

Teacher Excellence — Unlocking Student Potential Through Continuing Professional Development

Fifth in a series of mini discussion papers prepared for the Education Partnership Table to permit wide input to the direction of education in Ontario.

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INTRODUCTION

The McGuinty government accepts the responsibility to ensure that Ontario has a highly skilled and highly motivated workforce in our schools. Ontario has 116,000 full-time and 20,000 part-time and occasional teachers in publicly funded schools with instructional responsibility for just under two million students, as well as 60,000 education support workers. Influencing their well-being and effectiveness is clearly one of the most important priorities for the Ministry of Education and its partner school boards.

This paper is concerned with the ongoing continuing professional development of our teaching corps. Continuing professional development for teachers is about reinforcing all the dimensions of good teaching throughout a teacher's career. This paper sets out some of the principles and ideas that the ministry is considering for a new teacher excellence program for Ontario teachers. We recognize the professional development needs of principals, senior administrators, educational assistants and others. Although these are not dealt with in this paper, we expect to consider them in the future. A discussion paper focussed on the role of the principal is planned for the fall of 2004.

It is important to acknowledge that there are many other factors beyond individual skills and capability that influence the effectiveness of teaching. The state of the education workplace includes factors such as the quality of leadership in the school, the availability of supporting resources, the quality of the curriculum and the strategies being used by the school and the system. The government, therefore, recognizes its work to improve these factors as also being vital to ensuring overall teaching excellence.

The underlying principle for our approach to teacher development is that teachers must at all times be respected as professionals, deserving the same respect as other professionals.

As a result, we reject outright the overly formalized and controlled PLP or Professional Learning Program unilaterally imposed by the past government. The program was not respectful of teachers and exceedingly prescriptive. It created a unique professional jeopardy by tying a particular set of courses to the revoking of the licence to teach. Our Bill 82, currently before the Legislature, proposes to end this approach altogether.

Our outlook is for policies that will see as many teachers as possible engaged in professional development, appropriate to their daily challenges and the stage of their career, by streamlining and making better sense of existing processes.

We believe the time is very opportune for a discussion with our partners about how teachers can best be supported in their professional growth. Teachers, the Ministry of Education, school boards, teacher federations, a revitalized College of Teachers, the faculties of education, subject associations, principals, diverse entities such as TVOntario, as well as students, parents and the public, all have important perspectives and roles to play. While consultations on this paper occur, this government has a number of new initiatives. We are offering a summer development program for up to 9,000 JK to Grade 3 classroom teachers in literacy and numeracy across the province in August this year. During the 2004-2005 school year, we will increase the number of specially trained lead teachers in JK to Grade 6 literacy and numeracy from 8,000 to 16,000. These teachers will be exposed to the best practices and most effective techniques. We are also setting up a new literacy and numeracy secretariat that will ensure that teachers and principals get the supports they need when they need them.

In the secondary panel, new student success leaders at every board are coordinating training for thousands of high school teachers to implement initiatives to help students at risk. The Report of the Expert Panel on Math Success for Grades 7-12 was recently released and Student Success Leaders are being provided professional resources and support to lead implementation in their school boards, including opportunities for interaction and teamwork among professionals.

STATUS OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

It is vital to note that compared to its own past and to many other jurisdictions, Ontario is fortunate to have highly qualified teachers. Where once teachers were only required to have a single year after high school, now virtually all teachers have a university degree and a bachelor in education. Our faculties of education enjoy a high level of competition for spots; in 2004, over 15,000 applicants are vying for 7,000 positions.

There has been a strong tradition of ongoing professional development in a variety of forms, with as many as 85 per cent of teachers engaged in some kind of professional improvement through formal courses or workshops.

At the same time, the conflict of the last eight years within education has undoubtedly been a setback in the strength of teacher support. There are strong indications of the need for additional support for teachers. The loss rate of new teachers is high, with about one-third in the first five years exiting the profession. The strains upon teaching are also manifested in disability leaves, which have doubled since 1991, and depression rates, in particular, which have been identified as one-third higher than in other professions.

The challenges of teaching have certainly not stood still. Teaching students today is very different than in previous generations. There are much higher expectations by students, families and society. Students need to know more now than ever before to succeed. Yet, students are also less in awe of authority than in previous generations. Like never before, there is a broader diversity of students, both culturally and in terms of how they learn. Since

1990, an average of 225,000 immigrants of all ages arrive in Canada every year of whom 60 per cent come to Ontario. In Ottawa, Kitchener, Hamilton, London and Windsor, up to 10 per cent of the school-age population have a home language other than English or French. In Toronto, this figure is over 20 per cent. Progressive integration policies mean that classes are composed of greater numbers of students with special educational needs than in the past.

We also know that more than 32 per cent of Ontario teachers will be retiring over the next 10 years, continuing an accelerated rate of turnover as a disproportionate number have been reaching retirement age. Some 10,000 new teachers enter Ontario's classrooms every year. This represents a significant challenge, given the loss of experience to Ontario students, but also an opportunity to get teacher development right with high dividends in both increased retention and confidence on the part of new teachers.

FORMAL EDUCATION OF TEACHERS (PRE-SERVICE)

Given the new educational challenges, there is a growing consensus that the preparation for most Ontario teachers is too brief to be fully effective. About three-quarters of our new teachers have just one year's specific education preparation following their university degree. However, there will be a high demand for the foreseeable future due to the combination of high retirement levels and new government initiatives, such as smaller class sizes, leading to concerns about teacher supply.

As an alternative to a two-year program, the government is interested in exploring the need for a more formalized learning component to the first year of practice. A first-year induction

program could form a natural area for collaboration between faculties of education and school systems and most importantly a more confident entry for new teachers. The College of Teachers has published a useful paper in this regard, albeit for a two-year program.

Having an entry test to teaching is consistent with our approach of treating teachers as responsible professionals and is helpful to ensure student familiarity with Ontario curriculum and provincial education objectives. There is significant prospect for improvement, however, in the convenience for teacher candidates and the relevancy of the test. Instead of the ministry having responsibility for the test, we propose a revitalized College of Teachers could work collaboratively with the faculties of education. The test could be redesigned to ensure there is a core of common learning without homogenizing our diverse teacher preparation programs. Potentially, the test could be moved to after the end of the first practice or "induction" year.

MENTORING OF NEW TEACHERS

The 20 to 30 per cent of new teachers exiting the profession with less than three years represent not only a very significant lost potential, but also a financial cost to government of \$21 million for every year that was spent on faculty subsidies, and another \$14 million annually from wasted recruitment and hiring costs.

The government believes that effective mentoring programs over that period are vital to improve new teacher retention and development for beginning teachers. Our experienced teachers are held in very high regard and are valued for the professional support they give to new teachers. Those willing to act as mentors for new teachers

would be supported with release time and other resources to permit beneficial reviews and the ongoing exchange of information and ideas. This year, we propose to work with boards to design a mentoring program for new teachers.

Currently, fewer than 20 per cent of Ontario's new teachers participate in a formal mentoring program. The existing informal mentorship and pre-service teaching is highly valued by teachers, cited right after their own job experience as a source of skills and knowledge.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Once "trained," what obligation should a teacher feel towards ongoing professional development? As far as our government is concerned, that is a question that has to be answered by teachers in their capacity as professionals. As the current standards of practice of the College indicate: "members of the Ontario College of Teachers are learners who acknowledge the interdependence of teacher learning and student learning. They engage in a continuum of professional growth to improve their practice."

Does this standard need to be enforced in any way? Our government rejects the idea of licensing sanctions. Some professional colleges set quality designations that have to be maintained by their members or the extra designations are lost. We look forward to having a revitalized College of Teachers consider this question and find ways to recognize teachers' continuing professional development.

How then does the government ensure that we have good teachers? We believe that a fair and effective evaluation process at schools, one that ties in more strongly to personal growth for

teachers, is far better for the public interest than any artificial sanctions.

Schools and school boards should report the amount and quality of teacher development as one of their indicators of success. Teachers can also record their development activities in an annual learning plan and a portfolio.

FORMAL OPPORTUNITIES (IN SERVICE)

"The most valuable professional development is embedded in the on-going life of the school."

For the Love of Learning, Royal Commission on Learning, Vol. III, p. 35. (1995)

One of the many flaws of the PLP was its disconnect from the everyday working lives of teachers and students at local schools.

We would like to see existing teacher development programs, like annual learning plans, professional development days and additional qualifications, harmonized and made relevant to the challenges that teachers face at the schools where they work.

School-improvement needs, as well as board and ministry strategies at work in a particular school, should be drivers for teacher development, but in ways that respect teacher autonomy.

In harmonizing existing programs, individual teachers would be significantly free to choose courses or other development opportunities to meet their own needs and the needs of their school. A personal development portfolio could be maintained that would be subject to outside review at the time of evaluation. Mentors can help shape development choices for beginning teachers and principals could participate through the appraisal program.

School systems and the ministry can impact development through professional development days and programs that they provide to staff.

TEACHER APPRAISAL PROGRAM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO DEVELOPMENT

The current teacher appraisal program should be reformed to orient it more towards teacher growth and development.

Currently, the program is overly complex and time consuming in the accountability aspect while de-emphasizing personal development. Principals and staff alike report that so much time is spent on the formal process that the gains from meaningful discussion and exploring possibilities are lost.

The annual learning plan should recognize teachers' own high professional standards and responsibility for ongoing learning. It should take on more importance, as a way for constructive discussion among teachers about teacher development needs and opportunities. Principals would only take more of a role in influencing these plans if teachers are struggling or under review. In general, an increased priority has to be given to helping teachers overcome challenges. The current system is so structured in timelines, requiring improvement for example in 60 school days, as to almost preclude real development for teachers who need to address problems. While it is important to have some means of dealing with the small number who cannot reach standards, the first priority should be on helping teachers meet standards and succeed.

ADDITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Teachers spend \$22 million dollars a year taking more than 22,000 Additional Basic Qualifications (ABQ) and Additional Qualification (AQ) courses annually. The courses are recognized by the College of Teachers and are reflected as part of the salary grid. A teacher with 11 years of experience, the maximum recognized by a typical salary grid, receives 26 per cent more salary if he or she has completed the maximum range of AQ type courses compared to another teacher with the same experience who has completed none at all. The provincial government provides a special grant to recognize the impact of experience and qualifications on board payrolls.

Prior to 1993, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities had provided support for teachers seeking to enhance their qualifications. However, since that time, educators have been responsible for paying the cost of the courses themselves. It is clear they are motivated to take courses that are best for them. Yet, according to some teachers, the AQs and ABQs are dated and in need of revision so that current issues, such as assessment and evaluation, can be addressed in a meaningful way. It would make sense to have some connection to the annual learning plans for teachers. Boards and the ministry should also have some influence at least on the range of choices, so there can be a connection to school and system improvement.

The difficulty with the current system is that somewhere before mid-career, the direct incentive for development runs out as teachers maximize the incentive. Some would also argue that the incentive system runs counter to the professional obligation of teachers to take courses for their own sake.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY / PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAYS

In 1998, the previous government reduced teacher Professional Activity Days from nine to four, just as they were introducing an entirely new curriculum. Time used for professional development activities was taken over by report card writing, parent teacher meetings and semester turnaround time.

Effectively, two days out of 194 in the school year do not allow principals and their staff to keep up. In the absence of enough days, the opportunities for shared problem solving, team learning and learning communities suffered. This is particularly important, recognizing that development is not just acquiring knowledge or teaching skills, but sustaining motivation and innovation as well. Many boards have resorted to early dismissal days to make up the gap, but this still requires transportation arrangements and the inconvenience of arranging childcare for parents.

Our government wishes to introduce new collaborative strategies for a range of goals, beginning with literacy and numeracy and student success in high schools, but eventually including daily physical activity and arts in education and other elements. Each requires teacher engagement and training on an ongoing basis. Therefore, we want to explore with boards and teacher federations the idea of four days dedicated to professional development, while two separate days are recognized as professional activity to cover other needs. Implementing common PD days and activities is also something that we have been asked to consider.

The decision would be a consequential one; while not requiring more money, each PD day

represents \$41 million in cost to the system and, of course, inconvenience to students and parents. Respecting that, teachers would be required to participate in professional development activities on those days.

EXPERIENCED TEACHERS

There are few external incentives for experienced teachers to continue with professional development. The government is prepared to look at special opportunities, such as enhanced ability to undertake sabbaticals, masters programs, work exchange or complementary experience, as well as the aforementioned mentoring program, to help keep valuable teachers engaged and up to date.

INFORMAL OPPORTUNITIES

A great deal of valuable professional development is gained from informal activities such as:

- Improving personal technology skills;
- Academic programs;
- Participating in subject associations and curriculum development;
- Federation seminars and workshops;
- Applied research;
- Collaborating with other teachers;
- Collaborating with outside organizations; and
- Extracurricular activities.

We want the value of these kinds of activities to be recognized. Including them in an annual learning plan and a portfolio helps to raise awareness and gives some professional recognition to efforts made for professional growth. Consideration could also be given by the government to recognize out-of-pocket expenses by teachers as tax credits.

INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED PROFESSIONALS

A new orientation program for teachers qualified outside of Ontario is being developed to lower barriers for internationally trained professionals. This government-funded initiative is being implemented through a multiple partnership of the Ontario Teachers' Federation, the Ontario College of Teachers, Skills for Change, LASI/ World Skills, and also with support from school boards and faculties.

The ministry is vitally interested in making progress in this area, so that the significant skills and talents of these teachers can be put to use in helping students achieve success.

FUNDING

The average spending on training across all sectors has been reported as \$776 per employee, whereas the ministry has been spending about \$319.

The Ministry of Education provides \$37 million annually for general staff development through board grants, but will invest in 2004-05 at least another \$50 million for dedicated programs, or the equivalent of an additional \$430 per teacher.

PATH FORWARD

We welcome input from all parts of the education sector and the public. Our goal is to create a program that has every teacher in publicly funded education reaching her or his potential.

Once our plan is finalized, special discussions will be needed with a variety of stakeholders, such as school boards, teacher federations, faculties of education and a revitalized College of Teachers, and a special implementation task force will be formed to that effect.

ABOUT ONTARIO EDUCATION DISCUSSION PAPERS

These papers are prepared by the Ministry of Education to solicit ideas and solutions to combat challenges facing Ontario students before formal policy decisions are made by the ministry. They are discussed by the Education Partnership Table, which is composed of provincial representatives from several education stakeholder groups, including parents, students, teachers, trustees, principals, education support workers and other components of the education sector. Members of the table assist in problem solving discussions at meetings and help to disseminate papers to their respective members and solicit their feedback.

The ministry also invites input directly from the public. Parents, students, teachers and those interested are invited to join the interactive Ontario Provincial Education Network (OPEN) online and register to receive electronic updates on important education initiatives, meeting notices and opportunities to provide instant feedback on proposed policies. This way, perspectives are continuously represented from education stakeholders across the province.

Your feedback is welcome and solicited. It should be directed to:

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