

KNOW HOW? SHOW HOW

EXPERIENCED TEACHERS SHARE BEST PRACTICES THROUGH ONTARIO PROGRAM

By Lindy Amato, Paul Anthony, and Jim Strachan

“Every day in classrooms, there are miracles happening. Absolute miracles. Teachers are doing fantastic things. And the teacher in the classroom next door has no idea about the miraculous things that the teacher next to him or her is doing. The teacher in the next school doesn’t know it, and the teacher in the next district certainly doesn’t know it. How do we take those miracles and share them?”

— *A teacher in the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program*

In 2006, the Ontario Ministry of Education partnered with the Ontario Teachers’ Federation to explore these questions:

- What would authentic professional learning look like for experienced teachers?
- How might experienced teachers be engaged and inspired to learn from and with each other?
- How could classroom practice become deprivatized and shared beyond the four walls of individual classrooms?
- How might this type of intentional sharing of knowledge and practice foster teacher leadership?

While the province introduced a New Teacher Induction Program, both the Ministry of Education and the Ontario Teachers’ Federation also wanted to address the professional learning needs of teachers beyond their first

few years in the classroom.

Some of these experienced teachers would pursue traditional formal leadership paths, such as becoming a principal, but many more teachers were already engaged in leadership within their classrooms, schools, or districts and/or online. These experienced teachers whose choice of career is the classroom were the inspiration for the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program.

Launched in 2007, the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program operates on the belief that classroom teachers know their learning needs and the needs of their students best. Additionally, the program assumes teachers have the greatest knowledge of how to build and foster multiple learning networks in order to share their expertise both within and beyond their schools.

Each year, the Ministry of Education provides funding for proposals from teacher-led teams seeking to examine,

learn, and share the evidence-based instructional practices they are engaging in with their students.

The Teacher Learning and Leadership Program allows experienced teachers to assume peer leadership roles in curriculum, instructional practice, and supporting other teachers. The three goals of the program are to:

- Support experienced teachers in undertaking innovative, self-chosen professional learning in areas that are meaningful to them.
- Foster teacher leadership.
- Facilitate the sharing of exemplary practices with others for the broader benefit of Ontario's students.

LEARNING CONNECTED TO PRACTICE

Andy Hargreaves, the Thomas More Brennan Chair in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College, spoke about the program at a Share the Learning Summit in November 2011.



Andy Hargreaves

“Most reform that comes from somewhere else really tries to push change through a system,” Hargreaves said. “It tries to push new strategies into the classroom, push teachers further forward, have them confront the strategies that may not be working and that they may need to change. We call these challenging conversations at the moment between principals and teachers.

“(The Teacher Learning and Leadership Program) takes a different point of view, which is really more about pulling change from people. And the way we pull change from our learners. So we talk about drawing things out of people rather than forcing things into people” (Hargreaves, 2011).

In the past, much of the professional learning for Ontario's teachers has consisted of a traditional, one-size-fits-all format where all teachers received the same required basic input and direction in an effort to ensure consistent implementation of specific initiatives or strategies.

The Teacher Learning and Leadership Program uses a different approach, recognizing that effective professional learning is not something that is “done” to teachers. The program provides funding and support for teachers to develop professional learning that is connected to classroom

SCOPE OF TEACHER LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

- In the 2013-14 school year, 110 projects are being implemented across Ontario.
- More than 600 projects have been funded since the program's inception in 2007.
- Typical projects involve the collaboration of two to five teachers and an average \$15,000 project budget.
- Frequent learning themes include: Differentiated instruction, literacy, integrating technology, student assessment, math literacy, students with special needs, gender-based learning, French (core & immersion), media literacy, and the arts.
- Many project teams share and document their learning via social media and Web 2.0 tools. Here are examples from past projects:
 - Tap Into Teen Minds: <http://tapintoteenminds.com>.
 - Inquiry-Based Learning: <http://inquiry-based.com>.
 - 21st-Century Poetry: www.tbcdsb.on.ca/projects/TLLP/Home.html.
- A searchable archive of all projects is available at: www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teacher/search.asp.

practice and student learning.

This approach aligns with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning and demonstrates what can be achieved when experienced classroom teachers are empowered to collaborate with colleagues to pursue authentic learning goals and then share their learning within their schools, school districts, and throughout the province.

For more information about the Teacher Learning and Leadership program, visit www.ehdu.gov.on.ca/eng/teacher/tllp.html.

EVIDENCE OF LEARNING

While the learning of the teacher leaders involved in these projects represents a tremendous reserve of educational knowledge, the leadership skills fostered in teacher participants are an even more powerful legacy. Listening, mentorship, collaboration, flexibility, project management, and attentiveness to diverse learning styles and learning needs are just some of the attributes of teacher leadership that participants develop, model, and share with their colleagues.

One participant notes a key benefit of the program: “Great teachers who might otherwise never have a chance to share their tremendous work get to take on a macro-level leadership role.”

In their report on the program, Campbell, Lieberman, & Yashkina (2013) write, “The evidence from our research and from the [Teacher Learning and Leadership Program] is clear: These teacher leaders will do amazing things; they will initiate, innovate, implement, and share a wide range of topics and activities which can develop professional learning, improve practice, and support student learning; they will experience success in tangible outcomes — such as changes in professional

practice for instruction and assessment — and also importantly in the sometimes immeasurable benefits of being empowered, enabled, and valued; they will navigate personal, interpersonal, and practical challenges as their leadership is tested and grows; they will learn how to collaborate and share to spread knowledge and sustain changes; and they will demonstrate the professional, educational, and financial value of self-directed, teacher-led innovative and effective practices.”

Building the relational trust essential to any learning relationship has been a key learning not only for participants but also for the Ministry of Education and the Ontario Teachers’ Federation. As learning partners in the program, the ministry and teacher federation have built a collaborative partnership based on the ability of both parties to listen and learn from each other, and more powerfully from the teacher leaders across Ontario.

The ministry and teacher federation hope to deepen their knowledge and understanding of teacher leadership by embarking on longitudinal research where participants will be studied over a period of years in an effort to determine the program’s long-term impact on instructional practice, learning, and leadership and how the sharing of their learning impacts colleagues within their school, across their districts, and throughout Ontario.

“So we talk about drawing things out of people ...”

— Hargreaves, 2011

A COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND THE TEACHER LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Traditional professional learning	Teacher Learning and Leadership Program
Outside-in reform.	Inside-out transformation.
Top-down planning.	Collegial involvement in planning.
System-centered.	Student-centered.
Goals for learning are determined by others.	Teachers determine their own learning goals.
Knowledge consumption by individuals.	Knowledge construction by collaborative teams.

REFERENCES

Campbell, C., Lieberman, A., & Yashkina A. (2013). *The Teacher Learning and Leadership Program: A research report to the Ontario Teachers’ Federation.* Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Ontario Teachers’ Federation.

Hargreaves, A. (2011, November). *Teacher leadership and educational change: The fourth way.* Available at www.otffeo.on.ca/en/learning/teacher-learning-and-leadership-program.

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ONTARIO AT A GLANCE

- Ontario is Canada’s most populous province with 12.8 million residents.
- More than 2 million students attend 5,000 schools in its publicly funded education system.
- The system has 72 school boards that represent four sectors: 31 English public, 29 English Catholic, four French public, and eight French Catholic.
- In addition, there are 11 school authorities, consisting of four geographically isolated boards, six hospital-based school authorities, and the Provincial Schools Authority.
- Boards are spread across both urban and rural areas, with schools ranging in size from small (less than 100 students) to very large (more than 2,000 students).
- The Ontario Teachers’ Federation represents all teachers (about 150,000) in Ontario’s publicly funded schools. The teacher federation has four affiliate organizations.
- 27% of Ontario’s school-age children are born outside of Canada, while 20% identify themselves as members of a visible minority.

WALKING THROUGH A TEACHER LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAM PROJECT

Awareness

September to October 2013

- School board and teacher federation promote the program to experienced teachers.

Application and review process

November 2013 to February 2014

- Interested teachers submit application to the director of education of their school board.
- Board-level program committee reviews applications and submits two recommended proposals to the Ministry of Education.
- Committee comprised of ministry and teacher federation staff reviews submitted projects and notifies selected applicants.

Orientation and professional learning for teams

May 2014

- Teacher federation and ministry implement professional learning to assist new project teams in developing leadership, sharing, and project management skills.

Project implementation

September 2014 to June 2015

- Teacher-led project teams implement program learning and sharing activities at the school and district level.
- Ministry and teacher federation staff provide ongoing communication and support for implementation.
- Participants engage in an online community of practice: <http://mentoringmoments.ning.com>.

Reporting

June to July 2015

- Teacher participants submit final report to their school board.
- School board submits the teacher participant final report and board final report to Ministry of Education.

Sharing and celebration for program teams

November 2015

- Teacher federation and ministry hold Sharing the Learning Summit where project teams celebrate and share their learning with colleagues from across the province.

Extended sharing and learning across Ontario

November 2015 and beyond

- Previous project teams may continue to share their learning across their districts and the province with funds provided by the ministry.
- Through the Provincial Knowledge Exchange, school boards can apply for ministry funding to access innovative and effective practices from participating teacher leaders across Ontario.