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Short Course II Igniting Mid Career Leaders

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BCPVPA / UBCO 2020 SHORT COURSE II **Three Reflections**

Reflection on Short Course Facilitation Experience

Margaret Paxton

Before writing about this past year of learning, I wanted to reflect back on our shared experience in Kelowna.

The Water Ceremony – Courage and Clarity

We gathered on the shore of Lake Okanagan to take part in a Water Ceremony with Elders. There was circling, smudging and offering of tobacco and water brought from many places around the province to share. This moving ceremony required presence, participation, and understanding the purpose and the place.

Building Connections as a Summit Family

After the ceremony, our Table Groups met in smaller circles, during which we shared our “Gifts of the Four Directions.” What emotional, spiritual, cultural and intellectual aspects of ourselves do we bring to share with others?

This:

- Took time
- Required deep listening
- Required us to be vulnerable – able to share our struggles, not just our successes
- Was not about what we do or have done, but about *who we are and who we can become*

Learning from David, David and Amelia (Thought Leaders)

Back on campus over the next few days, we learned from David Istance, Amelia Peterson and David Weiss. We wondered:

- How could the OECD Principles of Learning enhance our schools?
- How to help our students, teachers and other staff members flourish in a VUCA world (volatile, uncertain, chaotic and ambiguous)?

- How can we learn from other regions about how to create new kinds of schools with human-centred systems design?

Field Experiences

During our visits to local, innovative businesses, we learned from people creating their own occupations, niches in the world. It was as if they were saying:

*“Here is something you didn’t even know you needed,
and it’s going to change your life for the better.”*

We began thinking about how we could infuse our schools with this energy and entrepreneurial spirit.

As the week drew to a close, participants made connections, shared ideas and made plans for the next steps in their learning journey. We committed to connecting with our table groups and supporting one another through the school year.

My Year of Learning

I began my first staff meeting with the story of meeting those young entrepreneurs. I told my staff how inspired I had been to hear their stories, especially how school had influenced their development. I confessed that the word ‘*entrepreneur*’ to me connotes a business focused on making a profit. I hoped that our students would be inspired to have the same imagination, creativity, growth mind-set and perseverance, but also a drive to make the world a better place. Our school’s inquiry has been around increasing student engagement and flexible learning spaces. I wondered how we could now use those flexible learning spaces to accelerate learning and build learner stamina.

One of the things I have been practicing as a school leader is how to find each individual’s entry point – personalizing and differentiating support for my staff. One way I did this was by providing choice and ‘going with’ teachers’ personal passions. Thus, we have a working wood shop, an atelier for math/science/art exploration, and a very versatile outdoor classroom space. We also created micro-environments within classrooms. They feel now more like family rooms.

We believe that we have seen an increased stamina for learning, and an increase in collaboration and cooperation, both for teachers and students. We’ve seen an increase in creativity and critical thinking – prototyping, working through many iterations, working with a growth mindset – not just ‘keep trying’ but try different things. We’ve seen students inspiring each other.

The journey continues. There are always more bridges to build, more obstacles to roll out of the way. I am grateful to the colleagues and friends I met during Short Course II for inspiring me to ‘nudge with love’, both staff and students, and to be a ‘Possibility Broker’, a co-learner saying, *Yes!* to great ideas. The best part of being a Short Course II facilitator was the reassurance that I am part of a community of educators who are highly invested, thoughtful and reflective about the craft of leadership and the quality of education in their schools and districts.

My experiences of Short Course 2 in 2018

Peter Scott

I truly believe, like Short Course I, that administrators should also take Short Course II as it helped me grow as a professional and provide myself with more insight on how to do my job more efficiently and effectively.

First I found it very valuable working with a group of people that had a similar focus as me. Even though my focus on literacy evolved into literacy through an ADST lens, I found it very valuable to connect, feel supported, and bounce ideas around with my colleagues (triad). **This experience reminded me of the importance of collaboration, and to stay focussed on my goals that were both school and district based.**

The impact of Short Course II was that it made me more accountable to myself and to the team to ensure I was following through with my plan (developed in Short Course II), being reflective of the plan, and making adjustments as needed to ensure that the plan was impacting student literacy.

From this I established a science literacy week at my school – and across all elementary schools in my district – that coincided with Science Literacy week. I worked with administrators and team-taught with teachers about how to implement and assess literacy through an ADST lens in purposeful ways via coding, and hands-on inquiry based learning. Lastly, I worked with other administrators and my director of instruction to put on a collaborative Sphero Olympics event that included groups from every elementary and middle school, and to establish a science fair that netted an attendance of almost 100 students, for an event that previously didn't exist.

Taking this course, and the experience I had, has made me a more informed reflective practitioner and that has not only benefited my own learning journey, but impacted those I have worked with as well fostered a genuine learning experience for the students in SD 52.

Short Course II Reflection

Naomi Hazon

As an elementary Vice-Principal with a decade of administrative experience, I chose to take part in the BCPVPA Short Course II to enhance my leadership practice around supporting collaborative inquiry, and to extend my learning. Having four days to connect with colleagues from all over the province in an immersive, meaningful and rich learning environment gave me time to reflect, grapple and connect with others as I worked to refine a focused inquiry question.

I left the course inspired, still knowing my question needed some refining but with clarity as to the direction I would be taking. Broadly, I was interested in finding new ways to create conditions to support collaborative inquiry. I was also hoping to develop some cohesion with various innovation inquiries to support and extend staff and student learning. I was working to bring our school story more alive and was mindful of weaving the seven principles of learning into our work.

I have learned how valuable it can be to let yourself be in the 'messiness' of inquiry and that if you trust the process, meaningful change and growth evolves in a very organic way.

It was helpful to develop a question prior to the start of a new school year as it provided an anchor for me to always come back to and helped me stay focused with the work I was doing.

It is worth noting that prior taking the course, I had the privilege of working with a team of teachers in the 2017-18 school year as part of an innovation inquiry to design a flexible-arts based learning space. This is now the space in which I teach a few courses (see pics below). This was part of laying the foundation for my current inquiry.



As an experienced administrator (*one with extensive Special Education and ELL teaching experience, and no longer having the ability to teach in this area*) I was searching for new ways to utilize my instructional strengths to support the learning and growth for my staff and students. This led to a conversation with one of our teacher leaders on staff. Together we agreed that for the 2018/19 school year, I would teach a 'leadership' course as part of my relief teaching with a focus on community.

The combinations of being at Short Course II, having just recently designed a new and flexible learning space with some of my teaching team, and having a new plan to teach an innovative course ultimately laid the foundation (*somewhat serendipitously*) for the focus of my inquiry to begin to evolve.

By November of 2018, as a part of the leadership/community course, I was working with students to develop student centered questions for our Spirals of Inquiry work. We were scanning and for the very first time, students were going to interview fellow students to collect data for our school story. Midway through this process, I attended a district session with Judy Halbert and my administrative colleagues. This helped with the refinement of questions and clarity with process.

We are now at a point whereby my leadership/community class has invited almost all of the classes in our school to take part in student-led interviews. Students have analyzed findings and have worked to highlight student voice throughout the process. The incidental and positive result of this was the connection of our teaching team to this process because they were invited to be a part of it, and they were able to witness their students sharing their learning and thus seeing their learners at the center of the process. This was both powerful and motivating and has helped to build cohesion around our school story. Teachers are now more interested in our school story work and in inquiry in general. We now have two other innovation inquiries that are connected to our school story work (Student Reporting Pilot Project and Inclusive Learning Communities grants).

We now also have a parent volunteer who is a graphic artist who is working with the leadership class, and we are in the process of creating an art installation that will feature student learning in relation to our school story.

In addition to building collaborative inquiry through this student-centered process, we also now have our very first team of teachers who I have worked with closely on an alternative reporting pilot project and they have reported positive feedback as to how students are now more self-aware as to who they are as learners. As well, I have helped another team of teachers work on an inquiry around Inclusive Learning Communities. We have created self-regulation supports for numerous students/classes and have provided Pro D to both our EA and teaching staff. We are moving into developing more social/emotional learning supports.

I have found that being in my second year in a school has allowed for more growth with teacher innovation largely because of the relationships that have evolved when I am able to work alongside teachers with various innovation inquiries. Teachers have provided me with some feedback, including being thankful to me for taking the lead with the 'requirements' for the grant process to allow room for them to just get down to the meaningful work. This was valuable to hear. In terms of working towards creating conditions to support collaborative inquiry, we released teachers in teams many times throughout the year and we released our two innovation teams several times as well. The work with students around our school story served as the anchor we needed to have more cohesion around various ongoing inquiries.

As a learner, I am always thinking about next steps and how I can link my learning and growth to extend it into another school year. I am continually reflective and aware that in order to get deeper into my work, it is helpful to have an anchor/inquiry focus. It is my hope that the cohesion we developed this year becomes clearer to staff and students, and that learning becomes more visible through the showcasing of student work as part of our school story mural.

I most certainly see an increase in staff willingness to want to work as part of collaborative inquiry teams, and many of my staff now connect with me both formally and informally to discuss professional learning. We have a new focus on social and emotional learning and will also be working with a literacy pilot project and new assessment practices. I think teachers now feel more comfortable taking their own risks and I am hopeful this will continue in the coming years.

Along the way I found support, encouragement and inspiration through connecting with several Short Course facilitators and colleagues (both by Zoom chats & meet ups). I also have to commend my district for what they have offered for us by way of professional learning opportunities that further inspired me, including sessions with Judy and Linda both for FESL support and at the NOII conference, and being part of the BCPVPA Women in Leadership session: all contributed to the overarching meta learning I received to help me along the way.

What Short Course offered, which greatly supported my inquiry question was the ongoing reflection and connection back to my inquiry question which allowed for the development of some cohesion with vision. I have learned that much of the process is ongoing....and look forward to building this into my professional growth plan.