writing teams of teachers using the competency framework, also paid attention to ways in which the curricula could be authentically Indigenized.

Unwin noted that “I’ve noticed huge changes” in conceptual understandings as well as practice for educators around the province. The research-informed process, augmented by a deep commitment to consultation and representation of multiple perspectives, confirmed that this was the right way forward. “The transformation of education supported our moral imperative to offer students a different kind of education,” she noted, enabling success (that looked different for each student) and confidence in abilities for all to learn. “The intention is to create a better environment to intake all sorts of different kinds of kids, including international students,

Indigenous learners, immigrant children, artistic youth, and gender-fluid individuals – imagine the difference in learning when we can think about personalized learning that is able to get kids to take a big idea and turn it into something that has relevance and purpose for them. They’re going to engage in the ideas and the learning has a better chance of staying with them. This is a much better environment than the one-size-fits-all model that has shaped school for decades, which is important because we are getting more and more diversified in BC.”

The Know/Do/Understand (KDU) model that curriculum writing teams used to develop both curricular content and curricular competencies better prepares learners for integrated and meaningful learning, where they can explore with ideas, play with concepts, and exchange ideas with each other. However, it was recognized by everyone working on the transformation that change needs to be sustainable for the system – “if it’s hooked on the backs of a few, or a particular political party, we’re doomed,” commented Unwin. “We need to continue developing a strong network of educators who understand and have a growth mindset to adopt and apply the new framework.” The team recognized that attention was needed to develop new structures, including funding models, timetable structures, and new curricular areas (i.e., Career Life curriculum). Nancy Walt also noted that it was vital to recognize that assessment and reporting practices had to align with the curriculum if the curriculum was to be successfully taken up. “The curriculum transformation is a process, she noted, “and when it stops it becomes a different type of ‘fixed’ entity – this curriculum is a growing, living, changing thing, based on multiple voices, ongoing consultation, with the ability to continue to develop.” Rosborough agreed, “the process needs to be iterative, changing, and responding; if we do that right, parents, students, and community members will be part of keeping things changing.”

“...one of the keystones was that the work is co-creation, we’re going to do it together – not consultation, but actual collaboration, working together, educators knew everything that was happening because they were part of the building.” Allen noted that “part of the joy of co-construction is that you can’t just sit back and do nothing and then complain, you’ve got to own it, because you’ve built it.”

Rod Allen

Implementation

Pat Duncan, seconded former Superintendent from New Westminster, commented that “a lot of teachers are now philosophically aligned with the new curriculum redesign but they are still struggling with how to implement it, how to make it work in their particular contexts and classrooms.” A mindset shift is underway, reconsidering what should be happening in this place called ‘school’, and until teachers begin to understand that their job is no longer to be that knowledgeable person that imparts what they know and children are the vessel they are going to fill up, things will not change. The importance of ongoing professional learning cannot be overstated.

Between 2014 and 2016, with Rod Allen as Assistant Deputy Minister leading the process, curriculum for K-9 was written; it was implemented in September 2016. Allen commented, “the model for curriculum needed to be a very different one to pull off this transformation; one of the keystones was that the work is co-creation, we’re going to do it together – not consultation, but actual collaboration, working together, educators knew everything that was happening because

they were part of the building.” Allen noted that “part of the joy of co-construction is that you can’t just sit back and do nothing and then complain, you’ve got to own it, because you’ve built it.”

“One of the strategies we have used from the beginning was to keep it focused on what’s good for kids.”

Rod Allen

“Moving forward, noted Allen, “one of the strategies we have used from the beginning was to keep it focused on what’s good for kids; we staked out the high ground and stood on it and invited others to join, but stayed on the high ground -- focused on what’s good for kids” – in complexity terms, creating a system of self-organization. The curriculum became more about the ideas and beliefs around what education needs to be today and in the future, rather than an implementation structure and who was responsible for what. “We were developing and sustaining a common understanding and vision,” Allen said. “We gave people permission to try new things, to take risks, and challenge a systemic process that had been in place for a long time. It was important to develop teachers’ confidence and to provide models of others (both regionally and internationally) who are making changes and changing their practices.”

“Our teams of educators who began writing the curriculum, drawing on the BCTF for teacher members, were made up of both innovators and more traditional-thinking teachers – it was important to have diverse voices in the curriculum conversations,” commented Nancy Walt. The articulation committee made sure the different curricula was aligned to the Curriculum framework (Core Competencies, Big Ideas) and ongoing consultations have enabled educators to own the transformed curriculum as they were the creators of it.

Walt described the new curriculum as having several unique features as it was developed – it is open and not prescriptive, it can be shaped in many different ways depending on the needs of the teachers and students in their contexts. It also identifies ‘big ideas’ that were more conceptual, showed the connections across disciplines and helped teachers and students see the connections so they could recognize that learning doesn’t happen in silos of ‘subject matter’. “We also kept the document to one page,” she noted, which was a major departure from previous curriculum documents. The one-page document was both rich and complex, but not overwhelming; it was open and flexible, with an emphasis on competencies.

“The core competencies are critical,” Walt saw, “and they come alive in the curricular competencies, within the subject area or areas, so you can see the ‘thinking’ and ‘communication’ competencies in social studies, in science, in math. We are working to make the interdisciplinary aspects of the curriculum more explicit, which is part of shifting mindsets”.

Several ministry personnel, including Mimick, understood that in “thinking about a redesigned implementation process was very important to support ongoing collaborative networked implementation.” In order for the curriculum change to be sustainable and take root, the Ministry needed to maintain its strong relationships with the BCTF, school districts, administrators, and parents. “A lot of the elements and conditions and design and intention around the learning partnerships portfolio,” Mimick commented, “work that was partnered with school districts and focused on sustainable relational networked change, is a key way to start implementing these transformative shifts and to support ongoing learning partnerships as we all

move forward together.” There was a lot of political pressure to get things done fast but it was important to make the transformation in a sustainable way, ensuring that the investment of time to develop strong relationships becomes key. Pat Duncan noted that, “part of the implementation is supporting initiatives like 3Campus, Rural Education partnerships, and mentoring work, which was enabled by Rod Allen; we need partnerships to continue changing school culture that has been really engrained over decades.”

“Get time out of the equation, and think about assessment as more than evaluation.”

Rod Allen

Assessment

Rod Allen’s vision was to “get time out of the equation, and think about assessment as more than evaluation.” We need to think of the whole learning journey for kids, right from the beginning through to postsecondary and beyond – “it should not be a series of ‘handoffs’”, he stated.

Conversations about assessment, as it aligns to the curriculum, has been challenging, partly because assessment has many purposes and roles, as described by the AGPAII report (2015): “documenting system effectiveness; tracking and monitoring data to understand how well students are doing; assessing potential for future learning; and representing and reporting individual learning, among others” (p. 1). Particularly as curriculum change reaches the Graduation Years (grades 10-12), perspectives about assessment become more fraught with tension – students and their parents use assessment (test) results to determine post-graduation options; school districts use assessment results to determine the success of their work, post-secondary institutions use assessment data to determine admissions. What often gets lost in all of these competing agendas is ways in which assessment can be supportive or detrimental to learners – considering their own personal goals, strengths and approaches to learning, background, and confidence. As noted in Fu, Hopper and Sanford’s (2018) review of research on reporting student learning, the key is assessment that informs teaching practice and the learning environment that is co-created with students, but ultimately motivates students to want to learn.

Earl’s (2003) book *Assessment as Learning* described three types of assessment, assessment ‘of’ learning, assessment ‘for’ learning, and assessment ‘as’ learning. The transformed curriculum, with an emphasis on a competency-based, personalizing learning approach, calls for alignment to ways in which assessment is understood and implemented. Using Earl’s framework Knaack (2017) calls for a “reconfigured assessment focus” with a greater emphasis on the processes of learning and less emphasis on a testing regime (Figure 16).

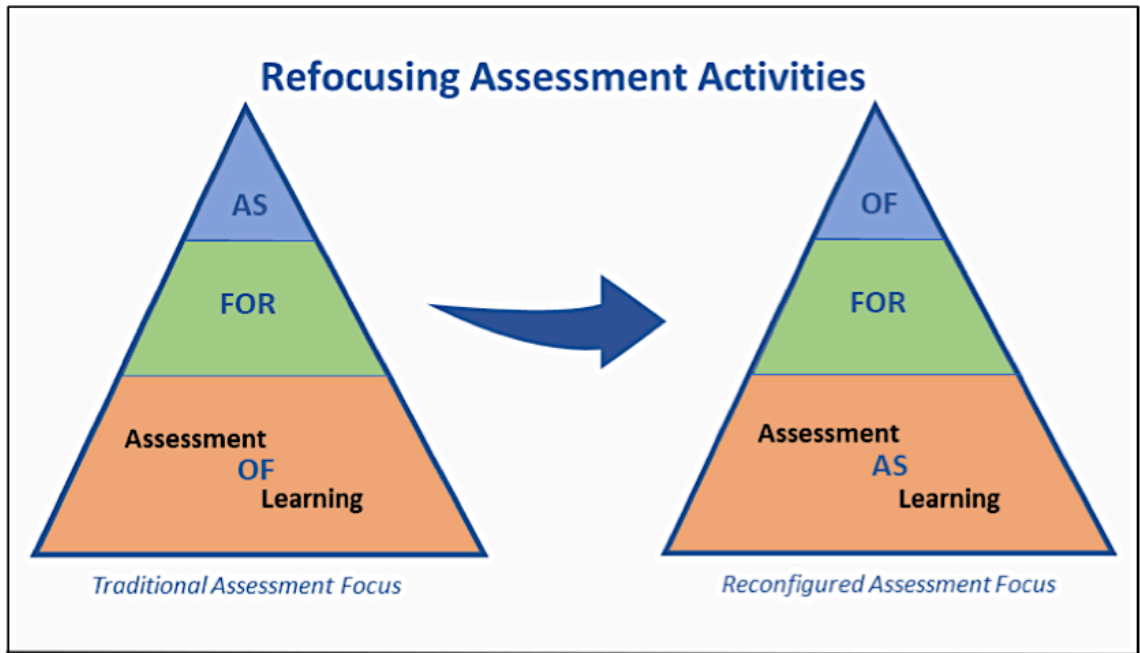


Figure 16 Model of realigning assessment practices

“Assessment and instruction are very interconnected, and so BC’s assessment system has been redesigned to align with the new curriculum. Assessment is given a much higher profile than in the past.”

Liesel Knaack

As Knaack (2017) notes, “Assessment and instruction are very interconnected, and so BC’s assessment system has been redesigned to align with the new curriculum. Assessment is given a much higher profile than in the past”, understanding it as diverse ways to communicate student learning rather than measuring and comparing students through grading. “The triangle diagrams show the shift from a greater emphasis on assessment of learning (tests, assignments, quizzes, formal evaluations) to more emphasis on assessment as learning (self-assessments, peer-assessments, reflections on learning, self-regulation monitoring etc.) – and this aligns with the significant research in teaching and learning. Students have richer and more impactful learning experiences when they have more opportunities to engage in assessment ‘as’ learning. As Knaack (2017) noted, “assessment ‘for’ learning (i.e., the ongoing assessment teachers do to monitor a student’s day to day progress to modify teaching) remains important in the reconfigured assessment focus”.

A significant change, unique to the BC Education system at the time of writing, is removal of provincial examinations, replaced by more flexible opportunities for teachers to create assessments appropriate to their students’ needs and interests, supporting a more personalized approach to learning. Paper and pencil tests are inappropriate measures of core competencies; self-assessment of learning is being described and supported by the Ministry in ways that had previously not been seen. Communication of student learning -- to parents, students themselves,

and other communities – is being done in a range of ways that align with the Know/Do/Understand framework. More and more teachers are utilizing new technologies, digital portfolios, video clips, and blogs to record and share evidence of student learning. Particularly in the K-9 years, assessment ‘as’ learning is being developed more fully, (enabling students to critically reflect on their progress and begin to make decisions about next steps) while there is less emphasis on assessment ‘of’ learning (where assessment is intended to measure student learning through externally-created tests).

Different models of documenting students’ development were explored and developed in the Ministry, including the one shown in Figure 17 that shifted from ‘grade levels’ to ‘profiles’ by which students of all ages and backgrounds could move through the profiles at a rate that best suited their learning needs, interests, and abilities.

However, as noted before, many factors come into play when considering curriculum and assessment changes, including funding models, policy, and public expectations. Allen asked, “How do you a build a system that is responsive to kids’ needs?” As Walt commented earlier, it isn’t possible to transform thinking without thinking differently about assessment. The Indigenous integration needed to shape the assessment approaches, as well as thinking about the implications of a personalized learning approach on assessment.”

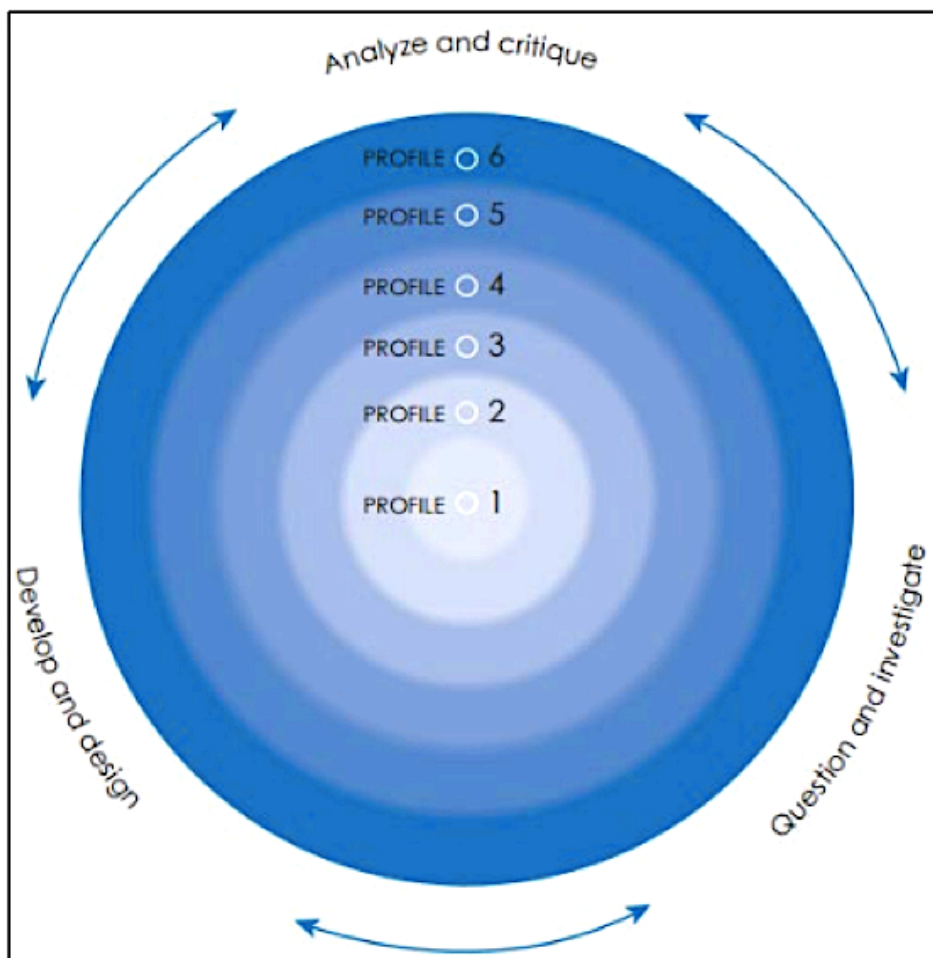


Figure 17 Prototype student assessment profile

In regards to the process of transforming curriculum and assessment, Allen described:

We were using a split screen, we were writing an improvement agenda at the same time as writing an innovation agenda; they were different yet connected, and you have to know which is which because the structures you put around an improvement agenda, we know there's nothing new there. We just needed to do it and get better at it and learn more and go deeper into it – that was the improvement agenda. But using portfolios as assessment, doing something completely different around the classroom is part of a transformation innovation agenda, and some people are willing to step up and 'strap themselves to the front of the fishing trawler (that's a Greenpeace reference)'.

And rather than attempting to shift the mindsets of everyone at once, a daunting task, Allen noted, "we were putting our energies into the twenty percent of educators who identify as innovators – we focused on this community of engagement first." It was important to have models and examples to share with other educators who were interested in adopting the new curriculum but were looking for support.

Inside the Ministry, discussions about assessment practices and policies "demonstrated the complexity of some of the new things we were trying," commented Allen, "and the silliness of past things we were doing – but we were focused on what is good for kids and there's nothing I've seen in any literature anywhere that says ranking and sorting kids is good for learning, so we need to stop, to get out of that business. It's really hard but I think we can do it, we're now seeing postsecondary institutions in the province come out with new thinking about assessment." Allen noted that changes to assessment practices and thinking were complex -- "while we are building a new assessment framework, we still have all the old policies in place and are still required to do all the things we have been doing previously, such as reporting. If teachers are developing stronger positive relationships with their students, integrating Indigenous ways of knowing and being, they can't continue assessing in the same old way, 'crush their souls at the end of learning with 25 multiple choices questions on a test' – we're in a different place in relation to assessment now." It was becoming clear that our pedagogical approaches, assessment, and curriculum all have to change, that one can't be changed without the others – they all need to align so that we can maintain the mandate of being responsive to kids' needs first. The purpose of education needs to be reconsidered and shifted, recognizing who and what the transformation ultimately is for. A mindset shift is needed, including ways to regroup learners and adults, encouraging open-minded learners, rescheduling when learning happens, and daring schools to try something different. It was this work that Jan Unwin continued, sometimes in the face of challenge and negativity, but she recognized the importance of maintaining the conversations, keeping communication channels open, and attempting to allay the fears of educators and institutions who saw the changes as a threat to successful graduation and post-secondary education.

A significant challenge, of course, is to maintain and keep the changes going, to build sustainability into the entire transformation. Walt noted that we needed to "build new concepts about assessment into the reporting policy, as students should be self-assessing on the core competencies, and that's the link to 21st century skills and to the educated citizen" (see p.14).

In 2016, and then again in 2018, there was some shift in the reporting order, allowing teachers to try something different, to be more flexible and innovative. Walt has seen districts doing a lot of innovative things, but others have still been able to follow a traditional assessment model. Currently in the Ministry website is a [document supporting self-assessment of the core competencies](#), demonstrating the importance of students taking ownership of their learning and providing rich examples of alternative forms of evidence of learning. Also on the Ministry website is an "[Educator Update: K-9 Reporting](#)", at the bottom of which is the statement, "This

policy was developed as an interim measure to provide districts with guidelines and flexibility as they implement the new K–9 curriculum. It will likely be in place until a new policy is landed.” It is clear that assessment is still an aspect of the curriculum transformation that is in process; the next steps will be important in determining how the transformed curriculum will move forward and shift the way in which education is done in BC.

As shown in Figure 18, in order to support shifts in thinking about assessment, a set of descriptors related to the ‘profiles’ mentioned on page 96 were created, so as to enable learners to track their own learning journey and describe it for themselves, using “I can” statements to support students’ own ability to assess their own progress.

Set of Profiles: Critical Thinking Competency	
These profile descriptions include the three facets that underpin the Critical Thinking Competency: analyze and critique, question and investigate, and develop and design. The three facets are interrelated and are embedded within the profile descriptions, which are written from a student’s point of view.	
PROFILE	DESCRIPTION
1	I can explore. I can explore materials and actions. I can show if I like something or not.
2	I can use evidence to make simple judgments. I can ask questions, make predictions, and use my senses to gather information. I can explore with a purpose in mind and use what I learn. I can tell or show something about my thinking. I can contribute to and use simple criteria. I can find some evidence and make judgments.
3	I can ask questions and consider options. I can use my observations, experience, and imagination to draw conclusions and make judgments. I can ask open-ended questions, explore, gather information, and experiment purposefully to develop options. I can contribute to and use criteria. I can use observation, experience, and imagination to draw conclusions, make judgments, and ask new questions. I can describe my thinking and how it is changing.
4	I can gather and combine new evidence with what I already know to develop reasoned conclusions, judgments, or plans. I can use what I know and observe to identify problems and ask questions. I can explore and engage with materials and sources. I can consider more than one way to proceed and make choices based on my reasoning and what I am trying to do. I can develop or adapt criteria, check information, assess my thinking, and develop reasoned conclusions, judgments, or plans.
5	I can evaluate and use well-chosen evidence to develop interpretations; identify alternatives, perspectives, and implications; and make judgments. I can examine and adjust my thinking. I can ask questions and offer judgments, conclusions, and interpretations supported by evidence I or others have gathered. I am flexible and open-minded; I can explain more than one perspective and consider implications. I can gather, select, evaluate, and synthesize information. I can consider alternative approaches and make strategic choices. I can take risks and recognize that I may not be immediately successful. I can examine my thinking, seek feedback, reassess my work, and adjust.
6	I can examine evidence from various perspectives to analyze and make well-supported judgments and interpretations about complex issues. I can determine my own framework and criteria for tasks that involve critical thinking. I can compile evidence and draw reasoned conclusions. I can consider views that do not fit with my beliefs. I am open-minded and patient, taking the time to explore, discover, and understand. I can make choices that will help me create my intended impact on an audience or situation. I can place my work and that of others in a broader context. I can connect the results of my inquiries and analyses to action.

Figure 18 Assessment literacy

The BC Ministry website offers a discussion of [‘assessment literacy’ that reflects changes in thinking and practice about assessment](#). As Suzanne Hoffman, current Superintendent of Vancouver School District, notes, “There has been an evolution around assessment practices in schools and districts; everyone is on a journey and we are all at different places on that journey.” Recognizing this, the Ministry has attempted to support educators, parents, and others in better understanding the directions being taken in BC. This document addresses “why is assessment literacy important?”, “How are curriculum, instruction, and assessment connected?”, “Given the shifts in curriculum, how do you see assessment practices evolving?”, “Why is it important for students to take more ownership of learning?”, and “How do we best build assessment literacy across our education system?”

In Figure 19, a model of the interconnectedness of curriculum, instruction and assessment is presented on the Ministry of Education website, indicating new directions for assessment thinking and practice in BC, noting that the “assessment takes place throughout the learning cycle.”

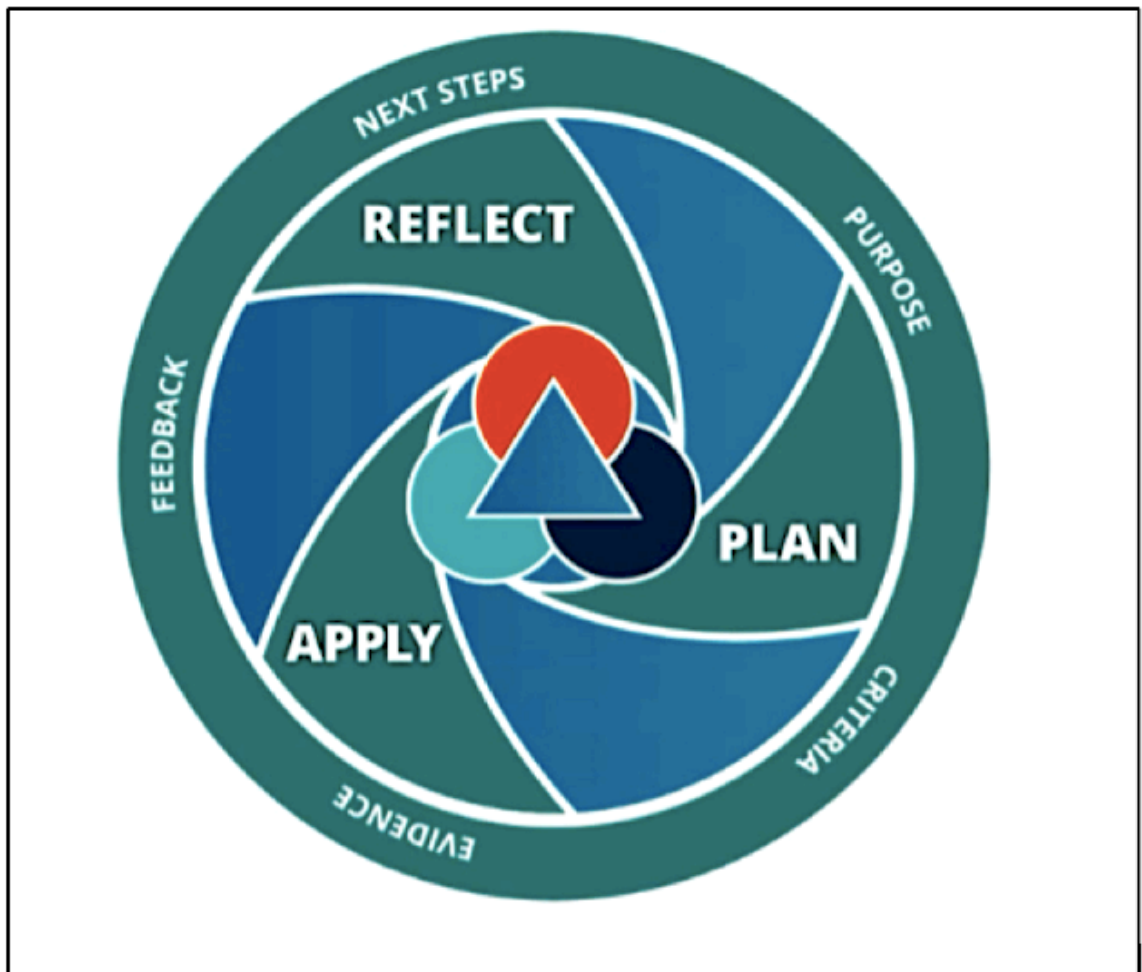


Figure 19 Model of interconnectedness of the curriculum

This is further supported by key ideas noting that “Assessment is: formative and differentiated; infused in the learning cycle; co-constructed; and strength-based and includes goal-setting” (p. 4). This document further notes that [“co-reflection and co-construction are collaborative](#)

[processes that support student ownership of learning](#)... and [ownership is the foundation of student agency.](#)” These comments suggest a very different direction for assessment-supported curriculum transformation than has been considered in the past, and indeed has been considered in most educational jurisdictions around the world, supporting our claim that BC is a global leader in educational transformation.

Literacy and Numeracy Foundations: Graduation Assessments

Replacing provincial exams in BC are two provincial assessment tools intended to ensure that all students complete high school with strong foundational skills in numeracy and literacy. These tools [“represent a fundamental shift in large-scale assessment, as it aligns with key changes taking place in the provincial education system”](#). The numeracy assessment is “based on mathematical concepts learned across multiple subjects from kindergarten to Grade 10”, and had three components: 1) common; 2) student-choice; and 3) self-reflection. The graduation literacy assessment example, shown in Figure 20, “uses an evidence-centred design” by focusing on multiple forms of evidence that supports core competencies of critical thinking and communicating. And while these assessment tools are in ongoing development, there is hope that BC will continue to lead the global community in shifting ways that assessment is used to support students’ learning rather than to merely measure it. As described on the Ministry website, the literacy assessment is an attempt to align with the education directions of the province, including core competencies, personalization, deeper thinking, student engagement, cross-curricular skills, First Peoples, collaboration, and self-reflection.

Education Direction	Implications for the Graduation Literacy Assessment
Core Competencies	The Core Competencies shape the design of and questions in the assessment, with particular emphasis on Communication, Creative Thinking, and Critical Thinking. The Personal and Social competencies are exemplified in questions requiring a written response and student self-reflection component of the assessment.
Personalization	The assessment offers students a choice of options for demonstrating their skills and abilities, thereby allowing them to better show what they know, understand, and are able to do, while maintaining rigorous provincial standards.
Deeper thinking	The assessment involves complex thinking and analysis skills. It looks at literacy skills through essential questions and asks students to comprehend and critically analyze a variety of reading materials, communicate their understanding, and make personal connections to these materials.
Student engagement	Assessment tasks, prompts, and stimuli are developed to be engaging and interactive in nature.
Cross-curricular skills	The assessment reflects the critical literacy skills acquired and applied across all areas of learning.
First Peoples	First Peoples content is contained in every assessment. The First Peoples Principles of Learning have helped shape the development of the assessment, and First Peoples texts are part of the assessment.
Collaboration	The assessment offers students an opportunity to interact with pre-assessment preparation materials and to collaborate with others.
Self-reflection	The assessment asks students to reflect on their performance on the assessment and to note particular aspects of their work.

Figure 20 Review of implications of graduation literacy assessment

Although no longer available on the BC Ministry website, the following example of numeracy shown in Figure 21 is an example of ways that students can show their numeracy understanding, a very different approach from previous tests that students have been given.

Exemplar #2 – Score: 4

- Work shows an advanced understanding of the situation
- Appropriate strategy implemented
- Correct mathematical solution
- Evaluates mathematical solution in context
- Communication is clear, detailed, and organized

$150\text{L/day} \cdot 7 \text{ days} = 1050\text{L/week (maximum)}$
 $1 \text{ shower per day} = 8\text{L} \cdot 11 \text{ mins} \cdot 7 \text{ days} = 616\text{L}$
 $\text{Clothes washer twice per week} = 120\text{L}$
 $\text{Dishwasher 3 times per week} = 16\text{L} \cdot 3 \text{ uses} = 48\text{L}$
 $\text{Toilet 4 times a day (maximum)} = 6\text{L} \cdot 4 \text{ uses} \cdot 7 \text{ days} = 168\text{L}$
 $\text{Tap } \frac{1}{2} \text{ min per hand wash 4 times per day} + 1 \text{ min for cooking per day} = (\frac{1}{2} \cdot 4 + 1) \cdot 7 = 21\text{L}$

Total:

616L
120L
48L +
168L
21L
973L/week

$1050\text{L/week} > 973\text{L/week}$ so I managed to use less than an average of 1050 L in my weekly budget.

Figure 21 Example of numeracy in the new curriculum initial planning documents

Glen Hansman, BCTF President, however, commented that there have been, many attempts in this province to do massive curriculum reform and usually it's failed – it gets part way and then sort of collapses, either because there's a regime change, blowback from parents, blowback from the profession – so, it's important to be asking what is it that is going right in this set of circumstances, what has gone wrong in the past that we could reflect upon and to make sure it's sustainable -- this time we're going to get through all the way to the end, but it definitely hasn't been a perfect process!

Hansman has been one of the few people who has been a constant throughout the entire process and was just starting with the BCTF when George Abbott first became Minister of Education. He reflected on the overall process:

I was elected in 2009-2010, so have a broad vantage point – I remember sitting in George Abbott's office at the legislature and him initiating a conversation around that started, 'I'm thinking of changing all the curriculum at the same time K-12, all subject areas, and looking at assessment and looking at pedagogical practices – what do you think?' We said 'that's interesting' – we think we'd like to be involved but there's some things we think would help make this successful.

A positive element of the new change, from BCTF's view, was that the existing IRPs had been done piecemeal and so some of the curriculum documents didn't fit well together; there was redundancy or they were written by different groups of people at different times in different spaces. Hansman reflected, "We had a completely different paradigm – so maybe there was an opportunity – I was hopeful -- since we were very interested in infusing Aboriginal content throughout all the curriculum documents. We were very much of the same view as Abbott around boiling things down a little bit, especially at the secondary level, to make the curriculum documents less trying to gallop through a bunch of content and trying to localize things more." The curriculum currently reflects the goals that Hansman and BCTF were envisioning; however, he commented, "The Ministry hadn't really fully embraced the notion of 'personalized learning,' but they were asking 'how do you get some more 'breathing room'? That had some appeal to us, a conceptual curriculum rather than content-focused, but with things fitting together, some coherence; we needed a really good collaborative conversation around what is the curriculum."

...now it has been changed to 'student success'; the conversation became focused on competencies, making education personal, recognizing that it is more important to have critical thinkers and problem solvers than storehouses of information.

Pat Duncan

"'Student success' is the term now being used", noted Duncan; "it started out being about student achievement and we were always asking, what does that mean? What is student achievement? Does it mean high percentages on provincial exams or does that mean leaving high school with skills that are making you have the ability to achieve whatever you want, wherever you are? However, now it has been changed to 'student success'; the conversation became focused on competencies, making education personal, recognizing that it is more important to have critical thinkers and problem solvers than storehouses of information. So, if competencies are the focus, let's focus on that – what skills do we want our children to have when they graduate? If you can Google it, why are we 'teaching' it? Deputy Minister Gorman was an enabler, and enabled us to engage in these important conversations, conversations that have got us to where we are today."

If you can Google it, why are we 'teaching' it?

Pat Duncan

The [Advisory group \(AGPA I\)](#), established at the outset of the transformation in 2011 and found documented in "Enabling Innovation, 2012, gave advice on assessment and reporting, recommending that all assessment activities, whether province-wide or classroom-based, support ongoing learning and focus on the five cross-curricular competencies as well as learning standards. This Advisory group recommended that the assessment materials developed to support classroom learning should utilize multiple approaches, emphasize student self-assessment and assessment for learning. Further, they recommended that the Ministry work with educators to create developmental continua and exemplars for each of the cross-curricular

competencies (later renamed Core Competencies) and that the Ministry refresh and add to existing performance standards to reflect changes to the curriculum (Enabling Innovation, p.7).

The Advisory group (AGPA I) developed a set of guidelines to give direction for provincial assessment aligned with the transformed curriculum:

- There should be provincial assessments at the elementary and secondary grades (what they look like is to be determined).
- Provincial assessments should be designed to support learning by providing relevant, timely feedback
- Provincial assessments should incorporate a wider variety of formats than at present, including performance tasks, structured inquires, and classroom-based assessments.
- In elementary years, literacy and numeracy skills and competencies should be assessed
- In secondary grades, increased emphasis should be placed on competencies and key areas of learning. (Enabling Innovation, p.7)

[AGPA I](#) “recommended a shift in language use – from ‘reporting’ to ‘communicating student learning’ – to highlight the importance of ongoing communication between the learners, teachers, and parents. As well, they recommended that teachers report at key times in the year on cross-curricular competencies and key concepts within areas of learning using clear performance-based language” (Enabling Innovation, p.7). The shifting of assessment practices has moved forward in line with the curriculum change, but has been challenging, particularly as it moves toward graduation years.

[AGPA II, Advisory Group on Provincial Assessment: the Graduation Learning Years](#) was reconvened in 2015 to make recommendations on assessments in the graduation learning years (grades 10-12). In their report (Magnusson & Frank, 2015), the group notes:

The BC Education Plan is moving toward educational choice and flexibility, with less focus on specific facts and more on concepts and competencies. Within this environment, teaching is no longer about imparting or mediating knowledge, and learning is no longer about absorbing information in order to prepare for timed achievement tests. Within the new vision for education, teaching will involve empowering and guiding learners, who will engage in discovery, creativity, and problem solving. The freedom from structured curricula allows students a freedom to develop curiosity, imagination, and the ability to think alone and collaboratively in groups with others.

Further, the report notes that “whatever program of assessment is adopted, it must place the needs of the learner first and it must provide a broad and nuanced picture of learning.” (p. 1). AGPA II identified five key components that the BC education system should focus on, which clearly align with the Core Competencies. Graduates of the BC education system should be:

- Literate
- Numerate
- Both curious and a critical thinker
- Able to lead a healthy lifestyle
- Able to understand and connect to society and the community, and able to connect to one’s past, present and future. (p. 2)

A revisiting of the principles identified from AGPA I (p. 6-7) maintained the focus but provided further elaboration on them. From the second collaborative report, seven recommendations were provided (p. 4) and shown below in Figure 22:

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Advisory Group believes that assessments should provide an opportunity for students to respond critically and creatively to prompts that allow them to show what they are able to do, rather than revealing the things they are not able to do.
2. The Advisory Group notes that no one instrument can meet all purposes: each instrument has strengths and limitations. It therefore recommends that the Ministry develop a dynamic set of instruments within a suite of assessments. A review of evidence-based practices, assessment approaches, and tools should be completed to guide the development of the most appropriate and effective system for the BC education system. The Advisory Group recommends a move toward forms of assessment that connect closely to classroom assessment and that examine 21st century skills and competencies.
3. The notion of self-evaluation needs to be embedded into the learning and assessment process. Self-evaluation allows students to reflect on where they are now, where they intend to go, and what they need to do to get there. When self-evaluation is implicit, the learner will be responsible for and an active participant in his or her own learning.
4. The Advisory Group recommends that adaptive assessments be used early in the graduation learning years. Provincial assessments administered at the beginning of the graduation learning years should not limit opportunities as students grow and develop throughout the remainder of their time in secondary school. Rather, assessments should identify areas for support and intervention early on. Teachers can intervene effectively and in a timely manner, identifying areas in which the student should be encouraged to excel.
5. Assessments of literacy and numeracy, which are not tied to specific curricular areas, should form the foundation of the provincial assessment program, and indeed should be the only formal assessments in the early stages of the graduation learning years. These assessments should be offered in a flexible manner, at a time in the school year when the classroom teacher, in consultation with the learner, feels that the learner is ready. Data collected in these assessments should measure system performance and provide feedback for individual development.
6. For curricular areas such as science and social studies, the Advisory Group suggests that the focus of assessment be on related competencies. For example, the notion of past, present, and future ties closely with social studies as well as the personal identity competency area. Science connects well to critical and creative thinking as well as personal and social competencies. Such assessment could happen in the form of classroom-delivered inquiries, a series of capstone projects, or a comprehensive examination to be completed at the student's own pace. These assessments must not further disadvantage vulnerable students. Information structures and support practices must be put in place to help highly mobile learners and to ensure that progress on these assessments is not lost when students move to a new school or district.
7. Competencies such as critical thinking, problem solving, working together, empathy, social responsibility, and creativity are not curriculum-specific and should not be assessed using a formal provincial examination. One approach, as noted above, might be the completion of a capstone project or comprehensive examination, in which students demonstrate their learning across multiple domains: transferable skills (e.g., teamwork), higher order thinking skills (e.g., creativity), foundational cognitive skills (e.g., literacy), working with others (e.g., group projects), and content (e.g., democracy). If a capstone project approach is chosen, it must be understood as a school-based project that will be completed during school time with the support of teachers. Much of the work can be gathered into a portfolio (e.g. a digital portfolio), to be used by students, post-secondary institutions, and employers.

Figure 22 Recommendations on assessment by AGPA II

These recommendations have been taken into account as the assessment policies and tools are created, revised, and refined for use in BC schools. However, as mentioned earlier, assessment has many purposes, ranging from feedback for individual learners in ways that support all of them to a “comprehensive program of assessment ... to ensure that the system is functioning effectively while concomitantly ensuring that no subgroup within the system is disadvantaged.” (AGPA II, p.1). A tall order for any educational system, requiring that the Ministry keeps moving forward to ensure that students learn from feedback that simultaneously helps them to improve, but also helps the system improve at creating the conditions for all learners to learn effectively.

Chapter 10: Implications for Post-Secondary Institutions



As the Ministry transformation team realized, long-term success in transformed curriculum implementation relies on support and acceptance by post-secondary institutions. Students, parents, and educators are concerned that their education will prepare them for next steps in their educational journey, whether vocational, workplace related, or university. The role that Jan Unwin played in connecting Ministry of Education work with Ministry of Advanced Education work was pivotal in enabling the curriculum to be accepted. Unwin's meetings with university registrars, with Deans of Education across the province, with superintendents and then with school principals, high school teachers, teacher candidates, students and parents were all important in addressing concerns about new graduation requirements and post-graduation opportunities.

Students, parents, and educators are concerned that their education will prepare them for next steps in their educational journey, whether vocational, workplace related, or university.

As noted in Chapter 1 referring to Maxime Greens's (1995) advice for educational change, Jan's role helped those involved to see the BC educational context both small (from a distanced perspective) and also big (close up, in the midst of the fray) as she moved between these positions. She helped those impacted by the BC curriculum to understand how their attitude about the curriculum at the local level impacted the global capacity of the curriculum to influence positive change for all students, which in turn allowed the global vision of the new curriculum to positively impact the local actions of educators in schools.

Critical in this global view was the awareness of post-secondary institutions about curriculum and assessment changes that was made possible through Ministry-sponsored meetings, information documents, and information circulated by post-secondary institutions themselves. The timeline created by Knaack (2017) at Vancouver Island University in Figure 23 was one of those informative documents. A fuller discussion of postsecondary implications can be viewed on Knaack's blog [5 Key Changes in BC's New K-12 Curriculum: What are the Implications for Post-Secondary? \(Knaack, 2017\)](#).

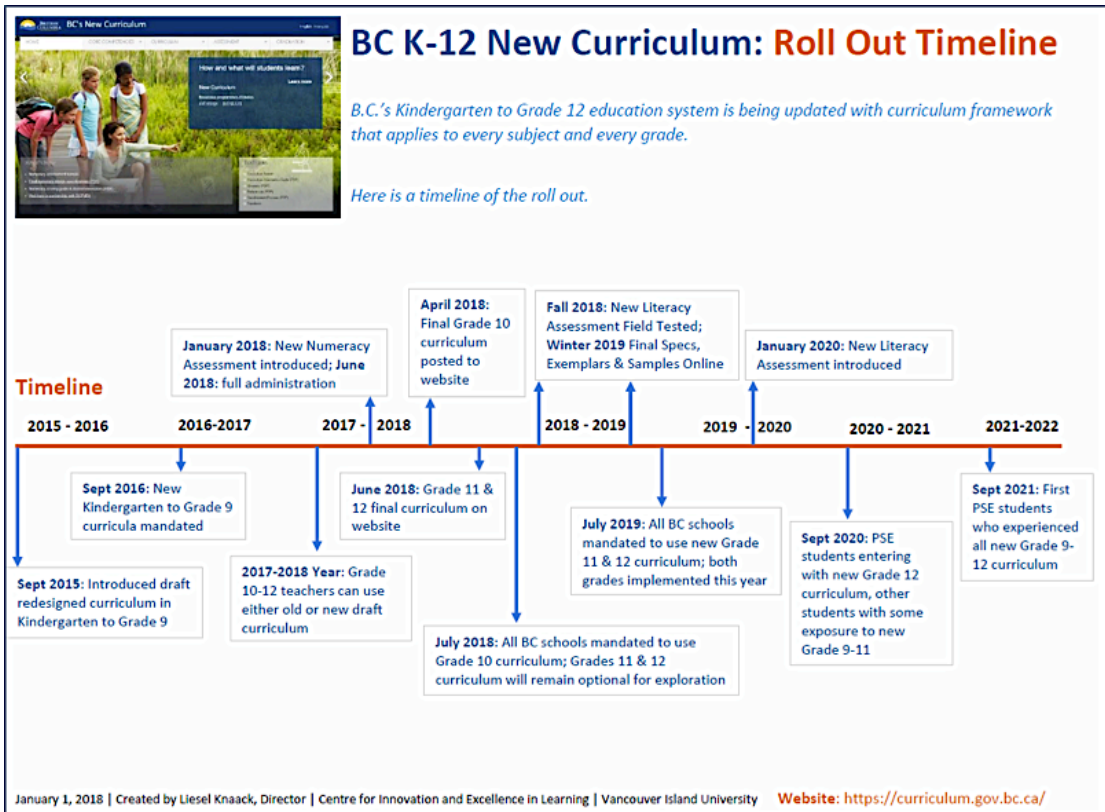


Figure 23 A time-line for the New BC curriculum

Post-Secondary Admissions

Considerable discussion about the transformed BC curriculum and admission processes focused on ways to assess admission criteria. Shifts to teacher-determined high school final grades and away from provincial examinations, discussion about digital portfolio graduation assessment, and mastery-based Numeracy and Literacy Assessments as indicators of post-secondary readiness were some of the concerns expressed in meetings with registrars and other members of post-secondary communities. While some universities began to embrace alternative forms of assessment and admission criteria, others were more reticent.

Shifts in K-12 assessment practices, away from product-oriented and standardized testing towards a personalized readiness approach, will create graduates with more awareness of their own abilities and strengths and greater capacity for reflection, critical and creative thinking as well as ability to work collaboratively. However, these approaches do not currently align with many post-secondary assessment approaches and expectations – ongoing learning and communication around shifting abilities and expectations of students will be required.

As Knaack (2017) has written, “With an increased emphasis in K-12 on assessment *as learning*, students should enter post-secondary institutions with greater self-awareness, abilities to engage in effective questioning and inquiry processes, as well as being able to reflect on their own learning and identify areas of strengths and need. Students may express wishes to continue these assessment practices as they continue their learning journey and development of self-regulation and metacognitive learning skills. Post-secondary educators should be prepared to foster continued growth with similar techniques and tools for student success.”

However, both K-12 and post-secondary sectors require more training and resources for knowing how to implement learning with greater emphasis on assessment *as learning*. It won’t happen overnight and requires understanding and confidence first with the strategies and methods for implementation.

Educational Transformation Sustainability

Change is complex, takes time and requires the commitment of teams that continue to grow and connect. As Pat Duncan noted, “Change felt painfully slow sometimes, but in the big picture of things it’s amazing how fast it’s gone, and where it’s still going.” Likely it will be the students who drive ongoing change as the world is rapidly shifting and requiring different types of learning opportunities. Looking across the province today, in 2019, it is amazing to see a landscape of innovation, personalization, and inquiry in classrooms, schools, and districts. Experiential education includes community in foundational ways in education; museums, galleries, recreation centres, businesses, ecological centres, parks and seashores are more and more finding a place in education. A growth mindset – for teachers, students, parents, and administrators -- is becoming more and more evident, challenging and replacing the fixed mindset of those wanting to retain the status quo.

BC education is providing leadership to jurisdictions around the world, showing how a system can transform. Utilizing strong partnerships between school districts, Ministry of Education, BCTF, and teacher education programs, needed change can happen, challenging former beliefs and expectations. Strong positive relationships within and across sectors, as this transformation story shows, can enable, support, and move forward the agenda of developing educational processes and understandings for our 21st century learners – learners who will likely be alive in the 22nd century!

...these conditions in human relations allow a complex learning system to form around an emerging self-organizing process, energized by common interests and goals, that represent things that members of the system want to address and problems they need to solve, as they strive for a common goal.

Conditions for change, in order to develop, maintain, and sustain movement forward, as identified earlier, centers on respectful, healthy, and informed relationships. As noted in Chapter Three, these conditions in human relations allow a complex learning system to form around an emerging self-organizing process, energized by common interests and goals, that represent things that members of the system want to address and problems they need to solve, as they strive for a common goal: an education system that works for all students, that inspires the best

for all educators. As a complex learning system forms, and as it becomes more inter-connected, it adapts to emerging challenges by drawing on the diversity within its own forming structure. This bottom-up emergent process creates networks of connections between different groups within the system. It is our hope that this redesigned curriculum, developed over several decades, and formed through strong relationships, allows complex networks to grow, spread, and take root, enabling the system as well as the individual to transform. It is these conditions and mindsets – and how they are brought to life through daily interactions among people – that create sustaining positive change. This is the emerging story of educational transformation in BC. In the next volume in this series we plan to share stories of teachers', administrators', parents' and students' innovations and transformation in educational practice enabled by the BC redesigned curriculum.

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Photography by Bryanda Smith, Jessica Smith, Katelyn Edwards, Adelyn Edwards, Kathy Sanford and Tim Hopper.

Educational Transformation: The BC Story

How do we prepare students for the twenty-first century who will be alive in the twenty-second? British Columbia (BC) currently has one of the highest performing education systems, as measured by Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Through their Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), students from BC score high in a range of measures; first in reading. However, educational leaders in BC have known, through Ministry of Education surveys and tracking of examination results, that there are recurring low graduation rates for particular populations (such as Indigenous, rural and low socio-economic), there is a lack of engagement of youth in general, and growing needs of special populations. As Jan Unwin, former BC Ministry Superintendent of Graduation and Student Transitions stated, "Too many kids sleepwalk their way through high school even though we count them as a success." The story of BC's complex educational transformation, recounted here in volume 1, interweaves many characters and compelling stories into an important 21st century narrative of educational transformation.

This 100 page story describes the development of an educational system that values students' interests and talents, builds a competency-based framework to assess students' successes over time, and provides teachers with the flexibility in curriculum design to address current world, real-life problems with their students.

Key to the success of this transformation has been the interconnectedness of political leaders with the educators, school and district administrators and teachers, all bringing strengths to reshape the curriculum for more innovative educational practices and thinking. The characters' voices appear and reappear as the story unfolds, captured over a two year period by Drs. Sanford and Hopper in extensive interviews with key educational leaders including government ministers and their staff, school district superintendents and teachers' union leaders.

Transformation happens when we work collectively, across institutions, locations, and contexts. The success of this transformation is due to the collective work of many educators. Over time this book recounts the foundation story for a radical shift in education. It sets the scene for inspiring stories of meaningful learning that are now emerging across BC that will be explored in volume 2. Educational leaders from around the world are looking at BC to see how this educational transformation will evolve. We believe it can be a promising model for school-based education in the twenty-first century.