European Journal of
EDUCATION
RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY

European Journal of Education, Vol. 50, No. 2, 2015
DOI: 10.1111/ejed.12125

Learning to Be. A Perspective from British Columbia, Canada

Judy Halbert & Linda Kaser

Introduction

In a large urban secondary school teachers were concerned with how quickly their students became discouraged and stopped trying when faced with an obstacle. They saw that many young people came with fixed ideas about their lack of competence in a range of subject areas and seemed unable to persevere in the face of challenges. The staff chose to focus their inquiry on the development of growth mindsets, including grit and resilience, and they became deeply curious about the impact of feedback on encouraging perseverance.

The teachers in a small Northern school observed that some of their students became upset, resistant and aggressive when placed in situations that were challenging in any way. The staff realised that some of their students were ill-equipped to deal with conflict in an emotionally and socially appropriate manner. This was causing discord in all areas of these students' lives (school, home, recreation and beyond), preventing them from fully accessing education in a fulfilling and consistent way. As a community, this school decided to focus their inquiry on developing mindful leadership skills, focusing on health and well-being, building strong and healthy relationships, and developing the emotional strength to deal with conflicts in a thoughtful way.

The staff in a rural K-12 school serving mostly Aboriginal learners wondered whether focusing more on developing personal identity would help students to create a stronger sense of self. They wanted to know if framing all student learning around one personal question: 'Who Am I?' would improve students' social and emotional well-being. They also wondered whether connecting all new learning to their traditional culture would help students to develop a strong sense of individuality and strengthen their empathy for others from their own community and from outside the Nisga'a world.

In a suburban school, parents and teachers were aware that students had increasing levels of anxiety and that they appeared to find it difficult to regulate their emotions. The inquiry team wondered whether increasing physical activity at the beginning of the day, incorporating a daily focus on mindfulness combined with explicit teaching of self-regulation strategies would lead to less anxiety and a more positive school and community culture overall.

What do these schools have in common? In each case they were involved in an inquiry cycle that started with the staff developing a deeper understanding of the experiences of their learners. As the adults learned more about what was going on for their learners, they focused their professional learning and collaborative actions on helping young people to develop greater self-confidence, stronger social and emotional skills and more self-awareness, confidence and integrity. In other words, these schools are working together to support their young people in *learning to be*.

In 1972, Edgar Faure in his Report to UNESCO (Faure *et al.*, 1972) first argued for a focus on *learning to be* out of the fear that the world would be

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

dehumanised as a result of technological change. The 1996 Delors Report, 'Learning: The Treasure Within' (Delors *et al*., 1996) reinforced the importance of *learning to be* as one of the four foundations for lifelong learning. This report stated that a fundamental principle was that education must contribute to the over-all development of each individual by involving mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic sense, personal responsibility and spiritual values.

Decades after the Delors Report was published, two American researchers defined social and emotional competencies in this way:

> The active ingredients boil down to a handful of emotional and social abilities. These include *self awareness*, or knowing what you feel and why; *self management*, what to do about those feelings; *empathy*, knowing what other people think and feel and understanding their point of view; and then *social skills*, putting all of that together for harmonious relationships, and drawing on all these emotional intelligence skill sets to make good decisions in life (Goleman & Senge, 2014, p. 15).

The focus of this article will be to explore how *learning to be*, with a specific focus on social-emotional competencies, has become part of the educational mindset — and now educational policy — in British Columbia (BC). The authors of this article have been facilitating voluntary networks of schools (www.noii.ca) since 2000 and *learning to be* has been a key feature of work in schools across this province for a sustained period of time. Specifically, we will address the following questions:

- How has the development of the Social Responsibility Performance Standards created a shared framework and a common set of expectations for students, parents and teachers? What evidence of impact is there for this sustained focus?
- To what extent have government policies helped to promote a focus on *learning to be*?
- In what ways is the disciplined approach to inquiry being used across networks of schools in British Columbia contributing to the realisation of the foundational principle of *learning to be*?
- How is the international research on social emotional learning being translated into action in BC schools?
- In what ways do the First Peoples Principles of Learning reflect the foundations of *learning to be* and in what ways are these principles shifting perspectives, policies and practices?

Context

To establish a frame of reference, we will draw on recent comparative reports from Canadian and international studies. The 2014 Conference Board of Canada report (www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/details/education.aspx), a benchmarking study of Canadian provinces and territories against a select group of comparable systems in other countries, found that British Columbia had the strongest public education system in Canada. The findings in this report reflected the perspective that both high performance on PISA assessments *and* high equity outcomes were valued. The international comparisons indicated that Japan, Finland and British Columbia had the strongest systems overall.

A second study (March, 2015) from Learning First (www.learningfirst.org.au) identified British Columbia, along with Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai, as

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

jurisdictions with significant strengths in developing and supporting high quality professional learning. The features that the research team observed in each of the four settings included: a systemic focus on educator inquiry, collaboration, coherence over time, professional leadership and the critical and ongoing importance of the 'right' focus.

The learning results summarised in these two studies are impressive, partly because the child poverty rates in BC are the highest in Canada with over 150,000 young people growing up in conditions of economic vulnerability (www.documentcloud.org/documents/842211-first-call-2013-child-poverty-report-card.html). They are also impressive given that the political culture of the province has been marked for many years by labour-government tensions with a prolonged teacher strike in 2014, the latest manifestation of a highly contested environment. As might be predicted, many educators, parents and citizens are unaware of the strengths of the BC education system, as most media coverage focuses on the political 'wars'.

Educators are also aware that — at the same time as the overall results are strong — many young people still struggle to find success in school. Most BC educators are concerned about the need to both improve and transform the system — especially in the areas of indigenous education and higher levels of intellectual engagement for all learners.

The notion of *learning to be* in a system that for decades systematically undervalued traditional ways of being has created significant challenges for Aboriginal learners and their families. The legacy of colonisation and of residential schools has contributed to the inequitable challenges for Aboriginal learners. (The term Aboriginal refers to people of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit heritage). Recent efforts to improve outcomes for Aboriginal learners are encouraging (www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/performance.htm), yet there is still much to be done.

Within this complex educational context, *learning to be* has been a central focus of educators, learners and families in networks of inquiry over the past 15 years. The development of an agreed upon framework for social responsibility in the late 1990s helped to bring a sharper focus to and a common understanding of key aspects of *learning to be*.

Social Responsibility

The framework for social responsibility (www.bced.gov.bc.ca/perf_stands/sintro.pdf) emerged from a dialogue with parents, educators and community members initiated by the Ministry of Education. Initially, the issue being discussed was focused on the value of strong foundations in literacy and numeracy. However, a consensus gradually emerged that intellectual accomplishments alone, without considerations of character and citizenship, were not enough to create the kind of society the participants desired. From this initial dialogue, a set of frameworks using learning progressions in citizenship/social responsibility, literacy and numeracy was co-developed by the province and the profession through the involvement of thousands of practitioners from all parts of the province.

Social responsibility is generally understood in British Columbia as being able to empathise with others, to recognise and appreciate diversity, to defend human rights, to solve problems in peaceful ways and to contribute towards social, cultural and ecological issues. In conflict situations, socially responsible citizens exhibit

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

empathy and a sense of ethics as they consider differing views. They demonstrate a strong sense of community-mindedness and take actions to support diversity.

Development of social responsibility is fostered by opportunities to:

- participate in service activities in the school and community,
- respond to human rights issues,
- identify ways of improving classroom or school environments,
- make ethical decisions,
- establish and maintain healthy relationships, and
- analyse controversial social issues and propose strategies for solutions.

Using these key ideas as a framework for cross curricular work, school inquiry teams have been encouraged to assess student levels of social responsibility using the learning progressions as a guide, and then to determine how much change they see in their learners as a result of their concerted team efforts. The learning progressions (rating scales) are organised in four broad categories:

Contributing to the Classroom and School Community

- Sharing responsibility for their social and physical environment
- Participating and contributing to the class and to small groups

Solving Problems in Peaceful Ways

- Managing conflict appropriately, including presenting views and arguments respectfully, and considering others' views
- Using effective problem-solving steps and strategies.

Valuing Diversity and Defending Human Rights

- Treating others fairly and respectfully; showing a sense of ethics
- Recognising and defending human rights.

Exercising Democratic Rights and Responsibilities

- Knowing and acting on rights and responsibilities (local, national, global)
- Articulating and working towards a preferred future for the community, nation, and planet — a sense of idealism.

The development of the Social Responsibility framework was the first attempt in British Columbia to establish a common set of understandings in the form of learning progressions. (See Appendix A for an example of the Quick Scales for elementary schools).

Once the social responsibility framework was published, hundreds of schools focused their inquiry work on improving the citizenship of their learners. Many of these schools engaged in an annual cycle of inquiry that will be described in more detail later in this article. The case studies written by teacher leaders during the past 15 years show a steady emphasis on *learning to be* through systematic application of key strands of the performance standards.

International groups of educators have visited BC to see how the focus on inquiry and assessment for learning within the various inquiry networks is changing the experiences of learners. Regardless of where these groups originate, the observations at the end of each study tour have been consistent. Experienced educators have all remarked on the respectful tone seen in each setting they visited. They have been struck by the positive, relaxed relationships between adults and young people. They have been impressed by the ways in which students take

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

responsibility for their own actions. They often remarked that they wished to see this kind of social responsibility in their own settings.

Over time, the focus on social responsibility by teams of educators within BC has led to increased interest in self-regulation and social-emotional learning. As teachers observed higher levels of anxiety and of distraction they became interested in helping their students to gain greater skills in cognitive control. There has been a growing awareness of the importance for young people to be able to regulate their emotions, to develop empathy and to be able to access an array of strategies for tackling different learning challenges. Before looking at the ways in which inquiry networks are helping to strengthen the foundation of *learning to be*, a few observations about provincial decisions that have had a positive impact on this work are in order.

Policy Decisions

Policy-makers at the provincial Ministry of Education made four key decisions that have had a positive impact on strengthening the focus on *learning to be* in schools across BC. These decisions have stood the test of time.

First, the province invested in the development of learning progressions in key areas, including social responsibility. Second, policy-makers involved teachers broadly in the development process. They also consulted with a range of community and Aboriginal groups to ensure that the social responsibility framework reflected the values of diverse communities. Third, they provided modest but sustained funding for an inquiry network of educators across roles — educators who were interested in voluntarily using the learning progressions to chart their growth towards important goals for learners and making their findings public in meetings and short reports. Fourth — and perhaps most challenging —, they resisted the temptation to mandate the use of the performance standards. This act of self-restraint allowed for a culture where self-organising networks could flourish and where educators could wholeheartedly throw themselves into the passionate and collective pursuit of creating stronger citizens.

In 2012, the province launched a three-year initiative focused on improving outcomes for young readers. This programme, entitled Changing Results For Young Readers (CR4YR) (http://youngreaders.ca), uses an inquiry framework and is connecting researchers, policy-makers and practitioners in new and important ways. Not only is the thrust of CR4YR to improve reading skills and comprehension, it is also about building confidence and joy in reading. Part of the design of CR4YR is for all participating educators to focus on one specific child as the basis for a year-long case study. The decision to focus on joy and confidence as well as on skills and comprehension is a reflection of one more way in which the province is supporting the foundation of *learning to be*.

Networks as Inquiry Spaces

In BC, the first system-wide inquiry community, the Network of Performance-Based Schools (NPBS), was established in 1999. The focus of the teacher-principal teams who voluntarily joined this network was to apply formative assessment strategies by using learning progressions in the four areas of social responsibility, reading, writing and mathematics problem-solving in order to change learning outcomes for their students.

From its inception, a major goal for the work was to transform schools and the BC system as a whole from a focus on sorting (using summative assessment to sort

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

and rank learners) to a learning-oriented system that emphasised both equity and quality in learner outcomes. Additional goals for the network were to strengthen cross-role and cross-district teamwork and to promote greater sharing of knowledge and expertise at all levels.

The network structure was and continues to be straightforward. Teams of educators and support staff at the school level develop a year-long inquiry in an area of importance to them. They pursue strategies to significantly shift learner attainment using well-constructed learning progressions as the central way of assessing the results of their shared work. Upon completion of their case study, participating schools receive a small grant to recognise their contribution to the networked community and the province as a whole. As educator interest in innovation grew and as the scope of inquiries expanded, the name of the network was changed to the Networks of Inquiry and Innovation.

The success of the network in attracting the interest of educators and in shifting outcomes for learners drew the attention of health educators and managers from the Ministries of Health and Education. This led to the formation of a Healthy Schools Network (www.healthyschoolsbc.ca/program/262/healthy-schools-network). The focus of this network is to advance the health of young people by drawing attention to emotional and social well-being, nutrition and fitness. Connections with local community health providers and the development of a comprehensive school health culture are emphasised. Key teacher leaders were commissioned to develop learning progressions in the area of healthy living and these were then used to inform the inquiry processes and to assess the impact on learners in health-promoting schools.

Next, the Director of Aboriginal Education at the Ministry of Education asked whether network participants would consider adding two goals to inquiry investigations: first, to improve the learning and graduation outcomes for Aboriginal learners and second, to ensure that every young person in the province graduated with a deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture, history and ways of knowing. As a result of this new challenge, the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network (AESN) was launched. By 2015–2016, the Aboriginal network included hundreds of schools from across the province and the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Targeted financial support from two foundations encouraged groups of schools within AESN to focus specifically on inquiries around issues of indigenous identity and to increase successful transitions across levels of the system for Aboriginal learners.

In 2013, a research study entitled *Aboriginal Inquiry: Lifting all Learners* examined the impact of teacher participation in the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network (http://inquiry.noii.ca). This report drew on a review of all the published AESN case studies, in-depth interviews with network members, written submissions, and in-depth case studies in two school districts. The full report describes the impact on teachers and on their learners as a result of their involvement in AESN. One comment in that report seems to be especially germane to the focus on *learning to be*:

> We have worked to make our students visible by developing their voice.
>
> Ability to manipulate language often defines how our students succeed in school. In all the AESN inquiries we have been involved in, we have sought to make our students visible by developing their voices in the learning

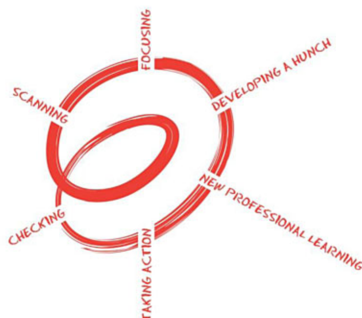
© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

> community. We have worked to develop language skills, social-emotional learning (sense of self) and a connection to 'big ideas' in traditional Aboriginal knowledge. We have seen measurable improvements in reading and writing skills, and we have observed the building of self-confidence when we have participated in an inquiry that focuses all members of the learning community, students and adults. We wanted our students to be heard and to be listened to with respect. (2013, p. 14).

It is difficult for teachers to support students in *learning to be* if they do not have that experience themselves. In some ways, the networks in BC are creating the space where teachers can fully express who they are as professionals. As one educator remarked:

> The network is a place of gathering, of personal and emotional connection. There is no competition, no hierarchy, no question is better than another. It feels powerful, trusting and not judgemental at all . . . It's respectful of teachers' vulnerability and allows teachers to wrestle with questions safely. There was no venue before this to bring us together and push our thinking forward. We are moving away from silos and isolation . . . it is allowing us to take up this work within the broader community. It gives us the ability to ask our colleagues, "What are you doing to make a difference to our kids?" (2013, p.vi).

In working with networks of schools in BC, the founders actively examined a variety of inquiry models designed to create equity and quality outcomes for all learners. This investigation included approaches within the province as well as the challenges and successes of networks in Alberta, San Francisco and New York. Ongoing networks of inquiry in Canada, the UK, the Scandinavian countries and New Zealand were also part of this study. As a result of these investigations, and in partnership with Helen Timperley (2014) from New Zealand, an inquiry was developed that is very much connected to the foundation of *learning to be*. The spiral of inquiry, first described by Halbert and Kaser (2013), requires educators to develop a deep understanding of the experiences of their learners as the basis for informed professional action.



Spiral of Inquiry

The spiral model uses the key stages of scanning, focusing, developing a hunch, engaging in new professional learning, taking new professional action, checking

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

that a big enough difference has been made and then re-engaging to consider what is next. Although the stages in the spiral overlap, paying attention to each aspect is critical in achieving the greatest benefit for all learners. At every stage, inquiry teams ask themselves three important questions: **'What is going on for our learners?', 'How do we know?'** and **'Why does this matter?'** The first two questions constantly prompt participating educators to check that learners are at the heart of what they do, and that educators are basing their decisions on thoughtful evidence from direct observations, as well as more formal data sources. The third question helps to ground teams in the importance of the inquiries they are pursuing.

Scanning: what is going on for our learners?

Just about everyone in a school community has opinions about what is going on for learners. Scanning is all about collecting a variety of rich evidence about what is really going on for learners. In a reasonable amount of time (generally no more than two months), school inquiry teams gather and consider useful information in key areas of learning. These areas include personal identity, empathy, learner well-being, creativity, physical activity, the arts and deeper understanding of other cultures. In other words, understanding the extent to which young people are *learning to be* is central to the scanning process.

Focusing: where are we going to place our attention?

In the focusing phase, teams ask themselves: *Where are we going to concentrate our professional energies so that we can change the experiences and results for our learners?* Sometimes, the scanning process results in a picture that requires deeper investigation. For example, an initial scan may identify that some learners are deeply engaged in their learning while others are not. Some learners express a great deal of interest in particular content areas; others say they are not engaged. Some learners are making good progress in developing key competencies; others are stalled. Some learners feel well supported by the adults in their school; others do not. Gaining greater clarity about the situation for learners before deciding on a course of action is at the heart of the focusing phase.

Developing a Hunch: what is leading to this situation and how are we contributing to it?

The phases in this spiral of inquiry framework often overlap. Evidence from one stage informs the next. Surprises are inevitable and can open up the opportunity for reflection and new understandings. The hunch stage asks educators to probe 'what's leading to this situation?' and, every bit as important, 'how are *we* contributing to it?' Everyone has hunches about why things are the way they are. Some of these views are passionately held. Getting these views on to the table in a way that they can be discussed and tested is fundamental to moving forward together.

New Professional Learning: how and where will we learn more about what to do?

All phases of the inquiry spiral involve learning, but at this stage teams engage with the specific task of carefully designing professional learning. At this point, inquiry leadership teams help teachers to identify *how and where can we learn more about what to do?* The professional learning focus flows organically from testing out the hunches about what is leading to the situation for learners. The evidence on

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

professional learning and improved learner outcomes in significant areas indicates that a year of focused effort is required at the very minimum. One year is good; two years are much better, and three may be required.

Taking Action: what will we do differently?

This is the stage in the inquiry spiral where new learning leads to new practices. Once teams have the evidence and the knowledge about the practices that will help learners, it is time to take action by jumping across the knowing-doing gap. At this stage, the inquiry team makes sure that all those involved are supported to try out new practices. Teams need to make sure that there is plenty of opportunity for dialogue, observation, reflection, and second, third and fourth tries without fear of judgement or failure. Changing practice can feel risky for many teachers and inquiry teams need to find ways to make the risk-taking less risky.

Checking: have we made a big enough difference?

The purpose of the inquiry spiral is to make a difference to valued outcomes for learners. Changes in practice do not always lead to substantive improvement and it is in this part of the spiral that inquiry teams ask whether they are making *enough* of a difference. The key is to have general agreement ahead of time on what evidence to look for and what constitutes enough of a difference.

What does this look like in practice? Here is one example (for more information about this case study, please see http://networksofinquiry.blogspot.ca/2015/02/building-opportunities-with-innovative.html). In the scanning process, the staff working with a disengaged group of struggling learners in a large urban secondary school noticed that when the students were involved in hands-on activities in an outdoor setting, they were far more focused, happier and productive. The staff decided to focus their inquiry on helping students to develop more pride and a sense of purpose through goal setting and by exploring a range of career options. Their hunch was that traditional classroom settings did not work for many of their disengaged learners. They decided to provide more learning experiences within and connected to the community. As part of their professional learning, the staff identified occupations that would better engage some of their struggling learners and looked out to the community to offer some job shadowing opportunities for the students. It allowed students to develop employability skills and learn from a variety of people, listening to and sharing stories of their journey. So what difference did this make? At the beginning of the school year, there were 30 students enrolled in the programme. None had employment and none of the senior students planned to pursue post-secondary education. By the end of the year, there were 45 students in the programme, with 12 students employed and 5 graduating students enrolled to attend post-secondary training programmes. This may not sound like a huge number, but for each of these students, the impact was profound.

As schools in BC have pursued inquiries focused on changing the learning experiences of young people over the past 15 years, two new areas of new professional learning directly connected to *learning to be* are starting to take hold within the province. In the final sections of this article, we will look at the ways in which the research on social emotional learning is influencing practice and policy. We will also examine the ways in which First Peoples Principles of Learning are shifting perspectives, policies and practices.

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

Social Emotional Learning

In 2010, the OECD publication *The Nature of Learning: Using Research to Inspire Practice* was released. In Chapter Four, Boekaerts describes the crucial role of emotion and motivation in classroom learning. She provides an important summary of contemporary research underscoring how critical it is for learning professionals to be highly attuned to the motivations of learners and the key role of emotions in achievement. She concludes:

> Students are more motivated to engage in learning when: they feel competent to do what is expected of them and perceive stable links between actions and achievement; they value the subject and have a clear sense of purpose; they experience positive emotions towards learning activities and, contrariwise turn away from learning when they experience negative emotions; and when they perceive the environment as favourable for learning. (p. 91).

The findings in *The Nature of Learning* and this chapter in particular have been influential in shaping the professional learning culture of BC. Network educators have also benefited from the work of Kimberley Schonert-Reichl (2012) (http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/people/Kimberly_Schonert-Reichl), a leading researcher in the field of social emotional learning at the University of British Columbia. Her 2007 article with Shelley Hymel captured the attention of BC educators and has led to significant changes in provincial curriculum. Schonert-Reichl has worked closely with the Ministry of Education in redesigning the curriculum framework to include personal responsibility and social responsibility competencies. These competencies are based on the works of CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning) (www.casel.org), the BC Social Responsibility Performance Standards and the British Columbia Early Learning Framework (www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/topic.page?id=9CAEBBF8B90848D1A66E2A7303E18915). CASEL has identified five inter-related sets of cognitive, affective and behavioural competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. Table I provides a description of these competencies.

In addition to focusing on specific teaching of social and emotional skills, SEL is a process of creating a school and classroom community that are caring, supportive and responsive to students' needs. It has been encouraging to examine the ways in which policy-makers, parents, community members and educators in BC are working together to address the social-emotional needs of all learners. In so doing, educators have been able to use key findings from a questionnaire developed by the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) (HELP is a collaborative, interdisciplinary research network, based at UBC, http://earlylearning.ubc.ca). The Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) (http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/mdi) is a self-report questionnaire that asks children how they think and feel about their experiences both inside and outside school. The questionnaires for 10- and 13-year-olds include questions related to the five areas of development that are strongly linked to well-being, health and academic achievement:

1. **Physical Health and Well-Being**
   Children evaluate their own physical well-being in the areas of overall health, including body image, nutrition and sleeping habits.

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

TABLE I. Social Emotional Competencies

SEL Dimension	Description
Self-Awareness	The ability to accurately recognize one's feelings and thoughts and their influence on behaviours. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a realistic sense of self-efficacy and optimism.
Social Awareness	The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse background and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behaviour, and to recognize family, school and community resources and supports.
Self-Management	The ability to regulate one's emotions, cognitions and behaviours effectively in different situations. This includes delaying gratification, managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working towards achieving personal and academic goals.
Relationship Skills	The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking help when needed.
Responsible Decision-Making	The ability to make constructive choices about personal behaviour, social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.

2. **Connectedness**
   Children are asked about their experiences of support and connection with the adults in their schools and neighbourhoods, with their parents or guardians at home, and with their peers.
3. **Social and Emotional Development**
   Children respond to questions about their current social and emotional functioning in seven areas: optimism, self-esteem, happiness, empathy, pro-social behaviour, sadness and worries.
4. **School Experiences**
   Children are asked about their school experiences in four areas: academic self-concept, school climate, school belonging, and experiences with peer victimisation (bullying).
5. **Use of After-School Time**
   Children are asked about the time they spend engaged in organised activities such as sports, music and art, as well as the time they spend watching TV, doing homework and playing video games.

The MDI reflects a major initiative to strengthen resources focused on helping children to develop positive connections. Understanding how groups of young people are doing in these critically important areas allows decision-makers to make informed choices about investments in new or adapted programmes. It is also of great utility in creating well-informed policies that support children and families.

In addition to the collaborative work around the MDI, the current work on core competencies as part of the Ministry of Education's new curriculum framework (www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/transforming_curriculum.php) reflects an additional way in which the principle of *learning to be* is currently being addressed in policy. A

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

consensus is emerging through dialogue amongst educators, parents and community leaders across BC that there needs to be a shift from an over-emphasis on discrete curriculum outcomes to more attention on core competencies that will permit students to navigate in today's world more successfully.

Within BC, core competencies are viewed as the sets of intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies that all students need to develop in order to engage in deep learning. Through provincial consultation, three broad core competencies have been identified: communication, thinking, and personal and social competence.

Communication

Communication encompasses the set of abilities that students use to acquire, impart and exchange information, experiences and ideas; to connect, engage and collaborate with others; to recount and reflect on their experiences and learning; and to understand and effectively engage in the use of digital media.

Thinking

Creative Thinking involves the generation of new ideas and concepts that have value to the individual or others, and the development of these ideas and concepts from thought to reality.

Critical Thinking involves the analysis and evaluation of thinking in order to improve and extend it, and includes systematically examining thinking about information that comes to them through observation, experience and various forms of communication.

Personal and Social Competence

Positive Personal and Cultural Identity involves the awareness, understanding and appreciation of all the facets that contribute to a healthy sense of oneself. It includes awareness and understanding of one's family background, heritage(s), language(s), beliefs and perspective, and sense of place.

Social Awareness and Responsibility involves ability and predisposition to cooperate and collaborate with others, display community-mindedness and stewardship, empathise with and appreciate the perspectives of others, and create and maintain healthy relationships within one's family, community, society and environment.

Personal Awareness and Responsibility involves developing all aspects of personal well-being; making ethical decisions and taking responsibility for one's actions and how they impact self and others; and self-regulation.

The new curriculum framework, as it is tested, revised and adopted in BC schools has the potential to provide even more support for the importance of *learning to be*.

In this final section, we will illustrate the ways in which First Peoples Principles of Learning are consistent with the foundations of *learning to be*. We encourage readers to consider the ways in which these principles apply not only to First Nations learners, but also to all learners, regardless of culture or background.

First Peoples Principles of Learning

In 2006, the Ministry of Education partnered with the First Nations Education Steering Committee (www.fnesc.ca) to create the English 12 First Peoples course. The development of this course included significant input from Aboriginal knowledge-keepers and educators and was unique in a number of ways. First, the

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

process began with the creation of an Advisory Committee, which included, among others, Aboriginal scholars and educators. This meant that the course had to take into account, not only authentic Aboriginal content, but also reflect Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy.

Second, it included the development of the First Peoples Principles of Learning. In an effort to help the course to focus more authentically on Aboriginal experiences, values, beliefs and lived realities, the following set of learning principles valued by Aboriginal peoples was articulated by the Advisory Committee to guide the development of the curriculum and the teaching of the course.

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognising the consequences of one's actions.
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- Learning recognises the role of indigenous knowledge.
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
- Learning involves patience and time.
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity.
- Learning involves recognising that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

Provincial documents note that these principles of learning represent an attempt to identify common elements in the varied teaching and learning approaches that prevail within particular First Peoples societies and the principles are generally recognised as reflecting common values and perspectives about education held by First Peoples in BC.

As described earlier, the core competencies currently under development in British Columbia are sets of intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies that all students need to develop in order to engage in deep learning and lifelong learning. In explaining the importance of the First Peoples Principles of Learning and the connections to *Learning to Be*, we are indebted to Jo-Anne Chrona (https://firstpeoplesprinciplesoflearning.wordpress.com), a Tsimshian educator and provincial leader who has developed background information and strategies for classroom teachers in BC working to understand and implement First Peoples Principles of Learning.

Chrona (2015) states:

> The increased emphasis on personalization and the recognition of the importance of paying attention to more aspects of self may be new to the BC education system, but they are not new to Indigenous peoples. These initiatives echo what has already been known by First Peoples — that education is a complex process that is personal, holistic, embedded in relationship, and is most effective when it is authentic and relevant. (https://firstpeoplesprinciplesoflearning.wordpress.com).

From a First Peoples perspective, the primary purpose of learning is for well-being — well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors. Chrona explains that, as with all other learners, there are diverse learning styles among Aboriginal learners. The uniqueness of each learner is valued

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

and appreciated. Each person is perceived as coming into the world with specific gifts that can be nurtured as he or she grows, and it is the responsibility of the adults in the child's life to acknowledge those strengths so that those gifts can flourish.

The First Peoples Principles of Learning also reflect the understanding that there is always a need to balance individual achievement against responsibilities to and for the family and community. This idea can stand in opposition to an individualistic perspective where the individual is more important than the community. This understanding is also based on the premise that 'we are all related', a view of the world that is deeply held by most Aboriginal peoples in North America. Embedded in this concept is the belief that, as human beings, we all share commonality and what affects one person affects all others.

The practical implications for teachers incorporating this particular First Peoples Principle of Learning into their practice include creating greater connections to the broader community. This mirrors the learning principle of building horizontal connections from *The Nature of Learning*. It also suggests the need for teachers to make explicit connections to social responsibility and to examine what is being learned in terms of how it influences the self, the family, the community and the land.

We have a history of well-established inclusive policies and practices and an on-going emphasis on social responsibility in British Columbia. The understanding, however, that there is much for us to learn from the indigenous peoples who have lived together on this land for thousands of years is relatively recent. *Learning to be* by necessity implies that we are open to learning from each other. There is much for us to learn and educators in BC are increasingly enthusiastic about doing so.

Conclusion

We began this article by describing the inquiry focus in four very different kinds of schools in BC. We will conclude by describing what took place in those schools and where their inquiry is leading them next. The urban secondary school decided to focus particularly on building resilience in Mathematics. It drew on the work of Carol Dweck (2006) and some of the trajectory changing research that indicates specific practices that contribute to students not only developing a growth mindset about Mathematics, but also resilience in the face of obstacles. It worked with its partners in the elementary schools and over the course of four years radically improved the outcomes for its learners, especially in the focus area of Mathematics.

In the small Northern school, the teachers are carefully monitoring the changes they are seeing in individual students, they are closely checking behavioural referrals and are looking for academic improvements as measured by more formal assessments. They have decided that their next step will be to extend the focus on peaceful problem-solving and self-regulation to their parent community, with the students taking the lead role as teachers.

Much was learned in the school (GES) that focused on 'Who am I?' as the basis for its inquiry. It drew directly on the following three First Peoples Principles of Learning as it developed assignments, planned events, and started to build new traditions:

- Learning requires the exploration of one's identity;
- Learning recognises the role of indigenous knowledge; and,
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

To check whether or not it was making enough of a difference, it conducted a pre- and post-assessment using an engagement scale. Among its reflections were the following:

> We found that as students gained self-confidence and began answering the question "who am I?" not only were they more open to learning academics, but also open to learning more about themselves. We found that through reflection and self-discovery, students expressed more gratitude for their families, the community they live in, and the environment. As a future generation of strong Nisga'a leaders, being connected to "Who am I?" will have an enormous positive impact on their life experiences as they pursue their dreams and goals, and help sustain a healthy community. The teachers of GES also learned a lot about themselves and about mindfulness throughout the process of this inquiry.

And in the suburban elementary school, the changes that teachers and parents are seeing are profound. By starting the day with movement in the gym (dancing, yoga, aerobics, zumba, game stations) followed by structured opportunities for mindfulness and self-regulation throughout the day, teachers and parents are seeing a marked decrease in anxiety — amongst both students and teachers. As students have learned self-regulation strategies, they have become confident in teaching the strategies to their younger learning partners and to their parents. The staff is now much more able to focus on improving the literacy and numeracy levels of their learners. The school is now a place of joy and learning, instead of stress and worry.

One of the major goals of the networks in BC is that 'every learner will cross the stage with dignity, purpose and options'. This is an ambitious goal yet we see evidence every day that schools and communities are working hard to make this a reality. We feel fortunate to work in a system where *learning to be* is valued and supported through policy, by research and within inquiry networks of educators and community members.

Judy Halbert, Centre for Innovative Educational Leadership, Vancouver Island University, 900 Fifth Street, Nanaimo, BC, Canada V9R 5S5, jhalbert@telus.net, www.noii.ca

Linda Kaser, Centre for Innovative Educational Leadership, Vancouver Island University, 900 Fifth Street, Nanaimo, BC, Canada V9R 5S5, lkaser@telus.net, www.noii.ca

REFERENCES

BOEKAERTS, M. (2010) The crucial role of motivation and emotion in classroom learning. In DUMONT, H., ISTANCE, D. & BENAVIDES, F. (Eds), *The Nature of Learning: Using Research to Inspire Practice* (Paris, OECD Publishing).

CHRONA, J. (2015) *First Peoples Principles of Learning*. https://firstpeoplesprinciplesoflearning.wordpress.com

DELORS, J. *et al*. (1996) *Learning The Treasures Within*. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001095/109590eo.pdf

DWECK, C. S. (2006) *Mindset: the new psychology of success* (New York, Random House).

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

FAURE *et al*. (1972) *Learning to Be: the world of education today and tomorrow* (Paris, UNESCO).

GOLEMAN, D. & SENGE, P. (2014) *The Triple Focus: a new approach to education* (Florence, MA, More Than Sound, LLC).

HALBERT, J. & KASER, L. (2013) *Spirals of Inquiry: for equity and quality* (Vancouver, BC, BCPVPA publications).

SCHONERT-REICHL, K. A. (2012) *Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in British Columbia K-12 Curriculum: competencies of personal responsibility and well-being and social responsibility*. Background paper for Ministry of Education.

SCHONERT-REICHL, K. A. & HYMEL, S. (2007) Educating the heart as well as the mind: why social and emotional learning is critical for students' school and life success, *Education Canada*, 47, pp. 20–25.

TIMPERLEY, H., KASER, L. & HALBERT, J. (2014) A framework for transforming learning in schools: innovation and the spiral of inquiry. *Seminar Series 234* (Melbourne Centre for Strategic Education).

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

Appendix A

Quick Scale for Social Responsibility: Primary Grades

Category	Not yet within expectations	Meets expectations (minimal level)	Fully meets expectations	Exceeds expectations
Contributes to the classroom and school community	■ often acts unfriendly or disrespectful of others ■ generally reluctant to participate in and contribute to classroom and group activities.	■ usually friendly, and if asked, will help or include others ■ may need prompting to participate in and contribute to class-room and group activities.	■ usually welcoming, friendly, kind and helpful ■ participates in and contributes to classroom and group activities.	■ welcoming, friendly, kind, and helpful ■ participates and contributes to classroom and group activities, often taking extra responsibilities.
Solves problems in a peaceful way	■ in conflict situations, often expresses anger inappropriately; blames or puts down others. ■ has difficulty recognizing problems; may suggest inappropriate strategies.	■ in conflict situations, tries to state feelings and manage anger appropriately, but quickly becomes frustrated; tends to over- or under-estimate the need for adult help. ■ can identify simple problems; and generate strategies with help.	■ in conflict situations, tries to express feelings honestly, manage anger appropriately, listen politely; most often relies on adult intervention without considering alternatives. ■ can clarify problems, generate and evaluate strategies.	■ in conflict situations, usually manages anger and expresses feelings appropriately; often tries to solve problems independently; knows when to get adult help ■ clarifies problems, generates appropriate strategies; predicts outcomes.
Values diversity and defends human rights	■ sometimes disrespectful; focuses on own needs and wants	■ usually respectful; may not notice when others are treated unfairly	■ increasingly interested in fairness; treats others fairly and respectfully	■ fair, respectful; may "stick up for" others when perceiving injustice
Exercises rights and responsibilities of a citizen in a democracy	■ can often repeat class or school rules, but is unable to think of ways to improve school or community.	■ with support, shows an emerging sense of responsibility for the classroom; may be able to describe simple ways to improve school or community	■ shows emerging sense of responsibility, generally following classroom rules; able to identify simple ways to improve the school or community	■ shows a clear sense of responsibility in the classroom, and an emerging sense of idealism — wants to make the world a better place

B.C. Performance Standards: Social Responsibility Draft (February 2000)

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

Quick Scale for Social Responsibility: Grades 4–5

Category	Not yet within expectations	Meets expectations (minimal level)	Fully meets expectations	Exceeds expectations
Contributes to the classroom and school community	■ often acts unfriendly, ignoring the feelings and needs of others ■ shows little commitment to the group or class, and has difficulty following basic rules for working together.	■ usually friendly, and if asked, will help or include others ■ generally willing and cooperative in classroom and group activities; may need some support.	■ friendly, considerate, and helpful ■ contributes and shows commitment to classroom and group activities.	■ friendly and kind, and often seeks opportunities to help or include others ■ voluntarily takes responsibility in classroom and group activities (effective).
Solves problems in a peaceful way	■ does not take responsibility or listen to another's point-of-view in a conflict situation, and tends to blame and put-down others. ■ has difficulty stating problems or issues, and may be unable to suggest or choose appropriate strategies.	■ tries to state feelings and manage anger, but often needs support to resolve conflicts, frequently over- or under estimating the need for adult help. ■ can identify simple problems or issues; and generate some strategies; tends to rely on the same strategies for all problems.	■ tries to manage anger, listen to others, and apply logical reasons to resolve conflicts, and usually knows when to get adult help. ■ can explain simple problems or issues, generate and select simple, logical strategies.	■ considers others' views and uses some effective strategies for resolving minor conflicts; takes responsibility and shows good judgment about when to get adult help. ■ can explain an increasing variety of problems or issues, generate and evaluate strategies.
Values diversity and defends human rights	■ sometimes disrespectful, and appears unaware of others' rights.	■ usually respectful to others, but may need prompting to see how "fairness" applies to some situations.	■ treats others fairly and respectfully, and often shows interest in correcting injustice.	■ fair and respectful and shows growing commitment to fair and just treatment for everyone.
Exercises rights and responsibilities of a citizen in a democracy	■ tends to be apathetic, and may feel powerless to affect classroom, school, community, or world.	■ willing to participate in actions that others initiate to improve the classroom, school, community or world, but may be unclear on the purpose or impact of their actions.	■ shows a growing sense of responsibility toward classroom, school, community, and world; wants to make a difference, but needs help identifying opportunities for action.	■ shows a strong sense of responsibility in the classroom, and an emerging sense of idealism — wants to make the world a better place; beginning to notice opportunities for action.

© 2015 John Wiley & Sons Ltd