EDITOR’S NOTE: Our final installment of the Developing Personal Leadership theme features the following article with advice to new & aspiring leaders.

Nine days from retiring as an elementary school principal one question dominated my thoughts, “What just happened?” My first day of school was September 1, 1959 when I walked through the Girls door at Boyle Memorial Public School in London, Ontario. My 11-year-old sister was in line behind me; my brother was on the other side of the building in line at the Boys door. From that day in Fall 1959, in one way or another, I have been going to school. By Grade 2 I began to realize that some people lead and some people follow but not necessarily all the time or for all purposes. By this time my family had moved to a new neighbourhood where I attended a more modern school called Prince Charles. At assemblies, I would watch the child leader intently. The entire student body of 700 plus pupils would sit cross-legged on the cool gym floor, standing at attention, as directed by the child who would announce, “Please stand for the singing of God Save The Queen.” First, that truly was a beautiful melody to hear played on the piano and accompanied by all of our jubilant voices singing on cue as requested. Second, and for me this was key, we the audience participated completely as the child leader would read the script from a construction paper folder, ascending and descending the stage stairs to the microphone, while orchestrating the entire event. Even the Principal stood when requested as did all the staff, modelling the correct response, posture, and attitude the child leader expected of all of us.

My mind raced to the future to the day I would clasp the red paper folder on behalf of my class and lead the assembly. Everyone would listen and respond as I experienced power with a purpose, power to entertain, power to instruct, power to lead. How would my teacher know I wanted the job? Did I know why I wanted to lead or where such an opportunity might take me?

All of these memories and thoughts flowed along like the Eramosa River as I hiked the trail beside the water. I was not at school leading today. In fact, I was barely leading my dog who darted back and forth along the path. Leaders have an overwhelming urge to lead and yet, here I was, back to imagining myself as a leader just as I had over 50 years ago.

Complexity abounds today. Everyone who works in the world of schools will be called upon to lead at some point. If being a leader inspires you, pay attention to the catalogue in your mind about leadership and sync it with the best available information. To lead well is to serve, to embrace what is often daunting responsibility and at times, to relinquish leading.
One need only scan the literature on leadership to know there is a business buzz around the topic. The iBooks Store alone offers hundreds of titles for sale with digitized items dating back to Peter Senge’s 1990 *The Fifth Discipline*. Yes, take time to read some of the books. Make time to read the leaders you observe around you daily. Whose style appeals to you and why? In what ways can you synthesize the best qualities of these styles and create your own? If you are not leading from the core of your being, even you won’t want to follow you!

There are so many choices in leadership styles; as evinced by this partial list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Servant</th>
<th>Coaching</th>
<th>Collaborative</th>
<th>Visionary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charismatic</td>
<td>Autocratic</td>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>Transformational</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>Laissez-Faire</td>
<td>Transactional</td>
<td>Cheerleader</td>
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While I believe the time to work on your personal leadership style is every day, across diverse situations and the shifting landscape of education, at some point you will become known for your style. I suggest you practise articulating your emerging style in under ten words. At the same time, determine opportunities you will seek that will allow you to lead and consider how far along the leadership continuum you are willing to go.

**Ten word examples:**

1. I lead from the inside with creative strength, by example.
2. I cheer you to your greater self by listening and modelling.
3. I coach believing you know your next best step.
4. I continuously observe, monitor, and assess then adjust.

I offer two further suggestions: download a copy of the recently revised *Ontario Leadership Framework for School-Level Leadership* and read at least one book on leadership published in the last two years. I recently read *Leaders Make the Future* by Bob Johansen so I will use that as my example. Keep in mind that this strategy can be adapted to any book you read.

On the Ontario Leadership Framework, highlight in one colour the skills, knowledge, and attitudes you already have. Use a second colour to highlight the skills, knowledge, and attitudes you need to develop if you are to become a successful leader in Ontario education. Until the Framework changes, this is the current overview so situate yourself in it. As you read and process your chosen book, bring to mind three desired skills, knowledge, or attitudes from the Framework and leverage your new understanding to help you master and internalize them in your daily practice.

Suppose on the Framework you highlighted and are striving to learn how to “foster a culture of change.” In Johansen’s book, you noted this array of ten new leadership skills for the future:

- Maker instinct, clarity, dilemma flipping, immersive learning ability, bio-empathy, constructive depolarization, quiet transparency, rapid prototyping, smart-mob organizing, and commons creating *(Johansen, 2012, p. 88)*.

Zoom in. Pick one. Commons creating.

“A commons is a shared asset that benefits multiple players. If a team improves its playing field, all the teams that play there will benefit” *(Johansen, 2012, p. 170)*. A culture of change must benefit the organization, and you as leader are charged with fostering growth through perpetual change in education. As you push this thinking through the skill of commons creating, you synthesize the reality of leadership and the future-looking stance Johansen insists is essential.

Again, all of this must fit with your core beliefs as you become the leader you are creating. Surround it in gratitude, ground it with humility and truth, and be comfortable leading. The technical skills and the managerial functions of the work of leadership can be assimilated but the essence of who you are as leader must always be you.

**References:**


**Author’s Bio:**

Val Morrison is a newly retired principal from Thames Valley DSB with 34 years of experience in elementary and secondary education in Ontario. Leadership that moves staff forward and improves student learning are topics Val continues to explore.
Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario

In April, *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* was released. The document provides an overview of the process taken to create this renewed vision, notes our successes and areas of continued work, and details the new goals moving forward. This piece will provide an overview of the four goals, as well as helpful resources for educators related to these goals.

In 2013, representatives from all parts of the educational system, as well as individuals from the business and non-profit sectors came together to discuss the skills needed by learners of the future. The results of these discussions are reflected in *Achieving Excellence*.

The four goals delineated in *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* are as follows:

1. Achieving Excellence
2. Ensuring Equity
3. Promoting Well-Being
4. Enhancing Public Confidence.

In its entirety, these four goals embed the tenets of ASCD’s Whole Child framework: healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged. More details about the Whole Child Approach can be found at: [http://www.wholechildeducation.org/](http://www.wholechildeducation.org/).

**Goal 1: Achieving Excellence**

"Children and students of all ages will achieve high levels of academic performance, acquire valuable skills and demonstrate good citizenship. Educators will be supported in learning continuously and will be recognized as among the best in the world" ("A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario").

The document recognizes the importance of a strong foundation in literacy and math for future success, as well as developing personal characteristics such as perseverance, imaginative thinking and empathy. It was also recognized that providing such educational experiences in our rapidly changing world would require effectively harnessing technology within our schools and increasing levels of student engagement ("Achieving Excellence").

The plan of action and assessment of this goal can be found on pages 6-7 of the document or [http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/great.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/great.html). Links of helpful resources for each goal are only listed on the designated webpages indicated in this article. For this goal, educators may find resources including, but not limited to: research on math learning, information on full-day Kindergarten, links to the School Effectiveness Framework and Ontario Leadership Framework documents, a Specialist High Skills Major fact sheet and information about the Student Voice project.

**Goal 2: Ensuring Equity**

"All children and students will be inspired to reach their full potential, with access to rich learning experiences that begin at birth and continue into adulthood" ("A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario").

With 27% of students born outside of Canada and 20% as visible minorities, Ontario’s strength is in its diversity. Creating schools where cultures of high expectations and diversity are valued, as well as structuring the best learning opportunities for ALL students is essential. Every student has the opportunity to succeed regardless of ancestry, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, physical and intellectual ability, religion, socio-economic status and other factors ("Achieving Excellence").
Provided in the document was a visual summary of the Minister’s Student Advisory Council meetings held in the summer of 2013. Students were asked to imagine the future of education in Ontario and their responses are captured on pages 10 and 11 of the document. At the time of this writing, this visual brainstorm is not provided on the Ministry website.

Further information about the plan of action and assessment of the goal is found on page 13 of the document and can also be found at: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/equity.html. Resources provided on this page include the province’s equity and inclusivity strategy (including a quick facts version), Second Progress Report on First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education, as well as resources for bias-free progressive discipline.

**Goal 3: Promoting Well-Being**

“All children and students will develop enhanced mental and physical health, a positive sense of self and belonging, and the skills to make positive choices.” ("A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario").

This goal recognizes the importance of the whole child in all realms of their being. Addressing well-being is dependent on providing safe and welcoming schools to all students where strong relationships are at the forefront. This document also acknowledges that this work cannot be done by schools alone and that continued engagement and partnerships with families and the greater community is essential to providing support beyond the school day ("Achieving Excellence").

The plan of action and progress indicators for this goal can be found on page 16 of the document or http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/wellBeing.html. The links to resources cover such topics as mental and physical health, promoting a positive school environment, and a helpful article for educators on the stages of child development.

**Goal 4: Enhancing Public Confidence**

“Ontarians will continue to have confidence in a publicly funded education system that helps develop new generations of confident, capable and caring citizens.” ("A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario").

This final goal recognizes the important role parents and guardians play in their child’s progress. It also highlights that trust is obtained when the system as a whole makes good decisions based on research and what is best for kids, as well as manages resources accordingly. It also maintains that continuing to support educators at all levels in their growth and development will ensure the success of future generations ("Achieving Excellence").

The plan of action and assessment for this goal can be found on page 19 of the document or http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/confidence.html. Educators may also find the links for Parents Reaching Out grants and Parent Guides: Helping Your Child with Reading, Writing and Math for K-6 helpful.

**Works Cited:**


**The Results Are In...**

Our winter survey polled Ontario ASCD members’ newsletter preference for our current PDF format or an electronic newsletter format. (ASCD SmartBrief is one of many examples of an e-newsletter format). The survey results showed 55% preferred an e-newsletter format. Our team of volunteers will be working hard over the summer and fall to transition to such a format. Stay tuned during the late summer/early fall for more details.
Collaborative Leadership: A Learning Commons Model

Imagine a school where leadership for learning is distributed across an engaged staff who model collaborative learning. Imagine a school where all learners naturally use higher-order critical thinking skills as they engage in authentic inquiry tasks. Imagine a school that leverages students’ inherent aptitude for using technology within a meaningful learning context. These are the possibilities of the Learning Commons model and the pedagogical and technology convergence set out in Michael Fullan’s recent report, *Great to Excellent: Launching the Next Stage of Ontario’s Education Agenda*. We invite you to imagine how to leverage an existing and often under-utilized resource, your school library, for collaboratively leading a much-needed revolution in the dynamics of learning.

The revolution has started thanks to a joint Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) and the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (Ministry of Education) document called *Together for Learning: School Libraries and the Emergence of the Learning Commons*. This document and the supporting *Together for Learning (T4L) website* invite a whole school sustainable approach to learning for the future. Join forces with your library teaching and support staff and lead your school to discover this potential for school improvement and the endless opportunities to engage teachers and students in exciting learning experiences. Imagine your school library as the teacher-librarian facilitated physical and virtual hub for learning – the ‘third teacher’ (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012) for students and teachers to be empowered by a resource and technology rich environment that fosters inquiry and collaborative learning.

Count on the Learning Commons

As our world continues to spin out new ways of working, playing and learning together one thing you can count on is the Learning Commons. Why? The very nature of the Learning Commons approach is responsiveness to changing needs.

Every school will have a different set of needs and approaches to the Learning Commons. Perhaps the ‘common’ element is everyone working together to be the best they can be.

The ‘learning’ is fostered by instructional design of collaborative problem solving, projects, experimentation and inquiry leading to new ways of thinking and knowing, creativity and innovation. To facilitate this we often need to restructure spaces both physical and virtual. Explore a small *elementary school journey* and visit a *secondary school virtual space*.

A Framework for Leading the Transition to the Learning Commons

The challenge for administrators is how to lead their school communities as we navigate through new contexts for learning in our hyper-connected world. The Learning Commons is ultimately a means for empowering leadership from all members of the learning community. Ontario’s *Leadership Framework for Principals and Vice-Principals* focuses on setting directions to motivate a shared culture of creativity and innovation in a collaborative learning culture. The Leadership Framework recognizes the role of technology for learning, and focuses on embedding professional learning into instructional practice. A Learning Commons approach can provide a means for realizing these crucial goals. Explore the *Supporting Principals* page of the *Together for Learning website*.

Leadership to transform school libraries in Ontario to 21st Century learning centers also initiates from the district level. Superintendent Tom D’Amico of Ottawa Catholic DSB laid out a *district wide plan* and supports schools in their transitions (D’Amico, 2011). In Waterloo Region DSB a collaborative project between teacher librarians, central consultants and technical support has resulted in a district virtual *Library Learning Commons* that supplements the learning needs of every school library in the district.
Expect More from the Learning Commons

School library programs and staffing vary widely across Ontario. While all libraries are grounded in principles of supporting the equity of access to resource-based learning opportunities, realizing the full potential of the library program in the Learning Commons model requires educational leaders to expect more from the program and imagine the possibilities. The Ontario Curriculum recognizes the extra potential of the library program for learning where a teacher-librarian is present. “The school library program plays a key role in the development of information literacy and research skills.” (Ministry of Education, 2013). The positive influence of the presence of a teacher-librarian on student achievement has been borne out time and time again by the research. (Haycock, 2013).

The teacher librarian is well equipped to lead learning in partnership with classroom teachers, administrators and other specialists. Because of the teacher-librarian’s unique role in the school they also have the potential to help students ‘learn how to learn’. We want students to leave our educational institutions having a set of competencies that will carry them on into successful lives after formal schooling.

School Effectiveness and the Learning Commons

“The information to knowledge journey is the main work of the learning commons… high level assignments and projects require learners to think critically and creatively as they build personal and collective knowledge.” (Koechlin, Rosenfeld and Loertscher, 2010). In this collaborative environment the potential of technology is realized to enable learning as never before. Multiple literacies, participatory learning skills and digital citizenship are applied to new contexts of learning. The learning commons is also about equity, which is as important now as it ever has been. “While we may think that the digital divide is a thing of the past, it is alive and well when it comes to our students’ access to technology at school. But today’s digital divide isn’t as much about how many computers the school provides – it’s more about how that technology is used for learning.” (Brooks Kirkland, 2011)

The Learning Commons is built for “reaching every student”, which is at the core of Ontario’s K-12 School Effectiveness Framework (Ministry of Education, 2010). It embraces learning partnerships, incorporates assessment for, as and of learning and evidence-based practice, and inspires meaningful collaborative professional learning across the school.

Lead the way to learning for the future with a Learning Commons

The Learning Commons is a whole school approach to learning and needs professional teacher-librarian leadership, but it is too big a project for one person to carry on their shoulders. This is where you need a team of collective and creative minds that understand the learning shift. As you imagine the possibilities, we ask you to think about how you, as a school or district leader, can support the teacher-librarian in his or her professional growth in the transformation, and how you can leverage the potential of the model for the whole school’s move from great to excellent.
"The Learning Commons is a real world whole school approach to creating such a new collaborative learning model. In joining the collaborative dynamics of the school library with technology-rich labs and expertise and providing a seamless portal of flexible physical and virtual learning resources and spaces. Top that with relevant participatory learning experiences and students will be energized to make meaningful connections and develop strategies for successful learning." (Bondi, G. 2011).

Please visit the Ontario School Library Association’s Together for Learning website to read the guideline document and explore ideas for making it happen at your school. http://www.togetherforlearning.ca

References:


Anita Brooks Kirkland served for twelve years as Consultant for K-12 Libraries at the Waterloo Region DSB. She remains active in teacher professional learning, specializing in the areas of information and digital literacy and the school library learning commons. Anita is currently the president of the Ontario Library Association.

Carol Koechlin is an experienced educator who contributes to the field of information literacy and school librarianship through writing, consulting and facilitation of professional learning. Carol’s current work centers on refining approaches for the virtual and physical School Library Learning Commons.
If you wish to write an article based on one of the themes, for consideration in an upcoming The Trillium, contact Dawn Imada Chan at: ontarioascdtrillium@gmail.com

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