

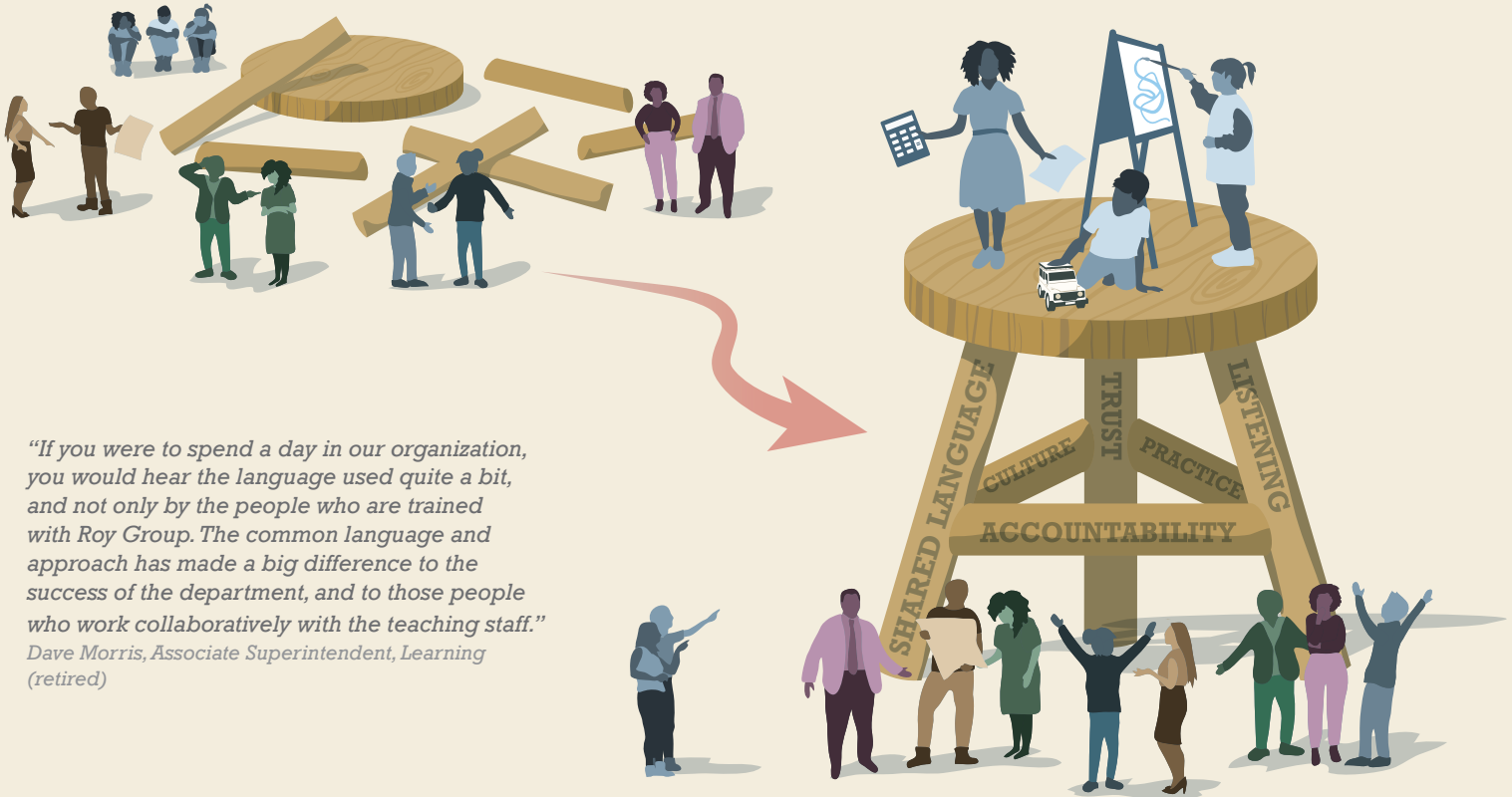


Building a Resilient Culture of Learning: A Case Study of



“When staff feel heard, valued, listened to and safe within the familiar Roy Group feedback loop, we create the space and place for trust, vulnerability, and self-reflection; this process nurtures reflective practitioners who feel well equipped to do the hard work they do every day.”

Sherri Black, Director of Learning Supports



“If you were to spend a day in our organization, you would hear the language used quite a bit, and not only by the people who are trained with Roy Group. The common language and approach has made a big difference to the success of the department, and to those people who work collaboratively with the teaching staff.”

Dave Morris, Associate Superintendent, Learning (retired)

Case Snapshot: Readying and Steadying to Serve

At 25,000 students, Rocky View Schools (RVS) is the fifth-largest and one of the fastest-growing school districts in Alberta. Rapid growth had exposed challenges to maintaining positive culture within the organization.

In 2014, Rocky View’s Learning Department reached out to Roy Group for leadership development support in hopes of addressing cultural stresses both at the district level and at the school level.

Through learning immersives like Opportunity in Conflict™, The Leader’s Discipline™ and Practice of Coaching, Rocky View has crafted resilience among staff at all levels, empowering team members to let go

of “individual expertise” and instead focus on “shared practice” in service of children and families.

Roy Group tools have significantly improved the collaboration and conflict-navigation abilities of leaders at Rocky View, and are used so often that being *Roy Grouped* has become a verb.

Roy Group facilitated engagements and shared the tools to help people position each other to step into their finest selves, strengthening the district’s leadership competencies and creating a platform for students to succeed and excel.

“Roy Group has made a big impact on myself, my department, and the school jurisdiction in a very positive way. It’s been a good organization to partner with.”

Dave Morris, Associate Superintendent, Learning (retired)

The Engagement

Surrounding Calgary on three sides, RVS is Alberta's fifth-largest school district, growing at a pace of about 1,000 new learners a year.

Following RVS's first participant in The Leader's Discipline in a 2014 open course, the district's Learning Department invested significantly in Roy Group training experiences, with the majority of leaders completing The Leader's Discipline over time, and many district leaders and administrators also taking Opportunity In Conflict and Practice of Coaching.

It is important to note that this case study focuses on the Learning Department of RVS—one of several departments at the district level. Taken together with select principals and assistant principals in RVS, this case highlights leadership development among two key groups: staff in the district office; and itinerant specialist staff who work in schools with teachers and at home with families.

Establishing a Culture of "Roy Grouping"

Rocky View's Learning Department invested in wide-scale training for its leadership team, as well as for interested principals and assistant principals. This allowed Roy Group to frame out a common philosophical approach that all participating RVS leaders could agree on.

One of the delicate things in this kind of work is when the district-level professional (e.g., a psychologist) steps onto a teacher's turf in an effort to develop strategies that better serve students.



"That's a little invasive into a teacher's practice. But you can go in as a psychologist and use the modeling that you get from Roy Group for the conversation. The training, language and background has had a significant impact on the ability for those people to successfully create change in those schools."

Chris Pawluk, former Lead Psychologist

Roy Group's approach instills a focus on continuous improvement, and deploys frameworks that make feedback less about *people* and more about *practice*. This ultimately benefits students, as their teachers and principals model and practice learning from feedback...just like them.

"The better equipped the administrative team in each school is, the better the subsequent results will be in terms of the learning for students. No two days are ever the same and you're not quite sure what's going to land on your desk, whether it's a parent or a student or a staff member or the community. Having access to Roy Group, whether it's Opportunity in Conflict or the Practice of Coaching, the skills that you're working on absolutely have applicability, and get better the more you use them."

Pam Davidson, Director of Learning Services (retired)

Providing people with a shared language takes a lot of the defensiveness out of receiving feedback. Roy Group frameworks have proven useful in providing a way to structure formal documentation and district feedback processes of teacher performance in supportive language. Many teachers aren't as worried now about having a learning specialist or a psychologist in their classroom to observe their interaction with learners. Instead, these instances are viewed as an opportunity to grow. The predictability of the process increases trust with teachers and learners alike.

"It has allowed us to do a better job at building relationships. A lot of the things that we learned from Roy were really about how to approach your role as a leader, as a coach, as a Mentor, in a way that's more supportive and more friendly. It puts people at ease. It helps them to feel that they're cared for, that you have empathy for them. It's a great trust-building approach."

Jason Ness, former Learning Specialist

What we found amazing when we went to put this case study together is how many people in Rocky View Schools have created a shared language and use *Roy Group* as a verb!

“We’ll actually say, I’m just going to Roy Group you. Because we have shared language with all the staff, it makes it very efficient to have that conversation.”

Chris Pawluk, former Lead Psychologist

Enabling Constructive Approaches

Teaching various RVS leaders simple, clear models for coaching—and how to listen for underlying and legitimate interests—enabled constructive approaches toward providing feedback. This oriented people toward their common purpose.

“Our people realized they were there to help. The job of our district team is to take them from where they are and support them in meeting the needs of the students.”

Dave Morris, Associate Superintendent, Learning (retired)

Roy Group methodologies helped leaders at the district level to honour people’s contributions, while providing constructive feedback and positioning others for their best work.

*“The things I learned in *The Leader’s Discipline* helped me to focus on harnessing the energy and leveraging the diverse strengths, talents and skills of our high-performing and highly skilled individual groups to create a strong, interdisciplinary team who work together, feel valued, and share a common vision and understanding of leading, learning and coaching. We are a strong, high-performing, responsive team.”*

Sherri Black, Director of Learning Supports

At the school level, Roy Group frameworks help administrators prioritize what’s important and make the most of their executive functioning, while equipping them to approach issues in a positive way. Differing views are welcomed.

“When there were divergent ideas, I would mark that and celebrate it, like, ‘Hey that’s good, I’m glad we’re hearing this. It’s a sign of a healthy organization.’”

Brendan Trinca, Principal, École Elbow Valley Elementary School



Harnessing the Utility of Conflict

Roy Group introduced practical, proven tools for navigating conflict and differences of opinion. One of the key outcomes from our work with RVS was supporting a culture of listening to understand, rather than seeking to be understood. Learning about the different conflict styles also helped RVS leaders ask different kinds of questions, enabling them to resolve differences of clinical opinion in a non-confrontational way.

“A lot of people used to come to me and say, ‘Chris, you have to be the referee. We can’t resolve this’. And now they don’t. They figure it out themselves. The number of times that I’m needed to adjudicate in those situations is far less.”

Chris Pawluk, former Lead Psychologist

In addition to improving listening, a coaching approach helps employees navigate those tricky conversations where a family’s demands and a school’s capabilities don’t match, and helps both parties agree on a common, doable goal—even if a solution isn’t visible at the outset. Roy Group training improved relationships between family-school liaison workers and the schools, translating into better helping the school to understand children’s home living situations.

“If [as a family-school liaison] you’re working 80 percent of your time in homes and then you have to meet with the school, the relationship with the school may not be strong. From changing and shaping the conversation methods with that specific group, they have become an invaluable asset to the schools. I can’t even describe how dramatic the change was.”

Dave Morris, Associate Superintendent, Learning (retired)

Resilience: Finding Balance in a Pandemic

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, RVS was ready to adapt and pivot. The Learning Department's culture—curious, collaborative, feedback-rich—made it possible for the team to continually look for better ways to serve learners and their families.

Roy Group's coaching tools helped the district team work with principals to ease decision fatigue and give them a sense of control.

Restrictions also meant minimal face-to-face time. The feedback model offered simple, solid communication tools when the team was unable to meet.

Other things that supported resilience during the pandemic are reflected in how much listening has become a part of the culture within the Learning

Department. As retired Associate Superintendent Dave Morris is wont to say, sometimes all that is needed is to 'just give people a good listening to'.

"There's that act of listening—that empathetic ear. And sometimes that's all they need right now. So even just some of those active listening skills of breathing deep, settling into your body, getting grounded and just hearing them authentically...that's the best thing you can do for some folks right now."

Jason Ness, former Learning Specialist

Through its partnership with Roy Group over the years, the Learning Department at Rocky View Schools has enhanced resilience among its team, established some common language and tools for constructive feedback, and fostered a climate of self-reflection.

Roy Group is honoured to support these expert practitioners in reaching for their finest selves.

