



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teacher Learning &  
Leadership Program

Final Research Report  
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Carol Campbell, Ann Lieberman and  
Anna Yashkina with Sharon Alexander  
and Joelle Rodway

# Introduction

Launched in 2007, the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP) is a joint initiative developed in partnership between the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) and the Ontario Ministry of Education (Ministry) to support experienced teachers' self-directed professional learning, leadership skills and knowledge exchange. In 2012, we were invited to conduct a research study about the value of the TLLP for teachers, what we could learn about professional development organized in the TLLP way, to what extent the three overarching goals of the TLLP were being realized, and what lessons could be learned so far (Campbell, Lieberman & Yashkina, 2013). We were then invited to conduct a five-year longitudinal study to provide annual reports on the impact and progress of the TLLP (Campbell et al., 2014, 2015, 2016 & 2017) and the longer-term impact and sustainability of the TLLP over time. This is our Final Report of findings drawing from all six years of research.

## Origins and Establishment of the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP)

In 2005, the government established a Working Table on Teacher Development to bring together education partners – including OTF and affiliates with the Ministry – to provide recommendations on teachers' professional development. Having started with a focus on new teachers, the second phase of the Working Table's focus turned to experienced teachers. Going forward, five characteristics were recommended for the design and provision of professional learning for Ontario's teachers: coherent; attentive to adult learning styles; goal-oriented; sustainable; and evidence-informed. The Working Table recommended:

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 in 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. (Working Table on Teacher Development, 2007, p.6).

The stage was set for the development of the TLLP.

## Implementation and Development of TLLP

The TLLP began in 2007 as a joint initiative between the Ministry and OTF 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.

In response to an annual call for TLLP proposals from the Ministry and OTF, experienced teachers can submit a TLLP project proposal. The proposal is to include a description of the proposed project, how the project will contribute to student learning and Ontario's provincial education priorities, and a rationale for the proposed TLLP team's professional learning objectives. A plan including specific goals, activities, measures and budget for each of the teachers' professional learning and for sharing is to be submitted. School district committees review applications and submit their priority choices to a provincial committee comprised of teacher union and government representatives, who select projects for funding.

Successful teacher applicants receive training, support, and funding for their TLLP projects. Over the years, TLLP projects have varied considerably in size (from a team of 1 to over 20) and budget (from under \$5,000 to over \$50,000); however, the average TLLP project has a core team of 2-4 members and budget of about \$20,000. In the May prior to the school year in which they will embark on their TLLP projects, teacher leaders attend a *Leadership Skills for Classroom Teachers* training to support their preparation to take on the professional



learning, project management and leadership expectations of a TLLP. TLLP teacher leaders are expected to develop and implement their projects throughout the following school year. Participants become part of an online community and, until recently, were required to share at least two artifacts from their TLLP on a dedicated online platform called the Mentoring Moments NING. More recently a further online platform, *TeachOntario*, has been created and is becoming a main source for TLLP teachers to network and share resources online. In the November of the next school year, following the completion of the TLLP project, TLLP teams attend the *Sharing the Learning Summit* to showcase completed projects and to further spread their practices. Typically, a TLLP project spans 18 months from initial training, through implementation and then the culminating Summit. TLLP project leaders are required to submit a Final Report, including information regarding project goals and successes, professional learning, project sharing, challenges and projected learning and impact beyond the TLLP funding. In addition, to further spread learning from completed TLLP projects, school districts can apply for Provincial Knowledge Exchange (PKE) funding for release time, resources and travel to enable former TLLP teacher leaders to share their knowledge and practices with other schools and school districts across Ontario (and potentially beyond). The PKE project budgets range from \$5,500 to \$60,000 per PKE. Ontario's involvement in the Norway-Canada (NORCAN) partnership with Alberta and Norway, focused on advancing improvements in mathematics teaching and learning, was also a direct result of the successes of the TLLP and provided another mechanism for sharing educators' professional learning, knowledge and practices to support student outcomes.

## Findings

In this section, we summarize the main findings of the three overarching research questions for the TLLP longitudinal research study:

- What are the impacts of TLLP projects for teachers, other adults affected, and students?
- How is learning being shared beyond the TLLP project team? and
- What longer-term impacts of participating in TLLP projects can be identified?



## Impact of TLLP for teachers, other adults and students involved



By providing the conditions (funding, in person training, and ongoing support) for self-selected and self-directed professional development, the TLLP facilitates active, collaborative learning that is embedded in teachers' work, informed by evidence and provides opportunities for authentic leadership experiences. TLLP supports and values teacher voice and choice in their professional learning. The TLLP professional learning and leadership experiences, our research demonstrates, have significant benefits for TLLP participants' professional growth as learners, educators, and leaders.

In our survey of TLLP teacher leaders for TLLP Cohorts 1 – 7, all 243 survey respondents reported improvements in their knowledge, skills, and/or practice as a result of TLLP-related professional learning activities that they developed and engaged in. In Cohorts 1-4, 70% reported benefits of new knowledge and improved understanding compared to 95% of projects in Cohort 9. In Cohorts 1-4, 58% reported benefits of changes in instructional practices compared to 90% of projects in Cohort 9. These are highly encouraging findings concerning the increasing impacts for participating teachers' knowledge, understanding and practices.

The majority of TLLP teacher leaders also report growth in their leadership confidence and improvements in their leadership skills. All (100%) participants in our sample of Cohort 9 projects reported improvements in their leadership: the majority reported leadership growth in collaborative problem solving (100%), communication (90%), facilitating sharing of learning (85%), collaborative decision making (80%), presentation skills (70%), team building (70%), empowering others (65%), facilitating adult learning (65%), organizational skills (65%), administrative skills (60%), mentorship (60%), building trust (55%), research skills (55%), and managing the change process (50%). Therefore, as their projects progress, TLLP participants become more confident in implementing new practices, sharing knowledge and practices, leading their own and others' professional learning, leading a team, and being a teacher leader.

The impact of a TLLP project extends beyond the immediate TLLP team also. The main benefit of the TLLP for other educators was improved knowledge and understanding, which was reported in over 65% of the projects in Cohorts 5-9. The majority (55%) of the final reports in the Cohort 9 sample stated that educators (outside of the TLLP team) who received new learning were inspired to make a change in their practice,

for example by trying out the newly learned strategies, tools, or shared resources. A teacher interviewee explained:

Our TLLP project dramatically increased the level of collaboration among the intermediate and senior Math teachers within our family of schools. By joining one another in a team-teaching environment on a regular basis, we developed a level of professional ease rarely experienced across panels. We coached one another and developed deeper professional relationships rooted in trust and a common goal to improve our teaching practice.

Relatedly, TLLP projects have a positive effect on students' engagement, attitude, and learning experiences. The majority of survey respondents reported their project's positive impact on improved student engagement and attitude (73%) and for students' learning experiences (68%). In our PKE case study of Ultimate Potential (UP) Math at Monsignor John Pereyma Catholic Secondary School in Durham Catholic District School Board, noteworthy gains in student achievement were made by developing students' confidence and learning in mathematics (from 17% of students achieving the provincial standard or above in Grade 9 Applied Math to 71% of students following the TLLP project).

Some TLLP projects help develop better connections with parents and local communities as well. For example, in the case study of the TLLP/PKE project on Documenting Literacy and Learning in Kindergarten in Renfrew County Catholic District School Board, parents were frequently identified as beneficiaries of teachers' use of learning technologies to document student learning.

## How learning is being shared beyond the TLLP team



The intended audience for knowledge exchange and sharing of learning is mainly teachers. However, the sharing does go to a wider student, professional, parental and public community.

The majority of TLLP projects share learning primarily within their school and/or school board. Wider sharing across groups of schools, other school boards, the local community, at the provincial level, and in some cases, nationally and internationally is also a frequent occurrence. The main approaches to sharing involve both in-person collaboration and online mechanisms to share resources to support changes in knowledge, understanding and practice; the combination of both in-person and online is powerful rather than one or other in isolation. Through the TLLP sharing of learning and collaborative knowledge exchange, de-privatization of teachers' practices is happening as they 'open up their classroom

doors'. The TLLP is also contributing to developing cultures of collaboration within and across schools and, in some cases, board-wide policies and practices; for example, the Balanced Math PKE case study in Simcoe County District School Board expanded to become a source of professional learning for the Board's Math strategy. Support for knowledge exchange within the TLLP community itself includes the vital role of the TLLP infrastructure – the NING and *TeachOntario* for online sharing, the *Sharing the Learning Summit* for in-person sharing. Support for knowledge exchange with a wider professional and public community includes the important combination of in-person and online sharing of practical resources that can be used to support knowledge, understanding and changes in practice.

The main challenge experienced is time. Other priority challenges can be developing communication, ownership and relationships with people affected by the TLLP and challenges of accessing or using technology integrated with the TLLP projects. The *Leadership Skills for Classroom Teachers* training is helpful in supporting TLLP teacher leaders to anticipate and plan for challenges. For the most part, TLLP teacher leaders successfully navigate challenges – and grow as leaders in the process. Schools, boards, colleagues, community members, the Ministry and OTF also provide additional supports to help address challenges.

The TLLP is a unique and powerful approach to knowledge exchange and sharing learning. This uniqueness comes from the powerful combination of a government, teacher federation and teacher partnership provincially, the provincial allocation of funding, training and supports for teacher-led innovation projects, and the TLLP enabling and empowering experienced teachers to lead their own and their peers' professional learning collaboratively.

## The longer-term impacts of participating in a TLLP project



The vast majority of TLLP teacher leaders report longer-term sustainability of impacts from participating in a TLLP project. In our analyses of a sample of Cohort 9 projects, all (100%) reported continuing implementation of the innovative practice from their TLLP. Respondents to our survey of Cohort 1-7 TLLP teacher leaders reported sustainability over time of professional learning from the TLLP (75%), of collaborating with colleagues to develop and/or improve teaching practices (70%), and/or sustainability of continuing to share learning, strategies and tools (66%).



The longer-term impact of TLLPs is enhanced also by the growth and influence of the TLLP alumni. Former TLLP teacher leaders frequently become ‘go to’ people for expertise locally, provincially and even internationally. TLLP alumni are also increasingly supporting new cohorts of TLLP teachers by providing input to the TLLP training events. Although the TLLP is not designed as a formal leadership career development program, TLLP teacher leaders benefit from experiencing leadership and gaining recognition for their knowledge, skills and practices. TLLP teacher leaders often further their career advancement following their TLLP experience. A major longer-term impact of the TLLP is that the TLLP ‘way of doing things’ has influenced education policies, initiatives and professional learning in Ontario, for example the development of Policy and Program Memorandum 159 Collaborative Professionalism. The TLLP is also being increasingly recognized internationally as a successful approach to teacher development.

## Conclusions: ten essential lessons from and for the TLLP

We conclude with ten lessons and suggestions for the future about the importance of:

### 1. The Ministry-Teacher Federations’ partnership

The partnership between the Ministry, OTF, and its affiliates during all the stages of the TLLP development and implementation is essential to the program’s success. The fact that the partnership persisted throughout the years is important and impressive. The continuous dialogue and further development of the partnership are vital to the future success of the program. The OTF and Ministry’s commitment to improvement is what makes the program current and successful year after year. The TLLP provincial team seeks teachers’ feedback and researchers’ recommendations and responds to these by adjusting the program according to the current needs, interests, and vision. The future success of the program depends on the TLLP’s partners’ continuous willingness to listen to and serve its participants. We highly commend the Ministry and OTF and affiliates for their continued commitment and evidenced action to provide continuous improvement.

### 2. The funding for teacher-led projects

Unlike most professional development initiatives, the TLLP provides competitive funding to teachers to lead projects on areas of identified need for professional learning and to benefit students’ learning. The evidence indicates that the TLLP provides excellent value for money in effective professional learning with sustained impact.

### 3. The TLLP’s principles

By giving teachers choice and voice in their professional learning, the TLLP supports authentic, collaborative, job-embedded learning, which leads to benefits for the program participants, their students, colleagues, schools, and communities. By encouraging de-privatization of practice and sharing of learning, the program helps spread innovation and best practices across Ontario and beyond. These principles are the essence of the TLLP that should be carried on.

### 4. The TLLP’s infrastructure for a support system

All aspects of the TLLP’s infrastructure provide essential support for the success of the TLLP – the initial in person training event, “in-between” one-on-one consultation and support, online platforms through the NING and now *TeachOntario*, support from the growing TLLP community, and the culminating Summit. These enable TLLP participants to learn and experiment knowing that their efforts are valued and supported. We suggest all aspects of the TLLP infrastructure of support continue to be provided.

### 5. The TLLP’s effective approaches to professional learning and knowledge exchange

TLLP projects vary in their goals and the approaches they use to achieve these goals. However, the combination of collaborative professional learning in person and online to co-create, share and apply practical resources is particularly powerful. Continuing to support TLLP projects to monitor their own processes and outcomes, as well as to conduct external research on effective practices and impact is essential.

### 6. The TLLP’s spread and sustainability

The TLLP changes the way teachers think, learn, teach, and lead. The program has been, and should continue, promoting further learning and sharing via: 1) holding the culminating sharing summit, which celebrates the participants’ accomplishments and also encourages them and shows how to continue sharing; 2) offering PKE grants to school boards interested in implementing TLLP projects on a larger scale; and 3) further developing the online learning community on *TeachOntario*, including developing an easily searchable database of past TLLP projects and their resources for use by other educators.

### 7. The expanding TLLP community

Involving TLLP alumni in the TLLP participants’ training, providing opportunities for the current participants to connect during the events, and launching *TeachOntario*

are significant steps to supporting and growing the TLLP community. The TLLP community offers a lot of potential for even further development; the community can be a source of additional support for TLLP participants (e.g. through more formal mentorship opportunities or less formal online discussions around similar challenges and interests). They can also provide new learning and sharing opportunities by connecting TLLP projects with similar topics and/or goals (a searchable database of all TLLP projects and contacts might be helpful here). Further development of the *TeachOntario* platform as a networking tool and a support tool is also recommended.

## 8. The further engagement of board and school leaders

Successful teacher professional learning and development requires involvement and support from board and school leaders as well. The TLLP has been engaging school and particularly board leaders by educating them about the program, engaging boards in the TLLP proposal selection process, and providing funding to the boards' PKE projects. Despite these efforts, some TLLP participants still experienced challenges associated with board and school leader support. We suggest the OTF and Ministry give further consideration to the ways to communicate with and engage board and school administrators.

## 9. The TLLP as a unique approach to teachers' professional learning

Teachers' professional learning and leadership of, by and for teachers requires teacher choice and voice in and through a wider range of professional learning opportunities. There is no one size fits all, even if modeled on the highly successful TLLP approach to professional learning. The TLLP provides one important approach to teacher-led learning alongside other teacher, school, and system professional learning opportunities. The spread of the TLLP principles and way of working are impactful and important; however, it is important to continue to support the TLLP as a unique and innovative approach that is distinctively focused on teacher-led self and peer learning.

## 10. The TLLP story and evidence

Alongside the important government, federation and teacher partnership has been the integral role of a research partnership to gather, analyze and report findings of the implementation, impact, successes and challenges associated with the TLLP. We commend the OTF and Ministry for acting on all recommendations arising from the research to date. The research has also contributed to telling the 'TLLP story' within and beyond Ontario. As the current research study concludes with this Final Report, we recommend further research is commissioned to continue to inform the development of the TLLP and to ensure evidence of effectiveness is considered.

## Concluding Remarks

Now in its 12th Cohort, the TLLP has developed into a highly effective and impactful program for supporting teachers' development, other adults affected, and for students' learning and growth also. We began our research on the TLLP in 2012. In our initial study, we began by asking:



If experienced teachers were supported to be leaders of learning – their own learning, the professional learning of other teachers, and their students' learning – what would these teacher leaders do and what would be the challenges and benefits? (Campbell, Lieberman & Yashkina, 2013, p. 1).

And we concluded from that study:

The evidence is clear: these teacher leaders will do amazing things; they will initiate, innovate, implement and share a wide range of projects which can develop collaborative 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 about student learning and sustain improvements in practices; and they will demonstrate the professional, educational and financial value of self-directed, teacher-led innovative and effective practices. We are struck by how the values of respectful relationships, partnership and collaboration underpin all aspects of the TLLP and how the work at all levels (teachers, projects, OTF and Ministry) demonstrates learning and leadership.

Our overall conclusion is to continue this outstanding way of leveraging and developing professional learning for experienced teachers. (Campbell, Lieberman & Yashkina, 2013, p. 4).

Now, after five further years of longitudinal research, we have further evidence of the continuous improvement of the TLLP design and implementation by the provincial partners, the benefits and impacts of TLLP projects for teachers, a wider network of adults engaged with the TLLP learning and for students' engagement, learning and development. The spread and scale of impact of the TLLP has grown extensively. Overall, from reviewing findings from all six years of our research, the evidence is even stronger and clearer about the power and

benefits of the TLLP. We conclude again that the TLLP is an outstanding way of leveraging and developing professional learning for experienced teachers. The goals originally established for the TLLP have been surpassed and thousands of teachers – and their colleagues, students and communities – have benefited. We strongly recommend that the TLLP, as currently developed and implemented, should continue.

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**Ontario Teachers' Federation**  
**Fédération des enseignantes et**  
**des enseignants de l'Ontario**

Suite 100, 10 Alcorn Avenue  
Toronto, ON M4V 3A9

416.966.3424, 1.800.268.7061  
FAX 416.966.5450

[www.otffeo.on.ca](http://www.otffeo.on.ca)