

Plenary Forum – Contemporary Issues, Policies and Practices

(December Academy 2007)

The last plenary session of the December 2007 Board Academy was a discussion event focusing on the future of education in British Columbia. Table groups watched a short video documenting some of the current and anticipated factors that influence all of us and public education in particular. Then they discussed two questions and recorded their responses in note form. The following documents the key elements of those responses.

1. **What is your reaction to the video/slide presentation *Future Search – Did You Know?* What are the implications for our work in BC?**

- a. All students must receive a firm foundation in the basic skills necessary for intelligent participation in the modern world: literacy and numeracy.
- b. It is increasingly important to develop students' critical thinking and problem solving skills so that they can distinguish relevant from irrelevant information and use that information to achieve their goals.
- c. Paradoxically, modern technology brings people closer together (the world is flat) and isolates individuals from one another. Students need to learn languages, social skills and values to live successfully in a multicultural environment, to take on global citizenship.
- d. We need to reconsider the role of schools in supporting national cultures, integrating newcomers into the "mainstream". In many of our cities, there is no "mainstream" any longer. Can our schools switch from channeling everyone into the same language(s) and culture(s) to broadening everyone into multiple languages and cultures? How will we reconcile apparently contradictory values?
- e. The arts and applied practical skills may become even more important in an increasingly complex, interdependent world.
- f. We all need to embrace continuous learning as the norm.
- g. In the midst of rapid change and a focus on the present and future, we must not forget to learn about and from our history.

2. What will you do now in your “home” district to begin or continue implementing the “new mandate” and other changes that will address the changing world of education? What will you keep doing, what will you do differently?

- a. Work at developing respectful community partnerships in the interests of students and families. Recognize this is a long term enterprise.
- b. Learn more about other service providers (i.e. early childhood educators) and develop memoranda of understanding with them.
- c. Develop more schools as “community centres”, accessible to students and the public for longer hours.
- d. Support programs that develop life skills, resilience, and cultural awareness.
- e. Support teacher professional development so that they can remain current.
- f. Implement more flexible learning arrangements (like distance learning) while improving tracking systems to ensure learning outcomes are met.
- g. Advocate to higher levels of government for funding and other support so districts can respond creatively and appropriately to rapidly changing circumstances.