

ASCA Conference 2017 REPORT

April 28-30

Edmonton

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G.W. Smith School Council

Below is a summary of some of the highlights of the sessions I attended, and a few comments. I HIGHLY recommend attendance at ASCA Conference for School Councils!

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Session #1 - Friday Pre-Session

Facilitator: Joanne Munro, Member,

Alternative Dispute Resolution Institute of Alberta (ADRIA)

The facilitator provided information and led our group through a series of activities related to the following:

1. Personal Conflict Style Inventory (can be found online)
(collaborating, compromising, accommodating, avoiding, competing)
2. Exploring interests in conflict
 - a. ask and then dig deeper to get to the issues/perspectives (“If this happened, what would that give you?”)
 - b. use paraphrasing
 - c. determine how a compromise to meet both needs
3. Anger and threat
 - a. the anger-arousal cycle (trigger – escalation – crisis (stress hormones activated make this a poor time to make decisions) – recovery – post crisis depression (valley of remorse)
4. Defusing strategies
 - a. know your triggers
 - b. be aware of what is happening physically and emotionally
 - c. breathe
 - d. count backwards – 40
 - e. choose collaboration over avoidance
 - f. focus on the other
 - g. productive self-talk
 - h. use ACTIVE LISTENING
 - i. all behavior has meaning; explore it

j. use a person's name

5. Drama Triangle Exercise (victim, villain, hero)

The idea here was that, when we are in conflict, whose perspective do we tell the story from? (Almost always from the victim stance) Triangulation is when we try to get others to sympathize with us. This is counter-productive.

6. Responses to Conflict: Fight, Flight, Freeze (our 'hardwiring' for conflict)

7. Think – Feel – Do Loop:

CONFLICT > thoughts > feelings > behaviors > outcomes > experience

We can change the outcome at any stage here. Viewing the situation from another perspective can change the way we feel or respond.

8. Positions – Point-of-view:

- Issues must be named as neutral and negotiable
- Interests: the collection of needs/motivators that a person desires to have met by any resolution (of an issue). E.g. Why is this important to you? This is an important question to ask in conflict to help determine a good resolution.

Overall, this was a very interesting and (obviously) well-developed presentation (lots of good information). I would recommend having someone like this presenter come and do a session . . . maybe IF it looked like a serious conflict was arising in School Council.

Resource recommended by the facilitator:

Book: The Joy of Conflict Resolution

Harper, Gary (Canadian lawyer and mediator)

THE BLANKET EXERCISE (First Nations' Presentation:

I had no idea what this was; however, it WAS an extremely valuable experience. The conference delegates were divided into smaller groups, each led by a First Nations facilitator who took us through what was essentially a simulation of the First Nations history in Canada. It was a very powerful awareness-raising experience that took about two hours.

I certainly recommend this activity for schools; however, I would suggest that a session be held for parents/detailed information be provided for parents in advance of the session for students. This would allow for much richer discussion between parents/children.

Resources recommended by the facilitator:

- National Film Board DOCUMENTARY, We Were Children https://www.nfb.ca/film/we_were_children/trailer/we_were_children_trailer/

- REPORT: <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=890>
- BOOK: [A Knock on the Door: The Essential History of Residential Schools from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission . . .](#)
Paperback | December 18, 2015
Foreword by Phil Fontaine by Truth And Reconciliation Commission Of Canada
Afterward by Aimée Craft

SESSIONS WITH MLA AND DEPUTY MINISTER

Heather Sweet, MLA

Dr. Curtis Clark, Deputy Minister of Education

The question/answer session with Dr. Clark was an important lesson in the potential power of parent voices. Parents can have a lot of political power through ASCA because they are not constrained; hence, this is a great opportunity to have a voice in the education of our children. The proof:

There were quite a number of very well-researched and well-articulated questions directed to Dr. Clark (bussing costs based on distance from designated school, forty-five credits/year funded not over – a high school issue, option courses not funded, cutting school fees – and lost revenue, Parents for Choice – sexual health issue, curriculum re-writes, Strategic Alliance for Students with Learning Challenges, definition of ‘teachable space’ needs to be defined and written into policy – the impact: what constitutes a full school and teachers having to teach in staff rooms/hallways . . .)

BOKS Session

A free, volunteer-run before school (30-45 min. but time-flexible) activity program for students, based on John Ratey’s research into exercise and learning (and his book, Spark).

- inclusive
- play-based, not skill-based
- founded by a parent in 2009 and the program came to Canada in 2014
- although designed as a before-school program, it is very flexible and can be incorporated into the school day
- NEW: BOKS Bursts – short activities 2-10 minutes; 65 in-class activities and weekly Bursts to inbox if you/your school signs up
- If the school signs up (soon) BOKS Canada has a limited number of Equipment Kits available for free (cones, pinnies . . .)
- all content is accessible online, including training program and 72 detailed lesson plans designed for three days/week (but flexible)
- anyone can run a BOKS (High school students could help)

Resources recommended by the facilitator:

- Facebook Trainer Community <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1081026748594517/>
- CANADA: <http://bokskids.ca/> LOTS of resources on the site, including a pitch for the program (John Ratey's video here is only 2 minutes long = worth a look!)
- Once enrolled, the trainer hub allows you to access all materials

LEARNING and TECHNOLOGY POLICY FRAMEWORK Session

The document is available online: <http://www.education.alberta.ca/LTPF>

Well, this session was out of my area of knowledge, so I hope I can get across a few pertinent points.

One of the main things that the presenter said is that, "It is incumbent upon School Councils to be aware of/support the Technology Policy Framework . . . Boards have a responsibility to consult with parents. Parents and School Councils have the right to give feedback to Boards."

Parents can give feedback online by mid-May (!) either individually or from School Council.

Some of the issues mentioned:

- Does infrastructure support the new expectations?
- Students having to bring their own device to school – socio-economic differences
- Standard guidelines needed
- In-house tech support or contracted out?
- Differences in levels of understanding/tech use by people within the Division
- Tech experts and come and go; expertise can be lost
- Responsible use
- Who owns the content?
- School website policies – should they exist? Should they be updated?
- Evergreen policies – Business donations of old tech may just be more trouble than they are worth (maintenance costs)

Resources: see above website

PLANNING PRINCIPLES Session

Presenter: Brenda Kell (ASCA)

The facilitator provided some helpful handouts:

- Changing the focus of School Council Business highlights potential GOOD discussion topics for School Councils to engage in
- School Council Annual Agenda Framework – would help a Council to ensure they are covering important topics over the course of the year, in a timely manner
- Effective School Council Checklist

ASCA offers free training sessions to School Councils. I would recommend such a training session for a Council that felt the need for a higher level of ‘professionalism’ or one that wanted to ensure their activities were best supporting their children’s educational needs.

I also learned that a School Council has/can have a different function than a Fundraising Association (more formal) and schools can have both.