

# Report to the Partnership Table on Teacher Professional Learning

*Recommendations of the Working Table on Teacher Development*

*May 14, 2007*

The Working Table on Teacher Development has concluded “Phase 2” of its deliberations, which were focused on two topics: 1) a revised Teacher Performance Appraisal program for experienced teachers and 2) professional development for experienced teachers and their ongoing learning. These topics build on Phase 1 which recommended the development and implementation of the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) including an enhanced teacher performance appraisal process for new teachers.

The first half of the Phase 2 meetings resulted in regulation amendments that revised the Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA) system for experienced teachers. These regulations came into effect April 1, 2007, and include a provision requiring all school boards to fully implement the new TPA system by September, 2007. The recommendations contained in this report relate to the second part of the Working Table’s task and conclude its mandate.

## Background on the Working Table on Teacher Development

On August 16, 2004 the government released a discussion paper, “Teacher Excellence – Unlocking Student Potential through Continuing Professional Development” (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/partnership/potential.html>). The paper signalled the government’s desire to review the broad topic of teacher professionalism with particular focus on the pre-service education of teachers, teacher appraisal, and the ongoing professional development of practicing teachers. The paper underscored the government’s wish to develop a positive relationship with teachers which respected them as professionals, and the government’s vision of publicly funded education that is focused on student achievement. As part of this, the government wanted to establish, through professional development, meaningful support mechanisms for teachers as they pursue their classroom activities.

In April 2005, the Working Table on Teacher Development was established to provide advice and recommendations to the Partnership Table on a number of issues related to teacher professional development. The tasks of the Working Table were divided into two phases.

Recommendations following Phase 1 deliberations were brought forward to the Partnership Table on June 2, 2005. Based on these recommendations, new legislation was proposed as part of the *Student Performance Act* to put in place a New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) that complements the year of teacher pre-service preparation by providing additional support and training during the critical first year on the job. The Student Performance Act was passed on June 1, 2006. Under NTIP, orientation, mentoring, and professional development opportunities, as well as a revised appraisal process for new teachers replaced the entry-to-practice assessment with a more meaningful support and assessment process for beginning teachers. The Act also added two Professional Activity days per school year in addition to the existing four, to each board's school year calendar. These two new days are used for teacher professional learning related to key provincial initiatives aimed at improving student achievement.

Phase 2 of the Working Table began in September 2006 and has led to new regulations on a revised teacher performance appraisal program for experienced teachers. The regulations strengthen the Annual Learning Plan (ALP) requirement by encouraging teachers to gather parent and student input in its development. The regulations also adapt the evaluation process to ensure that teachers have one appraisal every five years, using a two point rating scale all within a more growth oriented program.

The remaining tasks of the Working Table's mandate were to explore opportunities and support for experienced teachers to engage in professional learning and methods of recognizing a range of professional development opportunities.

The recommendations of the Working Table contained in this report represent the completion of the mandate of the Working Table on Teacher Development.

## Working Table Membership

Phase 2 of the Working Table was chaired by Harold Brathwaite and Marilies Rettig. The following organizations participated in the final phase of the Working Table on Teacher Development:

- Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes
- Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens
- Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario
- Council of Ontario Directors of Education
- Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario
- Ontario Association of Deans of Education
- Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education
- Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association
- Ontario College of Teachers
- Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association
- Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations
- Ontario Principals' Council
- Ontario Public School Boards' Association
- Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation
- Ontario Student Trustees' Association
- Ontario Teachers' Federation

## Context for the Recommendations

The quality of teaching is the largest, single variable in a school's impact on student learning. The government allocates considerable funds to developing and delivering professional learning activities to Ontario's approximately 120,000 working teachers in Ontario's publicly funded schools. For example, in the last year the Ministry allocated the following funds to teacher professional learning:

- Approximately \$40 million in GSN to school boards;
- \$15 million annually for the New Teacher Induction Program;
- Approximately \$290 million in teacher salaries for 6 professional activity days;
- Targeted professional development through the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Learning to 18 and Student Success initiatives; and
- Special one-time grants to support teacher professional learning (e.g. \$23 million to teacher federations in 2005/06).

Teacher federations and teachers themselves also make substantial investments in professional learning. It is estimated that in 2005, teachers spent over \$20 million of their own money on Additional Qualification courses alone.

The topic of effective professional development for experienced teachers and ongoing learning was therefore of great interest to the Working Table members. The teacher affiliates, a representative from the French-Language Education community and the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat shared their experience and research and

all members contributed rich insights from their organization's perspective. In addition, the Ministry shared a literature review (see appendix 1) of best practices and other research regarding the development and delivery of professional development for experienced teachers. A presentation by the Ontario College of Teachers on the Professional Learning Framework helped the group understand the relationship of professional development to the Ethical Standards and the Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession and the many ways teachers engage in ongoing professional learning.

Given that the terminology describing various types of professional development is wide-ranging, the Working Table members agreed to encourage the use of "professional learning" to encompass the following:

- Training: content knowledge required for the job by the employer or other agency (e.g. Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System training, reporting and data management)
- Staff Development: usually system-wide professional learning activities that are not chosen by the teacher, but are job-embedded and driven by the broader community and education system needs (e.g. early literacy for groupings of primary teachers, anti-bullying programs);
- Professional Development: self-chosen learning activities that teachers investigate individually or as part of a professional learning community (e.g. action research, lesson study, graduate work, additional qualification courses, writing).

The Working Table, recognizing that teacher professional learning occurs within a broad spectrum of activities, has focussed on determining the characteristics of what teacher professional learning experiences

must embody if they are to be successful (with success defined as having a positive impact on students). To this end, the Working Table is recommending the adoption of the following five characteristics that should be considered by anyone charged with, or seeking to provide professional learning experiences for Ontario's teachers:

i) Coherent

Teacher professional learning is ultimately about best practices for student learning and development and occurs in the context of the Ministry/board/school and parent/community/classroom continuum. Coherence is also built on the "three R's"\* of respect, responsibility and results, recognizing teacher professionalism and the complexity of teacher learning. Whether as part of required training, personal selection, or as the subject of an independent research initiative by an individual teacher or a professional learning community, and whether it is directly or indirectly job-embedded, the learning must have a positive impact on the students and school success.

*\*The "three R's" were articulated in the discussion paper Ontario Education Excellence for All: Developing Partners in Education (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/nr/05.12/developing.pdf>).*

ii) Attentive to Adult Learning Styles

Teachers come to each professional learning experience with a wide variety of skills, knowledge, education, teaching, and training background. As a result, when planning professional learning, adult learning principles should be addressed by:

- Considering the role of choice. Research supports the importance of choice and self-direction in personalizing the learning.
- Providing programming that is viewed as meaningful, relevant and substantive.

- Providing differentiation in the content and delivery models.
- Considering "best fit" within a culture of collaborative learning. The "one size fits all" approach may prove problematic in many circumstances. Effective learning must recognize and include the participants' understanding and perspective in order to bring about a culture of reflection and transformation.
- Providing appropriate recognition for the successful completion of professional learning.

iii) Goal-oriented

Professional learning is enhanced when it is goal oriented and is clearly:

- Connected to improved student learning and achievement.
- Connected to daily practice (job embedded), both directly and indirectly.
- Situated within and respectful of varied contexts (i.e. relevant to Ministry, board, school/community, classroom).

iv) Sustainable

Professional learning that will have impact in the classroom must:

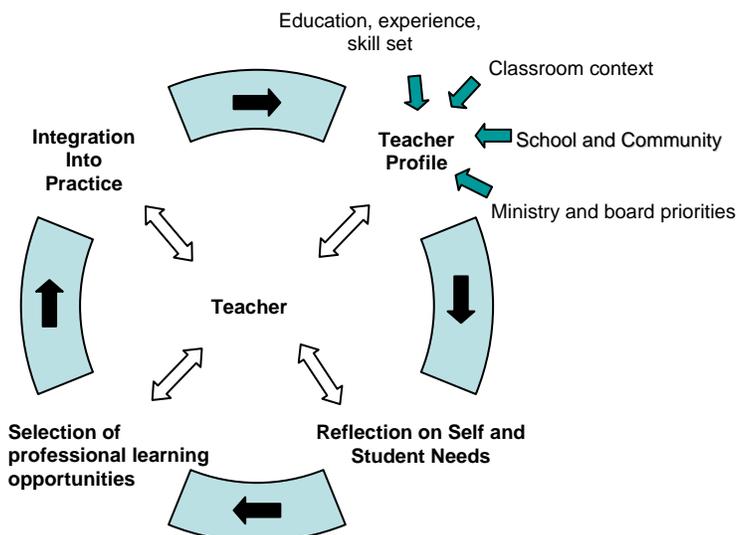
- Be planned and progress over time (i.e. it is a process).
- Be supported by appropriate resources focussed on its success.
- Involve the learners and allow time for practice (job embedded).
- Include time for self-assessment through reflection (construct/de-construct/re-construct thinking about practice) within its processes.
- Include, wherever possible, congruency in professional learning

for other staff who support student learning (e.g. educational assistants, social workers, etc.).

v) Evidence-informed

Professional learning should consider and be built upon current research as well as both formal and informal data (e.g. quantitative, qualitative information). This approach would ensure up-to-date theories and practices are aligned with the needs of teachers and students. Evidence based professional learning activities also provide a baseline upon which outcomes can be measured.

It became clear from the research and from the group's discussions that there is no single model of professional learning that can fulfill all of the needs of experienced teachers. There is also no single, linear pathway or career trajectory for teachers. There was agreement that the ultimate outcome of teacher professional learning is increased teacher efficacy and a resulting positive impact on students. Further, that within this context, there must be respect for the complexity of the teacher's professional journey and trust that teachers, on this journey, will make choices that ultimately benefit their students. The system must then ensure that professional learning programs and activities are effectively developed, delivered, coordinated and resourced.



Teachers' professional learning is an ongoing growth process which varies according to the teacher's professional profile. This profile is shaped by the teacher's own unique prior learning, experiences and skills, and by the context of the teacher's classroom, school and community (e.g. minority setting, urban or rural environment, culturally diverse classroom). Some professional learning activities are directed by the education system's priorities and needs and some learning activities are self-directed. As teachers plan for growth they build upon their existing profile and engage in reflection in order to identify their learning needs and those of their students. The many ways teachers pursue professional learning to address their unique needs are articulated in the Ontario College of Teachers' Professional Learning Framework

<http://www.oct.ca/standards/framework.aspx?lang=en-CA>

The Working Table is also concerned about the professional needs of the many excellent experienced teachers for whom their choice of career is the classroom (as opposed to those seeking an administrative career path) yet who seek a peer leadership role in areas such as curriculum, instructional practice or supporting other teachers. For example, opportunities to support the extension and sharing of their expertise could be made available to benefit other teachers and students in other schools, boards and even throughout the province. This paper includes a recommendation that begins addressing this aspect of professional learning for this group of educators.

Finally, the Working Table realized during its deliberations that for teacher professional learning to fully impact the students and their achievement, there are other members of the educational team who must be kept as

knowledgeable and as current as the classroom teacher. The Working Table therefore decided to include recommendations for considerations in this regard, in part B of this report.

## A. Recommendations to the Partnership Table on Teacher Professional Learning

The Working Table on Teacher Development recommends that the Partnership Table approve the following recommendations:

### **#1. Five Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning**

The following five characteristics should be considered by anyone charged with, or seeking to provide professional learning experiences for Ontario's teachers

- i) Coherent
- ii) Attentive to Adult Learning Styles
- iii) Goal-oriented
- iv) Sustainable
- v) Evidence-informed

### **#2. Coordination of Professional Learning**

That the Ministry engage with education partners to identify and implement structures and supports that assist in the coordination of professional learning in Ontario. This coordination would provide long-term oversight and reinforce the commitment to high quality professional learning for Ontario's teachers. Partners would work collaboratively to improve efficiency by developing mechanisms for improved long term planning, helping teachers better identify professional learning opportunities and maximizing the use of human and financial resources.

### **#3. Opportunities for Experienced Teachers to Share Exemplary Practice**

That the government develop with education partners a structure which enhances opportunities for teachers to expand their knowledge and skill, and share exemplary practice with other teachers. Ontario has many fine teachers whose choice of career is the classroom and who have expertise to offer to other teachers, boards and regions. They are a valuable resource that must be encouraged, developed and utilized to enhance the educational experience of our students. A structure is needed that would facilitate opportunities for teachers to extend their learning and share their expertise for the broader benefit of Ontario's students.

Examples of such opportunities could include supporting:

- Research projects aimed at improving educational knowledge for the classroom.
- Training to enhance teachers' ability to more effectively share their knowledge and skills with others.
- Mentoring opportunities (for experienced teachers).
- Formal and informal coaching.
- Teachers as writers of educational literature.
- Increased exposure through alternative work or work site placements (e.g. other schools/boards, business settings).
- Incentives for pursuing graduate degrees or other needed qualifications.
- Additional academic accreditation in education (e.g. Diploma in Early Childhood Education.).

## B. Other Considerations for the Partnership Table

In their discussions, the Working Table members raised some important issues to consider that are beyond the mandate of the Working Table on Teacher Development. The following recommendations are submitted as further enhancements to the effectiveness of the professional learning activities:

### **Consider a Team Approach**

That wherever possible, the providers of professional learning for teachers should consider expanding their professional learning activities by including the participation of resource teachers, educational assistants, parents, or others who work with the teachers to enhance learning in the classroom. This team

approach to the education of our students is increasingly recognized as important to student success (refer to characteristic iv) sustainable).

### **Professional Learning of Administrators**

That, within the context of an already demanding workload, the professional learning of vice-principals, principals, supervisory officers and directors of education be kept at least as current as their teaching staff in order for them to support good teaching.

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**This concludes the Working Table on Teacher Development's recommendations to the Partnership Table.**

## APPENDIX 1

# A Review of Literature on Professional Development Content and Delivery Modes for Experienced Teachers

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present findings from a review of the literature regarding professional development content and “delivery” processes/practices for experienced teachers. The review was conducted through a search of ERIC, other education research databases, Internet, OISE/UT Education Commons resources, and a variety of materials produced by provincial, national and international associations and educational jurisdictions. The information and conclusions contained in this reports are not necessarily reflective of the policies, views and requirements of the Ministry of Education of Ontario.

The key findings include:

### Professional Development Practices

- There are many definitions of professional development. Most refer to both formal and informal learning experiences and processes that lead to deepened understanding and improvement of practice.
- The professional development practices for mid-career or experienced teachers are generally viewed as part of the continuum of learning of teachers throughout their careers.
- Effective professional development strongly links teacher and student learning and is guided by data.
- Research highlights that effective professional development must be personalized and responsive to the complex and unique needs and context of the learner.
- Collaboration, shared inquiry and learning from and with peers have been identified as central to professional development.
- Effective professional development needs to be sustained, ongoing, in-depth, requiring active engagement by the professional. Short term, “one-shot”, “pull-out” programs are seen to be ineffective in changing or developing practice.
- There are recent efforts to offer more systemic, comprehensive research-informed approaches to professional development in Ontario and around the world. At the same time, connecting individual learning with larger initiatives and change processes is seen as key to sustainability and support.
- A wide range of practices is seen to be effective in various settings. These practices include: collaborative learning, peer-assisted learning, teacher researcher, teacher-as-student, independent learning and integrated approaches.

## **Experienced Teacher Stages and Pathways**

- There is no single, linear pathway or career trajectory for teachers. Instead, career paths are often cyclical and even recursive.
- Differentiation of professional development practices is critical to meeting the unique learning needs of experienced teachers due to their individual developmental and experiential career paths and contexts.
- As adult learners, motivation for professional learning is linked to relevance, meaning and choice. Thus, developing competence and a sense of self-efficacy by directing one's efforts to meet student needs is key to teachers undertaking professional learning.
- Internationally, many jurisdictions are exploring financial incentives, career ladders, differentiation of role and other forms of recognition to encourage professional development with no strong indications that these interventions are achieving desired outcomes.
- It does appear that the use of incentives without clear connection to goals, standards and appropriate assessment is problematic.

## **Standards**

- When compared with other professions, including law, accounting, and policing, education is the only one that does not have a universally accepted set of standards for required in-service training. However, the Ontario College of Teachers has recently created a Professional Learning Framework which is beginning to define these for Ontario.
- When one looks at various jurisdictions, both nationally and internationally, there are many standards and frameworks for the profession. However, fewer frameworks or standards exist for professional development and learning.
- Professional standards generally identify commitment to student learning, development of professional knowledge and practice, ongoing professional learning and collaborative learning and relationships as key features.
- Some professional standards frameworks attempt to identify career stages for professional knowledge, behaviour and practice.

## **Assessment**

- Professional development programs and activities frequently evaluate participant satisfaction but rarely professional learning or change in practice.
- Although complex to evaluate, research points to the need to connect assessment to student learning as well as teacher learning.
- Multiple measures and data sources are required in order to effectively evaluate the complex and multi-faceted nature of successful professional development. (e.g. observation, portfolios, behavioural measures, assessment data, etc.)
- Connection to program goals and standards also provides clarity.
- Attempts have been made internationally to outline evaluation frameworks with performance indicators in order to assist in evaluation and self assessment.

## **Considerations for Professional Development**

- Important components of professional development are:
  - ✓ the linking of professional development to student learning and professional standards for learning
  - ✓ providing many varied learning processes and practices within a learning framework,
  - ✓ incorporating assessment of both professional growth and attainment of program goals
  - ✓ ensuring reflection and forward planning are part of the pd cycle
- An integrated design that focuses upon student and teacher learning, linking to the larger system and incorporating a range of possible learning activities within a job-embedded context is recommended in the literature.
- There is recognition that evidence-based knowledge and practice should form the content of professional development.
- Effective professional learning requires time, resources and supportive structures.