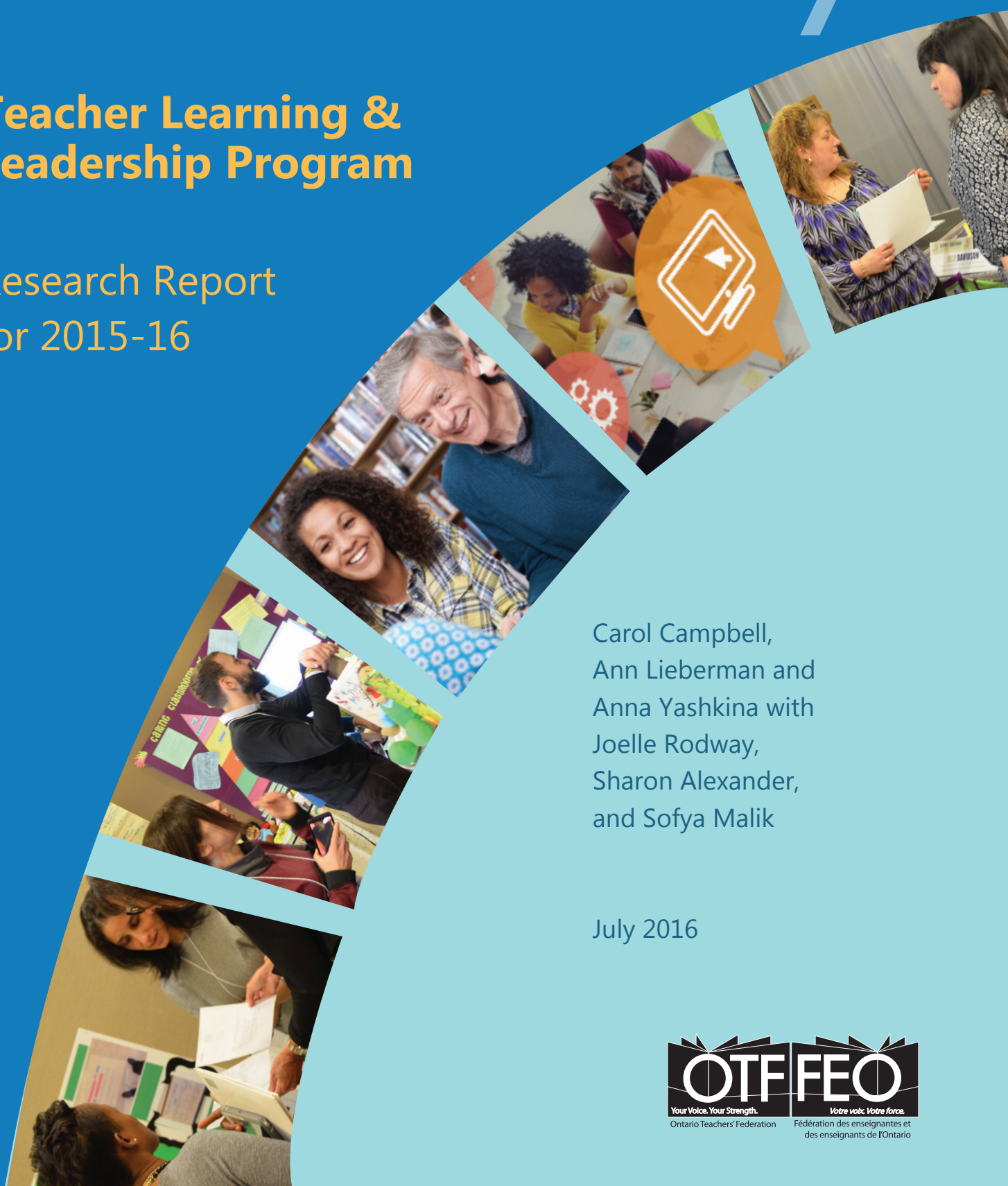


Executive summary

Teacher Learning & Leadership Program

Research Report
for 2015-16



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Overview of Teacher Learning and Leadership (TLLP) Program Research

Launched in 2007, the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP) is a joint initiative through partnership between the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) and the Ontario Ministry of Education with shared goals to:

- support experienced teachers to undertake self-directed advanced professional development;
- develop teachers' leadership skills for sharing their professional learning and exemplary practices; and
- facilitate knowledge exchange for spread and sustainability of effective and innovative practices.

Following completion of our initial research study of the TLLP (Campbell, Lieberman & Yashkina, 2013), we were invited by the Ministry to submit a proposal for a longitudinal study, beginning in 2013-14. We provided a report of findings and work on progress during 2013-14 (Campbell et al., 2014) and 2014-15 (Campbell et al., 2015). This report provides an update on research conducted and findings emerging during the 2015-16 year of research.

Research Questions

The research questions for the current study are:

1. What are the impacts of TLLP projects for: Teachers' professional learning, knowledge, skills and practices? Teachers' leadership skills and experiences? Other adults affected by the TLLP projects? 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?

Methods

The research methods conducted during 2015-16 were:

1. TLLP projects in cohorts 7-8: Application data and final reports

2. Mini surveys of TLLP teacher participants experiences during their TLLP
3. Vignettes written by TLLP Teacher Leaders
4. Observations of the Leadership Skills for Classroom Teachers training and Sharing the Learning Summit
5. Analysis of NING data for 2015-2016
6. Provincial Knowledge Exchange (PKE) logs and final reports
7. Case studies of TLLP/PKE projects
8. Case study of TeachOntario
9. Focus groups with provincial TLLP team in Ministry of Education and Ontario Teachers' Federation

Findings

2015-16 was a "milestone year" for the TLLP; in many respects, the TLLP become larger during 2015-16 in terms of scale, awareness and influence, and impact.

In our analyses of cohort information from TLLP proposal applications and Final Reports, we notice that in recent years, the number of funded projects increased significantly. There have been changes to the size/structure of a TLLP project team: the number of single-person projects has reduced (from being 17% of all projects in Cohorts 1-4 and 13% in Cohorts 5-6 to 5% in Cohorts 7-8); while the number of larger team projects (5-10 people) has significantly increased (from 10% in Cohorts 1-6 to 30% in Cohorts 7-8). Small team (2-4 people) projects, however, are still the most popular being 61% of all projects. The overall expenditure on TLLP projects has also increased greatly, with the Cohort 8 reporting the highest level of expenditure compared to previous cohorts. The average project budget has increased significantly as well (from \$14,412 in Cohorts 1-6 to \$21,224 in Cohorts 7-8). It is worth considering whether the increasing scale of TLLP teams and budgets is an intentional strategy or emergent and whether these increases are beneficial overall. We would support the need for flexibility in team size (including single person teams) and budgets; however, it may be worth considering the average anticipated budget and number of projects to be funded to support the continued spread of TLLP projects across the province.

Overall, differentiated instruction and technology have been the most prevalent areas of foci. Nevertheless, there have been some shifts over the cohorts. The number of projects on technology has increased greatly (by Cohorts 7 and 8, the focus on technology was three times the level in Cohorts 1 and 2). The numbers of Professional Learning Community (PLC) and Math Literacy projects have grown as well. Two new themes – Safe Schools and Equity – have been added to the application forms recently. During the analysis of the sample of Final Reports two new themes were identified: New Pedagogies and Community Engagement. We suggest adding these themes to the list of themes in the Final Report form.

As well as the increasing scale of TLLP projects, Ministry and OTF colleagues discussed the increasing influence of TLLP through linked initiatives, such as the Norway-Canada (NORCAN) partnership and TeachOntario, and importantly by more widely influencing the developing approach to collaborative professionalism and professional learning in Ontario. With regard to impact, we highlight some key findings linked to our research questions below.

What are the Impacts of TLLP Projects for Teachers' Professional Learning, Knowledge, Skills and Practices?

Consistent with our previous research (Campbell, Lieberman & Yashkina, 2013; Campbell et al., 2014), the top three professional learning goals for the TLLP projects in Cohorts 7 and 8 were to develop and improve understanding and knowledge (66% of projects), develop strategies or an approach (66%), and develop or improve skills or practices (59%). These goals were mostly focused on improving teaching and learning. By far, the most common professional learning activity was teacher collaborative learning. In 95% of projects in Cohorts 7 and 8, educators engaged in some kind of collaborative learning to acquire new knowledge or skills or to develop new strategies or resources (a higher proportion than the 85% of projects previously reported for Cohorts 5 and 6).

The outcomes of the program reported by TLLP participants for their professional learning were overwhelmingly positive. In 89% of the projects in Cohorts 7 and 8, TLLP project participants acquired new skills or improved their knowledge/understanding regarding some specific area of subject or curriculum

or a particular approach or strategy, such as use of math games, or regarding teaching and learning in general. The same percentage (89%) of projects reported improvement in participants' instructional and assessment practices.

What are the Impacts of TLLP Projects for Teachers' Leadership Skills and Experiences?

We continue to find evidence of the substantial benefits and impact of TLLP for developing teachers' leadership and experiences. Starting with Cohort 7, the TLLP Final Report form includes a separate section on Teacher Leadership. The most common areas of leadership growth (reported by more than three quarters of the projects) were related to managing a project, organizing and facilitating adult learning and knowledge sharing, collaborating and sharing leadership.

In an attempt to assess the growth of TLLP teachers' leadership over the 18 months of their project, we asked TLLP project leaders to complete a pre- and post-TLLP project mini-survey. The largest growth in teachers' reported leadership confidence level happened in the area of implementing practices from the TLLP project (the only area with a large effect size, $d=0.74$). Positive changes of medium degree were reported in the areas of sharing knowledge and practices with others, managing a TLLP project, leading professional learning, and being a teacher leader. Small but still significant changes were observed in the level of confidence in leading a TLLP team. We also invited TLLP teachers to write vignettes about their TLLP experiences and leadership growth. Thirty-nine vignettes have been provided to the research team. In all the vignettes, teachers were very articulate about what they were learning and the processes of learning leadership. The main themes were: learning to collaborate; building relationships with their colleagues; sharing the leadership with their team; learning to use technology as a teacher and the leadership needed to use it; implementing their professional development project over the 18 months that they had and, in the process, going public with their teaching as a model with their colleagues; and overcoming challenges encountered (primarily time).

What are the Impacts of TLLP Projects for Other Adults Affected by the TLLP Projects?

According to our analysis of a sample of Cohort 7 and 8 Final Reports, the main benefit of the TLLP for other adults is improved knowledge and understanding (reported by 68% of projects. Fifty-two percent of the Final Reports stated that educators (outside of the TLLP team) who received new learning were inspired to make a change in their practice (by trying out the newly learned strategies, tools, or shared resources) or in their professional learning experiences by taking more risks, engaging in collaborative learning, or submitting a TLLP proposal of their own. Forty-three percent of the projects reported those with whom they shared their learning already started implementing their strategies, tools, and/or resources. When comparing to Cohorts 5 and 6, fewer projects reported undertaking formal approaches to monitoring learning of others, while more projects seems to use less formal measures. The TLLP leadership team should continue emphasizing the importance of these measures via training sessions and reporting procedures.

What are the Impacts of TLLP Projects for Students' Engagement and Learning?

Despite the absence of the specific section on student learning in the Final Report form, 82% of projects in our sample of Cohorts 7 and 8 discussed the impact of the project on their students in at least one section of the report. Among those that did, improved learning skills and experiences and improved engagement, motivation, and attitude were most common. TLLP teacher leaders should continue receiving advice and support for developing appropriate methods for monitoring student learning and development, especially during the initial Leadership Skills for Classroom Teachers training session.

How is Learning Being Shared Beyond the TLLP Project Team?

Our analysis indicates that the vast majority of TLLP projects on Cohorts 7 and 8 shared learning and spread practice within their own schools (82%) and with other schools/educators in their school board (91%). There is a slight increase in the number of projects sharing their learning across schools, compared to previous years. The most common method of sharing was a workshop (utilized by 84% of projects on Cohorts 7 and 8). The number of projects sharing their learning and resources online increased

recently, with 73% of projects on Cohorts 7 and 8 reporting using one or more means of online sharing, compared with 55% in Cohorts 5 and 6.

TLLP participants appreciate opportunities within the overall TLLP structure to support sharing with other TLLP teachers and beyond. The Sharing the Learning Summit is highly valued. In fact, participants in the 2015-16 Summit reported the highest ever proportion of respondents to the evaluation forms being "highly satisfied" (82% of respondents in 2015-16 compared to 74% in 2014 and 73% in 2013). Overall, 98% of respondents reported being "highly satisfied" or "satisfied" with the Summit. No respondent reported being "not satisfied". These are excellent results and clearly indicate the high quality of the Summit and the positive experiences of participants involved.

The Mentoring Moments NING continues to be a source for TLLP teacher leaders to engage online. In 2015-16, there were increases in number of users to the site. At the end of this reporting period, the Mentoring Moments NING had 1,362 members, a 32% increase compared to the previous year. However, the number of page views per visit, page views per month and the length of time spent on the site during each visit decreased in 2015-16. TLLP groups continue to play a significant role in the sharing of TLLP learning as the number of groups increased by 32% in comparison to the previous year. That said, group membership and levels of activity varied greatly across the site. There has been a steady decline since the last reporting year in discussion forum and blog post activity. It appears as though many groups are using external sites for collaboration and knowledge sharing. The development of TeachOntario plus TLLP teacher leaders creating or participating in other online forums may have affected the levels of activity on the NING. It is worth considering in the longer term what the specific and unique role of the NING will be for the TLLP; it could continue provide a dedicated space for TLLP-specific sharing of artifacts and resources and a searchable site for information on all TLLP projects.

TeachOntario is an online platform, developed by TVO, to support sharing, collaboration, and knowledge exchange amongst educators across Ontario. From its very beginning, TeachOntario has drawn on TLLP teacher leaders to inform its development and content. The most visible platform for sharing the TLLP learning within EXPLORE is TeachOntario Talks, a series of publicly available, short articles that shine the spotlight on "exemplary

teaching and learning practices for the broader benefit of Ontario's students" (TVO, 2016). Since the beginning of the series, TLLP projects have been the subject of thirteen TeachOntario Talks. By the end of March 2016, the number of views per Talk ranges from 510 views to over 3000. TLLP educators are also visible within the community through posting blogs and leading webinars as part of the Professional Learning Series for which archived videos are made public through the Professional Learning Videos link in EXPLORE. There are more than half a dozen TLLP educators contributing blogs to the Teacher Blogs page and about a quarter of the Professional Learning Series videos are hosted by former or current TLLP project leaders. There is a dedicated space in the CREATE section of TeachOntario where TLLP groups can create a digital home for their projects. Over the time period of its inception through to the official launch of TeachOntario on March 31, 2016, there were twenty-four TLLP projects active within the community. All TLLP projects are tagged with *tlpcreate*, which allows users to search for this tag and locate these TLLP learning communities. Our social network analyses of the *tlpcreate* groups indicate that 145 people interacted at least once within one or more of the *tlpcreate* groups. In total, there were 264 ties recorded across the 24 TLLP groups. TeachOntario is facilitating access to new ideas and information; however, the development of stronger ties through increased engagement and participation by *tlpcreate* members is important to consider for achieving networks for constructing new knowledge or exchanging complex knowledge.

In our interviews with TLLP teachers, TeachOntario leaders, Ministry officials and OTF leaders, the response to TeachOntario was universally positive and popular. From a focus group with TLLP teachers, our findings highlight three key points: 1) the platform acts as a source of empowerment and encouragement to share, where the TLLP was often an entry point for its use, but they used the online platform in ways that extended beyond their TLLP projects; 2) teachers' use of TeachOntario provided a means to model professional learning to others; and, 3) TeachOntario provides an opportunity for continuous learning, building upon and extending the learning from within the TLLP.

The scaffolding and infrastructure to support TLLP teacher leaders develop their project management,

leadership and knowledge exchange is vital and both the in-person Training Session and Summit, as well as opportunities for online sharing and interaction, should be strongly encouraged and continued.

What Longer-Term Impacts of Participating in TLLP Projects Can Be Identified?

In our analyses of a sample of Cohort 7 and 8 projects; all of the projects in the sample planned to continue learning, working, and/or sharing in the area of their project. In 86% of the projects, innovations and learnings developed during the course of the project would continue to be incorporated into project participants' daily practices. In 55% of the projects, project leaders planned to continue learning about the area of their TLLP interest and/or continue developing strategies and resources for personal use and for sharing in person and online. TLLP teacher leaders of almost half (48%) of the projects in the sample stated they were going to continue collaborating/networking with their colleagues/other experts in the area around the issue/innovation. TLLP teacher leaders of about 30% of the projects did not have specific sharing plans but said that they were open to sharing their learning and/or were seeking sharing opportunities. Supporting TLLP teachers to consider ways to develop a future knowledge mobilization plan is an area worth further development.

One way of supporting longer-term impact is for TLLP projects, with the support of the school board, to apply to become a Provincial Knowledge Exchange (PKE) to support further sharing of professional learning across schools within a board or with other boards. Forty PKE projects have been approved and completed or are under way: 4 projects in 2012-2013, 11 projects in 2013-2014, 18 projects in 2014-2015, and 7 projects in 2015-2016. The most common level of sharing is with schools within the home school board. The most common method of sharing was a workshop; although for even deeper learning and more intense development, collaborative inquiry and learning were used as a method of sharing. In at least eight projects, such forms of collaboration as professional learning communities, communities of practice, study groups, planning committees were formed to analyze an issue/idea at hand, reflect on current practices, brainstorm solutions, and develop new strategies and resources, and/or plan together.

Across the PKE projects, and in three PKE case studies, we find a combination of professional learning and sharing activities where PKE leaders demonstrated successful practices/strategies, provided evidence (research results, videos) to support their points, made resources (e.g. lesson plans, assessments, materials to use in class, teacher toolkits, eBooks, instructional videos, suggested resources) available in print or online. According to the PKE logs and Final Reports, the project sharing activities resulted in more knowledgeable, skillful, motivated and confident educators. Eight projects reported changes in teaching practices as a result of participation in their PKE projects. In these projects, teachers had a chance to try new strategies or use new tools/resources in their classrooms and report back on successes and struggles. The changes in teaching translated into changes in student experiences; improved self-awareness and control, increased motivation and engagement, improved attitude, increased enrollment, improved sense of belonging and community, increase in student voice and choice, improved learning skills (collaboration, communication, sharing, problem-solving), better relationship with teachers.

Similarly, in our PKE case studies, we found evidence of benefits for both professionals' learning and students' learning. For example, in the Documenting Literacy and Learning in Kindergarten (DLLK) PKE, which developed from a TLLP project in St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Elementary school in Renfrew County Catholic District School Board (RCCDSB), reported benefits for teachers' and Early Childhood Educators' professional learning include: making public the knowledge and expertise of the individual participants; creating learning environments that openly encourage learning from each other rather than the 'expert' at the front of the room; making individual practice more visible among colleagues with invitations for feedback within a culture of trial and error; and extending the professional learning occurring within the PKE workshops to the broader context of the home schools, where participating educators modeled and coached their colleagues in incorporating technology into their classroom practice.

Likewise, in the Balanced Math (BM) program, originating in Fieldcrest Elementary School in Simcoe County District School Board, the PKE project team reported improved student engagement in math, strengthened differentiated instructional practice, greater confidence and capacity for teacher math instruction, and a wider integration of technology

in the classroom. By 2014-15, through the PKE and support of the school board, the BM Mentor PKE program had expanded to 18 schools and a new approach involving BM in kindergarten to grade one PKE involved 16 schools. Perhaps the most dramatic improvement in student achievement was demonstrated in the U.P. Math program at Oshawa's Monsignor Pereyma Catholic Secondary School in Durham Catholic District School Board. Prior to their TLLP project, in 2010, only 17% the school's students were meeting provincial standard in Grade 9 Applied Mathematics compared to 71 % meeting level 3 or 4 standards following program implementation.

To further support monitoring of impact of PKE projects, we suggest making changes to the Final Report form by requesting information on the nature and spread of PKE-related sharing activities that actually happened (not just planned ones) and by requesting more details on the impact of the project on project leaders/facilitators, educators, students, schools/board, and future plans.

Our evidence suggests that TLLP projects seek to sustain and further their learning and that PKE is one mechanism to support for sharing across schools and boards.

Final Remarks

In the words of TLLP participants, the TLLP continues to be "the greatest professional learning opportunity" for educators. It has "a tremendous impact" on its participants as educators, and provides them with "a very unique and educational experience" as leaders. It has also proved to effect students and schools in a positive way. The "buzz" TLLP participants create is "contagious" and spreads the knowledge, practices and the spirit of learning, collaborating and experimenting to support the development of educational knowledge, skills and practice. The partnership between the Ministry and OTF (and affiliates) continues to be vital to the ongoing implementation, spread and development of the TLLP. In 2015-16, the TLLP's impact grew both directly through TLLP projects, through connections to initiatives that engaged TLLP teacher leaders (including the PKE, NorCan, and TeachOntario) and, indirectly, through inspiring, modeling and informing the current emphasis on developing collaborative professionalism among and between all involved in the Ontario education system. We continue to be highly impressed with the findings from the TLLP

research and recommend the continued development of this important program which is supporting improvements in Ontario and becoming recognized internationally as a model for professional learning.

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