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EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Executive summary

This case study describes an ongoing systemic effort to transform the learning experiences of young people in British Columbia through curriculum reform.[1] British Columbia lies on the western coast of Canada and is its third largest province at around 5.1 million people. Public education in Canada is an entirely devolved responsibility of the provinces. The school system is "co-governed" by the Ministry of Education and the district school boards, with the ministry providing the framework for curriculum and assessment.

Over the past decade, British Columbia has undergone substantial reform to its central curriculum and assessment framework. This reform was not framed in terms of raising overall achievement levels, and instead explicitly aimed toward making education more relevant, engaging, and fit for a changing world. While reducing attainment gaps between non-Indigenous and First Nations students was an explicit goal, more broadly reform leaders aimed to bring Indigenous thinking into the curriculum and culture of schooling in ways that would benefit all students.

At the level of the curriculum, the reform involved reducing the number of curricular standards and introducing a framework centered on subject-based "big ideas" and cross-subject "core competencies:" communication, thinking, and personal and social competency. Subject-based provincial exams, taken in grades 10-12, have been removed and replaced by new literacy and numeracy assessments that prioritize

1 This case study is a companion to "Transforming education for holistic student development: Learning from education system (re) building around the world" (Datnow et al., 2022), a summary report that explores the work of building and rebuilding education systems to support holistic student development in six education systems in Singapore, Ireland, Chile, Canada, India, and the United States and in one cross-national system (the International Baccalaureate). While different in many ways, the seven systems bear remarkable similarities in their efforts to (re)build education systems—each is working in policy contexts pressing for academic quality and equity, while also facing additional incentives to support holistic student development.

the application of knowledge. Efforts to reform the reporting requirements on teachers and schools, to de-emphasize the role of grades in elementary school and percentage scores in high school, and to instead emphasize the formative assessment of core competencies are ongoing.

In contrast to a top-down approach, the new curriculum was developed in collaboration with stakeholder groups across the province, including those representing teachers, principals, superintendents, parents, the independent school sectors, and the First Nations. Curriculum drafts were released for review and commentary by the public as well as stakeholder groups.

The core competencies have been widely accepted by teachers, parents, and students as focal points of education. This has occurred quite rapidly in elementary schools and more gradually in secondary schools, but is an ongoing shift. The province is seeing mounting examples of practice that is more child-centered and more informed by Indigenous perspectives. The continued spread of new mindsets and practices are amounting to a transformation in the goals and experience of education.

Key lessons for policymakers

1. To secure the sustainability of reform, the ministry worked hard to collaborate with and secure the backing of a range of influential educators across the province. The new curriculum was successfully framed not as a political or ideological project, but as one informed by the best thinking on learning and education.
2. The introduction of the new curriculum and assessments was staggered and gradual, allowing time for teachers to create new practices before they were expected to consistently fulfil the curriculum outcomes.
3. Actors external to the ministry have played a key role, particularly through fostering networks and development opportunities that have enabled forward-thinking educators to take on greater leadership.

BOX 1

The summary report "Transforming education for holistic student development: Learning from education system re(building) around the world" lays out 10 key lessons for transforming education systems, which are all exemplified in this case study. In particular, this case study highlights the need to:

1. **Engage diverse stakeholders:** Engage and coordinate among diverse stakeholders and leverage partnerships.
2. **Construct coherence:** Create opportunities for diverse stakeholders to deliberate on different cultural norms, cognitive frameworks, and regulatory environments that inform schooling.
3. **Distribute leadership:** Develop and distribute leadership for instruction by, among other things, cultivating educator and student agency.

Introduction

This case describes an ongoing system reform effort to transform the learning experiences of young people in British Columbia through changes to curriculum and graduation requirements. Over the past decade, the province of British Columbia has undergone substantial reform to its central curriculum and assessment framework. Interlinked with this formal policy change, collaboration among the Ministry of Education, the teacher union, professional associations, and quasi-formal networks has enabled a deeper and more transformational shift in the structures and culture of schooling—not just improving on traditional metrics but moving toward a more diverse and encompassing vision of education and its outcomes. This case study

describes this reform journey and sets it within the longer history of educational change in the province. This introductory section provides an overview of British Columbia and its educational institutions.

Overview of the system reform

British Columbia lies on the western coast of Canada and is its third largest province at around 5.1 million people. Public education in Canada is an entirely devolved responsibility of the provinces. The school system is "co-governed" by the Ministry of Education and the district school boards. Of the 650,000 students, about 90 percent are in the public school system, with the rest in a variety of independent schools. All public schools are part of one of 60 school districts, which vary considerably in size—from 70,000 students densely packed into the urban area of Surrey, to around 200 in the vast area of Stikine. Districts take the majority of budgetary decisions and manage school accountability internally. Although districts do collect attendance and some student test score data (in grades 4 and 7) and are required to make this available to the ministry, test results are not used as accountability measures attached to funding or teacher pay.

In the absence of test-based accountability, the key aligning factor in the province is the provincial curriculum, which stipulates what students should learn across subjects at each grade level. The curriculum reform process that is central to this case study began with a multi-year public engagement resulting in the development of the "B.C. Learning Plan" in 2011, and subsequently the creation—by teams of teachers—of a new K-9 provincial curriculum between 2012 and 2014. A new grade 10-12 curriculum, known as the "Grad program," was developed from 2013 and has been introduced in a gradual way since 2018.

This extended reform journey was a response to multiple drivers. As of 2011, the three most widely cited elements of the "case for change" were:

(1) To respond to a feeling that the purpose of education was changing in line with technological change, particularly the way devices were making information widely available;

(2) To increase student engagement in school;

(3) To address ongoing concerns about the gap in graduation rates between First Nations and non-Indigenous students.

Alongside this formal process of policy change, a social change has taken place in the assumptions about what schooling should look like and what it is for. The province of British Columbia can be characterized by its growing commitment to re-found itself on the values and practices of its First Peoples. Amongst these values is a respect for time: The Indigenous population of B.C. are said to have stewarded the land since "time immemorial." This long-term view brings a different orientation to the question of reform and change. From this perspective, the current reform is not a 10-year policy initiative but part of a generational effort to overcome the legacy of colonial schooling practices and center the education system around more holistic learning experiences and outcomes. An alternative view of education was manifested in 2011 in a set of "First People's Principles of Learning," created through consultation by the First Nations Steering Council on Education (FNESC).

With FNESC, ministry officials and the key system partners—the over-arching union, the B.C. Teachers' Federation (BCTF), the Principals and Vice-Principals Association and School Superintendent's Association—all shared a primary concern about the graduation rates of Indigenous students. Given the existing investment into these students, the extent of the achievement gaps served to delegitimize the existing system—at least for educators: Despite widespread publication of graduation data, these concerns rarely featured in the responses to the initial public consultation on the curriculum. More recently, however, the horrific discovery of children's bodies on the sites of former "residential schools"—where Indigenous children were taken from their families to be educated in English—have again raised debate over the culture of schooling.

TELLING THE STORY OF TRANSFORMATION IN B.C.: A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

While this case describes a specific curriculum reform and refers to key actors who have promoted its creation and spread, it is important to note at the outset that the language of reform would be rejected by those involved. A typical way of understanding reform is as a process instigated and led by key actors, who find ways to scale or spread their vision to change a system. In contrast, in B.C. diverse leaders both within and outside government have worked to enable a bottom-up change: While the ministry holds formal authority to prescribe the curriculum standards and provincial assessments, ministry and district administrators understand that pedagogical change has to be led by teachers.[2] Rather than an orchestrated reform, it may be useful to think of Donella Meadows' model of transformation, whereby a system change emerges from the connection of different communities, as a mental model for how change is occurring in B.C.

The reform journey

In 2010, B.C.'s Ministry of Education formally initiated a curriculum review, in line with a 10-year cycle. From the start, however, it was intended to be different from previous curriculum updates, which had resulted in "binders being sent to schools and sitting on shelves." Spearheading an alternative approach were the deputy minister, James Gorman, and two former district superintendents who had been previously seconded into the ministry, Rod Allen and Maureen Dockendorf. Allen's role in particular evolved from being a "superintendent of achievement"—responsible for improvement of standards across districts —to a new, more open-ended concept of "superintendent of learning." In this role, Allen had been given scope to break down silos in the "learning division," the floor of the ministry responsible for curriculum and assessment, and to foster a more collaborative way of working.

While the reform marked a departure in the ministry's approach, in terms of its pedagogical philosophy, it built on previous efforts. In the 1990s, the ministry briefly promoted an agenda known as "Curriculum 2000," which was intended to allow more self-directed learning and use of information technology in schools. Officially, the agenda was soon dropped in a change of government, but it meant that some schools had already started to experiment with more student-centered practices and some in the ministry were primed to think more expansively about the potential of curriculum change. Over the decade from 2000 to 2010, the emerging consensus was that the curriculum required fewer standards and more scope for holistic outcomes. Some key influences during the 2000s included a ministry visit from John Abbott, a former principal in England and founder of the 21st Century Learning Initiative; from Dylan Williams, one of the proponents of Assessment for Learning; and Valerie Hannon, co-founder of the U.K.'s Innovation Unit.

In October 2011, the ministry put out a public website announcing the intention to create a "B.C. Ed Plan." Rather than presenting a finished plan, they invited public response to a short, lively animation accompanied by thought pieces. In addition to the website, they sought responses through public consultations held across the province.

A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

While the Ministry of Education instigated the "Learning Plan," the vision and content of the curriculum developed in partnership with system stakeholders. George Abbott, minister of education from 2011-13, was particularly intentional about attempting to mend relations with the provincial union—the BCTF—and the curriculum became a key point of collaboration and consensus, even in a period of teacher strikes.

During the first stage of the curriculum reform in 2012, the government re-introduced legislation, first passed in 2002 but then ruled unconstitutional, which limited the BCTF's ability to strike over class size and composition.

2 This notion of "bottom-up" change has been framed in different ways at different points in time. An early advisor to the ministry, David Albury, compared the necessary approach to that of social movements. Others now use the language of "emergence," derived from complexity theory, to describe how a new approach to education in the province is arising through the overlapping and intersecting work of many teachers, districts, and networks.

In response, for almost a year in 2012-13, BCTF teachers held job action in the form of not speaking to their administrators (principals and vice-principals), followed in August 2014 by the longest teacher strike in Canadian history, with school closures lasting into mid-September. While this battle could have been a key inhibitor, creating an antagonistic environment and taking up large amounts of ministry time, in reflecting on it after the fact, teachers have noted that a year with minimal participation in administrative meetings created space and time to rethink their practice.

In addition to working with the union, through secondments and collaborations on white papers, the ministry worked to secure the input of particularly influential educators. These educators—including a handful of key network leaders, faculty in the education schools, and curriculum specialists—provided important "backing" for the vision, ensuring it was perceived as more than a government agenda.

In taking this approach, B.C. departed from the top-down strategies typical at that time in the United States, and also in the neighboring systems in Alberta and Ontario. While these provinces had been showcased in case studies for their coordinated system-wide approaches, B.C. intentionally embraced something that would be messier.[3]

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE NEW CURRICULUM

The curriculum framework that emerged from this collaborative process has two distinct elements:

- A set of cross-curricular "core competencies:" communication, creative and critical thinking, and personal and social responsibility (later to evolve to include positive personal and cultural identity).
- A small number of "big ideas" creating a focal point for learning in each subject and grade.

The core competencies arose quite directly from concerns voiced in the public consultation. Many parents, students, teachers, and employers referred to these sorts of skills. The big ideas responded to the concerns about excessive content and the small "grain size" of that content. Both new pieces were intended to provide a more holistic framework for education. Teachers could better link learning across subjects and years and have more space to develop their own experiences and materials, freed from a focus on numerous narrow content standards.

The first draft of the new standards was published in November 2012, with an invitation for public feedback. Over 100,000 people viewed the curriculum drafts in the four months to February 2013 and over 900 provided written responses. In addition, ministry staff traveled round the province to gather responses from over 400 stakeholders representing a range of specific educational contexts and concerns. A wave of revisions then took place, which included providing greater specification of the competencies and the big ideas.

In September 2012, while still developing the new K-9 content, the ministry began consulting on a new "graduation program" for grades 10-12. This was a more complex change, involving a new approach to centralized assessments, as well as to the credit structure and course offerings. In place of the existing graduation requirements that required five provincial exams (three in grade 10, one in grade 11, and one in grade 12), students would "sit" only two centralized assessments—one each in literacy and math skills. In addition, all students would develop a personal portfolio reflecting on their development of the core competencies and take part in careers education. A range of new courses were offered, including in more Indigenous languages, and schools were encouraged to use freedoms introduced in 2004 to allow students to create more "independent study courses."

A RESILIENT REFORM

The new curriculum was introduced in stages from 2016 onwards (see the timeline at the end of this case study). While this allowed time for teachers and students to

3 One key difference in approach is the numbers working in the ministry: In B.C. around 300 staff manage all of the central functions; in Ontario, it is 1,700. As Allen has joked, they couldn't do "top down" even if they wanted to. In addition to a small ministry, unlike many jurisdictions, B.C. does not have established governmental or nongovernmental curriculum or qualification bodies that act as institutionalized centers of expertise. Instead, groups such as the Curriculum and Assessment Advisory Group and later the Advisory Group on Provincial Assessment were convened specifically for the purposes of this reform.

become familiar with the new requirements, in this time period it was at risk from backlash or political turnarounds. Only the ending of the traditional provincial exams really received heated media attention, however, when it was formally announced in 2016. Pushback contributed to the changeover to the new assessments being delayed by a year, by which time COVID-19 had become the much greater concern for school news. The release of PISA scores in December 2019 also received some coverage, as B.C. saw a statistically significant decline in 2018 PISA scores compared to 2015. However, this decline was not sufficient to derail the reform process, likely because other Canadian provinces also experienced some declines and Canada still ranked highly overall. With the exception of the Fraser Institute, a prominent Canada-wide think tank with a conservative-libertarian bent, there has not been a consistent voice of opposition to the reforms.

One key to its sustainability is that the new curriculum received support from both the province's main political parties, the Liberals and New Democrats. In part this is because it was spearheaded not by officials but by educators. While the Liberal George Abbott, education minister from 2011-13, played a vital role in supporting the initial vision, it has been influential secondees and network leaders who have sustained it. Consequently, even when some later civil servants in the ministry were more skeptical, elected officials continued to hear support for the curriculum from the field.

As of 2022, teachers and parents support the curriculum and the new graduation requirements. The latest addition to these—that all students take credits in Indigenous courses—met with a positive response, and many districts have already begin teaching such courses in the past school year before the formal introduction of this requirement. Another indicator of confidence is that Canada's Northwest territories have switched from using the curriculum of Alberta to that of B.C. Overall, education leaders are optimistic that despite—or in some views because of—lagging investment in assessment, the pedagogical practice to realize the curriculum's vision is emerging.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: ASSESSMENT

A central question in B.C.'s reform journey has been whether to attempt to use provincial assessment as a lever for change. On one side are those who feel that the new core competencies should not be assessed summatively—with a view that teachers should not be "waiting for the assessments" to start teaching to. On the other are those who see assessment as an outstanding "hole" in the reform—raising questions as to what extent the core competencies really are the "core" of the curriculum—and how they relate to literacy and numeracy, which remain the only skills that are monitored through provincial-wide centralized assessment in grades four and seven. Currently, in new report card designs, teachers provide comments on student development against the core competencies, and students have opportunities to self-assess. While there is relatively widespread agreement that the core competencies should not receive a score or grade, there are calls for more investment in assessment tools to support teacher feedback.

The assessment debate is linked to the challenge of defending the curriculum reform against accusations of "dumbing down" education. While, as noted above, there has been no widespread opposition, the revised math curriculum has come under fire from some journalists and parent groups due to the reduction of required content and more inquiry-based approaches (in parallel with the earlier U.S. "math wars"). In addition, the efforts to reduce external provincial exams have been framed by some as a lowering of standards. To counter this, proponents of reform have tried to educate the public about assessment for learning (for example, publishing on the ministry website a compilation of recommended works of contemporary educationalists and learning scientists).

An aim of the reforms is that assessment throughout the school years should be in the service of "learning not sorting."[4] In order to achieve this goal, ministry officials have had to work very closely with universities. A dual appointment to the Ministry of Education and

4 The guiding principles of the Advisory Group on Provincial Assessment (AGPA, a collection of academics and stakeholder representatives convened by the ministry to provide expert advice) sought to project this message in this way*: … stakeholder groups that are external to the K-12 education system (e.g., employers and post-secondary institutions) have commonly relied on graduation data to inform their decisions. While we recognize these "external" needs, we also acknowledge that meeting the needs and purposes within K-12 must remain the primary drivers for assessment, and that the functions of the K-12 system should not be controlled by external needs*. (AGPA 2015).

Ministry of Advanced Education, Jan Unwin, was tasked with getting agreement from the province's universities on new graduation requirements. There has been ongoing effort to negotiate a model with the selective research universities that would provide them with the information they needed for fair selection, without letting those needs drive the design of the graduation program. Since the introduction of a grade 12 literacy assessment in place of the former provincial exams, universities have adopted "proficiency" in these assessments as a key benchmark for entry.

Capacity building and infrastructures for change

To move from "paper to practice," the ministry has relied on districts and informal networks to promote a shift in pedagogy in line with the new curriculum.

DISTRICTS

Proactive districts have used several levers of change. These include:

- **Use of funds:** creating savings and repurposing parts of budgets to cover the higher costs of new models of cross-curricular, multi-age, or place-based education pedagogical innovations, e.g. transportation, staffing, and resource costs.

- **New professional development opportunities:** through international collaborations and participation in province-wide networks, as well as networking within and across districts.

- **Thought leadership and media communication:** creating videos and presentations to elevate desirable practices in the district; creating new opportunities to talk differently about curriculum, teaching, and learning, including public forums and "dinner series."

While increasing numbers of districts are taking such actions and more, not all are so proactive. The reliance on districts to influence a change in practice represents a limit on spread: Collaboration between districts is minimal, and some of the meetings and programs that used to promote exchange of learning have fallen to budget cuts. Provincial leaders also believe that the fragility of the superintendent position makes them cautious: If school boards do not like the direction, they can fire the superintendent at any time, and turnover can be high. Consequently, during the key reform period, two-thirds of the members of the B.C. Superintendent Association had been in their roles for less than four years.

NETWORKS

While school districts structure provides the predominant infrastructure for change, in terms of spreading practice across the province, longstanding teacher networks have played the key role. Among the province's range of different teacher networks, some are dedicated to specialist roles like teacher librarians or information technologists, while others support particular school types, like small or rural schools. There are many branches of the Canadian Assessment for Learning network that have been hubs for developing new formative assessment practices. In addition, the province's Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education (NOIIE) have been growing and developing since 2000, when they started to spread the new literacy, numeracy, and social responsibility standards. Both those standards and the inquiry approach have provided a shared language and mindset for teachers that was bedding down long before this wave of curriculum reform. It is an important foundation that has oriented teachers toward close observation of their students' learning and development (Kaser & Halbert, 2017).

RESOURCES

Core reform efforts have been funded by the ministry, but the cost—in time and material resources—to develop new pedagogical approaches has been borne by districts and often individual teachers. There is an ethic amongst B.C. educators to avoid funding from corporate social responsibility, although Apple and Google have played a noticeably larger role as more districts have joined in partnerships to provide students with devices

and take part in these companies' networks and program promoting pedagogical innovation.

Recognizing the need to resource pedagogical innovation, in January 2015 the ministry launched the "K12 Innovation Partnership," with a shared pot of CAN$500,000 of funding. The idea was for educators—representing schools or districts—to submit proposals to receive funding and/or exemption from policy necessary to develop new materials or pedagogical approaches. They could also get the opportunity to work with particular research or technology partners. An Innovation Partnership Working Group was created to select from the submissions and convene support. The only condition was that any teacher or school must have the written support of its district superintendent to indicate willingness in the district to support and spread any developed approach. Accepted projects formed part of an "inventory" designed to communicate innovative practice to the rest of the province.[5] Unfortunately, this inventory has not been sustained over time, although some of the projects highlighted remain connected to and learning from each other.

Impact on daily life in schools

In line with its philosophy, the new curriculum manifests in varied as opposed to standardized pedagogies. One uniting feature, however, is a shift toward more inquiry- and project-based pedagogies: involving students working on big questions or challenges either individually or in groups over a more extended period of time. This is in line with the focus on the core competencies, as these pedagogies can develop these competencies. Schools have made these pedagogical shifts in a variety of ways, ranging from adopting established inquiry-based approaches, such as the International Baccalaureate Primary and Middle Years curricula, to developing their own approaches from scratch.

Beyond inquiry and project-based approaches, the initial rounds of projects from the Innovation Partnership illustrate other efforts to create more holistic learning, including through outdoor and experiential learning, multi-grade classrooms, and approaches focusing on First Nations learners and learners with special educational needs. Likewise, many districts have made social and emotional learning and—in particular self-regulation—a focus, building on the work started in the early 2000s with the social responsibility standards.

Attempting to summarize the key shift, one B.C. principal has described it as being "child-centered" as opposed to "child-led." Students are not taking all the decisions about what they learn, but the learning design takes the particular individuals in a class into account. How this manifests is that students are more engaged in and more articulate about their learning.

Assessing change

The question of assessing change remains a vexed one in B.C., closely linked to the debate over whether the new core competencies should be assessed. For the most part, there are no metrics that summarize what changes have occurred. The exception is the graduation rate. There has been a marked improvement in the graduate rate of First Nations students: just over 71 percent of Indigenous students completed high school in the 2019-20 year, up from 66 percent in 2017.[6] In addition, as of 2020, over 52 percent of Indigenous students from B.C. public schools were attending a B.C. post-secondary institution within two years of completing high school, a share that has also been rising slowly. These trends are seen as an important indicators that things are moving in the right direction.

Proponents of the reform have argued that narrative, not metrics, should be the way to mark and communicate the change that is happening. They have made efforts to capture the new pedagogies emerging in short films and blogs. Stories are passed through conferences and meetings. The Networks of

5 See: http://k12innovation.ca.

6 https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021EDUC0059-001682

Inquiry and Indigenous Education encourage teachers to share their learning through case studies, which is the required annual output from each inquiry team, as well as at a large annual gathering. District leaders and principals talk of going into schools and talking to students to find out how things are changing, and will start meetings with short accounts of what they have witnessed. The book Street Data (Safir and Dugan, 2020) took considerable inspiration from B.C.

TIPPING POINTS IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY

Most B.C. educators have agreed for some years that the curriculum, including the use of core competencies, is bedding down well in elementary and middle schools. Here, the teacher can operate like a sole provider, making autonomous decisions that the "demand" side has to accept—unless things change too radically and parents choose to exit the system entirely. While the change is more incremental, it is also much more widespread: Most elementary classrooms seem to be making use of the core competencies.

In contrast, in high schools, there had been more frustration about the slow pace of change. Here, supply and demand operates at the level of student course choices. Any new course or program offering has to build up sufficient demand—and it is then constituted by the kind of students who are attracted to it. This had enabled some radical departures in high school course design—involving multi-year, interdisciplinary, place-based learning—but they had tended to remain small. Moreover, in what is evidently an unintended consequence of the reform, some innovative new curriculum courses had been susceptible to stigmatization where they are not deemed adequate preparation for college.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, educators speak of reaching a province-wide tipping point to normalize more student-centered practice in high schools, as well as elementary. B.C. schools experienced partial closures for several months in 2020 and weeks in 2021. During and in the aftermath of this disruption, the core competencies came to the fore as what to focus on.

The sense that there is "no going back" for education in B.C. was reinforced when, in 2021, the province was shaken by the uncovering of over a thousand previously undiscovered children's bodies at the sites of residential schools. The ensuing public conversation about this part of the province's history and its ongoing impact on generations of First Nations families is ongoing, but it has brought increased public attention to the role of Indigenous educators in creating more holistic and sustainable cultures of schooling. The curriculum reform that started in 2011 may yet prove only a small part of the larger story of educational transformation in British Columbia.

Lessons for policy

MORAL PURPOSE, NOT MANDATES

B.C.'s reform has multiple goals and many elements, but the message that has remained core and consistent throughout is that it is about orienting the system to the needs of learning and children. Reform proponents have continually voiced the mantra "focus on learning" and the question "is this the right thing for kids?" as a way to make decisions. This message has been helped build bridges across political differences. In the midst of job action and the government-BCTF court case, for example, educators in the ministry and union leaders could agree on their shared desire to create a curriculum that enabled more meaningful learning for kids. In addition, principals speak of being motivated by seeing a difference in student engagement, particularly students who had problems with attendance now coming to school. Teachers speak of being motivated by individual moments when kids respond or grasp something differently.

It is important to balance this lesson, however, with a recognition that the reform in B.C. is centered on much more than a loose vision. Many progressive efforts at system change start with loose "design principles" or guidelines. The idea is that distributed individuals should take these and work with them. In contrast, the B.C. curriculum, while stripped back from previous iterations, is quite detailed. It provides clear material foundations for teachers to work with and fall back on.

CREATION, NOT IMPLEMENTATION

When Rod Allen took over the Learning Division of the ministry, he "banned" certain words from their policy lexicon, among them "pilot" and "implementation." For Allen, this is an important indicator of a shift away from a top-down approach to change. The intention throughout has been that the new curriculum would manifest in a wide variety of practice, with learning more personalized to the places and needs of students. In another point about language, Allen noted that they shifted from talking about "personalized learning," as a noun, to "personalizing learning." Their goal was to emphasize that personalized learning is not a single model or approach that can be replicated, but a process of listening to and designing for particular groups of students.

This rejection of implementation places quite a burden on teachers to be designers of new practice. The ministry, districts, and principals are still working out the best ways to support more novice or time-strapped teachers, while maintaining the commitment to place-based and personalized education.

CONNECTING, NOT SCALING

Coupled with the rejection of pilots and implementation, proponents of the reform rejected the idea of "scaling" particular models and practices, in favor of more social diffusion of practice.[7] This approach relies on existing and new social networks to spread practice. Many of these networks are based on long social relationships as teachers can stay in their districts very long-term. British Columbia does not have an equivalent of Teach for America, where teachers spend only a few years in the profession and move schools frequently. Teacher pay and in particular pensions are good, and teachers acquire additional security and rights to choose their school with seniority. This contributes to relative stability and the development of relationships over time.

Provincial leaders are also finding ways to overcome a common problem in educational innovation in which the most forward-thinking educators become socially isolated by their outstanding practice, and their potential to influence others is limited. In B.C. such individuals can be networked, such as through the aforementioned Networked of Inquiry and Indigenous Education (NOIIE) or through the Transformational Educational Leadership Program (TELP) run by the NOIIE founders, Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser. TELP has had 170 students, many of whom have gone onto influential roles in districts across the province. The savviest district leaders have also been highly strategic about their placement of principals and the movement of teachers in and out of district coaching roles, to spread innovative practice.

This attention to the specifics of personnel and social dynamics has been key in spreading innovation at a district level: The best spread occurs when individuals with "moral power" (Mehta & Winship, 2010)—those with long-standing reputations or who represent First Nations communities—are also innovators and are placed into positions of formal authority, with the potential to influence others.

Conclusion

Overall, both in the content of the reform and in the way it has been carried out, B.C.'s system reform journey has centered identity and relationships. It has sought to enable more human-centered design and administration of education and learning. The transformation of educational goals and practice are taking place not through mandates but through chains of relational influence—connecting educators across districts, Canada, and internationally.

7 One alternative mental model, introduced to the ministry by consultant David Albury, proposes diffusion of practice via "nested communities:" a community of practice who are at the vanguard of developing new instructional approaches; a community of engagement who are keenly observing and starting to try some things out; and a community of interest who are aware of what is happening, possibly open to it, but not jumping in yet.

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Appendix A: Timeline

October 2011: The Ministry of Education launches the B.C. Education Plan in the form of a website to garner ideas from the public about the vision of transforming learning.

December 2011: A Curriculum and Assessment Advisory Group, with representation of all major stakeholders, begins to meet to create a draft curriculum framework.

February 2012: The ministry begins four months of travelling sessions presenting the draft framework around the province and gathering feedback.

June/July 2012: Subject experts in core subjects begin meeting to draft the content of the curriculum.

August 2012: *Enabling Innovation* is released, a publication summarizing the recommendations from the Advisory group and the regional sessions. The ministry issues "an invitation to innovate" to school districts, encouraging them to focus on personalizing learning.

September 2012: The ministry begins consultations around the province on a new graduation program for grades 10-12.

January 2013: The initial design of the framework for the K-9 curriculum is released for public review, along with a set of draft definitions of the new cross-curricular competencies. Groups of teachers and researchers begin work on developing continua to go with the cross-curricular competencies, and example inquiries to illustrate the flexibility of the new content framework.

November 2013: Full drafts of the K-9 curriculum are released for core subjects, initiating several months of public feedback and dedicated work with groups around the province.

September 2014: The school year starts late due to an ongoing teacher's strike. Upon returning, some teachers begin designing learning around the new curriculum.

November 2014: The revised K-9 curriculum is published in full, to become official in Fall 2016. The documents continue to be open to minor revisions (revised Social Studies documents are issued in April 2015). Draft versions of the 10-12 curriculum are released.

June 2014: The Advisory Group on Provincial Assessment issues its first report to outline how changes to assessment and report across the province can support the new curriculum.

January 2015: The ministry and key educator associations launch the K-12 Innovation Partnership.

October 2015: The first wave of projects to be supported by the partnership are announced.

September 2016: The new K-19 curriculum becomes the formal requirement as of the 2016-17 school year.

September 2018: The new grade 10 courses, the first part of the graduation program, are introduced.

September 2019: New grade 11 and 12 courses are added to the graduation program.

January - June 2020: Students take the new grade 10 Literacy and Numeracy assessments as a graduation requirement for the first time.

January - June 2022: Students take the new grade 12 literacy assessment as a graduation requirement for the first time.

March 2022: The Ministry announces the requirement that all students graduating in the 2023-24 year onwards must study four credits of Indigenous-focused coursework as part of their graduation program.

Appendix B: Methods

This case is based on 10 visits to B.C. which took place between March 2013 and November 2019, as part of a larger project studying transformation in the province. These visits involved spending time at the Ministry of Education and with seven different school district offices in varying parts of the province, with the deepest dive into Cowichan Valley. It draws on over 100 interviews with teachers, principals, ministry officials, students, and some parents, including a small number of follow up virtual interviews in 2020 and 2022.

Appendix C: Select case documents

AGPA. June 2014. Advisory Group on Provincial Assessment: Final Report. https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/pdf/assessment/agpa_report.pdf

AGPA. September 2015. Advisory Group on Provincial Assessment: The Graduation Learning Years: Final Report. https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/pdf/assessment/agpa-final-report.pdf

BCMOE. 2011. BC's Education Plan. http://buildingpublicunderstanding.org/assets/files/pubstory/bc_edu_plan.pdf

BCMOE. January 2013. Transforming BC's Graduation Requirements: Reports from Fall 2012 Consultation Sessions. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/support/graduation_reports.pdf

BCMOE. August 2015. Introduction to British Columbia's Curriculum Redesign. https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/rethinking-curriculum

BCMOE. 2016. Building Student Success – B.C.'s New Curriculum: Assessment and Reporting Info. https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/assessment-info

BCPVPA, BCTF, BCMOE, FISABC, BCSSA. 2015. British Columbia's K-12 Innovation Strategy. Innovation Inventory + Partnership Proposal. https://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/eboard/ind/topics/inn_part_guidlines.pdf

FNESC 2014. [FNESC-created website page] Informational website created by Jo-Anne Chrona, First Nations Education Steering Council Curriculum co-ordinator. https://firstpeoplesprinciplesoflearning.wordpress.com/background-and-current-context/

Acknowledgements

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