

21st Century Education in 1926-27

Charles Ungerleider considers how the 2016 curriculum makes the 'enduring elements' of the 1926 curriculum new again.

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The Ministry of Education describes the introduction of British Columbia's Kindergarten to Grade 9 curriculum as a transformation necessary for student success. Personalized learning, opportunities designed to meet the diverse needs of learners with flexible pacing and services tailored to those needs, and providing learners with a greater say in what and how they learn, are at the core of the new curriculum. Personalized learning through the exploration of "interest and passions" is one of a suite of elements in the revised curriculum. Other elements include "real world situations," and "hands-on experience in collaboration, critical thinking and communications."

Among my proud possessions is the *Programme of Studies for the Elementary Schools of British Columbia 1926-1927*. Beginning in Grade 1,

it describes the curriculum through Grade 8. "Brighter pupils will be able and should be given an opportunity to complete the course in six or seven years." Whenever student interests require, students should be able to transfer to "a higher grade ... without regard to the reorganization of classes"

Encouraging curiosity and a sense of wonder arise in part from the questions that students and teachers ask and the problems that are posed. Inquiry and question-based approaches are central to the 2016-2017 curriculum and take a variety of forms: inquiry, project-based learning, problem-based learning, self-assessment, research skills, and scientific methods.

Big ideas figure more prominently in the 2016-2017 curriculum than they do in the 1926-1927 curriculum. The stimulation of curiosity and a sense of wonder is present in the English Language Arts cur-

riculum introduced this September. One of the big ideas in that subject is that "curiosity and wonder lead us to new discoveries about ourselves and the world around us."

Ninety years ago, teaching was often referred to as training. The introductory paragraph of the 1926-1927 language arts links the control of oral and written language to "communicating and acquiring ideas." Teachers are advised that "full and intelligent use should be made of the project-method ... in order that the school work may be motivated, that initiative in children should be developed, and that there may be training in free oral expression."

The 1926-1927 program provides numerous suggestions about "project work and conversational lessons" in language arts. Emphasis is placed on connecting hands-on learning activities, called manual activities in 1926-27, with language use and linking them to the learner's interests and activities. Teachers at that time were obligated to "select material from this course to meet the needs of her class." Problems arise from the learner's interests and activities, problems that they are able to solve through project-based play.

The representation of the 2016-2017 curriculum, its contemporary

references, encouragement of new technologies, and the prominence it gives to big ideas, concepts and competencies are needed refinements of the curriculum that it is replacing. As was the case with *Programme of Studies for the Elementary Schools of British Columbia 1926-1927*, teachers shoulder significant responsibility for its effectiveness. It is doubtful that curricular changes make a meaningful difference in student achievement in comparison to the impact that teachers have. Like their forerunners 90 years ago, teachers today are responsible for organizing the time, space, and methods to teach the concepts and competencies (the "what") prescribed by the Ministry of Education. Today's teachers are encouraged to personalize the curriculum, make use of flexible learning environments in creative ways, and make use of technology to facilitate collaboration among students, educators, parents and classrooms just as their predecessors were in 1926-27.

There are probably more similarities between the curriculum in 1926-1927 and the curriculum in 2016-2017 than there are differences. That is a good thing. The 2016-2017 curriculum may seem new, but it preserves the concepts and competencies that were important in 1926-1927. The 2016-2017 curriculum makes the enduring elements of the 1926-1927 seem new again, and brings to them changes that reflect the changes that have occurred in the intervening 90 years. 

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Passion Enthusiasm and conviction are infectious. The ability to inspire and motivate others, especially when change can involve difficult decisions, is essential. Although we need those around us to ultimately take ownership of any new direction or path, a leader's passion can spark the initial movement and momentum.

Transparency Trust and open communication is integral to any organization. Individuals need to understand why change is necessary, what the intended outcome is, and how we're going to get there. They need to be partners in the process, not simply passive participants. As well, the reality is that not every initiative is successful. Leading change means admitting that we don't have all of the answers, that we make mistakes. If we have worked to foster trusting relationships with those around us, individuals will continue to support us during more difficult times.

Resilience There will never be a scenario where change is embraced wholeheartedly by an entire organization. Leading change means being able to shoulder dissenting opinions and sometimes outright hostility. Sometimes described as a "thick skin," the ability to not take "personal attacks" personally is key. Leaders need to be able to maintain a calm and consistent demeanor.

Empathy Change can be unsettling. It can be a time of uncertainty and flux. Even when the changes that are being implemented are leading to something better, leaders need to understand that leaving behind familiar routines and expectations can lead to anxiety, even anger in some individuals. Leaders also need to be empathetic towards those individuals who are simply unable to accept change. They can't let that halt their progress, but they can treat these individuals with patience and compassion.

Courage Even with the knowledge that change is necessary to move our schools and districts forward, it can be overwhelming to face the prospect of leading during transformative times. For those of us who have experienced significant change, we know that it can be "messy." Leaders may feel the same anxiety and ambivalence as those around them. But they have the confidence and courage to embrace those feelings of uncertainty with the understanding that it means they are moving forward into new learning and growth.

By seeing change as an opportunity for possibility rather than as a problem to be solved, we are better equipped to face the challenges and uncertainties that lie ahead. We are able to effectively lead change. As novelist Margaret Drabble wrote, "when nothing is sure, everything is possible." 

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