

Canada's Outstanding Principals' Conference

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From the Yukon to Baffin Island and from Vancouver to Newfoundland, 32 principals were recognized this year for their innovation, vision and leadership within their home schools and communities.

This conference gave principals the opportunity to meet and dialogue with business and education leaders about the current educational environment in Canada. We were welcomed by Veronica Lacey, the president and CEO of The Learning Partnership, who informed us that we were to celebrate the importance of exceptional educational leaders, applaud our accomplishments and create a network of community educational leaders.

The entire conference was fully interactive and participatory. It involved a co-consulting project orchestrated by Dr. Joseph D'Cruz, professor of Strategic Management at the Rotman School of Management and a variety of speakers. Undoubtedly, all there felt both humbled and honoured to be recipients of the knowledge imparted to us by this outstanding delegation.

Gerry McCaughey, president and CEO of CIBC Canada talked about the emergence of the Asian, Chinese and Indian influence on the global market. He pointed out that education is and will continue to be their key to future success. McCaughey believes that Canada must address its own educational needs and economic progress through improved national literacy. Improved literacy will increase Canadians' awareness of their rights as Canadian citizens and empower them to think about, ask the questions and provide the answers that will keep Canada a key player on the world's economic stage.

With a similar global view, Ben Levin, deputy minister of education presented his thoughts about *Leading in a Political World*. He drew the parallel of politics and education using metaphors and humour. He stated, "There is no such problem that is so small that it cannot be blown out of proportion." Levin contends that only through a discerning mind developed through education, will democracy become a reality.

Tim Broadhead, managing director of the McConnell Foundation expressed his views on *Social Innovation*. He talked about changing our society by transforming the system so that all people, including the marginalized are valued. Everyone must become a resilient and resourceful component woven within the fabric of Canadian society. All members of society need to readdress today's problems, take ownership for them, and come up with alternative solutions to support universal community involvement.

Michael Fullan, educational consultant and author spoke specifically about education, on the topic of *Turning Schools Around*. Fullan stated that schools plateau because people stop "the relentless pursuit of seeking change." He pointed out that change requires new materials, new behaviours/practices and new beliefs/understanding. Fullan's *Ten Elements of Successful Change*, are available on his website, www.michaelfullan.ca. This should be required reading for any

principal intending to improve his or her school's culture of learning with the ultimate goal of improving individual student achievement.

Beyond the series of impressive speakers were two activities. One centered on *Emotional Intelligence*. A few weeks before the conference, we received 130 questions, which had us examine our personal style of leadership. The results gave each person a rating on their spectrum of emotional intelligence heightening individual awareness of the role emotions play in effective teaching and learning.

The second activity, coordinated by Dr. Joseph D'Cruz, involved a *Change Management Simulation*. This exercise had the principals develop innovative strategies necessary for the hypothetical merging of two hospitals. The fact that the exercise given to a group of educational leaders involved a health care scenario was irrelevant since the application of change management involves teamwork skills, which are also essential in invoking positive change within schools.

A gala dinner and awards presentation crowned the conference. Business leaders, educational leaders, colleagues, friends and family came together to honour the outstanding principals. Each of the 32 principals was individually acknowledged for their exemplary contributions to their schools and communities. It was a most memorable evening.

The Conference's final speaker was Dr. Avis Glaze, CEO of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. Dr. Glaze provided an overview of *Leadership Imperatives*. Her focus, which clearly became our focus, was that education must involve all children. She made two key points simply and clearly. Her first was that as a society we will never have excellence without equity. She urged educators to work together to ensure an inclusive quality in our educational program. Her second point was "There is only one family, the human family, regardless of the altars at which they kneel." This is definitely pertinent in our multicultural and diverse Canadian culture.

Over the five days of this conference, we had the opportunity to listen to highly empowered and impassioned speakers. What I found fascinating was that each speaker connected intimately with each principal. The common element shared by all of these inspirational speakers was their ability to be topical, interactive and affirming. Each speaker impressed upon the attending principals their profound role, immense accountability and their overall impact on the educational system.

The conference is over; the voices are silent but the message resounds. Canada's Outstanding Principals returned to their schools, armed with the knowledge that their job is only just beginning. In their world they will continue to deal with the opportunities, challenges and needs of their students, recognizing that in their shared educational settings, there is no finish line when it comes to working with our young people.