

Regional Exchanges Report

**Identifying the
Signals of Change
Impacting the Future
of our Public
Education Systems**



inspired change
 on planning
 full Community outreach
 passion
 inspirational
 Empowerment
 Cooperation
 Inspiring
 encouraging
 inspired Co-creation
 Reassurance
 Caring
 Holistic
 Second
 Hope
 Change
 Students
 Open-ness
 possibilities
 opportunity
 Here I Belong
 Inspiration
 Collaboration
 Decolonization
 Success
 freedom to learn
 Bigger Picture
 life changing
 Chance
 positive & inspirational

Regional Exchange participants shared their "Stories of Getting There": the opportunities and challenges they faced while leading change in their schools.

REGIONAL EXCHANGES REPORT

Identifying the Signals of Change Impacting the Future of our Public Education Systems

For over 125 years, the Canadian Education Association (CEA) has held the unique mandate of convening some of the country's best thinkers around the most important issues and ideas facing students, teachers, system leaders and the communities of which they are a part. Even today, the ability to gather people from across the country in support of strong public education systems remains one of the hallmarks of the CEA's work. From the very beginning, Ministries of Education from all provinces and territories have supported and shared in the important work of following the issues and trends that form the backdrop of the work of Canadian educators, administrators and policymakers.

In 2017, the CEA launched the EdCan Network: the leading independent national voice in Canadian K-12 education to support the thousands of courageous educators working tirelessly to ensure that *all* students discover their place, purpose and path. We issued an invitation to education stakeholders across the country to participate in a series of **Regional Exchanges**: face-to-face meetings to identify top priorities facing public education on national and regional levels. The first major initiative of our newly formed network was to gather a wide variety of perspectives from the entire spectrum of K-12 education, as a way to begin the process of exploring the common values that unite us across the country, and to open up dialogue on the challenges and opportunities experienced within different regions. A major goal of the process was to answer this future-oriented question:

“What are the priorities we need to be focusing on TODAY to ensure that we achieve the education systems we want to see 5-10 years from now?”



With the guidance of our Advisory Council members – a group of thoughtful leaders from both inside and outside of Canadian education – a representative group of participants was convened in five regions across the country: in **B.C.**, **Western Canada**, **Ontario**, **Atlantic Canada**, and in **Quebec** and **Ontario** for Francophone education leaders from across the Canadian Francophonie.

To access the Francophone Report, please visit:
www.edcan.ca/ForumRegional

A similar process was conducted with members of the EdCan Network's Advisory Council in October 2017 to build on what we heard from Regional Exchange participants. The input provided by our Advisory Council also influenced this report (**see page 11 for a list of Advisory Council Member participants**).

A WORD ON THE PROCESS



In the years leading up to the establishment of these Regional Exchanges, the CEA had moved across the country exploring both the highest of aspirations and the thorniest of challenges experienced by educators, school communities and entire school districts. **Through this work**, we prepared this *working vision* for education – one that is commonly held by many Canadians:

A Vision For Canadian Schools

We envision our schools to be places where powerful, meaningful learning experiences are available to all learners in an environment that is respectful of individual needs and differences.

They are places where student voice is clearly evident in the way that programs are conceived, designed and implemented.

Schools form the centre of a broader community-based context that understands ongoing learning to be not just a privilege for some, but an integral part of human development for all.

Canadian schools are not only reflective of the complexity of modern life, but are able to embrace the new possibilities that emerge as a result of that complexity.

Using this high-level vision as a starting point, the EdCan Network convened the first Regional Exchanges in the Fall of 2016, where participants shared personal stories of when they felt closest to the elements of this vision. The rich and diverse *Stories of Getting There* that emerged provided an excellent way to explore both the opportunities and tensions that participants experienced in attempting to make those stories come alive within their school communities.

The Regional Exchanges were intentionally designed to attract participants from a wide variety of positions within education, and allow them to become part of our growing EdCan Network (**see participant list on pages 8-10**). The opportunity to share personal stories of change shined a light on different contexts and perspectives, and helped to develop a sense of trust and cohesiveness among each group of participants.

Network members returned home with the challenge of looking at their own contexts with fresh eyes: equipped with more curiosity and an increased awareness of the hurdles and opportunities that exist in their regions.



An online platform was used to allow participants to share their observations and insights between sessions. A podcast series, called **Stories of Getting There**, invited participants to reflect on the stories of change shared during their first gathering.

The first meeting of our Regional Exchanges was a way of laying the groundwork for a second gathering where we planned to dig deeper by scanning our local, national and global contexts in a different way and by identifying the priorities that would need to be set in order to move closer to our visions for education, learning and school.

In preparation for this work, network members were asked to look around for **Signals of Change**: the small innovations or disruptions that may not seem very important to our work right now, but that may point to significant changes to come in the future. We asked participants to look beyond the realm of education to the worlds of business, technology, science and the arts for signals that could have an impact on education and learning in the future.

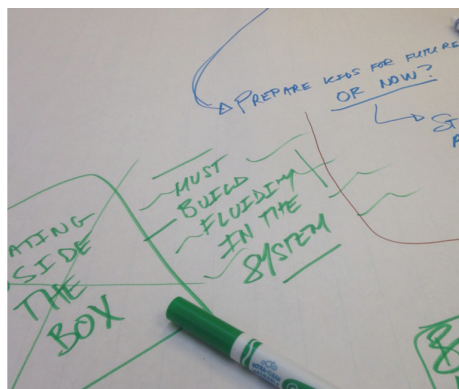
Each participant was asked to bring at least three signals along with them to their second Regional Exchange meeting. As expected, the signals were varied and diverse. We heard about:

- advances in artificial intelligence and virtual reality
- changes in the way that learners earn accreditation and recognition
- effective approaches to personalized learning
- impactful connections between schools and communities
- automation in family farms

Each of the signals was small on its own but when combined with other signals in the room, some very interesting conversations about the future ensued.

In particular, we encouraged participants to think forward to a future where these signals might become amplified to the point of impacting the way we think about and design our education systems. We asked participants two key questions:

- **What changes could we be making now to prepare for a future that includes – or even embraces – some of these signals?**
- **What does it mean to say that our schools are ready to prepare students and educators for life in this type of future?**



WHAT WE HEARD

Following vibrant conversations and creative foresight, we presented participants with a culminating question:



Given our aspirations, our visions and the potential impact signaled by the technological and cultural shifts that are afoot, what priorities are emerging for us? In other words, what do our education leaders and ministries of education need to be paying closer attention to NOW, in order to prepare us and our systems for possible changes in the FUTURE?

As might be expected, there were strong similarities in responses across the country, but also some regional differences.

Pay attention to authentic student voice

During the Regional Exchanges where students participated, we heard frustration around the fact that, even when student input was sought, there was no real follow-up or evidence that student voices were being heard, let alone acted upon.

Right across the country, we heard a call to pay closer attention to authentic student voice rather than merely paying lip service to the concept: to actively seek out, listen to and act upon the variety and diversity of the experiences and aspirations of our young people; to see them as equal partners in our schools and to leverage what we learn about the needs, knowledge and interests of our students to create changes.

Take the word “ALL” more seriously

We also heard a resounding desire to take more seriously our use of the word **“ALL.”** This means recognizing that our current approaches to schooling do not work for a large number of students and do not ensure equity for all. There was a call to be much more attentive in our use of words and concepts that are seemingly easy to inscribe into vision statements, but difficult to put into action. Participants encouraged school districts and ministries of education to explore and develop alternative learning pathways, systems of micro-credentialing, and more effective use of community resources, technology and more effective approaches to personalized learning. There was a strong desire for these ideas to become much more than popular buzzwords within the education lexicon. Instead, these words need to become part of the way we design learning environments and learning opportunities.

Explore what it means to be connected in the 21st century

Finally, we heard about the need to explore what it means to be connected in the 21st century. Participants talked about vertical connectivity between both decision-makers and the people and ideas that stand at the grassroots level. We also heard about horizontal connectivity across communities and around the world. This dialogue dealt far less with enabling technology and much more with the components required for more democratic involvement in the decision and policymaking processes that impact our systems, our students and our communities.

In addition to these nation-wide themes – student voice, equity and connectivity – some subtle regional particularities emerged:

In **B.C.**, the potential impact of technological advances was heard clearly. Advances in Artificial Intelligence as well as Virtual and Augmented realities captured the imagination of participants.

In **Western Canada**, an attunement to the challenges and opportunities associated with incorporating Indigenous Worldviews and perspectives into all aspects of schooling was coupled with a desire to begin framing new and more representative narratives on teaching in support of reconciliation.

In **Ontario**, lively conversations about equity pointed to the desire to look to the edges of our education contexts for students who struggle within the traditional school model. This is the region where talk of alternative education and personalization was strongest.

In **Atlantic Canada**, there was a focus on changes in how young people will participate in the economy. There was substantial talk about the gig economy and how automation might continue to impact the nature of traditional work.



We hope that what we have heard and experienced in our Regional journeys over the past year will inspire deeper conversations at the local, provincial and national levels. We hope that by setting our sights further into the future – beyond our traditional 3-4-year policymaking strategy cycle – that we might use these insights and processes to engage, excite and challenge Canadians to imagine what the future might hold for public education, including the emerging issues and new priorities that need to be set.

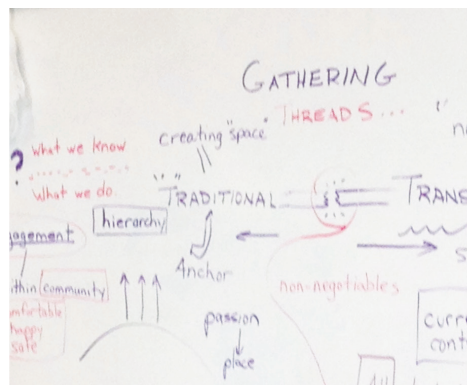
LEARN MORE IN OUR SPECIAL “SIGNALS OF CHANGE” THEME ISSUE OF *EDUCATION CANADA* MAGAZINE



In this issue, a cross-section of our network contributors – teachers, principals, superintendents, academics and students – explore how emerging big ideas could be creatively applied to education, why it may be important to do so, and the drawbacks or risks that need to be guarded against. From the aging population to micro-credentialing and artificial intelligence, what lies ahead for education? You will read about some of the specific signals identified by our Regional Exchange participants. You’ll encounter some deeper insights into what those signals could mean for the way we think about educational change. And you’ll read stories of people both inside and outside of education who are working to provide us with powerful prototypes of where some of this thinking could take us. But in dedicating an entire issue to *Signals of Change*, we are also presenting you with a call to action. What signals do you see emerging? What importance could they hold for the way we think about education right now? Consider this an invitation to continue the conversation, both in your local contexts and via the EdCan Network.



To access the online version of *Education Canada* Magazine, please visit: www.edcan.ca/signalsofchange





Student leadership in our Regional Exchanges underlined the importance of including all voices in our thinking about the future.

REGIONAL EXCHANGE PARTICIPANTS

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EDCAN NETWORK ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING PARTICIPANTS

October 4th, 2017 - Toronto, Ont.

For a full list of EdCan Network Advisory Council Members, please visit: www.edcan.ca/Council

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephen Hurley has worked as a classroom teacher, teacher educator and curriculum consultant, and is the chief catalyst behind **voicEd Radio**: a 24/7 radio station dedicated to deepening the way we talk about education in Canada. Stephen is passionate about supporting and nurturing new conversations about education across the country.





Regional Exchange discussions inspired powerful ways of imagining new possibilities for the future of education in Canada.



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