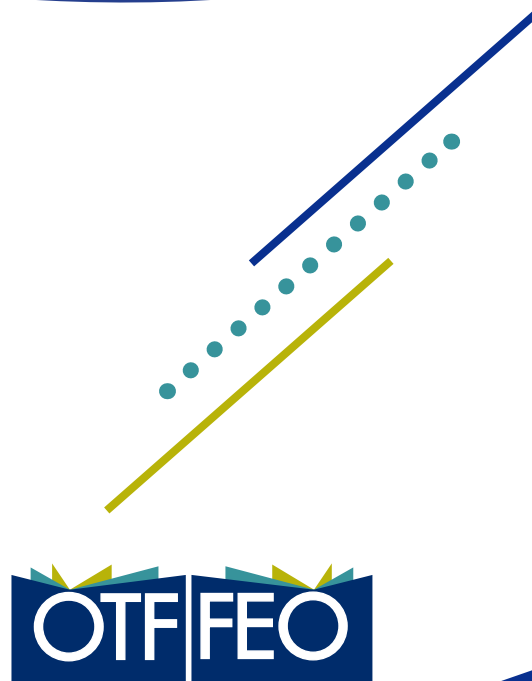


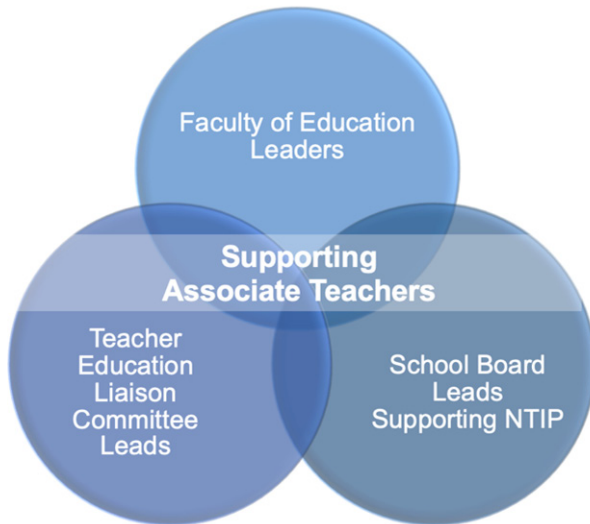
**Enhancing  
Collaboration  
in Support of  
Associate  
Teachers**



October 2023

# Enhancing Collaboration in Support of Associate Teachers

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*What if faculties of education, teacher federations and school boards intentionally collaborated to provide a menu of supports for associate teachers?*

The Ontario Teachers' Federation has long recognized the important role associate teachers (ATs) play in the professional learning and growth of teacher candidates. They serve as first mentors to our newest teachers providing ongoing consulting, collaborating and coaching support during and often well beyond the practicum placement. The importance of associate teachers as first mentors has been recognized by their inclusion as eligible for mentoring support in Ontario's [New Teacher Induction Program \(NTIP\)](#).

In 2022, OTF reached out to the faculties of education at Western and Lakehead universities, inviting them to engage in a collaborative learning partnership with the Federation and local school boards to explore ways of enhancing supports for ATs. The work with Western began in the spring of 2022 and with Lakehead in the fall of that year.

The logic model below reflects our theory of action and long-term goals as we embarked along our collaborative learning journey in partnership with both faculties of education to support associate teachers.

## Enhancing Collaboration in Support of Associate Teachers – Logic Model

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If,

- Faculties of education, teacher federations and school boards intentionally collaborate to provide a menu of supports for associate teachers

Then,

- The confidence, efficacy, instructional practice and commitment to ongoing learning of associate teachers will be enhanced; as will the professional learning and growth of teacher candidates during the practicum

And,

- More teachers will want to become associate teachers
  - Teacher candidates will experience increased coherence along a continuum of professional learning and growth as they enter the profession (Initial Teacher Education, New Teacher Induction Program)
  - Student learning and well-being will be supported
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This report is intended to provide a summary of our engagement and learning to date and features the reflections of faculty, federation and board partners. We recognize that every faculty of education faces unique circumstances and challenges but are hopeful some of these approaches and promising practices could be adopted and adapted to provide collaborative support for associate teachers across Ontario.

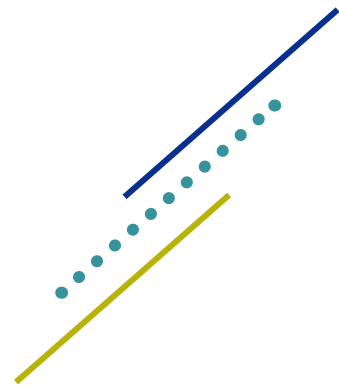
## GETTING STARTED

Our work began at both faculties by convening a Supporting Associate Teachers working group composed of:

- Teacher Education Liaison Committee (TELC) Teacher Federation Representatives
- School Board Leaders (NTIP Leads)
- Faculty of Education Leaders

At our first meeting we engaged in an [appreciative inquiry](#) about each person's experiences supporting associate teachers.

What is powerful about this approach is appreciative inquiry always begins by examining what is working well in our current practice (themes of success). Many of these themes can then be applied as actual strategies to collaboratively address specific challenges and issues. Appendix A contains full descriptions of the themes of success created by each working group.



What's working well?  
(themes of success)



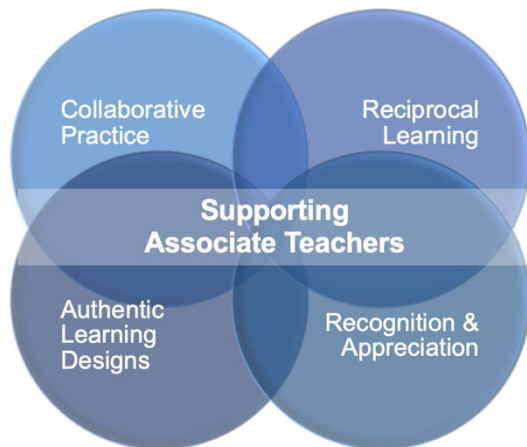
What's not working well?  
(stones in your shoe)



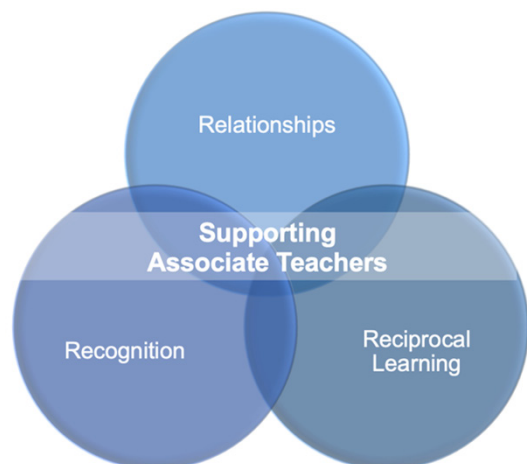
What are our next steps?  
(collaborative strategy harvest of ideas)

## Supporting Associate Teachers – Themes of Success

Western (March 25, 2022)



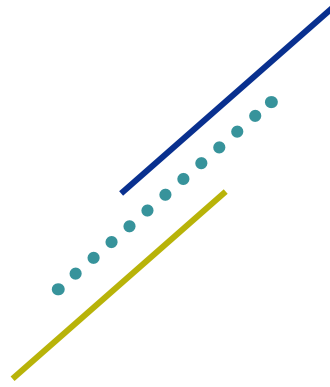
Lakehead (Sept 15, 2022)



Subsequent to our initial appreciative inquiry, both Western and Lakehead working groups met approximately every 4 – 6 weeks to continue to think together and to collaboratively construct a menu of supports for associate teachers.

## LEARNING DESIGNS AT A GLANCE

Below is a brief synopsis of ideas developed and implemented to date by the Supporting Associate Teachers working groups at each faculty. Additionally, we've included initial plans for the coming 2023-24 school year.



### Fall Celebration of Associate Teachers (Nov 2022)

Associate Teachers were welcomed to the newly opened Wampum Learning Lodge where they received generous gift bags, a tour of the site, authentic Indigenous food and had an opportunity to provide input to the faculty about how they might be best supported in their work. For the working group, the event highlighted the importance of relationships and power of face-to-face gatherings to strengthen connection and community.

### Associate Teacher Recognition (May 2023)

The theme of associate teaching as learning was shared in inspirational presentations from faculty members and associate teachers themselves. Individual associate teachers were honored with awards and using dotmocracy all associate teachers were able to provide input to the faculty in order to inform programming and supports for 2023-24. An online participation option enabled associate teachers from beyond the immediate London area to virtually attend. Following the event, an increase in interest in serving as an associate teacher was noted both in existing schools and in new schools coming forward.

### Next Steps for the 2023-24 School Year

- At the Spring 2023 event the idea of Communities of Practice for associate teachers was introduced
- In addition to supporting the professional learning and growth of associate teachers, these communities will provide input into the program and practicum at Western
- Each community will feature a specific area of focus and have “champions” or leads for each group
- Participation will be invitational, based on personal and professional interests
- Cross-pollination of these communities with all partners (Faculty, Associate Teachers, Teacher-Candidates, TELC / Federations, Board Leaders) will serve to strengthen and deepen opportunities for reciprocal learning



## Learning With and From Associate Teachers

At the heart of the conversations of the working group was thinking together about how the expertise of associate teachers can inform the initial teacher education program at Lakehead. Foundational aspects of this approach include:

- Supporting the work of a cadre of associate teachers at the school and/or board level through time and administrative support
- Developing mentorship opportunities
- Conducting action research into the skills and expectations the role requires
- Moving away from a deficit model of associate teachers professional learning
- Recognizing that the work of associate teachers is integral to assisting the transition from teacher candidate to teacher, and hence a crucial link in inducting teacher candidates into our profession

## Building Relationships

Relationships are the foundation of the collaborative work the faculty is engaged in. In Spring of 2023, Lakehead's Orillia Campus hosted a breakfast event to help in re-connecting with their associate teachers. Additionally, faculty leaders from the Thunder Bay campus visited several local schools in Lakehead DSB and Thunder Bay Catholic to engage in conversations with associate teachers and teacher candidates. The faculty also collaborates with school boards across the region via continued meetings with Northern Ontario Education Leaders (NOEL).

## Next Steps for the 2023 – 2024 School Year

- Host AT appreciation events this fall
- Take fall and spring “road trips” to visit area school boards and meet Principals, Department Heads, NTIP Coordinators, Directors and Associate Teachers
- Enhance communication by creating a “one stop shop” site for associate teachers – Associate Teachers Information Centre (ATIC)
- Include AT Representation on TELCs, Faculty Council Committees, Program reviews (esp. practicum)
- Work with associate teachers and school boards to identify experienced ATs who can act as mentors to new and potential ATs, and provide the time to undertake that work
  - Utilize mentoring materials from AQ on Leadership, NTIP
  - Pay particular attention to mentoring needs for First Nations community-based ATs, Language teachers, especially the development of language skills

## OUTCOMES

The outcomes of this collaboration to support associate teachers have far exceeded our expectations and are summarized below along with reflections from the Supporting Associate Teachers working group members. While there have been many positive outcomes of the work, participants have highlighted two major ones that have resonated deeply:

### 1. Heightened attention to the role and importance of associate teachers

The collaboration at both faculties has served to elevate and celebrate the role of associate teachers and also provide ATs with tangible supports and opportunities to build relationships with the faculty, TELC and board partners. Our work has shown us that if ATs feel heard and supported, they will want to continue to learn and grow in their role and also act as ambassadors with their colleagues who may be considering becoming an associate teacher.

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*It is so important for ATs to feel seen and recognized and I believe our collective efforts really contributed to this. Further, by incorporating consultation into our events, we were able to ensure ATs felt that their voices were valued and heard and then we were able to take their feedback and start putting it into practice in what supports we offer, and where we need to focus moving forward.*

**Clare Tattersall**

Manager, Teacher Education, Faculty of Education – Western

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*A very positive impact is the increased presence of Faculty, especially the Dean and Undergraduate Chair, in schools and in more direct contact with potential associate teachers. Teachers can easily come to believe that the Faculty of Education is out of touch with their day-to-day experiences and having those in high positions of authority make a direct connection is very validating for associate teachers.*

**Matthew Roy**  
TELC – Lakehead

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*The energy and enthusiasm witnessed at the events we have held this year signals that we have craved this time together. We have grown the number of Associate Teachers working with us, and found some creative new ways to bring their voices into our course planning discussions to make more seamless transitions for our Teacher Candidates. They are integral to the success of our program.*

**Dr. Kathryn Hibbert, PhD**

Distinguished University Professor and Associate Dean,  
Teacher Education – Western

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*We have created clearer, consistent communication with our ATs and I have done more school visits (locally) during placements, to say hi and thanks to ATs*

**Donald Kerr, PhD**

Associate Professor and Chair Undergraduate  
Studies in Education – Lakehead

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*I learned that the Faculty at Western values Associate Teachers and says that “without Associate Teachers there would not be a program”...this acknowledgement is something that most classroom teachers do not know. If they did find out how important and integral they are then I am sure more teachers would sign up to be an Associate Teacher. Being an Associate Teacher has a direct impact on the quality of teachers that enter our profession.*

*Thank you for involving a classroom teacher in this group...especially in Elementary. I feel that because our work was directly related to the classroom it was nice to add my voice. This group was well worth it!*

**Charlotte Devine-Cookson**  
TELC – Western

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## 2. Development of relationships characterized by trust, collaboration and reciprocal learning across roles

The working group meetings with faculty, school board and federation leaders created opportunities for all participants to think together about enhancing supports for associate teachers. As the professional collaboration deepened so did the understanding of, and appreciation for, the personal and professional attributes each member brings to our shared work. Many of our TELC leaders brought direct experience as an associate teacher themselves and board NTIP leaders shared thinking around the continuum of learning for both new teachers and their many mentors. These relationships, built in an atmosphere of openness and trust now extend well beyond the scope of our associate teacher work.

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*There are a couple of things. First, sharing gratitude is huge. It lifts and heals. I believe that was the primary outcome. Second, we solidified relationships. Finally, and sometimes forgotten, internally, it helped us focus on the centrality of these relationships. Not that my team was not aware and grateful. Rather, it invited us to be deliberate and that's significant.*

**Donna Kotsopoulos, Ph.D.**

Dean & Professor, Faculty of Education – Western

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*I'd like to gain an understanding of how NTIP can support associate teachers. I would like for us to explore this avenue further.*

**Corinne Scarfo**

TELC – Lakehead

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*I believe that the Supporting Associate Teacher Working Group has had some incredibly positive benefits for both the people who have been chosen to sit on the committee as well as for the Associate Teachers that we are supporting.*

*The opportunity to get to know various people/partners in education from UWO, our union partners, other boards, and not only think about how we support our Associate Teachers, but also connecting us so that we can network around various other queries that we might be facing in education.*

**Ken Overeem**

System Principal – System Staff Development –  
Thames Valley District School Board

*The group has been helpful in developing dialogue between my department and the undergrad dept in terms of the possibility of offering AQ discounts to teachers. It has also facilitated some dialogue with school board partners about Teacher Leadership AQs.*

**Kevin Dempsey, BA, B.Ed., M.Ed.**

Director of Professional Development in Education – Lakehead

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*Whereas before I felt my role of supporting associate teachers was really 'my role', it now has a much more collaborative feeling to it. Many of the discussions, ideas, activities, and beliefs shared in the working group were in one way or another 'in my head' or in my 'plans', but the working group has created a real sense of collaborative effort and common goals.*

**Joanne Lombardi, M.Ed.**

Practicum and Community Engagement Coordinator,  
Faculty of Education – Western

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*This project has been critical in focussing on the relationships that need to be developed in order to support teacher candidates.*

*These relationships are institutional, between faculties, schools and boards, ministries and accrediting bodies. The relationships are also deeply personal between instructors, teacher candidates, faculty administrators, associate teachers and school and board administrators.*

*And underpinning all of this needs to be a sense of trust - in both the people and institutions we work with every day.*

*And the only way trust can be cultivated is to have and understand the shared values of education as a pillar of a pluralistic society, and to consistently act in ways that reflect and respect those values. And have the humility to recognise that no one group has all the answers, and that adopting an attitude of mutuality will get us a lot further than if we retreat to our silos.*

*And how do I know relationships have had this impact? Because I see it in the work of this group: it is a privilege to work with such wonderful professionals and colleagues.*

**Dr. Wayne Melville**

Dean of Education, Professor of Science Education,  
Faculty of Education – Lakehead

As we continue this learning journey, we welcome your insights, reflections and questions about how we might connect, collaborate and learn together in support of associate teachers.

**Jim Strachan**

*Education Consultant*

*Mentoring for Mentors*

[mentoringforall@icloud.com](mailto:mentoringforall@icloud.com)

**Lindy Amato**

*Director, Professional Affairs*

*Ontario Teachers' Federation*

[lindy.amato@otffeo.on.ca](mailto:lindy.amato@otffeo.on.ca)





## Themes of Success

### Collaborative Practice

- Co-constructing resources with community partners
- Ongoing communication between faculty and board partners
- Strengthening of teacher-candidate associate teacher relationships as Covid reinforces the need for personal connections
- Fostering resiliency in an atmosphere of comfort and support
- Importance of connection and communication with school principal
- Knowing the principal / school enables deepening of relations vs “placement via spreadsheet”

### Authentic Learning Designs

- Meshing together our personal and professional experiences to make coherence between legislation, theory and practice in our schools while also dealing with the complexities of Covid
- Practicum partnership with full year placement in one school enabling teacher-candidates to fully participate in school life and learn from and with associate teachers beyond the classroom
- Continuity between initial teacher education and NTIP along an ongoing continuum of learning and growth

### Reciprocal Learning

- Being involved as an associate teacher in the learning occurring at the faculty
- Reciprocal learning of mentors / associate teachers with teacher-candidates and faculty as all adjust to learning challenges during Covid-19
- Associate teachers participating in teaching and learning at the faculty

### Recognition & Appreciation

- Appreciating the strengths and assets teacher-candidates bring to the practicum
- Seeing the power of recognition / acknowledgement for exemplary teachers and mentors
- Personal gestures of appreciation via thank you cards
- Feeling impact of learning and mentorship on future teachers



## Themes of Success

### **Building Relationships through Collaborative Practice**

- Involving school administrators and board level staff in providing a web of support for ATs and teacher-candidates
- Sharing positive experiences of being an associate teacher with colleagues
- Building relationships between the faculty and schools (ATs, principals)
- Experiencing direct in-school connections with faculty advisors

### **Providing Recognition & Appreciation**

- Acknowledging the role and importance of associate teachers
- Creating a welcoming atmosphere in the school
- Hosting information and appreciation events for associate teachers

### **Fostering Opportunities for Reciprocal Learning**

- Seeing the strengths teacher-candidates bring to the classroom (e.g., strong knowledge of Growing Success)
- Listening to the voices of associate teachers via surveys and ongoing learning networks with boards
- Fostering positive relationships and reciprocal learning with TELCs, Subject Associations
- Utilizing the Practicum Handbook to provide clarity around roles and relationships
- Recognizing the importance mutual learning between faculties and boards grounded in classroom practices
- Having alternate placements for teacher-candidates to enrich learning of the broader school system
- Exposing teacher-candidates to board approaches to professional learning (e.g., learning cycle)