

June 2015



### Goals of LFBC:

To provide support for leadership in/of professional learning leaders by:

- Exploring intentions and responsibilities across different roles
- Engaging leaders in effective strategies to build and sustain capacity in schools and districts

## President's Message

Sue Elliott

Inspired Learning



Research grounds us in our practice. Innovation creates change and propels us forward. In the article Split Screen Innovation Reform, the idea that research can create a situation whereby we reinvent the past – rather than be truly creative and innovative, leaves me pondering the role of professional learning. Is it to reinforce what we do, or to transform practice and inspire innovation?

Two recent stories have moved me to think deeply about aspects of current practice. A conversation regarding a bright high school student who is so uninspired that they are not going to school, and a conversation with a young waiter at a restaurant about his thinking schooling and learning; the imperative of inspiring curiosity, that guidance and

structure are required in personal learning, and that “we are shooting our future in the foot if we do not attend to quality learning,” have me pondering how we understand what learning is, and our role as educators in facilitating the learning journey.

In a recent LFBC board meeting we took a first look at a schema that is a glimpse of the future of learning. I watched board members view the schema, put the paper onto the table as they sat back, and smiled. Reporting on what ‘jumped out at them’ was inspiring. At the end of our sharing – the comment “This is how adults learn - it is not novel and new. It makes me wonder, what are we doing to our kids?” caused me to think about my two stories. How many students are we “turning off learning” and how do we ensure that



## Learning Forward British Columbia

Learning Forward BC provides opportunities for all educators to engage in quality professional learning that focuses on improving student engagement, learning and achievement in the province of British Columbia.

(President's Message continued...)

ALL students are in a classroom, school and school district where the expectation and support for innovative practice for engaging students and nurturing our respective future, occurs?

What is the responsibility of each of us in the 'system' to ensure that we are connected with our students and communicating effectively with parents? How is it that an able student loses interest in learning in school yet is engaged outside the school system? How is it that a well-read, articulate student who has a degree calls their university education 'fraudulent'? How do we ensure that effective practice where all students are engaged is common place?

The Learning Forward BC board is committed to creating opportunities to share innovative practices through professional learning network sessions.

Connect with others in an inspiring learning opportunity and challenge your thinking about engaging students at the **Richmond Hilton on Oct 1, 5 to 7 p.m.**, at an event co-sponsored by the BCPVPA and LFBC.

Check out our website at <http://www.learningforwardbc.ca>, and become involved in our network.

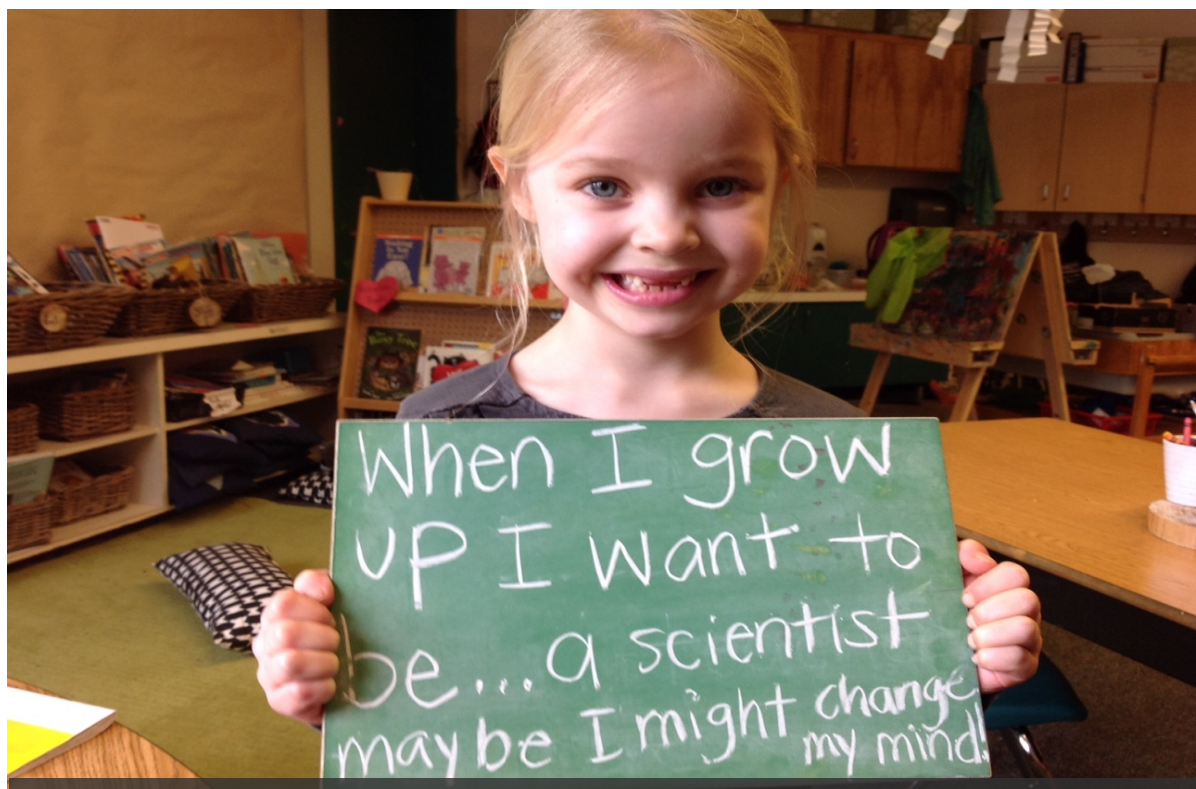
### Welcome to the 2015/2016 LFBC Board

Learning Forward BC Board members have a passion for quality professional learning. We inspire and motivate each other through the myriad of perspectives individuals bring from their varied roles and districts. As president of Learning Forward BC I want to thank our hard working board members who are committed to providing examples of collaborative practice from within their spheres of influence.

I am sorry to say farewell to outgoing board members Sharon Cohen, and Pius Ryan. Each contributed wise insight and provoked our thinking about innovative systems approaches to collaborative professional learning. We wish them well as they shift their energy to other endeavors.

I am excited that we have several new members joining the team of **Audrey Hobbs Johnson** [consultant], **Bev Craig** [Sunshine Coast], **Chris Southwick** [retired Nanaimo SD], **Jessica Antosz** [BCPVPA], **Karen Steffensen** [Surrey SD], **Kirsten Deasey** [Sunshine Coast], **Leslie Drinovz** [Sea to Sky SD], **Trudean Andrews** [Retired MofEd], and **Wanda Mitchell** [Burnaby SD].

I would like to welcome **Joanne Robertson** [N, Vancouver SD], **Karen Fadum** [Surrey SD], **Leanna Garner** [retired from Qualicum SD] **Shelley Lammie** [York House], and **Steve Cardwell** [UBC] to the LFBC Board.



## The Geography of Hope and Communicating Student Learning

by Sandralynn Shortall, District Principal of Early Learning, SD #45 West Vancouver

*Horizons draw our eyes towards the distance. They define the edge of our existing vision. Spread all around the compass, they provide points of focus to possible ways forward.... Horizons are our future starting points. They are, at their best, our geography of hope. (The Fourth Way, Andy Hargreaves, 2009)*

What is the process of grading a student's work? This question was posed by Mark Barnes, author of *Assessment 3.0*, in a breakout session at a conference I recently attended. The room was filled with educators from across North America and the responses to this provocation were varied, but one common thread wove the dialogue tightly. This thread was finding a way in our traditional educational structures to honour a child's growth and development while at the same time informing our instructional practices.

Traditionally, assessment has been the process of grading a student's work to a standard of what it should be. While we work towards a focus on formative assessment practices informing our classroom instruction, we often get pulled back to the task comparing a human's performance to arbitrary benchmarks in an attempt to

put everyone on the same page. We build a system where some students meet expectations while others minimally meet expectations or do not meet expectations at all. Lifelong trajectories are often set in motion when these messages about educational performance are received by families. For our children in the early learning context, where cognitive age does not necessarily match developmental stage, we frame inequities by mapping a child's growth to these arbitrary benchmarks. As educators we have become seemingly skilled in grading our students but are we skilled in grading our own practices? Do we pause and think about what we are doing when we assess and how it informs student learning? Are we able to articulate our hopes for each child in current reporting models?

Twenty-four months ago our school district embraced a conversation of possibility as we began to grapple with the opportunity to rethink our assessment practices. Our first thought was to explore the digital dimension and to use technology to make learning visible as an immediate way to communicate student learning in the classroom. This concept was extraordinarily appealing. Could instant



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photo/video messages change the answer to the rhetorical question “What did you do in school today?” Could an expeditious digital platform for communicating student learning demystify the work that happens in our classrooms? As a tech-savvy district this was not too far of a stretch. We were already beginning to regularly use devices to email and text photo images of student learning to parents. However, as we began the collaborative conversations about communicating student learning in the primary grades we quickly realized the depth to this opportunity and the critical need to ground our own professional understandings about human growth and development in the early years. Our journey began to take root and we began to nurture a growth-oriented lens as we considered the privilege of communicating a child’s growth in our community.

An open invitation was sent out to our Kindergarten teachers in May 2013, followed by an after school gathering where 20 teachers and administrators excitedly met to talk about a “Communicating Student Learning Pilot”. By September 2013 the group had shrunk to 4 brave Kindergarten teachers who, with the incredible support of their principals, began the complicated process of deconstructing our traditional lens for assessing student learning in the early years. Baby steps ensued and quickly a contagious momentum emerged leading us into year two of our “Communicating Student Learning Pilot” for Kindergarten. 16 dedicated teachers volunteered for the 2014-15 process. Complementing this process has been our ongoing parent feedback

cycle, in which we have repeatedly surveyed our parent community seeking input as the pilot has evolved.

The depth to the conversation has led to the creation of a new district framework for conversing about human development, using ‘levels of support’ which focus on growth and advancement for our children in the primary grades. Strengths based definitions for articulating student achievement, core competencies, essential concepts and key learning outcomes have grounded our communications about student learning. Complementing this process is our ongoing exploration of e-portfolios, with collaboratively created shared language and a growing understanding of the new curriculum drafts.

Embracing change in a mindful, invitational, informed and collaborative manner has been the keystone of this work. It is with hope we look forward to the opportunities that lie ahead as we continue to ground our assessment practices in the ‘geography of hope’ in our primary classrooms.

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*Stand aside for a while and  
leave room for learning,  
observe carefully what  
children do, and then, if you  
have understood well,  
perhaps teaching will be  
different from before.*

*(Loris Malaguzzi)*

### Tamanawis Secondary:

#### **Exploring New Structures for Professional Learning**

(Michelle Larsen, Vice Principal)

Structural changes to professional learning have positively influenced our school, thus impacting student and staff learning in our community. Tamanawis Secondary staff have been engaged in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) every second Wednesday for a number of years. Many influential school-wide as well as department-specific initiatives have sprung from these sessions. As this program has evolved, we now use every meeting as an opportunity for sharing and dialogue. Staff and department meetings are held in different learning spaces every month and are no longer stand and deliver. Any material that is deemed to be “stand and deliver” in nature is sent out in advance in the form of a Communique for Staff to read. The first five minutes of Staff Meetings are dedicated to tone setting: welcoming colleagues, covering a Health and Safety topic, and allowing for questions from the Communique.

At the commencement of the school year, administration set a course of inquiry via guiding questions, which encompass or explore the District and school visions. The remaining hour of our monthly meetings is filled with a professional dialogue exploring these questions. Meetings are consciously designed to reflect a classroom lesson in order to foster engagement, variety, trust, and



To view video on FreshGrade as used in Surrey SD #36, click [here](#).

*Simon Fraser University's Cmolik Prize judges name Surrey School District as prize's inaugural winner for innovative use of digital portfolio in education.*



Cmolik Prize winner Robyn Thiessen

For more information, visit the following link:

[Cmolik Prize Winner](#)

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respectful debate. Each semester we hold a sharing carousel in place of one staff meeting. Staff members volunteer to present to their colleagues, such as inquiry, use of apps, current research, assessment strategies, teaching strategies, use of technology, etc. We divide the staff into four groups and travel from room to room. This allows Staff to see and briefly experience the inquiry journeys of their colleagues—these are explorations they have been working on during PLC time—and it has brought together staff from various departments to look more deeply into topics.

We use technology to gather information and model digital literacy during our meeting times, such as Socrates, Twitter, Wordle, Plicker, Survey Monkey, Q codes, etc. This allows us to capture the information from discussions and report it out in a timely fashion. Our Technology Department now holds Tech Bites' sessions on alternating Wednesdays at lunch hour to allow staff to learn how they can incorporate technology into their classrooms, lessons, and assessment.

### How have changes in structures for professional learning had an impact on the Tamanawis' journey?

These changes have been seminal in leading our Staff in a new direction for school wide Pro-D as well as in collaboration with neighboring schools during District Pro-D. Our departments have moved away from static goals to dynamic, inquiry models that are cross-curricular.

Staff are asking questions, taking risks, changing their teaching practice, evolving as teachers, making more efficient use of release days, challenging one another, visiting classes, and engaging in respectful dialogue on purposeful topics.

Perhaps most telling are the remarks they have made that "they feel they are coming away from meetings revitalized, with useful professional opportunities and information that they can use in their practice." Our school has become a home to questioning, discovery, and learning with an inquiry mindset.

### Communicating Student Learning Project- SD #36

(Karen Fadum, Helping Teacher, SD #36)

*"I memorized my FreshGrade code because I like to log in a lot and see my stuff" (Tazia, grade 5)*

*"When I have reached a goal, like in writing, I get to take a picture and put it on my FreshGrade so my teacher can see it and comment, and then we can, like, talk about it" (Arjun, grade 6)*

Students are excited about their learning in Surrey. Comments like these are common in classrooms where teachers are using a digital platform called FreshGrade to document and communicate student learning.

In 2013, Surrey Schools launched a *Communicating Student Learning* project to evolve its student assessment practice and tools. One

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part of this project, *Making Learning Visible*, invited teachers to explore electronic portfolios using FreshGrade as an alternate to traditional paper report cards. Digital documentation provides the opportunity to capture student learning in authentic ways through notes, pictures or video, provide meaningful feedback to support learning and engage in frequent dialogue with parents and students. Over the course of two years, hundreds of teachers from 35 schools (K-9) adapted their practice and took part in this powerful initiative.

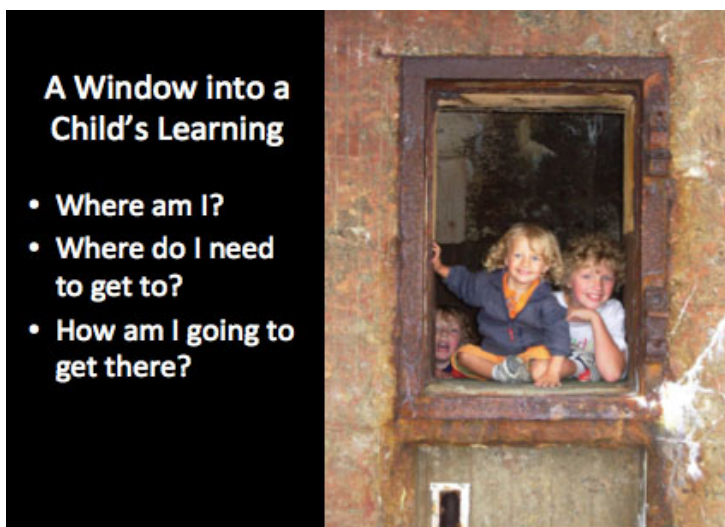
The Making Learning Visible project was established as a collaborative focused inquiry with a clear direction and criteria for participants. School teams committed to the use of formative assessment and to explore questions such as:

- How can digital documentation and digital tools impact teacher and student learning?
- How can formative assessment and the progression of learning become visible in a digital format?

Support from the district level included the provision of hardware (mostly iPads) where necessary, formative assessment resources, release time for collaboration and as of January 2015, a full time Helping Teacher.

As all decisions were made in consultation with school teams and based on the comfort level of parents, the use of FreshGrade unfolded in various ways. Many teachers began by dipping their toes in; creating private portfolios while still writing traditional report cards. A few jumped right in and provided parents access to portfolios as soon as possible. Either way, teachers were cognizant to make decisions appropriate for their classroom, school and community. During the course of the inquiry project, teachers moved along a continuum at their own pace as FreshGrade is only part of a more significant paradigm shift.

One of the most powerful outcomes of this project has been the impact on student engagement through meaningful pedagogical documentation. When students have voice and feel connected to their learning, the process becomes collaborative in nature as all stakeholders work together to move learning forward. A digital platform supports this practice with timely access to evidence of learning, alongside descriptive feedback. Formative assessment is actualized as learning is made visible and frequent communication established. This is a significant shift from the status quo - skills based evaluation three times a year. Successful transition requires a shared district vision and a strategic plan of support. Providing a safe and positive space for teachers to share their struggles and successes is crucial.



### **Making Learning Visible: Transforming Learning through Assessment**

#### **Surrey School's Electronic Assessment Goal:**

*Our goal is to provide parents with a 24/7 virtual window into their child's learning to encourage more active parent understanding and involvement as well as ensuring timely responses and intervention in order to maximize student learning.*