

Review

Our members read.
And read, and read.

Of course, one of the best things about reading is being able to start a conversation, and share your thoughts with others.

In the first installment of this regular column, we hear from two BC educators about the books that intrigued and challenged them.



Kelda **LOGAN**
Principal SD64

*Decolonizing Education:
Nourishing the Learning Spirit*
by Marie Battiste
(2013)

I was excited to read *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* (2013) by Marie Battiste after the book was recommended to me by our school's teacher librarian. I was very interested in the notion of 'decolonization'. What exactly did that mean? How could educators engage in a process of system transformation so that our Indigenous learners experience success on par with our non-Indigenous students?

While the book is not the 'road map' I was perhaps hoping it would be, it was nonetheless a very valuable read in that Battiste does a masterful job of "critiquing past and current systems and directing attention to the disciplinary omissions that perpetrate stereotypes and contribute to cognitive assimilation" (pg 102). It has helped me to develop

a broader understanding of how our current school system perpetuates colonial structures which in turn put barriers in the way of our Indigenous learners, interfering with their ability to succeed at school.

The first three chapters outline, with examples from her own Mi'kmaw heritage, the "legacy of forced assimilative education for Indigenous Peoples." These of course included specific interventions from Provincial and Federal governments to "root out the French influence and...restrict...the Mi'kmaw nomadic lifestyle" such as "planting out" Indigenous children with English settlers and removing children from their families and placing them in residential schools to "destroy Indigenous knowledge, languages, and relationships with the natural family and replace them Eurocentric values, identities and beliefs..." (pg 56). Since the publication of the Truth and Reconciliation report two years after the publication of this book, educators are hopefully more aware of the devastating impacts of these and other assimilative policies have been on the "self esteem, self concept and healthy relationships" (pg 56) of our Indigenous learners.

The chapters I found most interesting were Chapter 6 (Confronting and Eliminating Racism) and Chapter 8 (Displacing Cognitive Imperialism). Battiste notes that even though racism is a difficult topic for Canadians, with their "self-narrative of a generous, liberal and progressive society," it is necessary to "confront and eliminate the false concept of racial superiority" (pg 125) and to be able to clearly see our "whiteness and privilege" (pg 125) both in history and in our contemporary experience. She states, "Racism is more than hatred or prejudice... it is the structural subordination of a group in society based on the idea of racial inferiority that establishes a hierarchical power relationship" (pg 138). This is closely tied to cognitive imperialism, a "cognitive

whitewashing...where the government of Canada and religious groups have used schools and their curricula as the swords of cultural transmission; they impose a cultural and political hegemony based on superior/inferior relations" (pg 162).

The solution that Battiste proposes in her final chapters is one that incorporates both Aboriginal and Eurocentric thinking. She concludes, "...the education of Aboriginal students remains Eurocentric in its structure and content, in its exclusion of Aboriginal cognition, knowledge and ways of knowing. What a new curriculum must do is replace the failed Eurocentric educational practices with a more equitable and broader theory of education that informs, includes and builds with Canadian pluralities and identities. This educational transformation must conform to the new constitutional vision of Canada as a nation in its own right rather than a derivative British colony" (pg 163).

I personally found this idea fascinating, especially the idea that Indigenous knowledge in all its forms must be equally valued as part of a "fair and just postcolonial society" (pg 163). The integration of Aboriginal ways of knowing into our BC Curriculum and our daily teaching practices is a good first step. I feel a renewed commitment in our own school community. Our first steps are to hold monthly lunchtime meetings with our Indigenous learners to share the different traditions practiced in their homes. I look forward to a time when the learning spirit is truly nourished for all our children in all our schools throughout the country.

Kelda Logan has been an educator for 23 years, and an administrator for 11. When she isn't at her amazing little elementary school on Salt Spring Island, you can find her cheering on her boys at the local soccer field or perusing the shelves at the book store and library.



Margaret PAXTON Principal SD39

Onward: Cultivating Emotional
Resilience in Educators
by Elena Aguilar
(2018)

Principals and Vice-Principals interested in adopting a coaching approach with their staff members and colleagues will be inspired by Elena Aguilar's *Onward: Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators*. Aguilar is also the author of *The Art of Coaching*, has written this comprehensive guide to engaging school staff members in conversations about their own resilience, emotional literacy and capacity for compassion. On the first page, she writes,

"Change is the only thing we can count on. It will rain when we wish it wouldn't, kids will say obnoxious things when we're exhausted, leaders will come and go. However, we have tremendous power in how we interpret what happens and, therefore, how

we respond to big and little incidents that we didn't anticipate, don't want, or don't like. The opportunity for resilience originates in how we make sense of the things that happen, because interpretation dictates actions." (p.1)

It seems obvious, but sometimes hard to remember, that we have choice in how to respond to the hundreds of interactions and interruptions we experience every day. Aguilar takes us through a calendar's worth of habits and dispositions to practice, including knowing oneself better, building community and cultivating compassion.

Aguilar acknowledges that schools are stressful places. I took this sentence to heart: "School leaders must focus on boosting the resilience of staff as a lever for school transformation" (p.3). At our first staff meeting, rather than dive into data as I'd originally planned, I chose to begin with conversations about our core values and hopes for the school year. Using Brené Brown's list of values from Dare to Lead (daretolead.brenebrown.com) teachers and support staff wrote three core values on an index card and then shared with a partner in a different role than themselves. They then met with a new partner and repeated the process. We debriefed the activity as a whole group, acknowledging that sharing in this way can make one feel vulnerable, but the conversation leads to a greater sense of connection and empathy.

Aguilar acknowledges that schools are stressful places.

Building and sustaining a culture of belonging and safety in a school can be a daunting undertaking, especially when the group has experienced a lot of change in a short time. *Onward* is an essential

resource for leaders who want to strengthen their own resilience as they engage others in the important work of helping all members of the school community thrive, for what Parker Palmer says of teaching aptly applies to school leaders as well:

"Small wonder, then, that 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."

Margaret Paxton has been a teacher and Principal in SD#48 Sea to Sky, SD#38 Richmond, and is now at Southlands Elementary in Vancouver. She has a passion for literacy and social-emotional learning and is a Tribes, Roots of Empathy and MindUp teacher and a peer mentor for the BCPVPA.

Have you read a book that changed your perspective, debunked myths, made you ponder or made you laugh?

Can you share your story in 500 words or less?

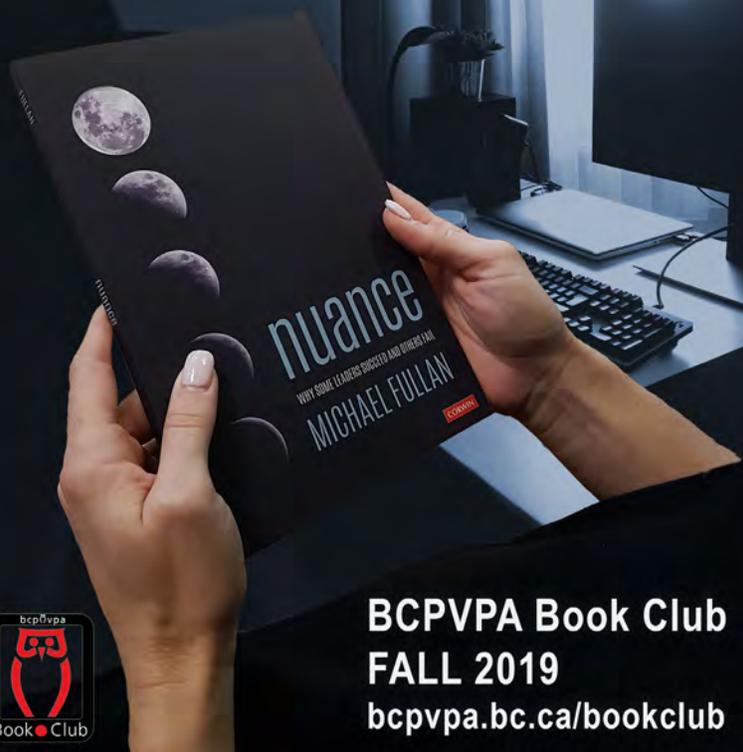
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LEADERSHIP & CULTURE

–How to Create a Workplace Where People Like to Work

Vancouver: December 18

Based on the book, *The Culture Question*, this workshop provides a guide for how every organization can increase employee engagement and become a great place to work. By exploring six key elements that make up a healthy workplace culture, participants will learn the answers to two fundamental questions: "How does your organization's culture impact how much people like where they work?" and "What can leaders do to make it better?"



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