



Unleashing the Power of Transformative Educational Leadership: Executive Summary

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Independent evaluation of UBC's
Transformative Educational Leadership Program
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THE UNIVERSITY
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Faculty of Education
Transformative Educational
Leadership Program

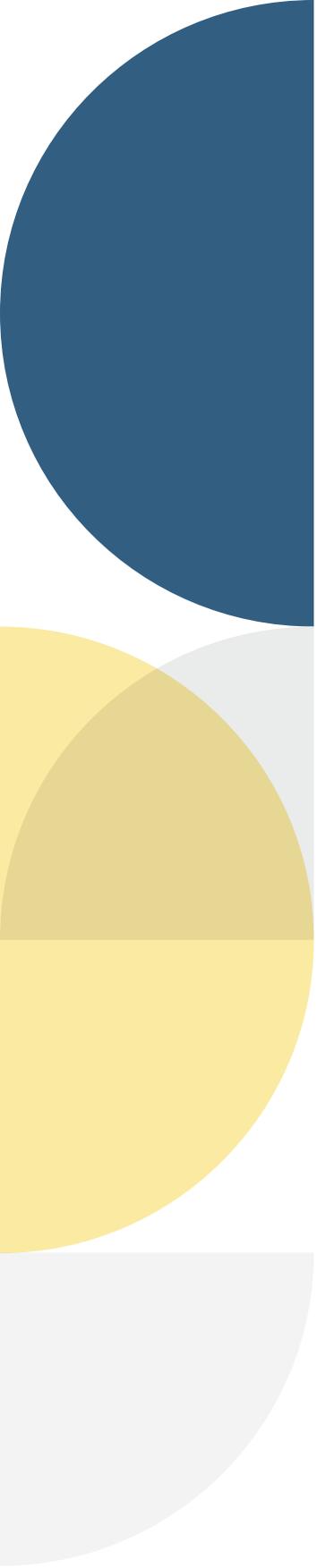


Rena Sweeney,
2020 Graduate

Complex, interconnected global, national and provincial challenges require profound changes in education in order for all students in British Columbia (BC) and beyond to flourish at school and in their future lives. Achieving this necessitates powerful and impactful leadership, which in turn, requires equally impactful leadership development.

This evaluation explored the University of British Columbia's (UBC) Transformative Educational Leadership Program (TELP), a 10-month cohort program for individuals in the K-12 system and other connected sectors, established in 2015-2016. Since program inception, 173 people have completed or are currently completing TELP, including 70 district-level leaders; 93 principals or vice principals; nine teachers or teacher leaders, including two district teachers; and one university instructor. Thirty-one of BC's 60 school districts have been involved in the program, with further participation from the Yukon Territory and the First Nations Educations Steering Committee (FNESC).

The evaluation's aims were to explore TELP's impact on participants, colleagues they lead, and on their schools and districts; and to explore and provide feedback on TELP's design and learning processes. Methods included: background reading; interviews with TELP originators, leaders and facilitators, advisors and support team; a survey of TELP years 1-5 alumni (51.5% response rate); interviews with individual and district team graduates, and colleagues impacted by TELP; and observation of a UBC alumni TELP webinar.

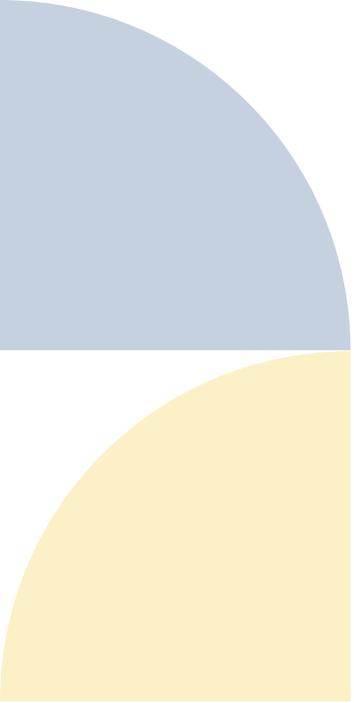


Impact

On participants

TELP graduates believe they have developed the capacity to transform themselves through participation in the program. Almost 80% of survey respondents considered TELP ‘transformative to my thinking and action,’ with the remainder viewing it as ‘reasonably transformative.’ Participants noted that TELP pushed them to probe, inquire and reflect deeply, provoking them to challenge their own assumptions, and trigger paradigm shifts; led them to take a much broader perspective; helped them find new opportunities; demanded and provided them courage; built confidence; piqued greater interest in the potential of leadership; stimulated even greater passion for learning; prepared them for further study and provided useful evidence for job applications. Just over half of former TELP participants responding to the survey have subsequently moved on from the roles they filled while in the program, most to new roles offering the opportunity to extend their sphere of influence.

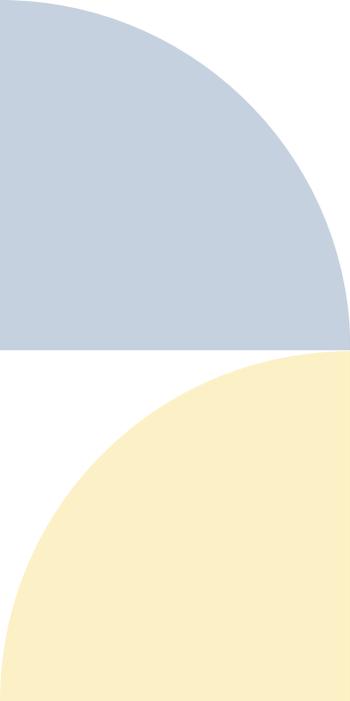
“ I am more courageous in my leadership and clearer on how to support and lead innovative practices. ” 2019 Graduate



Of TELP graduates

Former participants have transformed the culture, structures and learning experiences in their local environments. Actions include courageous changes to enhance pedagogy for deep learning, including radically altering student assessment, infusing Indigenous perspectives and worldviews into curricula and pedagogy, family and community engagement in new schools, co-designing a framework for professional growth as a voluntary alternative to teacher evaluation, and widening access to transformative forms of leadership development. External reflections on TELP's impact from uninvolved BC teachers and leaders highlight that TELP graduates in their settings deserve to be called 'transformative' – they have demonstrated that they think widely and creatively on how they and those they lead can make the biggest difference, give others the chance 'to dream big,' push against the status quo, change the conversation, know how to make change happen within systems, and bring about big impact.

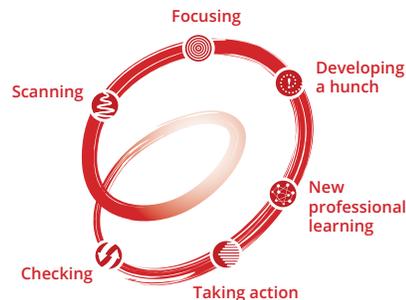
“ We never had a discussion to look at each student in high school, each one who is failing. Let's have a discussion about what we can do. If we believe in equity, that is equity. What do they need? TELP does that. How are you going to change things? ” 2020 Graduate



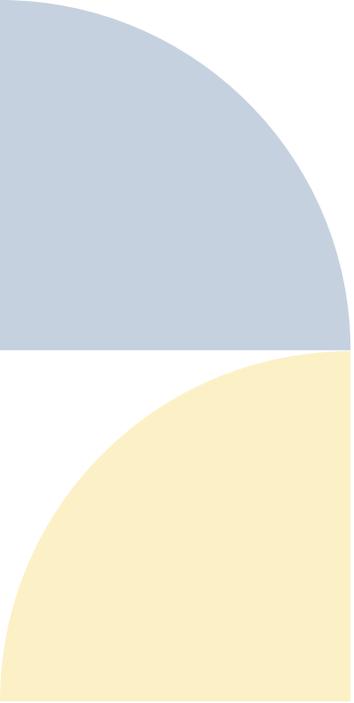
On and of districts

TELP's influence was felt strongly across many TELP graduates' districts. Sixty-one percent believed this impact is significant, with a quarter observing profound influence. Many districts are now better positioned to address longstanding barriers to improvement, such as incorporating anti-racist approaches to Truth and Reconciliation and integrating Indigenous perspectives, disengagement and inequities in graduation rates, or pushing for more innovative learning practices and environments, including challenging traditional student assessment practices. Changes have occurred in district frameworks, curricula, planning processes, team meeting agendas, leadership development, and language, including roles being created and renamed. Several districts are now committed to inquiry, and presentations to trustees have demonstrated impact on students and their learning. In the case of some larger districts with many TELP participants, participation has helped generate critical mass, shared language and an inquiry mindset. In some smaller districts with a number of engaged leaders, action has really taken hold, as they display an urgency towards equity, innovative learning environments, and transformative change. Superintendents' involvement or commitment to TELP (nine engaged in the program themselves) proved important. The pandemic has influenced but not halted districts' work. Challenges requiring urgent attention sometimes detract from the ability to engage in higher level conversations. Nonetheless, the Spiral of Inquiry – a key tool used in the program – has provided the opportunity to 'pivot' to explore and address learning, well-being and equity issues.

The Spiral of Inquiry



“ TELP has been a catalyst for transformational change in our district. ” 2017 Graduate



Wider impact

The main focus of this evaluation concentrated on individual participants, their schools and districts. Interviews and survey responses, however, highlighted that TELP's impact has spread beyond districts, with interest and influence across British Columbia and internationally. TELP themes and processes have found their way into BC Ministry of Education initiatives and provincial working groups, as well as other areas of leadership development.

“ I can see impact and a ripple effect across the province. ” 2018 Graduate

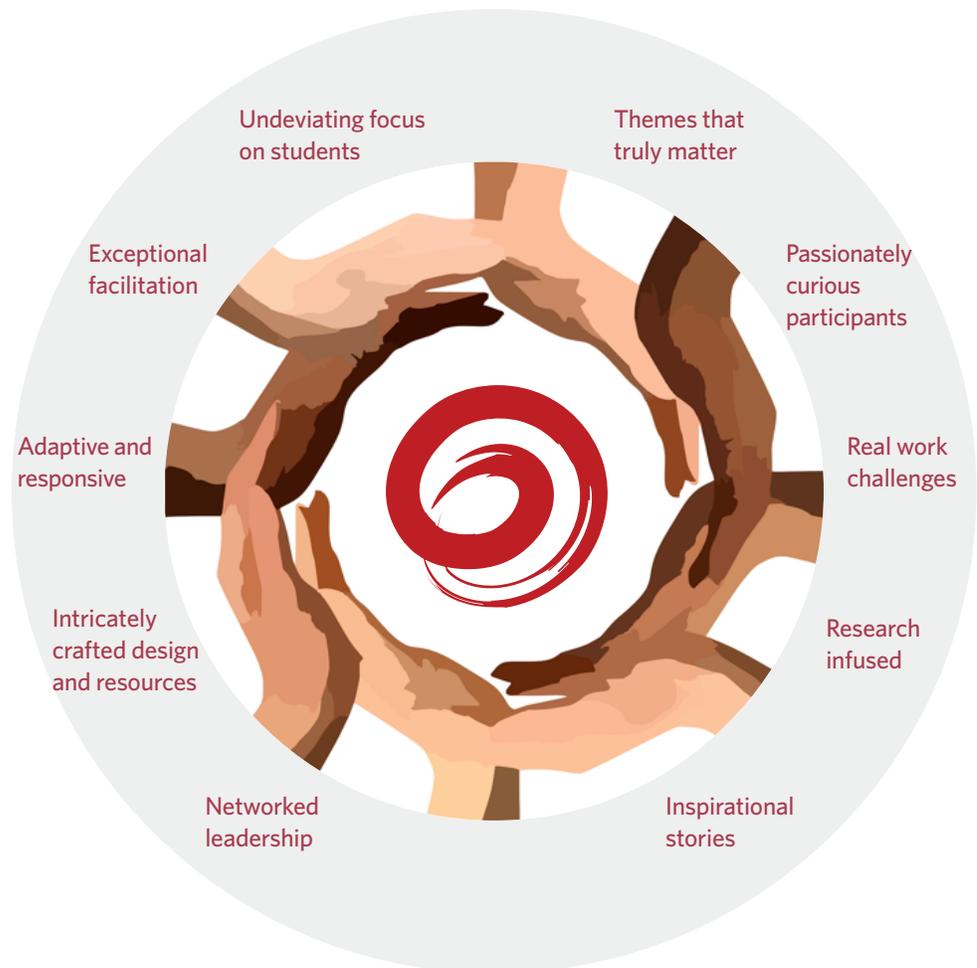
“ We're in an interesting period around Indigenous Truth and Reconciliation building. We have conversations in our offices, but when you network with others outside your district, it creates a space and place for having those conversations. You're not alone in having those conversations. It's made conversations easier in the district. . . It's built a larger momentum with transformative conversations. ” 2019 Graduate



Unpacking Learnings About TELP

TELP is a rich and profound leadership learning experience.

Former participants' expectations were exceeded (84%), or at very least met (16%). Looking across the findings, 10 interconnected ingredients emerged.



In combination, these appear to play important roles in TELP's impact.



Marie-Josée Bédard,
2018 Graduate

Undeviating focus on students

TELP demonstrates an incessant drive to make a difference for each and every student. This core purpose underpins graduates' efforts and constant questioning about all activity. The Spirals of Inquiry framework is central to the TELP approach and inquiry appears to be ingrained as an approach for most graduates and all significantly engaged district teams.

Themes that truly matter

TELP deals with urgent problems and emerging complex global issues that powerfully affect education. Participants engage with current and seminal knowledge about enhancing learning and the environments in which this takes place, and care has been taken to ensure that Indigenous worldviews and pedagogies are at the heart of this narrative. Wrapped around these are essential features of a comprehensive and deep approach to profound change and learning. These themes proved compelling for participants.

Passionately curious participants

TELP participants play a major role in its success. Recruitment aims to ensure people with transformative potential – leaders who can and will have significant and wide influence – are admitted to the program. Deep commitment is clear, as they navigate challenges of extensive reading, long distance travel, expense, work and family commitments and, for the 2019-2020 cohort, a pandemic-induced shift to online learning. Other participants are seen as like-minded lifelong learners, progressive thinkers ready for challenge, risk takers, impactful, energizing and inspiring.

Real work challenges

A strong connection between TELP themes and processes, and participants' daily work makes TELP unique in comparison to other leadership development. Rooted in participants' real work, the research and readings are immediately applicable and enable "quality interlacing of learning" with daily system activity.



Jody Billingsley,
2020 Graduate

Research-infused

The UBC's TELP is deeply informed and enriched by research. Extensive effort and attention in sourcing and curating high quality, relevant, current, international readings is hugely valued, stimulates deep and meaningful conversations and is highly influential to thinking and practice. The academic connection is particularly important for some TELP participants.

Inspirational stories

Living case studies have special significance. Stories shared by Indigenous leaders and provincial and international educational leaders are resonant, deeply touching, brave, courageous and memorable. The "guest provocateurs" push and challenge assumptions, are inspirational and motivational.

Networked leadership

Networking with fellow TELP participants is the greatest highlight. Great value is found in the diversity of participants' roles. Professional dialogue and other learning with and from leaders and teachers from around the province and beyond are enjoyable and powerful. Weekend retreats create relaxed informal social opportunities and help cement trusting professional relationships and friendships. Deepening professional relations within and across their own district is a further benefit for a significant majority.

Intricately crafted design and resources

TELP's unique design has been shaped by the TELP team, guided by the TELP Advisory, consisting of Faculty of Education faculty, and BC K - 12 Senior Leaders, and increasingly supported by TELP graduates - part of its capacity-building intentions. Design and development benefits from engaging with a wealth of international research, projects and networks. A special feature is the commitment to education in BC, and situating local contexts. The program meets participants' differing needs, with the majority of its elements highly valued or valued by the vast majority of graduates.



Heather Rose,
2018 Graduate

Adaptive and responsive

Since TELP 1, the design and management team have flexed program elements, responding to feedback and changing times. While themes remain consistent, emerging issues are woven into the evolving program, with new elements such as the TEL journal in 2017 and reading group facilitators in 2020-21, responding to the need to switch the program entirely online during the pandemic. This transition, during the 2019-2020 cohort's experience, was well navigated, although some participants found the online experience more challenging for deep learning and relationship-building and, therefore, less satisfying.

Exceptional facilitation

TELP's program leaders, Dr. Judy Halbert and Dr. Linda Kaser, are acknowledged by all to be extraordinary facilitators. Their imprint is seen in the other ingredients. Their multiple qualities are expressed in graduates' descriptions of TELP highlights, what they achieve as educators and what they mean to former participants.

TELP comprises the unique blend of these ingredients, although each TELP graduate has their own highlights. Critically, the ingredients, individually and in combination, are also oriented toward sustainability.

The TELP program clearly aims to be transformative not just for individuals and others within their particular sphere of influence, but in unleashing the power of transformative leadership across the province of BC and beyond.



Sustainability

Is this impact sustainable? Are the learning and transformation deeply embedded? Is impact still reaching those in TELP graduates' spheres of influence? Is it spreading more widely? And is TELP durable?

Sustaining impact for alumni and the network

Four areas stand out as helping to sustain impact for TELP graduates.

Connecting with TELP network colleagues – The network of TELP graduates is a fundamental feature for sustainability. Many former graduates continue to connect with colleagues who remain sources of support, ideas and friendship. District leaders meet up with TELP peers through provincial arenas. People would like further ways to connect and share current activity.

Further academic extension – Curiosity and wishes focus on the potential for extension development opportunities, including TELP 2.0 or TELP +, access to readings, and a related doctorate through the university, also reintroducing TELP accreditation.

Contributing to TELP – Some alumni contribute to TELP, maintaining their own and others' connections while deepening their presentation, facilitation, mentoring, writing or editorial skills. Program leaders play a major role in keeping graduates connected, signalling further networking opportunities and extending their learning.

Connecting with TELP district colleagues – Some graduates would appreciate further opportunities for within district networking.

Michelle Relova,
2019 Graduate



Nicole Morgan,
2017 Graduate

Sustaining district impact

Sustainability of district impact is critical to support sustainability of impact for individual graduates, and for depth, spread and length of district-wide impact. Ensuring sustainability of district impact can't be left to chance. Four themes emerged.

Approach to TELP participation – District strategy varies in participant selection, financing of participation, numbers and roles represented, and Superintendent involvement.

Connecting TELP participants and alumni – Maintaining connections between TELP participants and alumni and between alumni is important. The TELP experience can be isolating. Smaller districts find it easier to bring graduates together internally and keep them connected. Other districts have plans to connect TELP graduates.

Diffusing TELP's messages and approaches – District activity is essential to maintain TELP's spirit and purpose and extend its reach. Some teams are finding creative approaches. In several districts where TELP has taken a particularly strong cultural hold, TELP graduates have moved things forward using a team approach.

Persevering – The journey isn't over for very involved districts. Much work and further challenges lie ahead. But they keep going. Two districts will now be working in partnership, growing the network of networks.



Robyn Gray,
2018 Graduate

Sustainability for TELP

TELP will be starting its seventh year in 2021. It's going strong, despite the pandemic's challenges, including moving online. What are the key issues for sustainability and how is sustainability being addressed?

Sustainability around the program format – Mixed reactions exist for fully online learning. A pandemic necessity offers potential, especially for those inhibited by long-distance travel and accommodation costs. Some value may, however, be lost if the majority is online. The answer may lie in finding 'the sweet spot.'

Extending reach – Around half of BC's districts haven't yet engaged. Some may prefer inhouse leadership development or connect with different universities. Ideas for extending TELP's reach included publicizing impact more widely, including greater opportunities for teachers, building beyond one cohort, regional opportunities, extending the program outside BC, and persuading a senior leader from a new district to register.

Sustainability through academic extension – The original intention for TELP to lead to associated doctoral study at UBC has never been realized, to the considerable disappointment of many graduates. If further related doctoral study through UBC was available, over 80% either would or might be interested in registering. Considerable disappointment exists in what is viewed as a missed opportunity in not viewing TELP as a starting point for further academic study. A number of graduates have taken up doctoral studies elsewhere, including out of the province.

Future beyond current TELP leadership – The TELP team are seriously considering sustainability and succession. Opportunities are created to enable alumni to support current cohorts and share TELP learning more widely, provincially, nationally and internationally. Mentoring, encouraging and enthusiastically supporting initiatives are fundamental features of the current approach. Concern exists that much is invested in the power and name recognition of the two program leaders. Ultimately, succession matters both in relation to people and TELP's purpose in not becoming 'just another program.'



Michelle Iacobucci,
2019 Graduate

The TELP network – In many senses, unleashing the power of transformative educational leadership is down to the TELP network. It is essential in keeping TELP’s purpose front and centre. For this, the community needs to be intentionally engaged. Considerable confidence already exists around its sustainability, in keeping connected, developing capacity and building collective efficacy. Graduates are moving into system leadership roles and changing the system. During or since participating in TELP, seven graduates have become Superintendents, and others have moved into district positions. Thirty-one BC school districts have already engaged with TELP and graduates are on the move. They have connections with many other networks throughout BC and beyond. The next few years of the program and its network of participants and alumni promise to be fascinating ones to watch.

About the author

Dr. Louise Stoll is Professor of Professional Learning at UCL Centre for Educational Leadership, UCL Institute of Education, London and an international consultant. Her R&D activity focuses on how schools, local and national systems create capacity for learning, with an emphasis on learning organisations and systems, professional learning communities and learning networks, creative leadership, leadership development and connecting research and practice. She is a critical friend to school districts in BC and internationally, and to the BCSSA in development of its leadership competencies. Dr. Stoll is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, an OECD expert and a former President of the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement.