



It's All About Learning

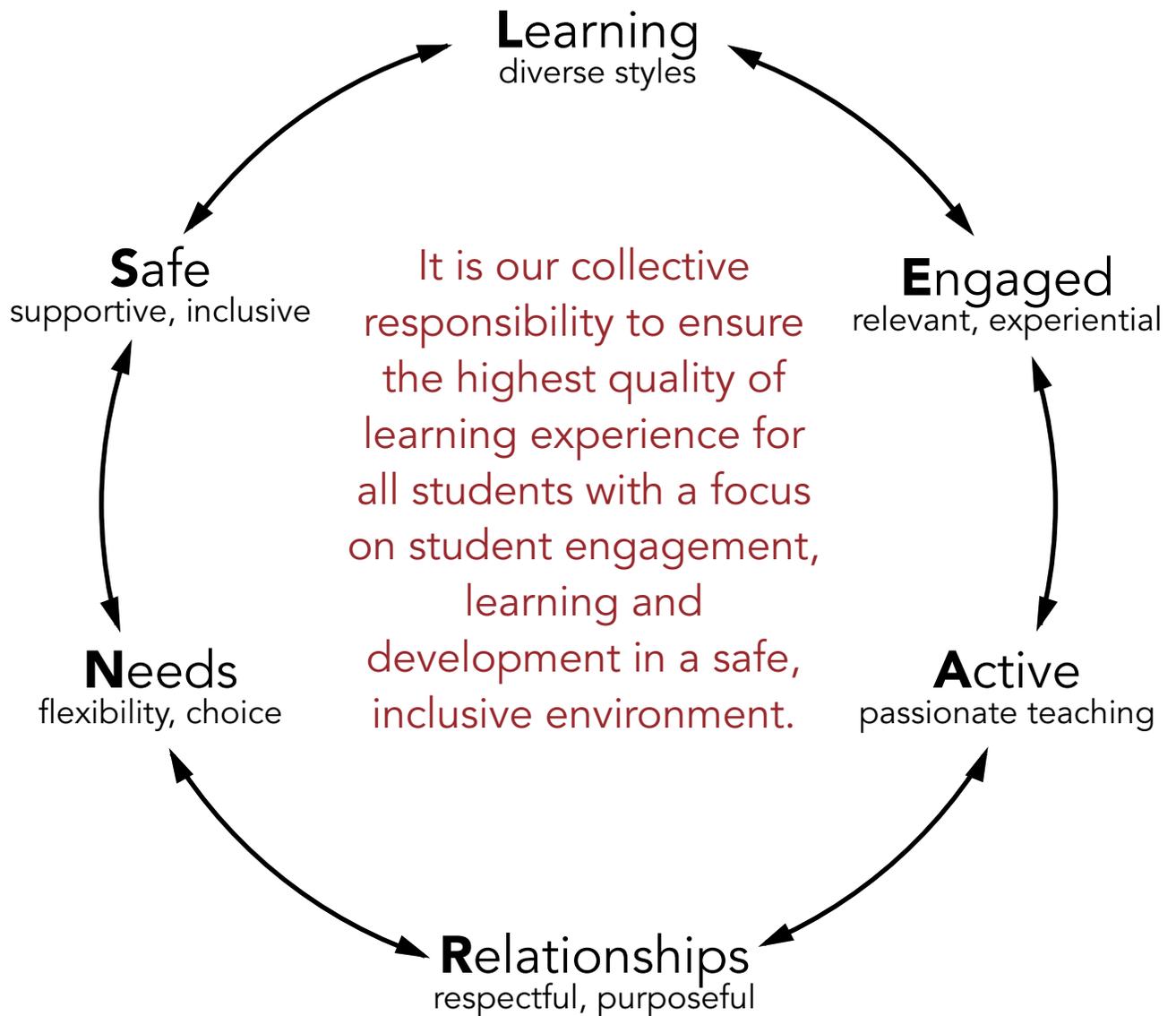
What We Know About Learning
and What We Are Doing About It



Vancouver Board of Education

It's All About Learning:

What We Know About Learning and What We Are Doing About It



Acknowledgments

This document is made possible through the invaluable engagement and contributions from the community members of the 33 Learning Inquiry Sites. Their stories and ideas are foundational to our understanding of the learning essentials.

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Table of Contents

Part One: Overview of the Learning Inquiries

Introduction	
Learning: Our Core Purpose	1
1. Purpose and Use of this Document	3
2. Background and Context to the Learning Inquiries	6
3. Process of Appreciative Inquiry	7
4. The Adolescent Learning Inquiry (ADLI 2005)	10
5. The Aboriginal Learners Inquiry (ALI 2006)	13
6. English Language Learners Inquiry (ELLI 2007)	15

Part Two: Outcomes of the Learning Inquiries

1. Introduction and Overview	19
2. Outcomes of the Inquiries: “LEARNS” — The Essentials of Optimal Learning	20
2.1. Recognize and Support Diverse Learning Styles	23
2.2. Engaging, Experiential Learning	26
2.3. Active, Passionate Teaching	30
2.4. Strong Relationships and a Sense of Belonging	33
2.5. Flexibility and Choice	41
2.6. Safe and Supportive Learning Environments	45
Conclusion	49
Endnotes	51
References	54
Appendix A: All Appreciative Inquiry Sites	57
Appendix B: “It’s All About Learning”: The Learning Framework	58
Appendix C: “LEARNS”	59
Appendix D: Aboriginal Learners Inquiry	60



Part One:
Overview of the
Learning Inquiries

Introduction

Learning: Our Core Purpose

There was once a young Aboriginal learner in our district who saw no purpose to school and continually disrupted the class. But when he interrupted with an account of his mother's ancestors during a lesson about the first peoples of BC's West Coast, his teacher stepped aside and encouraged the other students to listen to what he had to say.

This experience had a lasting impact on the life of this young man, who went on to become an esteemed elder among his people. By setting aside her lesson plan and respecting the student's first-hand knowledge, the teacher demonstrated to him and to his classmates that learning comes first – not just amassing facts but engaging the mind, body, heart, and personal history.

The pivotal choice made by this teacher demonstrates the Core Purpose of the Vancouver Board of Education (VSB):

It is our collective responsibility to ensure the highest quality of learning experiences for all students with a focus on student engagement, learning and development in a safe and inclusive environment.

The importance of our definition of core purpose is this: it makes each and every learner, under our influence and care, the judge of the quality and fullness of work by virtue of the reality of what they actually gain from being associated with us. It makes us wholly and primarily responsible for recognizing, respecting and responding to the individual needs and interests of the learner, rather than requiring the learner to adapt and respond to the needs and interests of us, our organization and system. It regards each learner, regardless of age or circumstance, as a full person, capable of making his or her own meaning out of experience and equally entitled to the best experiences we can provide them. It means we understand and envision our purpose as that of enabling each person, as a learner, to determine her or his own education rather than us pre-determining an education for them.

With this sense of purpose in mind, then, we created the learning inquiry in order to identify and transmit across our system as a whole, the best and the most essential of what we know about learning, and are doing about it.

Serving learning focuses and connects everything that we do as a district. What do we mean by learning? This definition put forth by the great humanist, Carl Rogers, and echoed in the experience of the student in our story, still inspires us today:

It has a quality of personal involvement—the whole person in both feeling and cognitive aspects being in the learning event. It is self-initiated. Even when the impetus or stimulus comes from the outside, the sense of discovery, of reaching out, of grasping and comprehending, comes from within. It is pervasive. It makes a difference in the behavior, the attitudes, perhaps even the personality of the learner. It is evaluated by the learner. She knows whether it is meeting her need, whether it leads toward what she wants to know...When such learning takes place, the element of meaning to the learner is built into the whole experience.¹

“Every person realizes her or his potential through learning. It's through learning that we manage to stay alive, make meaning out of our life and, in turn, make meaning out of the life of our world.”

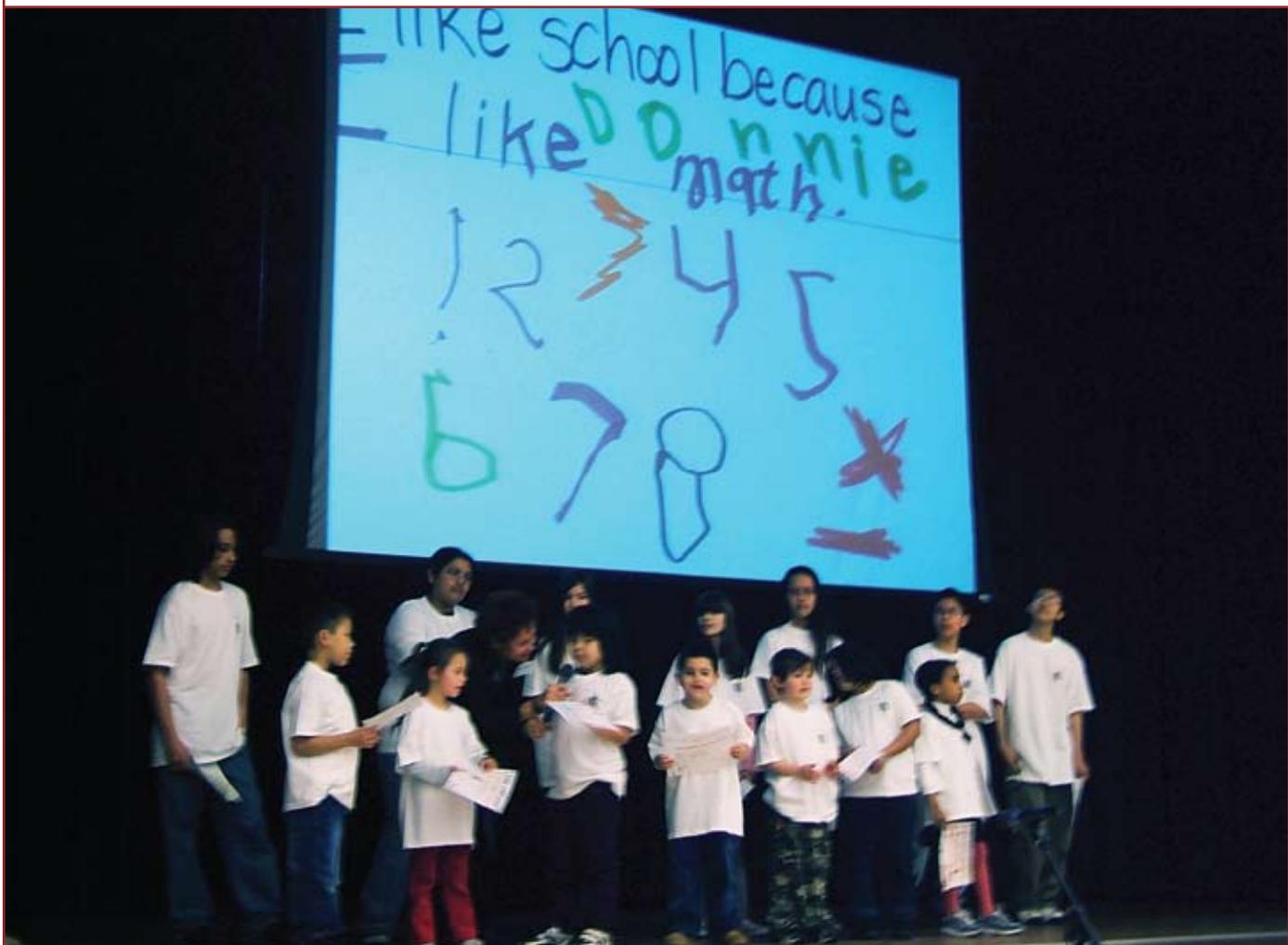
*Chris Kelly
Superintendent of Schools*

We want students to be lifelong learners, not the proud owners of fading report cards."

*Maureen Bayless, Parent
Point Grey Secondary School*

Rogers' wisdom becomes practice in our district's intention to "surround a student with the best we can offer in each major area of her development: academic, artistic, technical, social, emotional, and physical. We do this by knowing, first, why we are doing this, then knowing how a person learns, what their learning requires, how to provide it, and what happens as a result."²

As a district, we support this intention with a commitment to serve learning in a manner that is informed, cohesive, consistent, and fully supportive of the interdependent efforts of all of our stakeholders – from district office, to school, to classroom, to home, to community. In order to fulfill this commitment, in order to ensure that our collective actions and decisions – from curriculum choices, to staffing decisions, to supplies acquisition, to financial allocations – serve our students' learning, we need to operate from the same knowledge base.



1. Purpose and Use of this Document

The first intention of this paper is to illuminate the essentials of learning as we understand them through our professional practice, as we are discovering them through our ongoing, district-wide Learning Inquiries, and as they have been revealed to us through leading educational researchers and thinkers. The first overarching question – **What do we know about learning?** – is a distillation of this intention.

The second intention of this paper, to highlight how our knowledge about learning is reflected in our schools, is captured by our second overarching question – **What are we doing about it?** It is understood that our knowledge about learning emerges from our own dynamic and continuous learning as educators, which is akin to the kind of learning we are supporting in our students.

This document represents the collective learning uncovered at the VSB's three Learning Inquiries: The Adolescent Learning Inquiry (2005), the Aboriginal Learning Inquiry (2006) and the English Language Learners Inquiry (2007) (Appendix A - All Appreciative Inquiry Sites List). All these sites are continuing their foci on learning through 2008 and beyond. Each of these individual inquiries is described in detail further on in Part One.

The Learning Inquiries used an organizational change method called "Appreciative Inquiry" to engage our district in an overall focus on learning, with the two key questions above to guide us. Appreciative Inquiry as a methodology is explained in Section 3, Part One of this document.

It is the hope of all of the constituents of the Learning Inquiries that this paper will inform and inspire ongoing inquiry leading to decisive actions as we continuously work to fulfill our Core Purpose for our students:

It is our collective responsibility as a school district to ensure the highest quality of learning experiences for all students, with a focus on student engagement, learning and development in a safe, inclusive environment.³

The outcomes of the inquiries are proving transformational for our system. We have distilled the learnings, both revealed and co-created, into six core concepts, which form Part Two of this paper.

Each section addresses **what we have learned in that area, what the research tells us and what our practice and system is doing to address these convictions.**

How to use this document:

This paper is divided into two parts. Part One provides the background, context and detailed explanation of the Learning Inquiries and the methodology used. Part Two is the narrative based summary of the key information learned in the six core areas, along with the research and current practices in the district.

"If the learning environment is positive, supportive, respectful, inclusive, non-threatening, non-discriminating, encouraging, caring, and constructive, the whole learning experience will be exceptional."

*Britannia Community
Appreciative Inquiry Site*

It is our overall intention that this document be used by system stakeholders to deepen their understanding of the Learning Inquiries and how they are shaping district directions. This paper represents the **foundational curriculum** of what we have discovered to be **optimal learning conditions** for the engagement of learners through surfacing the tacit and common knowledge of stakeholders. We hope that these ideas give rise to further and deeper inquiry.

This document can be used as a **reference tool** in terms of planning for best practice in classrooms and guiding employee engagement, continuous learning and development in schools, work sites and the system as a whole. "It's All About Learning": The Learning Framework, in Figure 1, provides a model of how the outcomes of the Learning Inquiries can be applied to various elements of the VSB as a learning organization. It identifies and describes essential connections between what we know and what we do across key functions and processes within our schools and across our district, and provides a reference for what it is that we need to maintain, change and improve.



Figure 1 (see also Appendix B):

“It’s All About Learning”: The Learning Framework

Application of the following model as an analytic framework for the Learning and Development Initiative would be worthwhile. The findings and outcomes of the inquiry could be applied to various elements of the framework to explore implications for the system.



2. Background and Context to the Learning Inquiries

"I felt a stir of excitement as she explained that this initiative was about looking at the positive – the things that are working in our school and what we could get more of. We had never approached things like that before."

Anita Bramhoff
Fleming Elementary

"Appreciative Inquiry is all about narrative...and it's about how to integrate that into the way we educate First Nations kids...Let's tell stories about it, and let's hear your story."

Gino Bondi, Vice-Principal
Vancouver Technical Secondary School

"The best part of the summit for me was the real sense of community that came out of it – elementary and secondary school parents, grade 7, 11, and 12 students, teachers, support staff, administrators, everyone was part of the process and contributed as an equal partner."

Germaine Tsui, English Department Head
Tupper Secondary

The preceding comments emerged from our Learning Inquiry (LI), a long-term district Learning and Development initiative launched in November 2005 and currently in its third year. These comments speak to the effectiveness of this Learning Inquiry initiative in achieving its central intention to inform and support a culture within the VSB that fosters continuous improvement and the delivery of the highest quality learning experiences for all students.

The foundations for the Learning Inquiry were laid in 2003-2004 within the District Planning Group, among representatives of trustees, district administration, students, parents, elementary and secondary teachers,

administrators and all employee groups.

This group collaborated to express a common understanding of the VSB's core purpose and three key emphases for the district. The three key emphases are: building relationships, supporting equity, and advocating for public education. Given this recognition of core purpose and key emphases, the District Planning Group subsequently committed to ongoing collaborative and inclusive inquiry into our understanding of core purpose and the need for coherence among roles and functions as a system; a need for continuous improvement; and a need for a comprehensive plan to enhance student, employee and system learning and development.



3. Process of Appreciative Inquiry

“For those of us who work in the system, day after day, the Appreciative Inquiry process offers a positive ‘shot in the arm’ as it redirects thinking towards valuing the many, many things that are working in our classrooms, every day, as we participate in an enthusiastic dialogue with students and colleagues about what engages and excites us in our learning.”

Mary Filleul and Barbara Rowland

Using Appreciative Inquiry in the Vancouver School District: A Positive Approach to Enhance Learning

“At the AI Summit, I think I came closest to feeling the sense of fulfillment I always wanted to feel in a school setting. It was to me what school is supposed to be about. It was about the development of a community of people around a single vision and a positive vision at that...It was about asking how we are going to take the strengths we have and really take it to the next level. How are we going to really ensure that we value the students that we have and make sure that every aspect of their lives is fantastic?”⁴

Carl Jantze, Teacher Templeton Secondary

Appreciative Inquiry (AI), a research methodology that uncovers what is working well within an organization and devises ways of developing and expanding upon these “learnings”, has been our means for achieving the Learning Inquiries’ overall objectives, as well as those unique to each Inquiry. Rather than dwelling on what is problematic and attempting to find solutions, AI honours the best that people and their organizations know, want and can do. In so doing, it “unleashes innovation and imagination, as it is designed to be highly inclusive of all members of a system, to build and expand capacity to cooperate, and to foster shared leadership.”⁵

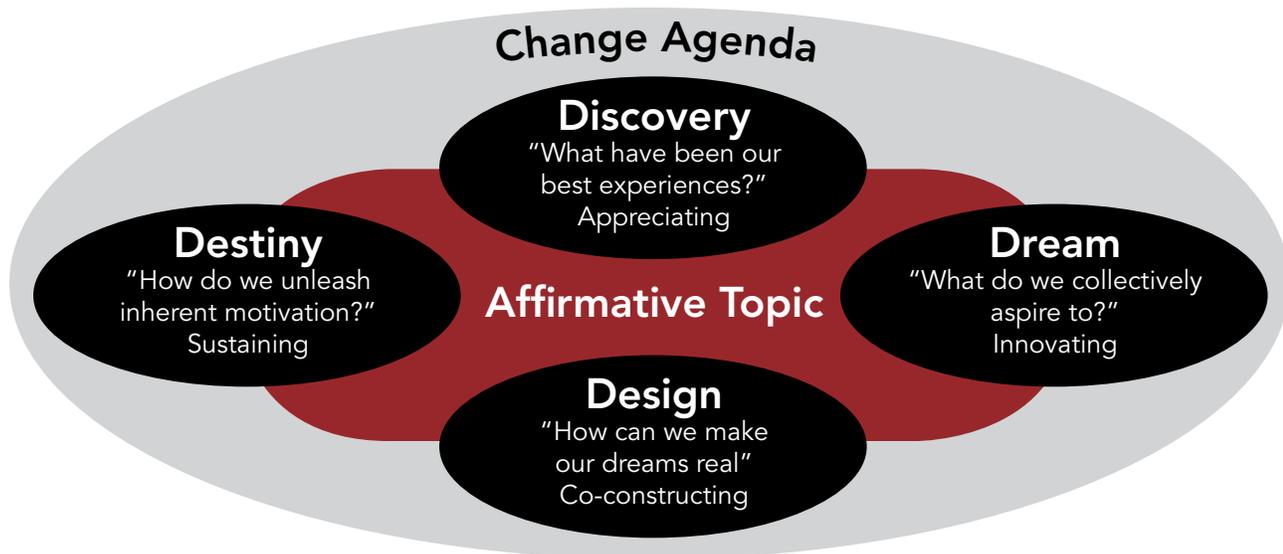
The data that drive AI are not numbers but the depth of the stories. These stories arise from the experiences of all stakeholders in our schools – students, parents, teachers, support staff, principals, vice-principals, district administrators, and trustees. Everyone’s stories, regardless of the role or status of the teller, are deemed to be of equal importance, and all are prompted by an unconditional positive question. For example, the questions that framed the district-wide 2005-06 AI on Adolescent Learning were, “What do educators do that create exceptional learning experiences?” and “What choices and options offered in educational settings most enhance learning?” With these broader questions as a guide, schools also developed their own affirmative questions – e.g., Main Street Adult Education Centre’s “What are the advantages of the quarter system?” or Tupper Site’s “Tell me about a positive experience you’ve had that has made you a better reader.”

Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny are the four phases of an Appreciative Inquiry cycle. Storytelling, catalyzed by the affirmative question, defines the **Discovery** phase, with participants interviewing one another and writing up the most compelling story they hear. Examples of stories include the one about the shy grade 4 student who became much more confident after his teacher enlisted

Figure 2

Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Model

Source: Gervase Bushe "Appreciative Inquiry Training" September 2007



his help to teach a group of grade one students once a week; the teacher with no experience teaching art, who became a successful and creative specialist art teacher, thanks to mentoring from another teacher and support from her principal; the student who is transported by music class when "the sad music pours out its story and reminds us how lucky we are"; the single mother who is grateful for the love and support that she and her critically ill son have received from his school; and the teacher who helped tutor a Grade 12 student and then got to watch her receive her graduation diploma, with her young son walking across the stage beside her.

Stories developed in the Discovery phase are shared at a school site "synergogenesis" meeting at which team leaders and participants derive wisdom and meaning from the data, extracting the key ideas about learning in order to spark new generative ideas. At some sites these findings have been compiled into a Discovery Document, which is read by all members of the school community, and is used to develop affirmative topics unique to each site – e.g., "Strengthening Student Engagement in Learning within Our Community."

These affirmative topics serve as the focus for two-day summits in which schools complete the remaining three phases of the AI cycle.

During the **Dream** phase, they share their hopes and dreams and create inspiring images of the future. For example, this dream emerged during Britannia's 2006 summit: "Parents will be welcomed in the school with a special place for parents to gather." And this one from Gladstone School addressed curriculum: "Learning about other cultures and faiths would be central to curriculum, including everything from experiencing world music to taking Tai Chi. It is

exposure to things which makes the mind expand.” A dream connecting home and school surfaced at the Point Grey site: “I envision the creation of village type connections within the Point Grey/Sty-Wet-Tan school community, like a web of support for students and parents, with the school as its centre.”

The group’s collective dreams are then shaped into structures, processes and behaviours that reflect the **Design** phase of the process. “Good design statements are created that are provocative in that they stretch or challenge the status quo, yet are grounded and desired,”⁶ as this excerpt from the 2007 Aboriginal Learning Inquiry Design Proposals indicates: “We acknowledge and respect the Aboriginal belief in the sacredness of Life Long Learning and knowledge of the land! In our school we use locally developed Aboriginal content that includes knowledge, history and cultures. And through this we recognize the interconnectedness of all cultures.”

The task of the **Destiny** phase is to translate the design statements into action plans that will bring vision into reality. These plans are later shared and expanded upon with members of the school community who were unable to attend the summit. For example, the summit topic, “Building Learning Relationships for Engagement and Empowerment at Tupper and Livingstone” was translated into actions such as designing welcome banners in a variety of languages for the school foyer, conducting a staff forum as well as student forums to focus on the good work occurring at Tupper, and math/science meetings between Grade 7 teachers at Livingstone and Grade 8 teachers at Tupper. The Destiny phase of the Aboriginal Learners Inquiry inspired schools to organize Aboriginal student forums, offer peer mentorship programs, and invite Aboriginal community and family members to help plan celebrations, family days, etcetera.

The outcomes of the AI process then stimulate, focus and guide follow-through actions and changes at each site to fulfill the Destiny it has determined for itself. Descriptions of the Inquiries and their results are offered in the next three sections of this paper.



4. The Adolescent Learning Inquiry (ADLI 2005)

Nine sites took part in Year One's Adolescent Learning Inquiry. Five of the sites were combined schools, one was a district group, and the remaining three were single schools. In total, 12 elementary schools, 7 secondary schools, and 3 adult education centres were involved. Sites were selected on the basis of a clear proposal directly linked to enhancing adolescent learning, a strong team comprised of formal and informal leaders throughout the system, and representation from all adolescent cohorts – upper immediate, secondary, and adult education.

Below is a list of each site, its affirmative topic and a summary of recent directions and innovations that are related to the outcomes of their Learning Inquiry.

1. Britannia Community of Schools (Britannia Elementary School, Britannia Secondary School, Hastings Adult Education Centre)

Site Collaboration to Enrich Success through Relationships and Engagement

The Britannia Community of Schools continues to work collaboratively to enhance success through seamless transitions from elementary to secondary to adult education. They are working on offering more diversity in their programming to meet varied needs and further expanding their community connections. For example, they are developing a pod program for grade 8's and new programming to include aesthetician and animation options, as well as a hockey academy.

2. Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School

Shedding Light on the Churchill Way: Illuminating School Culture and Practice

The Churchill community continues to articulate a desire to create a changing yet dynamic school culture. They wish to pursue initiatives in the areas of experiential learning, flexibility and choice, cross curricular and collaborative practices as well as technological improvements. For example, they have made an inventory of all field studies, are committing to all students experiencing one field study per year, and are developing curricula that is more experiential and hands on. They have also initiated a cross curricular focus on enhancing technology in the classroom.

3. Downtown (King George Secondary School, Lord Roberts Elementary School, Elsie Roy Elementary School and Roberts Adult Education Centre)

The Downtown Community of Schools: Caring Relationships and Seamless Partnerships that Strengthen Powerful Learning Opportunities for Everyone

The Downtown Vancouver Community of Schools is working together to break down barriers and build relationships to actualize the Family of School concept. Their recent focus has been on working together on sustainability issues relating to the environment, recycling and transportation. Their future plans include increasing opportunities for collaboration among the various sites, creating more student learning opportunities beyond the classroom, and enhancing community connections.

4. Gladstone (Gladstone Secondary School and Tyee Elementary School)

Strengthening Student Engagement in Learning within Our Community

Gladstone and Tyee are focusing on improving learning through stronger ties between the schools and placing more focus on supporting diverse learning styles, experiential learning and a comprehensive leadership program. Their plans align with their original design statements regarding the themes of school spirit and leadership, diverse learning styles and community integration and outreach. They are also continuing to focus on finding ways to create more parental involvement in the secondary school.

5. Hamber Family of Schools (Hamber Secondary School, Emily Carr Elementary School, Jamieson Elementary School, Osler Elementary School, Simon Fraser Elementary School, General Wolfe Elementary School)

Collaborating to Create Confident Math Learners in the Hamber Family of Schools

The Hamber Family of Schools continues to focus on developing confident learners, particularly in the area of Math. They are pursuing interschool collaboration, teacher student relationships, engaging the parent community and influencing student motivation. Elementary and secondary teachers meet on an on-going basis to examine math curriculum, transitions, assessment, classroom practice and student needs and engagement.

6. Main Street Adult Education Centre

Working Together to Strengthen our Successful Adult Learning Community at Main Street Education Centre

Main Street continues to focus on improving the learning climate and enhancing their sense of community through increased collaboration, flexibility and choice, student support, the use of technology and an improved facility. For example, consistent standards in the assessment of English language skills across the departments have been established and more professional development has been undertaken by the Humanities teachers. The purchase of new tablet technology boards has engaged more teachers and students in various pedagogical methods.

7. Point Grey Secondary School

Creating a Healthy Community of Lifelong Learners at Point Grey/Sty Wet Tan

Point Grey is working towards a positive school climate through improving the school facility and working to develop strategies for increasing student engagement in learning. For example, they are looking to empower students through global education leadership opportunities.



*"You can't fool a kid...
the only things that will
work for a kid's growth are
respect and time."*

*Support Worker at
Britannia Elementary*

8. Tupper/Livingstone (Sir Charles Tupper Secondary School, David Livingstone Elementary School)

Building Learning Relationships for Engagement and Empowerment at Tupper and Livingstone.

The Tupper/Livingstone Family of Schools continues to stress student empowerment and engagement for success. They wish to extend their plans in the areas of student leadership, connections through the transition process, technology, community building and meeting diverse needs. For example, they are expanding the use of Smart Boards to the high school and continuing community outreach through inviting volunteers into the school and completing a Green Way Project. Students are taking a leadership role in training teachers in the use of new SMART Board technologies as well as role modeling and mentoring younger students.

9. Learning Services at the Vancouver School Board

From Congenial to Collegial: Creating a Collaborative Environment in Learning Services to Enhance Learning

Learning Services staff was the first VSB site to experience an appreciative inquiry and they remain one of the strongest proponents of taking a strengths based approach to their work in the department and in schools. Some recent examples include the ESL consultants working with the Technology staff around on-line learning, ESL and Literacy working together to examine programs for secondary ESL students success, Social Responsibility staff working with Learning and Development Staff to present workshops on school climate, etcetera. Learning Services staff continue to reinforce some core learning concepts including a new focus on learning as a process which occurs over time, and the most effective professional learning and development activities will not be "one-shot" workshops but instead:

- provide learning in context, embedded in daily practice
- focus on student learning and engagement
- provide on-going opportunities for collaboration with colleagues
- be well planned and integrated
- build individual and school capacity

The 2005-2006 sites continue to be actively focused on inquiry and enhancing the engagement of their learners. The district continues to support them by providing consultative time to liaise and by providing resources and supports where appropriate.

5. The Aboriginal Learners Inquiry (ALI 2006)

As an Aboriginal student in Nanaimo in the 1970s, Shane Point belonged to a gang as a way to survive. Daily fights on the schoolyard were a normal part of his life. One day, he and two other First Nations students, Ed and Buzz, were called into the office. Shane was terrified because Buzz, a tough guy, threatened to beat him up if, in explaining the reason for the fight, he failed to get them off the hook with the principal. When the dreaded moment arrived, Shane tried to impress the principal by using big words that he'd heard on his favourite TV show, the courtroom drama, Perry Mason. The principal sent Buzz and Ed back to their classrooms and said to Shane, "You don't know what you're saying, do you?" Shane had to admit he didn't. The principal continued, "And you can't read very well either." Shane had to agree. From then on, Shane went to "the office" every day and the principal taught him how to read. Perhaps getting a helping hand from an unexpected source at a critical point in his young life was what inspired Shane, now a respected local Aboriginal leader, to devote his time to supporting young Aboriginal learners.

The focus of Year Two's Aboriginal Learning Inquiry was **"Walking With Aboriginal Learners Through Graduation: Creating Schools Where All Aboriginal Learners Succeed."** Ten elementary and secondary schools took part in this Inquiry, which sought to shift the discourse about Aboriginal learners from deficit-oriented to appreciative; to empower Aboriginal students relative to school and to their own learning; to understand Aboriginal ways of learning and knowing; to accelerate the creation of a safe, inclusive, and engaging learning climate for Aboriginal learners; to share expertise on best practices; and to provide opportunities for co-creating new strategies for teaching Aboriginal learners.

The inquiry began with staff, students, parents, and graduates telling stories about the best thing the school system has done for them as learners or as teachers/administrators working with Aboriginal learners. The ensuing Summit gave participants a chance to dream and design schools in which all Aboriginal learners are successful.

The Discovery phase of our district's Aboriginal Inquiry uncovered countless stories like Shane Point's – stories of young people in our schools whose lives have been turned around by a caring teacher, support worker, or administrator.

As one of the facilitators of the two-day Aboriginal Learners Inquiry Summit held at the Italian Cultural Centre on February 20-21, 2007, Shane invited the 150 student, parent, teacher, administrator, trustee and government representatives in attendance to "Come join me in our canoe and let's paddle this journey together." These words not only reflect traditional First Nations values of community and inclusiveness, they also encapsulate the spirit and intent of our Learning Inquiry as voiced by Britannia Secondary student delegate, Dakota Prince: "I felt kind of like equal and we were all together and that we really wanted something to come out of this."

The Appreciative Inquiry storytelling approach seemed to be particularly

"I saw people really going deep and challenging their perceptions about education, certainly their views of Aboriginal people. I saw people in tears, I saw people in joy, laughing, talking about real change...The Aboriginal Learners Inquiry is probably the most important thing to happen in Aboriginal education – maybe even education in BC – for a long time."

*Jeff Smith, Retired
Administrator
Aboriginal Education*

"People have shifted from blaming and problem identification when they talk about Aboriginal students to excitedly relating stories about ways to create student successes."

*Lynn Green, Associate
Superintendent*

"A key moment happened just before the boys did the Eagle Dance. Eagles came overhead and flew above the whole school. There was absolute silence as the eagles flew overhead. The shared meaning of this according to Coast Salish people is that the Creator came to witness what the students had done. He was showing that he was very proud of these children."

Frances Carlick
Britannia Elementary
Community School

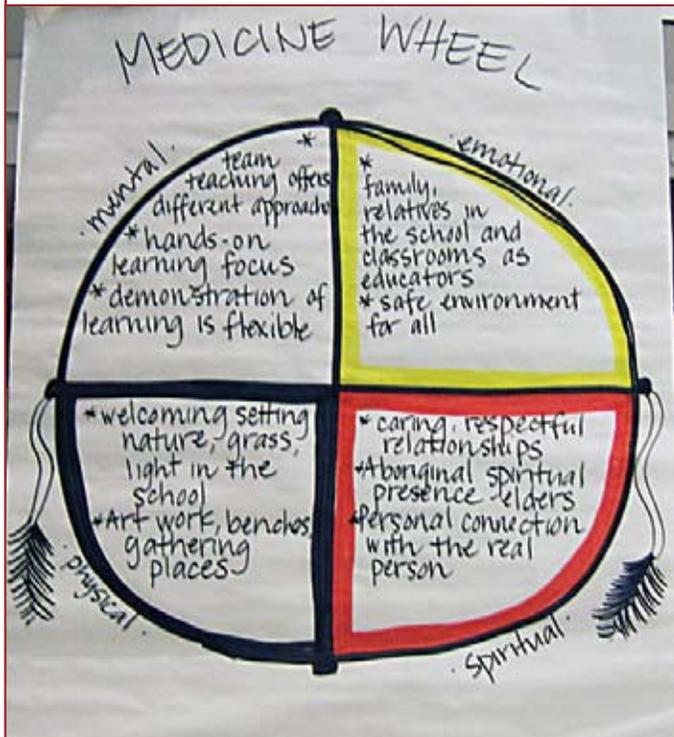
meaningful for Aboriginal learners, perhaps because it resonates with the deep roots of their culture, as these words by Jeff Smith, retired administrator of Aboriginal education indicate:

"Narrative is how we passed on history. It's how we've been able to articulate our values, our stories, our milieu... its how we've been able to connect to each other."

While these proposals reflect the particular needs of Aboriginal learners, in the words of First Nations School Support Worker, Amanda White, "Whatever changes we make for Aboriginal students will benefit all children in our school system."

The Aboriginal Learners Inquiry confirmed the learning discoveries that arose in the 2005-2006 Learning Inquiry into Adolescent Learning, as well as those emerging in the Learning Inquiry on English Language Learners, and it offered further insights unique to the Aboriginal experience. These additional elements that support Aboriginal learners, distilled from *Aboriginal Learning Inquiry Design Proposals* (see Appendix D), emphasized the need to:

- Recognize the central importance of family and community, with parents and elders serving as teachers/resource people/role models, and with support provided to families (as needed) from preschool onward.
- Make sure First Nations students have a voice in school governance and receive opportunities to develop leadership skills.



- Embed Aboriginal content in all K-12 curricula – to be developed by multigenerational, multicultural committees that would include elders, students and other family and community members.
- Ensure there are sufficient Aboriginal staff to support Aboriginal students by making personal connections with them, sharing cultural teachings with students and other school personnel, and liaising with families and other members of the Aboriginal community. Having Aboriginal role models at all levels in the system is essential.
- Educate staff about Aboriginal culture and teachings, providing opportunities for them to reflect on their own values and possible biases.

6. English Language Learners Inquiry (ELLI 2007)

“The ELLI’s focus on building connections between home, school and the community is long overdue. We all know that strong connections between parents and school enhance student learning and build success. By using the interview process and “fanning out” into the larger community I believe we will not only amplify appreciation for different cultures at our school, but also improve language development and learning overall.”

Reflections of Betsy Surchin, Teacher, Norquay Elementary

“Language, Culture and Learning: Embracing our shared responsibility to honour diversity and foster the engagement and success of all English Language Learners”, represents the hopes, aspirations and goals of schools seeking a deeper understanding of the strengths, issues and practices related to English language learning within the VSB. Plans began in the late spring of 2007 to focus on ESL learning as district stakeholders responded to the ESL community’s desire for a review of practices and issues and saw the value of applying an appreciative approach to that undertaking. In the fall of 2007, the ELLI was launched to stimulate dialogue among teachers, administrators, parents, students, community members and other stakeholders about how to create schools that best support the success of English Language learners.

Two schools - Fleming Elementary and Norquay Elementary - as well as many district staff, were engaged in this process. Each educational community put its own unique interpretation on the district generated affirmative topic by co-constructing their own focus, which addressed the community’s priorities and interests, but was consistent with the district affirmative topic as headlined above. In each case, the affirmative topics were developed through dynamic narrative and dialogue based processes, which saw high engagement in the diverse group of stakeholders including multicultural workers, teachers, administrators, etcetera.

For **Norquay** the affirmative topic is: *“Sharing responsibilities, working collaboratively and strengthening connections to enrich English language learning for everyone in our school community”*

For **Fleming**, it is: *“Engaging confident English language learners in an inclusive environment, with open communication and respectful relationships.”*

Using an “Appreciative” approach, the ELLI’s purposes include:

- creating environments where English Language learners are highly engaged in learning in their classrooms
- sharing expertise on best practices and providing opportunities for the co-construction of new strategies for teaching English language learners
- creating a safe and inclusive learning climate for English language students
- finding meaningful ways to engage the parent community with the school community

Their stories told us how students learn best, how parents wish to feel included in their children’s education and how so many staff went beyond

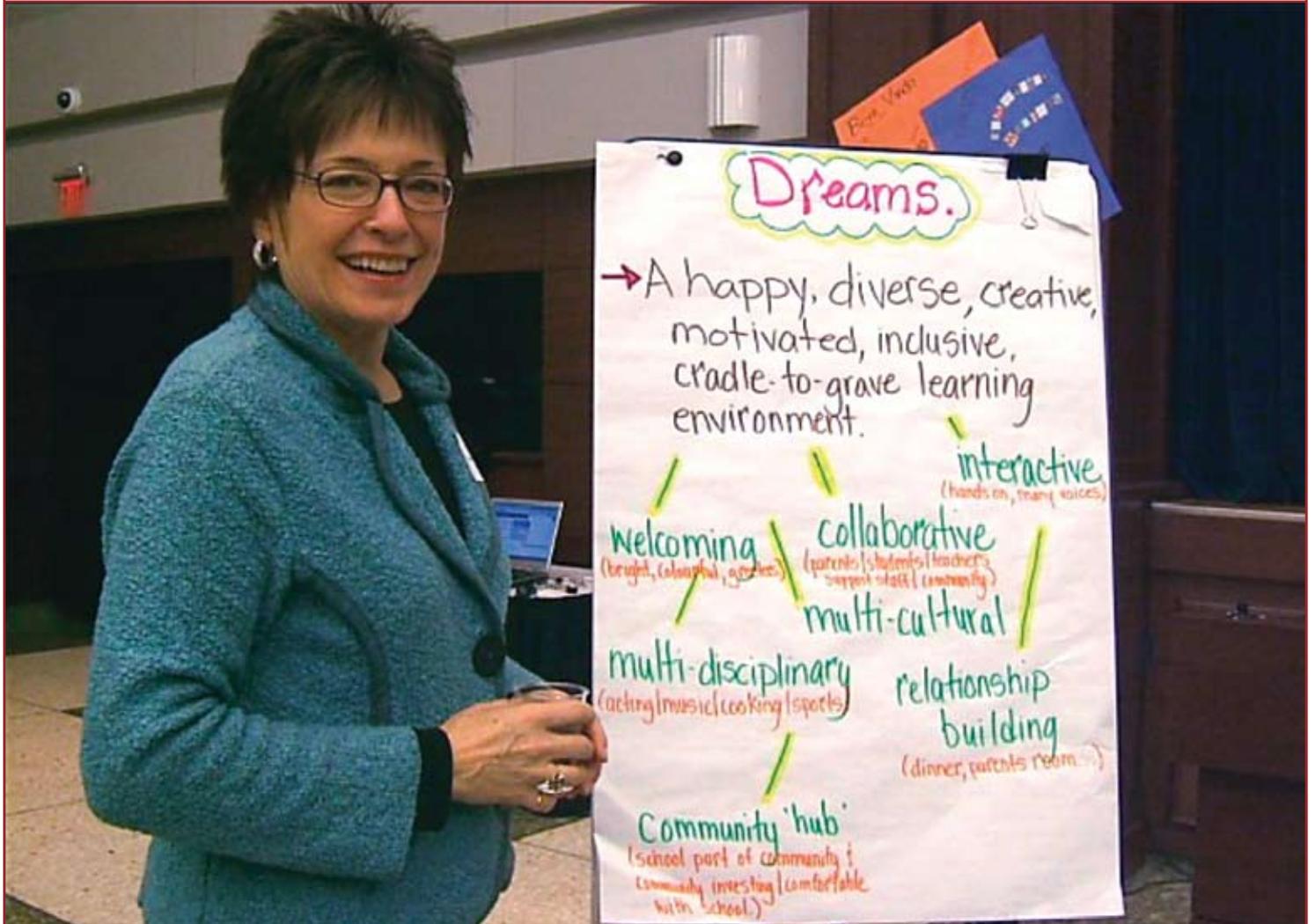


the four walls and the six hours of classroom life to support English language learners. The stories are the catalyst to change the discourse from focusing on deficits to appreciating what already exists in our system. The stories built relationships and empowered stakeholders to take the time to talk about English language learners, their unique needs and issues and how best to maximize their success in the classroom.

At the English Language Learners Inquiry Summit, held at the Italian Cultural Centre on February 19-20, 2008, 70 stakeholders dreamed and designed schools where all English language learners would be successful. By the end of the two days, the participants had created **Design Proposals** around key elements to build a successful school experience for English language learners. They are:

- Parent Engagement
- Collaboration/Shared Responsibility Amongst All Stakeholders
- Active/Engaged Meaningful Learning
- Access to Resources and Support
- Community Building
- Safe and Welcoming Learning Environment
- Strong Relationships





Part Two:
Outcomes of the
Learning Inquiries

1. Introduction and Overview

The impact of the Learning Inquiries has been significant in our district as we recognize both the tacit knowledge within the system and the creativity and desire for excellence. **This section of the paper divides each of the six core learning outcomes of the Inquiries into separate sections, in which we discuss what we have learned, what research supports our findings and what our practices are.**

The core learnings have been synthesized into the acronym “LEARNS” which is a succinct representation of the outcomes of the Inquiries. That model is explained in section 2 of Part Two.

The Learning Inquiry has ignited a sense of pride, confidence, and creativity that is producing significant change in a number of our schools. Current, ongoing academic research into VSB’s Learning Inquiry suggests that Appreciative Inquiry, as well as being a rich learning modality, is also an effective catalyst for personal and organizational transformation.

In his dissertation about the VSB Learning Inquiry, Mark Dickerson, PhD graduate from Fielding Graduate University in Santa Barbara, California, noted these significant changes in those who took a leadership role conducting the Learning Inquiry at their schools:

The experience of leading the AI initiatives in their schools provided site team members with opportunities to...develop stronger collegial relationships with staff members, and become intimately involved in developing special programs for their schools. New administrators were able quickly to immerse themselves in their new schools, teachers were able to connect with their colleagues and site team members were motivated to strengthen their level of engagement in their schools.⁷

During the Adolescent Learning Inquiry (2005), Simon Fraser University Faculty of Business Administration professor, Dr. Gervase Bushe, an internationally recognized scholar in organizational development, conducted a study to determine which sites experienced transformational change in areas related to student learning. He discovered that half of the sites “had changes in the cultures of their systems that should increase student learning – things like a significant shift in how teachers view their role...[and] much greater engagement and voice of students.”⁸

In the three years since it was introduced to the District, in addition to the three Learning Inquiries, Appreciative Inquiry has been and continues to be used in leadership training, school visioning, team building, school growth development, community forums, and other applications throughout the VSB. It is clear that a culture of Appreciative Inquiry has had a powerful impact within the Vancouver school system.



2. Outcomes of the Inquiries: “LEARNS” —The Essentials of Optimal Learning

A student from King George Secondary School tells the story of working with a small group of students to create a film on a global issue inspired by Vancouver Art Gallery’s 2004 Massive Change exhibit. Challenged by tough deadlines (making a short documentary in seven days!), and the need to immediately grasp brand-new movie-making skills and technologies, she found the self-directed project exhilarating: “there were no adults involved to guide us... also because it allowed us to concentrate on this one task, without having to worry about schoolwork or tests.” After creating the film, she and her group presented it to a symposium attended by students from other schools: “We found out that their points of view on the subject were quite different from ours, so we got to learn even more even after we finished our project!”

Her story illustrates the six core themes that emerged from our Learning Inquiry. Working with a small group of students on a single project created a sense of **belonging** as did being part of the larger group of students from different districts who were selected to participate in the symposium; the trust accorded to her by the teachers reflected strong teacher-student **relationships** and provided a **safe environment** within which she and the other students felt free to take risks with their learning; being released from regular academic expectations so she could give the project her full attention showed **flexibility** on the part of her teachers and administrators; creating a film is clearly **experiential learning** that embraces a **range of learning styles**; and the attribute, **passionate teaching**, in this instance, was evident in the fertile context created behind the scenes by the educators who structured the project and by the opportunity it afforded students to “learn something that we were interested in, by ourselves and then teach others about it.”

VSB’s Appreciative Inquiry process has given rise to an ideological consensus shared by all stakeholder groups, including students, teachers, administrators, support staff, trustees, and community members who participated in the district’s Adolescent, Aboriginal, and English Language Learning Inquiries. They have all agreed that the following attributes constitute an optimal learning experience:

- Strong relationships and a sense of belonging
- A safe and supportive learning environment
- Active, passionate teaching
- Opportunities for experiential learning, both in and out of the classroom
- Recognition and support for diverse learning styles
- Flexibility and choice at the classroom, school, and district levels

These learnings, many of which are considered “best practice” among leading educators, have a particular resonance at the VSB. More than prescribed ideas on the pages of a textbook, they arise from the lived experience of representatives from every corner of our district, and from an inclusive dialogue process producing a collective sense of ownership with the power to generate lasting change.

Each of these six core learning outcomes or themes is explored in greater depth in this section.

The outcomes of the three learning Inquiries have been synthesized into the acronym "LEARNS", (outlined on next page, also in Appendix C).

While the six learnings span all three Inquiries, inevitably there are differences in emphasis because of the different populations being examined. Among adolescent learners, student voice, an attribute of a safe and supportive learning environment, and experiential or hands-on learning, were particularly important. For Aboriginal learners, the inclusion of their cultures within mainstream curriculum was a significant desire. In the current Inquiry on English Language Learners, the need for more parental involvement is emerging as an area of special focus.



Figure 3 (see also Appendix C)

“LEARNS” Outcomes of the Learning Inquiries, Vancouver School Board

Adolescent Learning Inquiry 2005-2006

Aboriginal Learning Inquiry 2006-2007

English Language Learners Inquiry 2007-2008

Overwhelmingly students, teachers, administrators, parents and community members repeatedly told us that optimal learning takes place when the following conditions are in place:

L	LEARNING Diverse rates and styles of learning are recognized and supported
E	ENGAGING, EXPERIENTIAL Engaging experiential learning opportunities within and beyond the classroom are routine
A	ACTIVE, PASSIONATE TEACHING Active learning experiences are created by teachers passionate about their work
R	RELATIONSHIPS Relationships are respectful, supportive and purposeful
N	NEED FOR FLEXIBILITY AND CHOICE Flexibility and choice in the classroom, school and system is accommodated
S	SAFETY A safe and supportive environment exists

2.1. Recognize and Support Diverse Learning Styles

Recognize and Support Diverse Learning Styles: What We Know

A parent at the Eric Hamper site, whose son “doesn’t fit the ‘mold’ of the typical learner”, was impressed by one teacher in particular who said, “It wasn’t his fault he wasn’t ‘getting it,’ it was her that wasn’t teaching the right way – she was willing to take the time to find out the best way he was able to learn and teach him with that approach.”

A student at the Gladstone-Tyee site, who used to find Social Studies boring, got a teacher who taught the subject by using narrative: “He made me look forward to social studies. He made learning fun. I found that telling stories made it easier to learn too.” This testimonial reflects the teacher’s ability to reach intuitive learners who respond to material that engages the imagination and focuses on meaning and possibility. Howard Gardner refers to this “narrational entry point” as one doorway for learners.

These stories are emblematic of the importance of acknowledging diverse learning styles and using teaching approaches that are appropriate for the learner.

When teachers use a range of approaches to a topic, they are able to reach more students, since students learn in different ways. According to Gardner, multiple approaches can also help deal with student biases and stereotypes since they force them to see an issue or phenomenon in more than one way. In addition, they give students a sense of what it is like to have expert knowledge: “An expert is an individual who can think about his or her area of expertise in multiple ways—verbal description, graphic sketches, behavioral embodiment, humorous renditions, and so on.”⁹

Supporting students in identifying their learning styles can give them insight into what modalities work best for them. This in turn can assist them in taking more responsibility for their own learning, discovering with their teachers how best to approach a given concept or topic.

The Learning Inquiry produced a number of illustrative stories of teachers who adapted their lessons and/or assessment practices to accommodate different learning styles:

“The professor offered to test me orally as an alternative way to examine my knowledge. This proved to be very positive because I was able to show knowledge in the area, and as a result he permitted me to continue in the field of biology.” (Teacher, Gladstone-Tyee Site)

“...[in a Criminology/CSI Science10 Unit] the teacher sets all the textbooks aside and assigns each of us a drawing of a crime that might be found in our daily lives. To me one of the greatest pleasures in life is drawing. All of a sudden, I am inspired with passion and totally looking forward to the presentation.” (Student, Main Street Site)

“A grade 6 boy who struggled with academics in school had an amazing connection with his culture, classmates and curriculum. When the class

“I’ve also come to realize that not all people are capable of learning verbally, some people need to be taught visually and also physically.”

*Student
Britannia Secondary School*

"A number of factors contribute to the academic success of Aboriginal students. These include... teaching practices that reflect Aboriginal learning styles (e.g., differentiated instruction and evaluation)."

*The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Ontario
What Works?
Research into Practice*

"One of the problems, however, in programs geared to individual differences in learning rates is that the slower children become bored or discouraged when called upon to persevere for long periods of time. This problem can be significantly reduced if teachers employ a variety of approaches to the same concepts or skills...from dance, to field trips, to reading, to writing, to drawing, even though the body of knowledge or skills to be learned remains unchanged."

*John Goodlad
What Schools Are For*

was studying Nigeria and specifically the "Gum Boot" dance he had an opportunity to create a mask...With the help of his father the boy... created a final project in wood. He led the dance at the school and in so doing shared his culture with the class...It was a real moment that he shone."
(Teacher, Queen Alexandra Elementary School)

"...he was very easily frustrated and tore up his assignment. Rather than insisting that he complete another series of questions on a sheet of paper, I asked him to get one of the small student blackboards...I would write 5-6 questions on the blackboard for the student to complete. After he had completed each series of questions I would praise him for it, erase it, and write down another series of questions. He seemed to thrive on the task and the constant reinforcement and was completing the same questions as his peers and thus completing the same learning outcomes..." *(Support Worker, Queen Alexandra Elementary School)*

"Those lecturers who impressed me most and helped me learn are those who used various techniques to present their lecture. They are fired up and cause you to feel excited too." *(Parent, Hamber Site)*

Recognize and Support Diverse Learning Styles: What the Research Tells Us

Studies cited in *Educational Psychology* indicate that effective teachers are those who meet the needs of diverse learners (Darling-Hammond, 2000), and that teachers whose practice stems from the belief that all students can learn leads to improved student performance and self-esteem (Jordan, Lindsay, and Stanovich, 1997)¹⁰. Further, a research study of elementary and middle school teachers revealed that a professional development course "which sensitizes teachers to their own individual learning differences (ILDs) and those of their colleagues can contribute to teachers developing more effective beliefs about students."¹¹

In their report on "The Language of Learning Styles", Burris et al define "learning style" or "cognitive style" as "the preferred or habitual patterns of mental functioning: information processing and the formation of ideas and judgments."¹² The report highlights a number of different models that have proved useful to educators – field dependent versus field independent; Kolb (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation); Myers Briggs (a psychological construct based on qualities such as extraversion, introversion, sensing, intuition, thinking, feeling, judging, and perceiving); and McCarthy (Innovative, Analytical, Common Sense, and Dynamic learners). They conclude that "it is important to take the time to become well versed in the language of learning styles and implement new teaching and assessment methods; classroom and laboratory activities; and classroom management techniques in an ongoing effort to meet the needs of our diverse students."¹³

Recognize and Support Diverse Learning Styles: What We Are Doing

Here are some of the steps we are taking or planning to take to support students with diverse learning styles:

- Providing training for staff in diverse learning styles including differentiated instruction
- Devoting professional development time to addressing “struggling learners” in their individualized learning settings
- Encouraging older students to teach younger students (peer tutoring/mentoring)
- Utilizing technological devices to support successful learning experiences for students with special needs
- Working with staff to adapt curriculum to address diverse learning needs of ESL, special needs and gifted learners in an inclusive setting
- Focusing on struggling learners from the district that includes focused staff development for new teachers and targeted programming with adaptations to help ensure success in learning
- Using the Inclusion Support Team that provides capacity building opportunities through engagement of teachers, support staff and students
- Offering programs such as IB, Mini School, Montessori, and other Alternate Programs for those students better served in a specialized program
- Using the Community Links Teams assigned to Family of Schools to support the most vulnerable students
- Providing Distributed Learning opportunities for those students who prefer that mode of learning and assessment
- Supporting Gifted education that includes mentoring for inclusion, Multi-Age Cluster Classes (MACC) at the elementary level as well as the Gifted Learning Disabilities Class (GOLD) for Secondary aged students with dual learning profiles
- Implementing a Resource Team Model at each elementary and secondary school to provide on-going inclusive support for those students who struggle to meet expectations academically and behaviourally



2.2. Engaging, Experiential Learning

“When students are asked to engage in tasks and activities that require them to be active rather than passive, for example, their academic performance tends to increase.”

*Lawrence W. Lezotte
Learning for All*

Engaging, Experiential Learning: What We Know

A student from one of our downtown schools will never forget a Biology 11 field trip to Bamfield on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Exploring phosphorescent marine animals in the dark and in the rain, going on a boat to gather plankton, and then looking at them under a microscope – all of it delighted her: “I think I learn best by feeling, touching, watching, hearing, and doing experiments...I love adventure and I learned too much in Bamfield but I do remember everything!”

The student’s story speaks volumes about the power of experiential learning, learning that emerges from Confucius’ famous dictum: “Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand.” Countless students interviewed in our Learning Inquiry share her enthusiasm, as these accounts from students involved in the Britannia Elementary School Aboriginal Inquiry demonstrate:

“This year a scientist came to our classroom. She let us touch and study fossils, she showed us how to make a volcano and she gave us gems.”

“Mr. B. gave us paper, pipe cleaners, tongue depressors, coffee stirrers, straws and tape. We first made a boat out of those 5 objects. People were put into groups of 5. My team’s boat held 5 weights and then sank.”

Here are some of the dimensions of experiential learning that were uncovered in the Inquiry:

- **It is hands-on:** “Some boys who had behaviour problems loved activities such as making bannock or cooking, as they had a chance to show their skills. They seemed to behave if they were engaged in doing something productive and practical.” (Teacher, Britannia Elementary Community School)
- **It builds upon students’ lived experiences.** It is important to provide students with opportunities to incorporate and build upon their lived experience in their learning: “Children made connections to their own heritage through their own stories. Most of the work was done at home with the parents encouraging their children to learn the legends...Doing the presentation of the legends brought it all together and gave the children a sense of pride.” (Teacher, Britannia Elementary)
- **It can engage students in subject matter with which they are having difficulty:** “I hated Math, it troubled me...The whole point was that my grade 8 Math teacher was fun. Probably 60% of the course was activities and games, with the other 40% for learning. But somehow...the teacher was able to slip in Math – so actually we were learning!” (Student, Britannia Elementary)
- **It is connected with the “real world”:** “Mike (our guest speaker) told us that he was never properly trained in how to use the forklift which is what caused the loss of his leg. I found the presentation very powerful... it made me realize that what happened to him could happen to me so now I am

sure to ask any questions I have when I am working and to think before just taking on a task to see if there are any dangers.” (Student, Main Street Site)

- **It provides a more tangible entry point to the subject:** “After I arrived at Main Street, I experienced a different study style. To help students better understand a play, my teachers have students play different roles. I found this very helpful when I was learning *Romeo and Juliet*. I understood the background of the play much better.” (Student, Main Street Site)
- **It often calls forth new skills and allows students to be experts:** “My story takes place after I arrived back from taking part in the Red Cross Symposium...We decided to prepare workshops on the topics of landmines and child soldiers...Setting up the workshops were a lot of work...I sparked an interest in the students to learn more about the issues and ask questions. I think that teenagers feel successful if they are given an opportunity to build something of their own.” (Student, Gladstone-Tyee Site)
- **It connects students with the surrounding community:** “The work experience involved researching the wireless connection in Yaletown and whether they were secured or not. Again, an opportunity like this could only be gained in this type of work experience...” (Teacher, Tupper Site)
- **It expands students’ horizons:** “As the lights of the Eiffel Tower lit up the sky, we felt suspended in time. One of the students commented, ‘This is surreal – I have never been out of Vancouver and here I am by the Seine my eyes drinking in this vision. I really see the world for the first time now.’” (Teacher, Main Street Site)

“A recent article in the Review of Educational Research examined ninety-six reviews of adventure education programs from around the world...The authors found that students who participate in adventure programs show significant improvement in their problem-solving abilities, leadership skills, social skills, and independence.”

*Roland S. Barth
Learning by Heart*

Engaging, Experiential Learning: What the Research Tells Us

Myriad opportunities await the teacher searching out experiential learning opportunities. Research will assure her/him that:

Through their involvement in field studies and experiential learning in general, evidence clearly identifies heightened connections among students and the curriculum. Field trips are treasured for their relative rarity and involve extensive planning, which builds interest and excitement about the topic. Teacher and student rapport was found to improve as did students’ willingness to see each other in different lights outside of the sometimes confining atmosphere of the school’s four walls.¹⁴ Retention of content information has also been identified as a potential immediate outcome of a field trip as well as improved attitudes towards the subject area.¹⁵

Experiential learning is defined by Cornell University’s 1995 report as occurring when “students are placed in a situation where they think and interact; learn in and



from a real-world environment. While traditional teaching and learning is typically teacher-directed, content-driven, text-oriented, and classroom-based, experiential learning involves active participation of the student in planning, development and execution of learning activities, is shaped by the problems and pressures arising from the real-world situation and occurs most effectively outside the classroom. For experiential learning to occur within the classroom, the instructor must use strategies that simulate or incorporate real-world situations.”¹⁶ The report goes on to state that such learning needs to be purposeful, supervised, evaluated, and should provide opportunities for reflection.

The importance of experiential learning for learners of all ages is a prevailing theme for educators. Canadian Education Association’s 2005 report, *Adolescence and Learning: Their Future for Our World*, states that



“Education systems need to support the development of young people who build knowledge rather than consume information and work that is rich in meaningful experience rather than rich in information.”¹⁷ The Aboriginal Teacher Education Taskforce’s recommendations to the Association of BC Deans of Education stress the need to “create authentic experiential opportunities for students, faculty, and school associates to learn firsthand about Indigenous teaching and learning (i.e., land-based learning and traditional ways of teaching and learning).”¹⁸

In “Exploring Problem-based Learning in the Context of High School Science: Design and Implementation Issues,” authors Karen Goodnough and Marie Cashion noted that the majority of their participants liked learning through problem-based learning (PBL) “because it promoted active learning, made science relevant, provided variety in learning, and supported group work.”¹⁹

A doctoral candidate at East Texas University maintains that teachers in the upper grades should not hesitate to use “learning by doing” modalities used at the primary level. In her research she discovered that “all the cooperative group learning strategies were positive in the academic and affective-social domains.”²⁰

A study of students required to apply their learning by teaching younger students enabled participants to make a meaningful connection to the material as this example indicates: “I suddenly cared a lot more about what I was learning and seemed to be better able to pull out the essential information and aspects of science that applied to my life. I found myself raising my hand more in class and asking better questions.”²¹

Engaging, Experiential Learning: What We Are Doing

Here are some of the steps we are taking or planning to take in our schools to provide more opportunities for experiential learning:

- Committing to offering all students one field trip per year
- Exploring and evaluating resources in order to incorporate experiential learning in the classroom
- Responding to student led Sustainability Initiative, culminating in a district wide one day “summit”, a planning session which resulted in sustained district changes in the areas of energy consumption, curriculum, water consumption, composting and recycling
- Encouraging student government and leadership opportunities through a district Students Council
- Engaging student representatives in a District Planning group
- Building relationships with local organizations, businesses, and educational organizations for the purposes of work experience opportunities, career prep opportunities etcetera.
- Offering Career preparatory experiences in a variety of post secondary pathways are offered in most secondary schools

“There is a good deal of evidence that learning is enhanced when teachers pay attention to the knowledge and beliefs that learners bring to a learning task, use this knowledge as a starting point for new instruction, and monitor students’ changing conceptions as instruction proceeds.”

*John D. Bransford, Ann L. Brown, and Rodney R. Cocking, editors
How People Learn*

2.3. Active, Passionate Teaching

“Teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be. The courage to teach is the courage to keep one’s heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that teacher and students and subject can be woven into the of community that learning, and living, require.”

*Parker J. Palmer, Founder
Fetzer Institute Teacher
Foundation Program*

Active, Passionate Teaching: What We Know

The daughter of a teacher tells the story of a time when her mother observed a physical education teacher leading children with hearing impairment: “The teacher was so expressive, energetic and totally involved with every child. He created a special communication between himself and the children. My mom had never seen before how much happiness a good teacher could bring to students.” (Downtown Vancouver Schools Site)

There is probably no single factor that is more important in engaging students’ learning than teachers’ passion for their subject: “Every lesson should feel like it is their ‘best day ever.’ Teachers who can ‘sell’ their passion will help students learn more effectively.” (Britannia Community Site)

Here are some of the ways that educators demonstrate their passion for teaching and ignite passion for learning in their students:

- **Facilitating connections between classroom learning and the outside world:** “I was taking my art class from a teacher who had recently graduated from art school. She was passionate about the subject and her students’ work. She would treat our work like we were making legitimate art that was contributing to the body of art for the real world.” (Teacher, Gladstone-Tyee Site)
- **Setting aside the textbook and connecting directly with students:** “From as far back as I can remember, the teachers who have had the biggest impact on me have been the ones who have put the textbook down on the table and spoken to my face.” (Student, Gladstone-Tyee Site)
- **Using a variety of fun and creative teaching strategies including experiential learning and interdisciplinary approaches:** “He had a real passion for teaching and for the subject area and used very innovative teaching methods. One day, he noticed it snowing and took us outside to gather snowflakes on a piece of paper. Then we went back inside and analyzed the location of the snowflakes on the page. This was a very innovative and creative method of teaching systems, etc.” (Student, Britannia Secondary)
- **Seizing the teachable moment:** “This was the day of the student riots staged in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China... My biology teacher created an exceptional learning experience by changing her lecture from biology to teaching us about the history of China.” (Staff, Gladstone-Tyee Site)

It was also evident from the Appreciative Inquiry data that students are inspired by their teacher’s passion, not just toward their subject but also toward them as learners:

“As I plan each daily lesson, I ask myself, ‘What will change their lives today? ...I need to be passionate about both the students and the subject matter.’” (Teacher, Downtown Vancouver Schools Site)

“He was passionate about his subject and wanted us to do well!” (Parent, Gladstone-Tyee Site)

"He is a passionate man who loves to teach and cares about how we are doing as human beings." (Student, Britannia Community Site)

Active, Passionate Teaching: What the Research Tells Us

Research conducted in 2005 at the University of Illinois on 30 exemplary teachers confirms the findings of the VSB's Learning Inquiry. While factors such as knowledge of the subject, preparation, and a student-centered philosophy of education have some bearing on their success, the top two factors were "love for teaching and learning" and "respect for students."²²

In their study, "Committed Teachers, Passionate Teachers: The Dimension of Passion Associated with Teacher Commitment and Engagement," Leanne Crosswell and Bob Elliott put teacher passion front and centre: "The traditional view of teacher commitment considers it to refer to external referents. However, there is a growing body of literature that draws a strong connection between teacher commitment and the very intimate element of passion for the work of teaching (Day, 2004; Elliott and Crosswell, 2001; Fried, 1995)."

Parker Palmer, founder and senior partner of the Center for Courage and Renewal, supports this view in his work, "The Heart of a Teacher: Identity and Integrity in Teaching." He maintains that it is not technique that distinguishes a passionate teacher – it is the capacity "to weave a complex web of connections between themselves, their subjects, and their students, so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves. The methods used by these weavers

"The cry for interesting, open-ended, relevant, imaginative teaching was a key message. 'The important thing about teachers is that they teach.' From all three cities came frustration about teachers who simply told them to open their textbooks and 'do the work.' Frustration, too, that often the 'good' teachers do all the 'interesting stuff' with the smart kids, giving the average students less stimulating, exciting, dynamic curriculum to tackle."

*Kathleen Gould Lundy
Imagine a School...What
Could High School Look Like If
We Got It Right?*



vary widely: lectures, Socratic dialogues, laboratory experiments, collaborative problem-solving, creative chaos. The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts... the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self."²³



Active, Passionate Teaching: What We Are Doing

Many of the measures that contribute to strong relationships and a sense of belonging, safe and supportive learning environments, diverse learning styles, experiential learning, and flexibility and choice also support teachers in sustaining/accessing their passion for their craft, their subject, and their students. As indicated earlier, the Appreciative Inquiry process itself, by focusing on what is working in our schools and what people are doing well, has been a significant boost for all participants, including teachers. Passion such as this is bound to light up the classroom and the lives of students.

2.4. Strong Relationships and a Sense of Belonging

Strong Relationships and a Sense of Belonging: What We Know

Among the hundreds of stories shared in the Discovery phase of all three Learning Inquiries, the central importance of positive relationships was a resounding theme – in every story, at every level of the district: the suicidal grade four student whose teacher taught him organizational skills and presentation skills, thereby helping him boost his marks – and his self-esteem; the homeless US draft-dodger struggling to enter the teaching profession, whose colleague took him under his wing “out of the kindness of his heart because he saw in me that spark that makes us all teachers”; the youth worker who won the trust of a hostile Aboriginal boy, who went on to become the most popular kid in the school and to win a prize awarded to the student overcoming the most challenges; the cook who helped a shy immigrant boy out of his shell; the parents whose children’s teachers taught them to read to their kids at home and who later got involved in PAC; the School Liaison Police Officer who gave a second chance to a young Aboriginal man because he believed in him, even though the student had broken the law; the young teacher whose busy principal was always willing to listen to her concerns; and our Superintendent who, as a young teacher in North Vancouver, co-created with the Squamish First Nation an effective, culturally based, interactive Bighouse of learning for their children because of his strong relationship with a Squamish elder and her people. Relationships are the lifeblood of our district.

“Here’s where the phenomenon of another’s person’s potential begins...in a relationship that stimulates and nurtures another person’s learning and growth.”

*Chris Kelly, keynote talk
United Way of the Lower
Mainland, 2007*

The Teacher-Student Relationship

The most central relationship, as revealed at all Learning Inquiries and at all school sites, is the teacher-student one: “When we look at the themes arising out of the some 120 stories collected...the preponderance of stories centre on positive relationships with teachers, and the capacity of teachers to motivate and inspire through that relationship.”²⁴ In her synthesis of the qualities that teachers demonstrate in order to foster positive relationships with students²⁵, Barbara Rowland, a former Learning and Development consultant at the VSB, has identified the following:

- **Inclusive** – accepting all students and treating them equally; being approachable: “The teacher modeled how to value and develop relationships with every student. She showed us in powerful ways how to treat all people with respect...This teacher showed the importance of loving each child for whom they are and recognizing that all learners are different.” (Parent, Wolfe Elementary)
- **Nonjudgmental** – setting aside personal biases and allowing students to make “mistakes:” “Here they (students) were able to say anything without fear of judgment. I treated them like mature adults, and they responded with enthusiasm and engagement.” (Teacher, Britannia Community Site)
- **Respectful** – listening to student’s ideas and viewpoints: “I like O. because he treats us with respect, and doesn’t talk to us like we are jerks.” (Student, Britannia Secondary) “Respect is utmost. It is the highest of laws.” (Student, Tupper Site)

"It doesn't matter if you have the best lesson plan in the world, if you don't have a relationship with the student they won't learn."

Teacher, Vancouver
Technical School

- **Reciprocal Learning** – demonstrating that learning is a two-way street: "It really opened my eyes to the possibility of First Nations culture and showed me the importance of being exposed to the culture, not just for those kids but how all people can benefit from it. I guess I learned we have a lot to learn from First Nations culture." (Teacher, Point Grey Secondary)
- **Optimistic** – providing the students with hope and believing in their abilities: "She made me feel that I could do anything...and I did learn to read." (Student, Hastings Elementary)
- **Encouraging** – recognizing strengths; praising achievements; encouraging questions, opinions, and interests; encouraging student creativity: "I noticed M. struggled to keep up with the other students, particularly with writing. However, when I saw her in a 'Music' setting, she was a shining star...M. has shown me her authentic self. This talent needs to be encouraged and nurtured." (Teacher, Queen Alexandra Elementary) "She's always encouraging and she always urges us to ask questions and just to ask for help. She will actually listen to the student talk, instead of just yelling at him/her for doing something wrong." (Student, Eric Hamber Secondary)



- **Patient** – breaking concepts down into smaller steps and being willing to repeat instructions: “She always helped me with my reading and my math. She broke up the words and I read one word then another word, put them together and got it right.” (Student, Hastings Elementary)
- **Caring/Compassionate** – caring for the students, treating them as individuals, and making personal connections with students: “I was a very shy child, but she helped me come out of my shell. What I learned from this teacher is that with her compassion came the respect of every student – we hung on her every word and were very open to learning.” (Support Staff, Fraser Elementary) “He kept me in school when I was going through a very bad time.” (Project Manager, Aries Project)
- **Trusting** – trusting the students: “I think this is all we need to keep our kids in school. Someone to trust and believe in them.” (Parent, Queen Alexandra Elementary) “The adults involved had to take a risk: to trust the young people to make good decisions for themselves, and to allow them to experience the consequences of occasional poor judgment.” (Student, King George Secondary)

“One thing I really like about school is the ESL students. I like to try to teach them English and make new friends.”

*Student
Hastings Elementary*

Student-Student Relationships

Student-student relationships also play a key role in a young person’s well being and capacity to learn. Interviews of students involved in our Learning Inquiry strongly affirm the central importance of their relationships with peers for a number of different reasons, many of which overlap:

- **Friendship:** “One day I didn’t want to miss was when my best friend Velvet came back. Velvet came back from Guatemala. She went there in grade 4. She was there for 2 months and 4 days. That period of time was so long to me, it was like 2 years for me.” (Student, Britannia Elementary)
- **A Sense of Belonging:** “When I come to school my friends make me feel welcome. They greet me like they haven’t seen me for a long time. It makes me want to come to school.” (Student, Hastings Elementary)
- **Mentoring:** “...three high school kids from Britannia High came here. They did Drama with us. It was really fun...” (Student, Britannia Elementary)
- **Tutoring:** “My most powerful learning experience was when I was in Grade 3 and I was learning long division. My friend taught me and it took a few practices but then I finally got it. After I learned it really well I went to other people in my class and taught them.” (Student, Gladstone-Tyee site)
- **Learning about other Cultures:** “I was surprised with all my classmates because I learned things about them that I never knew before. I knew my friend was Chinese but I never knew he was Filipino too...” (Student, Hastings Elementary)
- **Academic Success:** “In fact, the peer-support was the most instrumental strategy for promoting their success in their grade 12 year.” (Principal, Nightingale Elementary School)
- **Developing Confidence:** “The forum started with the students sitting in a circle having to introduce themselves by telling others their name, where they came from, their language and tribe information and any other

"In all cases, the teacher is the most effective initiator of involving parents because once again they draw in the parents to learn about what their kids are doing."

*Teacher
Gladstone Secondary*

information they felt important enough to say. Every student stood up and spoke with such pride about who they were and where they came from."
(Administrator, Point Grey Secondary)

Barbara Rowland points to the teacher's role in supporting positive student-student relationships, although stresses that there are limits: "Teachers can foster positive student relationships through role modeling, and inclusionary practices such as daily class meetings and group projects, but ultimately student relationships depend on the students themselves."²⁶ However, activities and practices that empower students can foster stronger peer relationships: "Students appreciate the times when they can participate in socialization activities, team building activities and leadership prospects where they can learn with and from their peers."²⁷

Relationships with Parents/Family

Another critical relationship in supporting student learning is the relationship between the teacher and the student's caregivers. Our Learning Inquiry offered numerous stories of the importance of developing strong relationships with caregivers. Here is a sampling of the many aspects of this relationship that were highlighted in the Discovery interviews:

- **open communication:** "You have to feel that you are really being taken seriously, the parent-teacher relationship is fair and open, that there is follow up and follow through." (Parent, Gladstone Secondary)
- **inclusiveness:** "She encouraged parent involvement in her class with food projects, cooking, and crafts she incorporated into learning French." (Parent, Hastings Elementary)
- **reassurance:** "I told her I was scared for my girl as she was attending high school at Vancouver Technical next year. She sat with me, trying to convince me that she was going to be fine, that she was a bright girl." (Parent, Queen Alexandra Elementary)
- **meaningful student involvement in parent-teacher events:** "Student-led conferences are one way to involve parents that is way better than what my parents call 'the cattle call' that happens in the cafeteria." (Student, Gladstone Secondary) "For each subject area, students put together a sampling of their work in a folder (portfolio) and then presented to the parents...it made me very proud. This presentation also gave me an opportunity to talk to him about some of the things he did at school." (Parent, Gladstone-Tyee Site)
- **support for families:** "The school here has always supported my family and I really appreciate the help that I've had with Marcus." (Parent, Britannia Elementary)
- **sharing information:** "As teachers, we see students in a different environment. We have lots of information to share with parents that relate to the student's character—ways of interacting with peers and others. In this respect, parents are encouraged when they hear about the gifts and strengths of their children." (Teacher, Gladstone-Tyee Site)

Relationships with Aboriginal Families

The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) data indicate that, although positive relationships with caregivers are important throughout our district, in the case of Aboriginal caregivers, they carry a particular urgency, even poignancy. Two teachers at Nightingale Elementary tell the story of a father who attended an assembly featuring student work on an interactive First Nations Social Studies project. Fascinated by the students' model of a Haida village, and other student creations such as cedar weavings and button blankets, he was tearful as he later confessed to the teachers that this was the first time he had "darkened the door" of a school since his painful experiences as a child.

As the following comments indicate, positive relationships between home and school are very important to First Nations students as well:

"One teacher made Raven's day when he accepted her invitation to her birthday party, and attended on that weekend!" (Parent, Hastings Elementary)

"I was surprised at how just being at the dinner changed my relationship with my First Nations students." (Teacher, Vancouver Technical Secondary)

"A number of the students who brought their families to the luncheon really turned things around. Many of the students improved in their attendance and work completion. They really seemed to be taking an interest in their learning... They really felt that we had taken the time to get to know them and their families, and it really made a difference." (Teacher, Vancouver Technical Secondary)

Relationships with Parents of English Language Learners

Cultural and language differences can inhibit parental involvement in their children's learning. These teachers' accounts illustrate some solutions:

"As an ESL teacher it is always a challenge to get parents of my students to become actively involved in daily school activities. However, I always find that they are happy to hear from the school and willing to attend any musical concerts or dramatic performances. The availability of translation services helps greatly in encouraging parental involvement and is appreciated." (Teacher, Gladstone-Tyee Site)

"Craft night was very successful... They brought parents who didn't speak English. When the teacher insisted that they participate in the activity they did so and enjoyed it. They came back to do the activity a second time. The next day the Dad said 'Hello' for the first time." (Teacher, Tyee Elementary)

Creating relationships with parents of new Canadians is a central learning in the English Language Learning Inquiry. At the Summit conference, support for parents of English language learners arose as a priority for all participants: "All stakeholders realized at the summit that they wanted the same thing and committed to innovations (a parents room, parenting classes, more translation

"I think that it is a much longer road to learn to be a socially successful learner, requiring many opportunities for participation in a wide range of activities. As a teacher I have been cognizant not to apply too much pressure on students to solely achieve in the academic areas, as I am personally aware of the pitfalls of this single focus."

*Teacher
Gladstone-Tyee Site*

"I have found no characteristic of a good school more pervasive than healthy teacher-principal relationships—and no characteristic of a troubled school more common than troubled, embattled, or antiseptic administrator-teacher relationships."

Roland S. Barth
Learning by Heart

services, stronger links to the community centres, etcetera) for their schools. These are intended to build those relationships with parents, get them into the schools, learning English, and better supporting their own children's progress."²⁸

Collegial Relationships Among Educators

It is evident from the AI data that positive teacher-teacher and teacher-administrator relationships – both within a school and between schools – also enhance student learning. Here are some attributes of these relationships:

- **Collaborative:** "I made it clear that from now on I was going to enforce boundaries, and so we all worked together, the counselor, his classroom teacher and myself. That did make a real change in his behaviour over time." (First Nations Resource Teacher, Britannia Elementary School)
- **Caring:** "He literally saved the teacher in me." (Teacher, Churchill Site)
- **Trusting:** "My boss tapping me on my shoulder and instilling trust that I would represent our department well meant a lot to me."²⁹
- **Generous:** "I was so well mentored by Mariette. She was a fabulous role model. She had great skills, she never talked down to people, she was gracious, she shared, she was always inviting but never compelling. She believed in people."³⁰
- **Dedicated:** "When I was an enrolling classroom teacher I would advocate for, protect and encourage all of the students in my class – it was all about them. When I became a VP I realized I was doing the same thing but now it was the whole school who belonged to the 'my kids' group."³¹
- **Encouraging:** "By having two supportive mentors who led me down that path and instilled confidence in me that I did not know existed. I am in a job I love and feel I have a lot to contribute to. To this day I believe I am a better administrator that I ever was as a teacher."³²

Most sites stressed the importance of improved communication and collaboration between elementary and secondary teachers: "Secondary and elementary teachers know very little about each other's roles, teaching styles and strategies. During the AI summit it became very clear that we have a great deal to learn from each other in the area of student learning, and a strong theme of empowerment through transitions emerged."³³

In discussing the necessity for seamless connections from elementary to middle to secondary school, Dr. Carolyn Shields of the University of Illinois points out, "It is important to understand not only the curricular scope and sequences, but also attitudes and expectations. Too often one hears that teachers at the next level will not care and will simply impose 'tough' standards – and this is and should be simply false."³⁴

Appreciative Inquiry is a powerful process for shifting these kinds of dynamics and, in fact, at some sites in our district, has given rise to "collaboration and partnership between teachers in the service of learning where none existed before."³⁵

Strong Relationships and a Sense of Belonging: What the Research Tells Us

The evidence obtained in our Learning Inquiry speaks eloquently about the vital role of the teacher- student relationship. This is confirmed in recent research cited in an *Education Canada* article: "Indeed, teacher warmth and support have unparalleled power to help children achieve and thrive, even high-risk children, as illustrated in recent research conducted by Hamre and Pianta (2005)."³⁶ An account by Kathleen Gould Lundy of a play written and performed by teenagers for the Canadian Education Association's 2006 symposium about adolescent learning was described in the following manner: "Students shared story after story of teachers who went the extra mile, who believed in them and their potential and made positive futures possible. Because of their guidance and teaching, students succeeded academically and socially."³⁷

The *Education Canada* article also cites research about the importance of student-student relationships: "Decades of research on children's peer relationships (see Ladd, 2005; Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker, 1998) have shown that being rejected by the classroom or school peer group is associated with a number of adjustment problems, both concurrently and over the long term, including internalizing problems (low self-esteem, depression, anxiety), externalizing problems (acting out and antisocial behavior), delinquency and criminal behavior as well as academic difficulties and early school withdrawal (for reviews, see Juvonen and Wentzel, 1996; McDougall, Hymel, Vaillancourt, and Mercer, 2001); Parker and Asher, 1987."³⁸

Regarding collegial relationships between teachers, an action research project undertaken by the University of Alberta about the world of beginning teachers stressed the importance of collegial relationships: "The teachers expressed a deep appreciation for the opportunities to meet regularly to share ideas and resources and to learn from each other. The beginning teachers came to realize that much could be learned from each other as well as from veteran teachers."³⁹

Social-emotional learning (SEL), in which students acquire the prosocial skills and sensitivities they need to get along with others, is a priority in our district and its importance is strongly supported in the research. In her report, *Does Being Good Make the Grade?* Dr. Kathryn Wentzel of the University of Maryland discovered that middle school students' prosocial behaviours, such as helping, sharing, and cooperating exhibited in the classroom were better predictors of academic achievement than were their standardized test scores." In his book, *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman cites a meta-analysis of 668 evaluation studies of SEL programs, which confirmed the strong correlation between SEL and academic achievement. The studies also showed that SEL led to safer schools, higher attendance, fewer suspensions, and significantly more positive behaviour on the part of 63 percent of the students: "In the world of social science research, these are remarkable results for any program promoting behavioral change. SEL has delivered on its promise."⁴⁰

"Anderson, Manoogian, and Reznick (1976) found that when children worked on an interesting task in the presence of an adult stranger who ignored them and failed to respond to their initiations, a very low level of intrinsic motivation results, and Ryan and Grolnick (1986) observed lower intrinsic motivation in students who experienced their teachers as cold and uncaring."

*Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci
"Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being"*

"I find that Rohan's self-esteem and self-confidence is really increasing and I think that has a lot to do with the fact that Mom's in the classroom."

Parent
Britannia Elementary

There is considerable overlap between measures that foster strong relationships and a sense of belonging, and those that enhance safe and supportive learning environments.

Strong Relationships and a Sense of Belonging: What We Are Doing

Here are some of the steps we are taking or are planning to take to strengthen relationships both within and between our schools:

- Instituting school-wide social responsibility initiatives – e.g., investigating grade 8 learning behaviours
- Organizing fall camping trips
- Exchanging curricula and activities among teachers
- Organizing joint Pro D days
- Buddying grade 6/7 teachers with grade 8/9 teachers
- Increasing informal mentoring of new teachers
- Enhancing collaboration between teachers and support staff
- Including students, staff and parents in school decision-making, governance and planning
- Providing workshops in dialogue and communication skills
- Creating a newsletter that encompasses a Family of Schools – e.g., the Downtown Vancouver Schools newsletter
- Creating an electronic discussion forum for a Family of Schools
- Holding regular breakfast meetings among members of a Family of Schools
- Providing meaningful opportunities for parent volunteers. ("We need to tap the valuable skills of parents to do more than cook hotdogs." (Downtown Vancouver Schools Site))
- Developing a buddy reading/literacy support program between grade 9 and grade 4 students identified as feeling lost or "without purpose"
- Purchasing software and technical supplies for language translation
- Enhancing parent communication with a parent group email, school web page, and school newsletters
- Providing math/science meetings between grade 7 and grade 8 teachers
- Teaching kids how to teach
- Bringing in First Nations carvers to create totem poles and other structures for schools to honour Aboriginal students' cultural roots, to teach students carving, and to strengthen relationships with the Aboriginal community. (This measure also contributes to a safe and supportive school environment.)
- Providing release time and structured opportunities for secondary and elementary teachers to dialogue about their environments

2.5. Flexibility and Choice

Flexibility and Choice: What We Know

A student who had been attending one of our regular high schools quit school at age 17 because he was bored and alienated. After a period of introspection, he had the opportunity to attend City School, where he responded well to the school's mixed age group, daily field trips, collegial relationships with teachers, parental involvement, and most importantly, to the opportunity to make his own choices regarding his learning. He blossomed in this environment: "I was not only able to focus on the arts, for example, by learning how to use the darkroom, performing music, and organizing cultural events in the evening, but also was able to acquire useful skills that have helped me a great deal in life such as planning a camping trip for 80 people, speaking in public, fundraising, lobbying politically to prevent the shutdown of the school, and tutoring younger students in French and Math."

This story demonstrates that providing flexibility and choice within our system can make the difference between success and failure in a student's life: "It is not our purpose to prescribe what each person's way will be, but to provide for the best of possibilities for that person."⁴¹

A previous section on Diverse Learning Styles addresses flexibility and choice in teaching approaches and learning methods in the classroom. Here are other ways in which flexibility and choice enhance engagement and learning at the classroom level:

- **Encouraging students to create alternate assignments to illustrate comprehension:** "The program was a very well planned one; however, it had enough flexibility to accommodate my desire to film the activities rather than journal like the others." (Student, Main Street Site)
- **Providing opportunities for student directed learning:** "The reason this educational project stands out in my mind is the fact that we were allowed to get out of the classroom and learn something that we were interested in, by ourselves, and then teach others about it." (Student, Downtown Vancouver Schools Site)
- **Using technology to provide more flexibility:** "I remember the first time I used a PowerPoint program. My class was so excited to finally take a break from science homework... At first, I was so engrossed with my computer that I did not notice the silence. It was a silence that came because all of our class's usual troublemakers were completely focused on their projects." (Student, Eric Hamber Secondary)
- **Allowing student input into assessment methods** (e.g., self, peer, and group evaluation): "I was in Grade 6. My teacher gave everyone in the class the privilege of writing our own report card. I enjoyed this because I got to think back about what I did during the year. I think all intermediate students should have the choice of giving themselves their own grades." (Student, Gladstone-Tyee Site)
- **Different classroom compositions** (e.g., a variety of ages/abilities; being grouped with people with the same attitude to their studies; learning with

"Students need to discover where their interests lie and school can do exactly that...School should be a place where many choices are possible enabling students to have self-awareness!"

Britannia Community Site

"Specifically to promote success in math, he received adaptations like extra time to complete tests, a reduced amount of daily work, no homework and little or no 'copying' of questions."

Teacher, Hastings Elementary

“Currently, our conventional design assumes and requires that the adolescent learner adapt and comply with the efficiencies and customary practices of the existing system. This means the learner is required to serve the design of the system. This is wrong-minded and ill-conceived. It is the opposite of how the design of the system should be oriented.”

*Kevin Lukian and Chris Kelly
46th Annual Education CEOs’
Forum, 2007*

adults) “When I was in grade 4, myself and three other grade 4 students were transferred to a grade 7 class to study English with them. I was thrilled!” (Parent, Gladstone-Tyee Site)

The Learning Inquiries make it clear that flexibility and choice needs to be extended to the school and district level as well. Here are some ways in which school and district can support learners with greater flexibility and choice:

- **Delivering courses in a variety of formats** (e.g., student-centered learning, teacher-centered learning, on-line, self-directed) “I really enjoy having options in education, opportunities to be self-directed in my learning. I enjoy the need for freedom to go ahead in work when I’ve mastered what needs to be accomplished and to explore areas of interest...Options in the learning environment and curriculum delivery make a huge difference...” (Student, Sir William Osler Elementary)
- **Offering second and third chances to retake courses:** “Sometimes in life, timing is everything. This is true of learning as well. Second, third and fourth chances can often be the tipping point toward lasting personal growth.” (Britannia Community Site)
- **Providing flexibility regarding the time needed to finish a course:** “I want to go into college or university to do my diploma in order to become a nurse. Therefore I chose the quarter system to do my course because it fits into my schooling and my part time job.” (Student, Main Street Site)
- **Providing support outside the classroom** (e.g., learning centre, resource room, etc.) “The instructors in the learning centre provide me with individual attention; they cater to my unique learning style and needs. They take the time to personalize and customize the learning material to help develop my skills in math and science.” (Student, Main Street Site)
- **Offering creative team teaching and cross-curricular initiatives through flexible timetabling:** “Flexible timetabling also allows for creative things to happen between teachers. This can lead to great connections and programming for students.” (Teacher, Gladstone-Tyee Site)
- **Presenting a range of careers and multiple pathways to success:** “Our education system caters to the academic students, leaving many students to fall through the cracks...Many students do not have behavioural problems, they just learn better through experience.” (Teacher, Downtown Site) “I think people should be guided and encouraged like my son. Last year his Tech Ed instructor told him, ‘You excel with your hands and have a knack for this. There’s a program you might like to enroll in—framing carpentry—ask your parents.’” (Teacher, Gladstone-Tyee Site)

Flexibility and Choice: What the Research Tells Us

In the book, *Optimizing Learning: The Integrative Education Model in the Classroom*, Barbara Clark and her team identify seven keys to optimizing learning, one of which is “Choice and Perceived Control.” “During the past decade many researchers have found that choice and the resulting perception

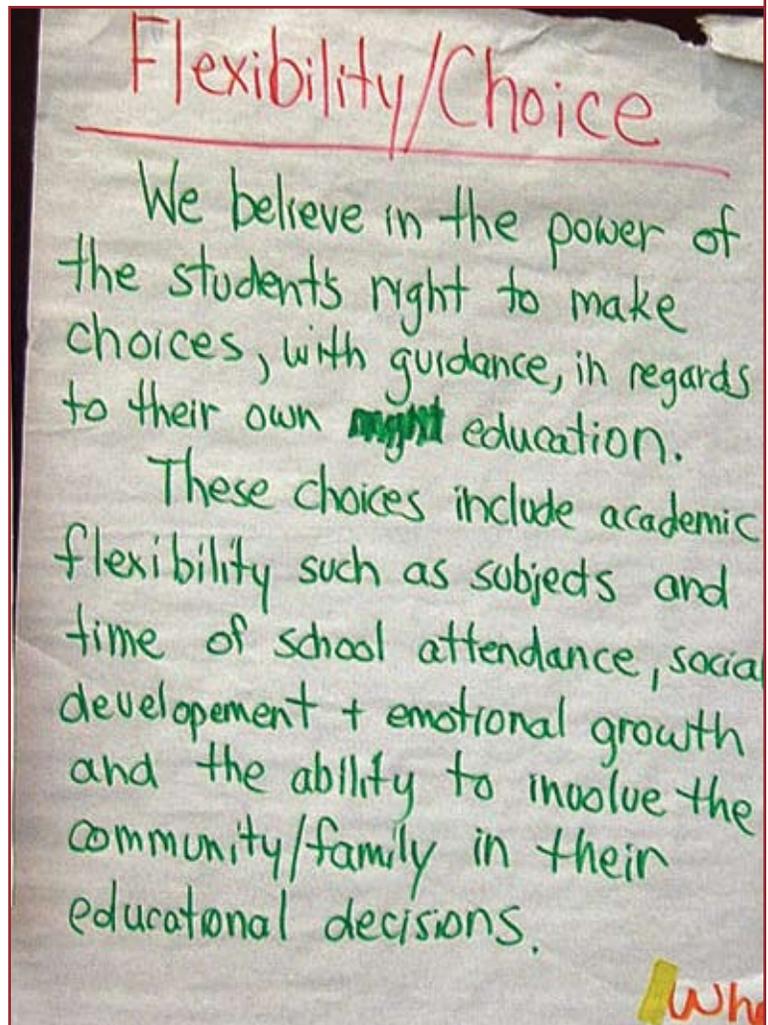
of control are significant factors in student academic achievement and self-concept."⁴² Students 6-16 participating in Clark's summer school project that offered them a high degree of choice were observed to be caring and respectful toward one another and their teachers; creative and willing to engage in more alternative and higher level cognitive activities; and highly motivated toward learning.

The importance of choice is also supported in the work on self-determination theory (SDT):

Field studies have further shown that teachers who are autonomy supportive (in contrast to controlling) catalyze in their students greater intrinsic motivation, curiosity, and desire for challenge...Students taught with a more controlling approach not only lose initiative but learn less effectively, especially when learning requires conceptual, creative processing."⁴³

In *Bending Without Breaking: Improving Education Through Flexibility and Choice*, the authors address flexibility and choice at a school and district level. They give the example of a middle school that had instituted the following instructional and organizational changes over a six-year period: block scheduling, team teaching and a thematic approach to curriculum planning; using a range of assessment techniques – standardized and performance-based; jointly developing content and curriculum standards by staff, students, and community; and establishing a school governance council of staff, parents, and students. As a result of these changes, the school had the lowest incidence of student disciplinary problems in the city; student dropout and staff turnover rates dropped to zero; attendance rates of students and staff rose to 95%; and 71% of students increased reading scores in a standardized test by at least one level.⁴⁴

The authors of *Bending Without Breaking* assert that offering greater flexibility and choice within a school system is not a one-shot project but a systemic undertaking in which "policymakers need to provide an infrastructure of investment, information and assistance; introduce strong incentives; and make fundamental changes in the role of the school, the school board and the state education agency."⁴⁵



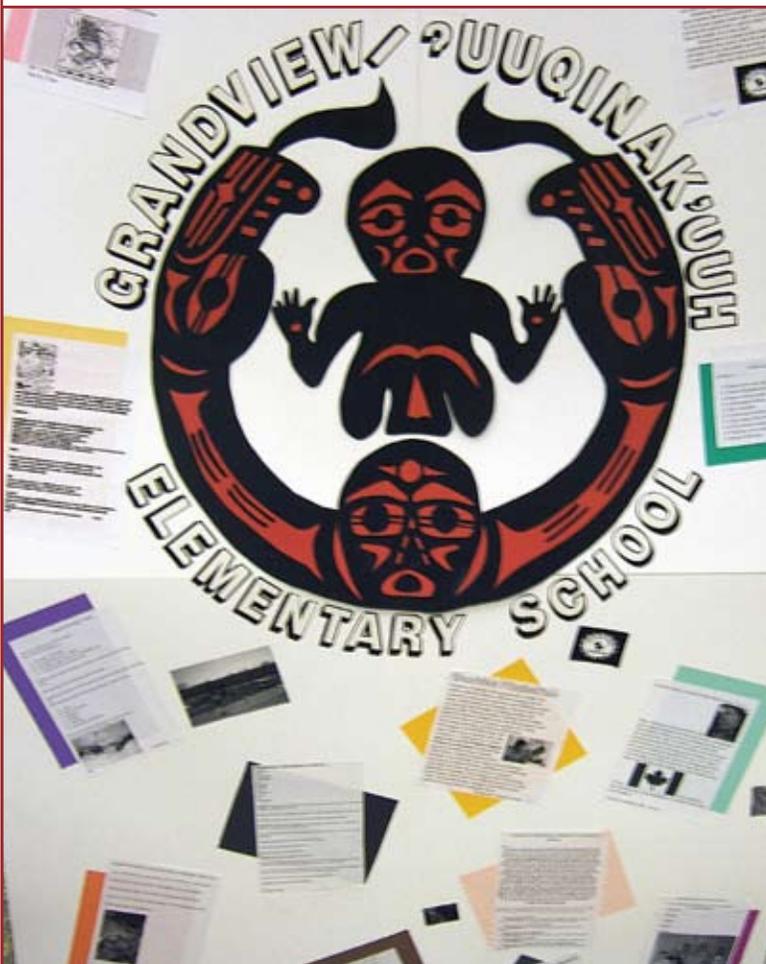
"Alex flourished under the nine week system which allowed him to concentrate on two subjects at a time and be more organized."

Main Street Teacher

Flexibility and Choice: What We Are Doing

Here are some of the steps we are taking or planning to take in our schools to provide more flexibility and choice in our schools:

- Creating skill based classes for students needing extra help
- Providing opportunities for student directed learning and engagement (Sustainability Summit April 2008)
- Developing new career-oriented programs – e.g., esthetician and animation programs and Hockey Academy at the Britannia Family of Schools
- Expanding upon course offerings to support student interests – e.g., a team-taught forensics component to Biology and Law 12
- Developing a "Connections Program" to help build success for grades 8-10 students whose learning is "significantly below expectations"
 - Creating "continuous progress" classes to enable students who have not finished the coursework from the previous grade to complete units left undone as opposed to repeating the entire course
 - Developing a "Humanities 8" course (integrated English 8 and Social Studies 8) for students whose learning is "significantly below expectations"
 - Developing a semester system at sites where none exists
 - Creating smaller class sizes for students whose learning is "significantly below expectations"
 - Experimenting with alternative timetable structures such as a staggered timetable and year round schooling
 - Providing self, peer and group evaluations
 - Surveying staff about ways they wish to implement technologies in their classroom and providing the necessary support
 - Creating flexible subject schedules that include team planning, personal reflection, family of school's professional development days, delayed start to provide for collaboration time, paced, self-directed or various combinations of instruction



2.6. Safe and Supportive Learning Environments

Safe and Supportive Learning Environments: What We Know

A mother tells the story of bringing her two children all the way from England to one of our elementary schools: "The first day I brought them to school...I spent the whole day crying because I was so anxious about them – and how they would settle...When I picked them up I cried because they'd had a good day!" She credits the school for being "very community oriented. It's very supportive and they've had a really great time...We've seen another different aspect of them developing which has taken me by surprise."

This story speaks to the relationship between the school environment and student learning. When students feel safe and supported, they thrive, they take risks, and they realize new potentials in themselves.

There is a correlation between this learning essential and the "Relationships and Belonging" aspect. If a school and the people who work and learn there are committed to fostering strong relationships and a sense of belonging, safe and supportive learning environments are a likely outcome. And the reverse is equally true. This section therefore embraces the preceding findings/ observations/action steps regarding relationships and extends the discussion to school culture and to the broader community.

Here are some of the characteristics of a safe and supportive learning environment:

- **A Sense of Community.** Schools that nurture a family feeling make everyone feel welcome and included: "We all work and play here at Britannia. It's a model that works." (Britannia Community Site)
- **Student Voice/Student Leadership.** Empowering students and including them in real decision-making (not just school dances!) contributes to healthy learning environments: "Part of the success of the program had to do with the fact that the program was process oriented not outcome driven. The program helped break down the hierarchies that the students rebelled against and as a result the students moved from being highly disaffected to high levels of personal power." (Downtown Vancouver Schools Site)
- **A Strong Parent Community.** Meaningful parental involvement is critical to a supportive school community: "It's a good time being a parent for my daughter, volunteering, all of us helping each other, as a parent, and all our little spirits." (Parent, Queen Alexandra Elementary). The need for this parental involvement is further echoed by the ELLI and by many secondary schools continuing to plan deliberate events to engage more parents on an on-going basis, not just at report time.
- **Inclusive and Non-Discriminatory.** Few things erode a student's confidence in self and others more than being discriminated against and the reverse is equally true: "There were racist overtones in the other schools I went to. But when I came to Britannia I instantly felt at home. Our basketball team rocked and staff and students alike were willing to be friendly and give a newcomer like me a chance...so go Bruins! P.S. I graduated with a B.A. from UNBC just

"When one walks into the front foyer of almost any high school in North America, one can usually see a trophy case, honoring past and present athletic achievements and star athletes of the school and a plaque identifying the Honour Roll, honoring the school's top academic scholars. What is missing?"

Shelley Hymel, Kimberly A. Schonert-Reichl, and Lynn D. Miller, Reading, 'Riting, 'Rithmetic and Relationships: Considering the Social Side of Education, 2006, p. 167.

“Despite the fact that humans are liberally endowed with intrinsic motivational tendencies, the evidence is now clear that the maintenance and enhancement of this inherent propensity requires supportive conditions, as it can be fairly readily disrupted by various non-supportive conditions.”

*Richard M. Ryan and
Edward L. Deci
Self-Determination Theory
and the Facilitation of
Intrinsic Motivation, Social
Development, and Well-
Being (Jan 2000 American
Psychologist)*

this last December!” (Graduate, Britannia Secondary). Particularly important in an ethnically diverse region like Vancouver, students seeing themselves and their culture reflected in the curricula experience a sense of inclusion and validity directly linked to self-esteem.

- **Valuing Everyone’s Contribution.** A culture that honours everyone, not just the “stars,” creates a sense of safety: “It is important to accept that not everyone can be the lead musician, actor or scorer, but that all positions within a group, including the audience, have a valuable role and make a valuable contribution to the whole... Respecting everyone, in the classroom, on stage, or on the field, helps to reduce stress.” (Teacher, Point Grey Site). Educators know the significant impact of paying attention to encouraging and valuing the shy, the quiet and sometimes, the ‘hard to love’ student.
- **Small Student Groupings.** Dividing students into pods or placing them into smaller groups has emotional and academic payoffs: “I like our classroom because we are all in pods and no one is alone.” (Student, Hastings Elementary) “I have about eleven First Nations students in the class. This particular group is getting better academically... There are smaller groupings so that kids are nurtured more. Many more kids are succeeding... The kids seem happier!” (Teacher, Britannia Elementary)
- **A Welcoming Physical Environment.** A school’s physical surroundings, interior and exterior, have a significant effect on students, staff, parents and visitors: “If classrooms were more home-like and cozy (in terms of colours, furniture, and lighting), spending an entire day in one might not be as cumbersome.” (Student, Eric Hamber Secondary) “Britannia Elementary School succeeded in bringing parents together and giving them a space to gather and talk.” (Parent, Britannia site) “With the decorations and music, it is perfectly suited for an art room and inspires creativity and thought.” (Student, King George site) It is particularly important that the school’s décor reflect its multicultural nature: “From the first moment that I saw Jerry Whitehead’s artwork painted in the school I knew this was a place I wanted to be.” (Librarian, Britannia Site)
- **Challenging/Extending Students’ Beliefs.** Introducing new perspectives to students can be an enriching experience which empowers them to be open to alternative ways of thinking: “You can talk to her about a problem and tell her everything. She will consider all of it and help you solve it. She doesn’t necessarily take your side.” (Student, Hastings Elementary)

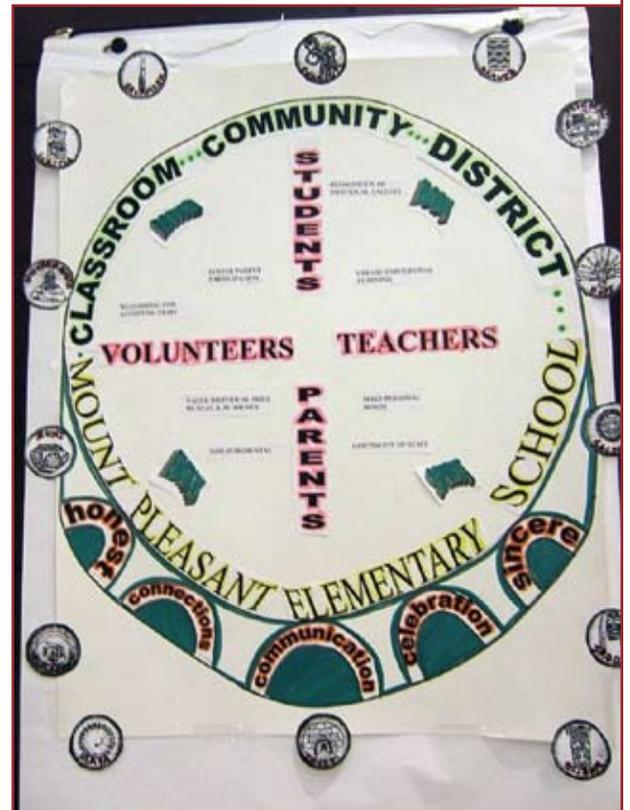
Safe and Supportive Learning Environments: What the Research Tells Us

Enhancing School Learning Climate: Theory, Research and Practice (1988), a paper prepared by Dr. Larry Sackney of the University of Saskatchewan, under the auspices of the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, cites a number of studies that stress the importance of safe and supportive learning environments:

- Murphy et al. (1985) stressed the importance of student leadership. Successful schools ensure that a variety of class and school-wide activities

- are planned in which students can participate.
- Rutter et al. (1980) noted the beneficial effects of giving students a role in decision making.
 - Wynne (1980) emphasized the importance of good communication in effective schools. "Good communication means there is trust, respect, openness and caring from the participants. Each participant in the process does not attempt to hide information from the other."⁴⁶
 - Murphy et al. (1985) pointed out that positive school-home relationships are a function of frequent and clear communication from the school about how parents can help the school to reach its goals; clear expectations for parents; parental input into school goals and decisions; opportunities for parents to participate in school functions and activities, including classroom instruction; and opportunities for parents to learn about school programs, develop parenting skills, and learn how they can work with their children at home on academic subjects.

Sackney also emphasized the importance of activities that brought staff and students together outside of the classroom: "Such activities help each to appreciate the other better and to share some of the same goals. Whether the activities are a student-staff volleyball game, or a staff, student and parent breakfast event, all serve to tie the school into a closely knit community."⁴⁷



A 2003 study for Ontario's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health on the relationship between school culture and student success noted the following:

- Students who perceived the culture of their school in positive terms were more likely to perform well academically, display fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety, and report fewer incidents of in-school problem behaviour (e.g., truancy, disciplinary referrals).
- Students who felt a strong connection to their school were in turn less likely to report academic and behavioural difficulties and poor mental health.
- Schools assessed as high on appreciation and recognition of student achievement and promotion of student activities experienced fewer student disciplinary referrals and fewer symptoms of student oppositional-defiance disorder.

Research also indicates that a school's physical environment can affect students' well-being. Stockard and Mayberry (1992) found that the quality of a physical plant or environment is related to better attitudes toward school, and Christopher (1988) concluded that people feel better about themselves when their surroundings are pleasant.⁴⁸

Safe and Supportive Learning Environments: What We Are Doing

Here are some of the steps we are taking or planning to take to create/enhance safe and supportive learning environments in our schools:

- Enhancing connections among elementary, secondary, and adult education centres in a given area to create “Neighbourhoods of Learning”
- Supporting the transition for grade 8 students through greater connections between secondary and elementary staff, and creating programming and scheduling options targeted to promote a sense of community and identity.
- Instituting student forums on processes and issues in the schools and acting on their outcomes
- Focusing on a comprehensive student leadership program
- Forming an Aboriginal student council at one of our secondary schools
- Encouraging Global Education leadership opportunities.
- Engaging all stakeholders – students, staff, parents – in a Family of Schools to collaborate in addressing a learning challenge shared by a significant proportion of their students
- Conducting common elementary/secondary professional development days
- Making facility improvements – e.g., upgrading washrooms, creating outdoor classroom spaces, creating a student lounge, encouraging murals on the walls, providing better lighting, new signage (e.g., in different languages), etcetera
- Developing student mentorship/buddy programs between senior and junior students
- Offering more recognition and celebratory activities (e.g., multicultural feast night, multicultural concert, community days, community fairs, etc.)
- Creating meeting places for parents in elementary and secondary schools
- Reducing the number of teachers for grade 8 students through Humanities and Math/Science blocking
- Developing grade 8 pods to further a sense of connectedness
- Creating homework clubs in which secondary students tutor elementary students
- Preparing students to present their portfolios to businesses, unions, arts organizations, sports organizations, etcetera
- Providing guest speakers at PAC meetings on topics such as parenting, brain research, individual learning styles, and mental health issues
- Offering speaker series at PAC meetings in languages other than English
- Providing opportunities for Aboriginal secondary students to share their culture throughout a Family of Schools
- Developing an Aboriginal students’ transition forum

Conclusion

Reflecting on the questions that have informed our Learning Inquiry – **What do we know about learning and what are we doing about it?** –

The simple answer in both instances is “a lot.” Regarding the first question, the Appreciative Inquiry process has taken great strides to ensure that our knowledge base about learning has emerged from the lived experience of learners and educators throughout the system: “The voice of adults is no more important than that of the grade three student who may not have the pedagogical or academic language but certainly knows what works for her in the classroom.”⁴⁹ As indicated in the references cited throughout this paper, our discoveries are clearly reiterated in the research.

Further, the core learning outcomes have been considered individually but it is understood that they are interdependent. It would be difficult to have a safe environment in a school in the absence of positive relationships and vice versa. Attributes such as flexibility and choice, recognition and support for diverse learning styles, offering engaging, experiential learning opportunities are all dependent on positive relationships and a safe and supportive learning environment.

In response to the second question “What are we doing about learning?” there is exciting evidence that the Learning Inquiry is bringing about transformational change in participating schools in a number of significant areas. The most powerful ones are student engagement and voice, relationships with Aboriginal parents and community, relationships between elementary and secondary schools, and innovative applications of educational technology.

This document emphasizes the importance of **relationships and a sense of belonging** as foundational to the other core learning attributes: **safe and supportive learning environments; active, passionate teaching; engaging and experiential learning; recognition and support for diverse learning styles; and flexibility and choice.** This emphasis is a direct reflection of our Appreciative

Inquiry research in which stories involving relationships took centre stage at every site. In addition, the Appreciative Inquiry process itself fostered relationships: “The Learning Inquiry was



a potent process for building relationships between groups that participated together in it.”⁵⁰ And, according to Dr. Carolyn Shields, Head of the Department of Educational Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois, the importance of strong and caring personal relationships is one of the strongest recent emphases in the academic literature.⁵¹ UBC professor, Dr. P. Taylor Webb, also cites numerous studies about the role of relationships in supporting student learning.⁵²

Building on a foundation of strong relationships, our challenge is to move forward with what we know about learning and embed the six core themes in student and adult learning experiences. The outcomes of the Learning Inquiries have broad implications for organizational learning within Vancouver (Appendix B – “It’s All About Learning: The Learning Framework). The “LEARNS” constitute a common language that can build coherence around achieving our core purpose among the roles and functions of the Vancouver school system and in our communications with external groups. These outcomes of the Inquiries can further foster an organizational culture of continuous improvement and deeper inquiry, and specifically inform and guide plans to enhance student, employee and system learning and development.

“Understanding that organizational change takes 3-5 years, we look forward to continuing to support the shift in discourse, and the generation of inspiring visions for the future and effective practice in schools and classrooms.”⁵³



Endnotes

Part One

- ¹ Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn for the 80s*, p. 20. (The italics are his.)
- ² Chris Kelly, *It's All About Learning – A Framework for Appreciative Inquiry into Our Understanding of Core Purpose and the Need for Coherence among our Roles and Functions as a System*. 2004, p. 5.
- ³ VSB Core Purpose
- ⁴ Interview with Carl Jantze, Aboriginal Learners Inquiry DVD
- ⁵ Leann Buteau, Lynn Green, Mary Filleul, and Barbara Rowland. *The Learning Inquiry: Shared Leadership and Organizational Change in the VSB*. March, 2007.
- ⁶ *Using Appreciative Inquiry in the Vancouver School district: A Positive Approach to Enhance Learning* by Mary Filleul and Barbara Rowland. a Science Field Trip", *School Science and Mathematics*, Vol. 100, 2000
- ¹⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.cals.cornell.edu/cals/teaching/elr/index.cfm> 11/05/08 at 7:05 PM.
- ¹⁷ Canadian Education Association, *Adolescence and Learning: Their Future for Our World*, p. 5.
- ¹⁸ *Aboriginal Teacher Education in British Columbia – A Plan for 2006-2011*, p. 7.
- ¹⁹ Goodnough, Karen and Cashion, Marie. "Exploring Problem-Based Learning in the Context of High School Science: Design and Implementation Issues," *School Science and Mathematics*, November 2006.
- ²⁰ Stooksberry, Jeanette. "Using the Kindergarten Model in the Intermediate Grades," *Clearing House*, July/August, 1996.
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- ²² Silvestri, Jacob. "Exemplary Professors: Factors Leading to the Development of Exemplary Teachers," *Update on Research and Leadership*: University of Illinois, Fall 2005.
- ²³ Palmer, Parker J. "The Heart of a Teacher: Identity and Integrity in Teaching." *Change*. November/December, 1997, p. 14.
- ²⁴ Discovery Document, Tupper Site, p. 1.
- ²⁵ Synthesis: Learning Inquiries 2005-07, Relationships for Learning, pp. 3-5.
- ²⁶ Rowland, *Relationships for Learning*, p. 6.
- ²⁷ Britannia Community Site Discovery Document, p. 8.
- ²⁸ Mary Filleul, Learning and Development Consultant, VSB Learning Services; private email communication, May 8, 2008.
- ²⁹ Mike's Story, Appreciative Inquiry Site Team Training Manual, p. 32
- ³⁰ Chris's Story, *Appreciative Inquiry Site Team Training Manual*, p. 29
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30
- ³² Heather's Story, *Appreciative Inquiry Site Team Training Manual*, p. 33
- ³³ Tupper/Livingston Action Plans.

Part Two

- ⁷ Mark Steven Dickerson, *Leading Appreciative Inquiry in Public Schools: The Experiences of Site Coordinating Team Members*, 2008, p. 109.
- ⁸ Gervase Bushe, Ph.D, Transforming School Cultures: One Year Results on the use of Appreciative Inquiry for the VSB Learning Inquiry, 2006-2007, Executive Summary.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- ¹⁰ Rosenfeld, Melodie and Rosenfeld, Sherman. "Developing Effective Teacher Beliefs About Learners: The Role of Sensitizing Teachers to Individual Learning Differences." *Educational Psychology*, 28:3, 245-272.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 259.
- ¹² Burris, Scott; Kitchel, Tracy; Molina, Quintin; Vincent, Stacy; and Warner, Wendy. "The Language of Learning Styles." *Techniques*, February 2008, p. 44.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- ¹⁴ Janette Griffin, *Science Education* 88(Suppl. 1):S59-S70, 2004, Wiley Periodicals, Inc
- ¹⁵ Doug Knapp, "Memorable Experiences of

- ³⁴ Dr. Carolyn M. Shields, *Review and Comment on the Vancouver School Board's Document: it's About Learning: Flexibility and Choice for Adolescent Learners*, p. 4
- ³⁵ Dr. Gervase Bushe, Op. Cit., p. 1, 3
- ³⁶ Hymel, Shelley; Schonert-Reikl, Kimberly A.; Miller, Lynn D. "Reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic and Relationships: Considering the Social Side of Education," p. 158.
- ³⁷ Lundy, Kathleen Gould;
- ³⁸ Hymel, Schonert-Reichl and Miller, p. 151.
- ³⁹ Melnychuk, Nancy, and Melnychuk, Allen, "Beginning Teacher Initiatives – Helping New Teachers Gain an Upper Hand." *The ATA Magazine*. Vol. 83. No.1
- ⁴⁰ Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence*, p. xi.
- ⁴¹ Chris Kelly, Op.Cit., p.5
- ⁴² Clark, Barbara. "Putting the Pieces Together in a Working Model." *Transforming Education*, Winter 1988, p. 44.
- ⁴³ Ryan, Richard M. and Deci, Edward L. "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being." *American Psychologist*, January 2000, pp. 70-71.
- ⁴⁴ Education Commission of the States, *Bending Without Breaking: Improving Education Through Flexibility and Choice*, p. 14.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 30.
- ⁴⁶ Sackney, Larry. *Enhancing School Learning Climate: Theory, Research and Practice*.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Literature Review, School Design and Planning Laboratory, University of Georgia, 1999.

Conclusion

- ⁴⁹ Interview with Mary Filleul, Aboriginal Learners Inquiry DVD
- ⁵⁰ Dr. Gervase Bushe, Op. Cit., p. 9
- ⁵¹ In her Review and Comment on the Vancouver School Board's Document: *it's About Learning: Flexibility and Choice for Adolescent Learners*,

Dr. Shields cites the following: "See for example Starratt (2005) who advocates relationships built on 'absolute regard' for others; Sidorkin (2002) who affirms relationship as fundamental to learning; or Buber (1970) whose philosophy is that relationships are fundamental to life."

- ⁵² In his *Review of Flexibility and Choice for Adolescent Learners*, P. Taylor Webb says: "Much of this research was developed in response to large-cafeteria plans that offered much curriculum and school choice but eroded supportive relationships between teachers and students (Banks et al, 2007; Gutierrez and Rogoff, 2003). The development of strong teacher and student relationships and supportive learning communities has been identified as a cornerstone to successful learning (Banks et al, 2007)."
- ⁵³ Leann Buteau, Mary Filleul, Lynn Green, Barbara Rowland. *The Vancouver School Board Learning and Development Team Year End Report 2006-2007*, p. 3

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Appendix A: All Appreciative Inquiry Sites

Adolescent Learners 2005-06 Sites

Britannia

- Britannia Elementary
- Britannia Secondary
- Hastings Adult Ed Center (AEC)

Churchill Secondary

Downtown

- King George Secondary
- Elsie Roy Elementary
- Lord Roberts Elementary
- Roberts AEC

Gladstone

- Gladstone Secondary
- Tye Elementary

Hamber

- Carr Elementary
- Cavell Elementary
- Fraser Elementary
- Hamber Secondary
- Jamieson Elementary
- Osler Elementary
- Van Horne Elementary
- Wolfe Elementary

Main Street AEC

Point Grey Secondary

Tupper

- Livingstone Elementary
- Tupper Secondary

The Aboriginal Learners Inquiry Schools

Britannia Elementary
Britannia Secondary
Florence Nightingale Elementary
Grandview/?Uuqinak'uuh Elementary
Hastings Elementary
Laura Secord Elementary
Mount Pleasant Elementary
Queen Alexandra Elementary
Southlands Elementary
Vancouver Technical

English Language Learners Inquiry Schools

Fleming Elementary
Norquay Elementary

Appendix B: “It’s All About Learning”: The Learning Framework

Application of the following model as an analytic framework for the Learning and Development Initiative would be worthwhile. The findings and outcomes of the inquiry could be applied to various elements of the framework to explore implications for the system.



Appendix C: "LEARNS"

Outcomes of the Learning Inquiries, Vancouver School Board

Adolescent Learning Inquiry 2005-2006

Aboriginal Learning Inquiry 2006-2007

English Language Learners Inquiry 2007-2008

Overwhelmingly students, teachers, administrators, parents and community members repeatedly told us that optimal learning takes place when the following conditions are in place:

L	LEARNING Diverse rates and styles of learning are recognized and supported
E	ENGAGING, EXPERIENTIAL Engaging experiential learning opportunities within and beyond the classroom are routine
A	ACTIVE, PASSIONATE TEACHING Active learning experiences are created by teachers passionate about their work
R	RELATIONSHIPS Relationships are respectful, supportive and purposeful
N	NEED FOR FLEXIBILITY AND CHOICE Flexibility and choice in the classroom, school and system is accommodated
S	SAFETY A safe and supportive environment exists

Appendix D: Aboriginal Learners Inquiry

Design Statements Linked to Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement (November, 2007)

The three goals of the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement are as follows:

- Belonging:** to increase Aboriginal students' sense of pride, belonging, place, acceptance and caring in their schools
- Mastery:** to ensure that Aboriginal students achieve increased academic success in Vancouver schools and that they participate fully and successfully from kindergarten through the completion of Grade 12
- Culture and Community:** to increase acceptance, empathy, awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal histories, traditions, cultures and contributions for all students by eliminating institutional, cultural and individual racism within the Vancouver district learning communities

ALI Design Statement	Key Concepts/Strategies of Design Statement	Aboriginal Enhancement Goal Connection
Student Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> student voice is represented on all student, staff and community committees First Nations' students have a variety of leadership opportunities student input is occurs in school cultural events, social responsibility and classroom content 	Belonging Mastery Culture and Community
School Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> schools will create relationships that honour, value and respect every individual schools design a physical environment to meet the needs of all schools celebrate community, culture and achievements 	Belonging Culture and Community
Staff Student Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> schools value relationships as the key to students' success schools do not permit judgmental and/or demeaning comments every student has a mentor in the school who they can trust and confide in 	Belonging Mastery Culture and Community
Peer Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> all staff model and construct healthy peer relationships by inclusionary practices, class meetings, etc. peer support groups are facilitated peaceful problem solving is facilitated 	Belonging
School Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we create leadership opportunities from those who traditionally do not have a voice we bring elders into the school decision making processes we encourage older students to be role models for younger ones 	Belonging Culture and Community

Aboriginal Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal staff are key to educating Aboriginal children • our school is increasing its Aboriginal staff • Aboriginal staff provide cultural teaching and support to our community • our Aboriginal staff participate in staff development to support them in supporting the school community 	Belonging Mastery Culture and Community
Early Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school community forms one to one relationships with families from preschool age onwards • sufficient staffing exists to build strong relationships with families • safe places and times are provided so families can learn skills in academic and social responsibility areas, as well as a wide range of other activities 	Mastery Belonging
Flexibility and Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • our students have the right to make choices in their education with respect to timetable, courses, teachers, family involvement, measures of success and assessment • our teachers provide guidance and support for students to meet their desired goals 	Mastery
Aboriginal Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • our school respects the Aboriginal belief of the sacredness of lifelong learning • we use locally developed Aboriginal content in the areas of history, culture and knowledge • we embed Aboriginal content across the curriculum • we invite elders, students and community members to be part of this process 	Belonging Culture and Community Physical Space Mastery
Class Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • our school space meets the needs of the wide range learners • student voice is included in decisions around colour, furniture, etc. • our classroom design allows for flexible groupings • we have designated First Nations community rooms • we create green spaces in our school 	Mastery Belonging Culture and Community
Instructional Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high expectations and respectful relationships are valued as central to learning • meaning is co-constructed with staff through inquiry based activities • knowledge is demonstrated in a variety of ways • the learning environment extends beyond the classroom 	Mastery Belonging

Staff Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff development includes time for mentoring, experiential learning, student and community voice and input • successful grads and others are engaged to report to staff/school • time is provided for a school/Aboriginal retreat • workshops on traditional teaching are provided 	Mastery Culture and Community
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collaboratively created by multigenerational, multicultural committees • assessment is creative and collaborative and involves choice • professional development of "Shared Learnings" and other Aboriginal curriculum is planned 	Mastery Culture and Community
Family and Aboriginal Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • schools recognize parents as teachers and resource people • schools provide cultural opportunities for parents to share • schools provide parent rooms 	Culture and Community
Role of District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides long term funding • involves community in decision making • hires staff knowledgeable about Aboriginal people 	Culture and Community

