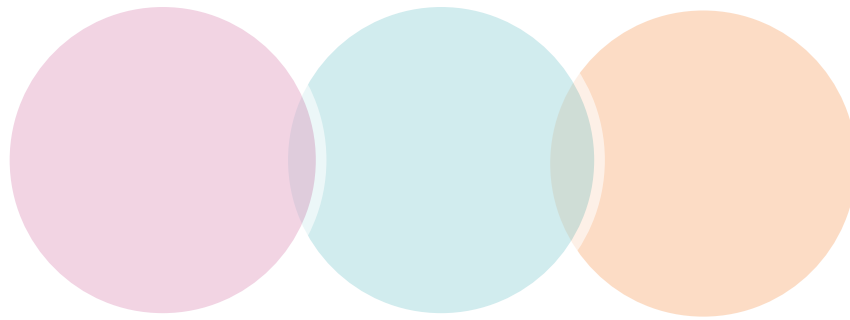# THE TEACHER LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAM:
Executive Summary: Research Report 2013-14

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TEACHER LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAM (TLLP): Research, 2013- 2014

Following completion of an initial Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP) research study and report (Campbell, Lieberman & Yashkina, 2013a, b), a subsequent study was developed by the research team in discussion with the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) and the Ontario Ministry of Education (Ministry). This document provides a report on the research currently in process and emerging findings (1 October, 2013 – 30 April, 2014).

Our overarching research questions are:

1. What are the impacts of TLLP projects for teachers' professional learning, leadership and practices, for other adults affected, and for student engagement and learning?
2. How is learning being shared beyond the TLLP project team?
3. What longer-term impacts of participating in TLLP projects can be identified?

RESEARCH METHODS: OCTOBER, 2013 – APRIL, 2014

Research completed:

- Descriptive analyses of TLLP Final Reports for all projects in Cohorts 5 and 6 (total of 164 projects), analyses of Cohort 5 and 6 data alongside previous analyses of Cohort 1 to 4 data (overall combined total of 466 projects), plus in-depth analyses of sample of 20% of Cohort 5 and 6 reports (total of 33 reports).
- Analyses of 19 vignettes written by TLLP teacher leaders to examine: what these TLLP teacher leaders did in their TLLP project; who they worked with; what happened as a result of their TLLP; how they are sharing their TLLP knowledge; and what they have learned.
- Observation of the TLLP *Sharing the Learning Summit* (November, 2013) and analyses of participant evaluation forms (total of 161 forms).

Research in process:

- Case study of a TLLP *Provincial Knowledge Exchange* (PKE) project including: observations of professional learning sessions; interviews with teachers, a principal, Superintendent, and the PKE team; and review of project documentation and resources.
- Review of Google Analytics data for the *Mentoring Moments NING* site, http://mentoringmoments.ning.com
- Focus groups with provincial TLLP teams from the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) and Ministry of Education's Teaching Policy and Standards Branch.
- Development and administration of survey items to add to the Ministry mini-survey of TLLP participants and for future inclusion in TLLP provincial learning events.
- Development and administration of logs to be completed by PKE project leaders.
- Development of a survey for all current and previous TLLP project leaders.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

Description of TLLP Projects

During Cohorts 1 to 6, there have been 466 TLLP projects. Although there are fluctuations between years, an average of 78 TLLP projects has been funded per year. The majority (75%) of projects have a TLLP core team of two to four people. The average funding is $14,412 per project although there are projects with significantly lower and higher budgets. TLLP projects include a range of priority themes, with projects generally including multiple themes and areas of activity. Overall, differentiated instruction, technology, literacy, and professional learning communities have been the most prevalent areas of foci. Nevertheless, there have been some shifts over the cohorts. The number of projects focusing on differentiated instruction and technology grew significantly in the last two cohorts. Literacy, on the other hand, was by far the most common topic in Cohort 1, whereas fewer projects are now focused mainly or exclusively on literacy. In addition to the project themes developed by the Ministry, the research team has identified several new themes: Community Engagement, Mental Health/Health Education, Aboriginal Education and Social Justice. We suggest these themes be added to the project theme list of the Final Report Form.

Impact of TLLP for Learning and Leadership

Our research indicates that TLLP has considerable impact for teachers' professional learning. The "TLLP approach" is grounded in principles of adult learning and professional development and embodies the philosophy of "authentic learner led learning" "by teachers, for teachers". Our analysis of a sample of Final Reports for Cohorts 5 and 6 indicates that:

- 94% of TLLP teacher leaders reported improvements in their knowledge and

skills through participating in the TLLP;

- 76% of TLLP teacher leaders reported improvements in their instructional and assessment practices; and
- 55% of TLLP teacher leaders reported improved leadership skills.

In addition, improvements in communication and collaboration skills, technological skills and enhanced self-efficacy were important findings in the Final Report analyses. These developments in knowledge, skills, practices and self-concept were similarly evident in our vignettes, case study work and interviews. An important and interesting finding is that TLLP projects in Cohorts 5 and 6 have enhanced their approaches to monitoring and measuring impact for professional learning.

Our research also suggests important benefits of TLLP for developing teachers' leadership skills and practices. Although "teacher leadership" was not explicitly included as a category in Final Report templates for Cohorts 1-6, it is interesting to note that our analysis of when teacher leadership was voluntarily cited as an impact has increased considerably between our previous and current analyses. Our analysis of the Cohort 1-4 Final Reports identified teacher leadership as a reported benefit in 15% of our sample responses, whereas the new analyses of Cohorts 5-6 identified 55% of TLLP Final Reports indicating impact for teacher leadership. Our analyses of vignettes, case study and material speak even more strongly to

the importance of TLLP for developing teacher leadership "by doing". For example, the 19 TLLP teacher leaders providing vignettes discussed a vast array of leadership skills, practices and learnings including: communication; planning; implementation; leading professional learning; collaboration; team leadership; learning new behaviors; building relationships; networking (in person and online); increasing professional dialogue; building a vision; learning to share leadership; going public with their practice and learning how to share learning and knowledge; learning new technologies; developing their own leadership understanding and practices; and facilitating knowledge mobilization. This is an impressive array of practices, skills and knowledge to grow teachers as leaders of learning.

Our research did not seek to measure student learning. However, analysis of Final Report data indicates that TLLP projects can have an impact for improving student engagement, developing learning skills and experiences, and for contributing to achievement, character development and student leadership. The TLLP projects described in the vignettes and in the case study provide evidence of impact where specific TLLP practices contributed to changes in pedagogy which benefited students' engagement and learning. For example, in our PKE case study, the introduction of a Balanced Math program and accompanying technology was changing approaches to Math learning for elementary students and for transitions

into secondary schools. Similarly, the areas of technology and math received particular attention in our vignettes, indicating benefits for students in general and for students identified as having special needs in particular.

Sharing Learning and Knowledge Exchange
In our previous research report, we commented on the importance of knowledge exchange and, while commenting positively on the sharing happening, strongly encouraged the further development of knowledge exchange as a goal and practice through TLLP. Our impression from our emerging findings, work in process and developments taking place in the TLLP is that the level and impact of TLLP sharing is growing considerably and has the potential for further exponential growth. As our provincial interviewees noted, there is increasing recognition of TLLP and consequently TLLP teacher leaders and TLLP projects are increasingly "go to" people for advice, ideas, expertise and materials.

At the level of TLLP projects, the majority of Cohort 5 and 6 Final Reports identified the use of teacher collaborative learning as a main approach (85% of respondents), engagement with research (52% of respondents) and participation in teacher inquiry and use of evidence (55% of respondents) as important strategies. Overall the twin strategies of developing professional

collaboration and of developing practical resources for use by teachers appear to be both the most prevalent and impactful approaches to sharing learning through TLLPs. For example, in our case study PKE, teams of teachers from 15 schools came together for PKE professional learning sessions which involved provision, discussion, modeling, demonstration, planning and application of a Balanced Math program and linked resources. This combined developing professional learning communities within and across schools with tangible resources that were used to inform teaching and learning practices in classrooms. Similarly, vignette writers spoke of use of social media, video, websites, blogs and newsletters to communicate with and develop a network, plus creation of teaching units, resource books, DVD, assessment materials and training to inform and change practice. The cohort 5 and 6 Final Reports identify provision of workshops/professional learning (55% of respondents) as a main method of knowledge exchange and sharing learning. Equally predominant is the use of online methods of sharing and networking (55% of sample of Final Report respondents). Indeed, the use of social media and online methods for knowledge exchange has increased substantially. The introduction of the NING has also contributed significantly to the development and use of online professional learning, networking and sharing; for example, from September 2013 to February 2014, there was a per month average of 2,415 visits to the NING site by an average of 1,695 unique visitors. Relatedly, as well as sharing within and across schools and boards, TLLP teacher leaders now report contributing

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to a "larger educational community," which can include presentations at conferences, publications, and online contributions. The use of more traditional staff meetings, newsletters, modeling and mentoring as methods for sharing and developing professional learning are also identified. Benefits of sharing learning were considered to be predominantly improving knowledge and understanding (94% of sample of Final Report respondents) and, equally, both inspiring future change (30% of respondents) and impacting current change (30% of respondents). Encouragingly, at the formal end of their TLLP funding, the majority of TLLP teacher leaders (73% of sample Final Reports) reported that they planned to continue the innovations and implementation from their TLLP project over the longer-term.

Nevertheless, there remain challenges to advancing knowledge exchange through TLLP. Consistent with our previous research, challenges included: planning and allocating sufficient time and balancing workload; introduction of new technology; project scope being too large to manage and/or too small to effect anticipated change; gaining commitment and overcoming resistance; budget allocation and management; managing TLLP team dynamics; and logistical issues. However, an encouraging finding across our research is that TLLP teacher leaders generally find a way to face these challenges, and that the process of overcoming or navigating challenges contributed to their leadership learning, development

and skills. Furthermore, interestingly, the issue of managing TLLP team dynamics was less pronounced in recent cohorts than in our previous analyses. Perhaps a contributing factor has been increased attention in the TLLP *Leadership Skills for Classroom Teachers* training on project management, conflict management and leadership development. Indeed, the feedback about the provincial TLLP *Leadership Skills for Classroom Teachers* and *Sharing the Learning Summit* continues to be extremely positive. For example, 97% of participants at the 2013 *Sharing the Learning Summit* were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the Summit. Opportunities for networking with colleagues, learning about other TLLP projects and presenting their own TLLP project were considered to be particularly valuable.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The research team continues to be impressed by the ongoing development, present impact and future potential of TLLP for enabling experienced teachers to develop their practices, to lead the learning of other teachers, to support improvements in teaching and learning, and to innovate and contribute to improvements in knowledge, skills, practices and outcomes across the larger education community and beyond. The OTF and Ministry are to be highly commended for a continuing remarkable partnership to respect, advance and celebrate Ontario's teachers and teaching.

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