Growing up in a small rural town in the prairies, I was raised within a strong community that recognized and supported my strengths. In my community, it truly was the “village that raised the child”, and I am forever indebted to the many mentors that instilled the values and morals that I carry with me today. It was this early sense of community that fostered a felt sense of belonging and connectedness, a positive belief of myself as unconditionally loved and important, beliefs that continue to foster my inner strength and resiliency today.

Principles of connectedness and belonging have formed the core of my educational philosophy. Moving to Vancouver to pursue a Masters degree in School Psychology, I was determined to make a difference in the lives of the children and families with whom I work. As a practicing School Psychologist however, I felt dissatisfied with the narrow scope of my practice. To gain expertise in social-emotional assessment and intervention for children and families, I pursued an additional Masters in Counselling Psychology. To truly make a difference, it seemed critical to provide holistic support (i.e., social, emotional, academic, and physical) for children in the many systems (e.g., schools, families, communities) in which they live.

My educational training, in addition to my work experiences in school and community settings in local and international settings, have informed my systems-based, “whole-child” philosophy of education. It was my work in a community-based therapeutic setting that helped me to appreciate the inherent potential of schools as an accessible catalyst for change. Schools provide the perfect environment for seamless and integrated preventative education and support. In the 21st century, I believe that schools can serve as the critical link between children, families, and the larger community.

Driven by my belief in schools as a catalyst for positive change, I decided to pursue the professional linking program at SFU. Completing my teaching degree during this time of political turmoil however, I was beginning to feel concerned as to whether the implementation of my educational vision was feasible given fiscal and time constraints faced by educators in the 21st century.

That was until I was fortunate enough to finish my placement at Byrne Creek Secondary.

Before coming to Byrne, I had yet to witness a whole-child approach put into effective practice. The Byrne Creek community has been a true inspiration for me. Moving away from a narrow perspective of “education” as purely “academic”, Byrne Creek focuses on fostering the physical, emotional, social, and cultural well being of students, their families, and the community at large.

Given the increased responsibility given to schools without a parallel increase in resources, I have witnessed considerable resistance to the whole child approach to education. Responding to this problem, it seems that Byrne has taken a novel and creative approach to an age-old problem. Integrating a “bottom-up” and a “top-down” approach to education, Byrne Creek serves as a community “hub”, providing a safe, supportive, and accessible place from which children and families can receive support and to which the larger community, in turn, can provide support to those in need. Adopting a big picture approach to education, Byrne Creek serves as a catalyst fostering mastery, independence, generosity, and belonging, for children, families, and the community at large, ensuring the health of not only the children, but also the larger “village” that is raising them.