

v

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 Elementary Teachers'
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Fédération des enseignantes et des
enseignants de l'élémentaire de l'Ontario

oice



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SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND LEADERSHIP

TAKING TIME TO LEARN

SMALL TEAMS WITH BIG IMPACT

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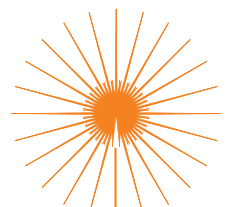


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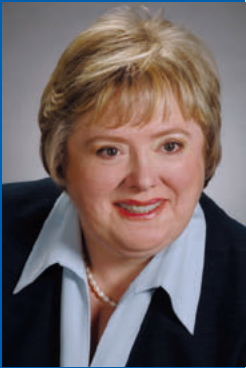


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EMILY NOBLE

President, ETFO

Celebrating Your Work

THIS issue of *Voice*, devoted to professional learning, is special in a number of ways. First, it's a celebration of the work that you, our members, do. It also celebrates your energy and your commitment to improving learning outcomes for Ontario students. Every day you are demonstrating that you care deeply about the quality of instruction you provide. Many of you are taking on leadership roles in your schools and boards and at the provincial level. Thousands of you participate in ETFO's professional learning programs every year and take that learning back to your schools and classrooms. All of you are truly working to make a difference.

By your actions you have demonstrated what ETFO has always held to be true: classroom teachers are the best judges of their own professional development needs. Teachers don't need to be forced to enhance their professional qualifications. They do need to be given the opportunity and the time to take part.

This issue of the magazine is also unique because it has been made possible in part by funding provided by the provincial government. Last spring the government gave our federation close to \$8 million so that we could provide professional learning programs for our members.

In the short term that funding made it possible for ETFO to offer more than the usual array of Summer Academy workshops and Kindergarten Learning Institutes last summer, at a minimal cost to members. More members than ever before took part, enhancing their knowledge and skills in many areas of elementary education. During this school year, the funding allows us to do more of what we already do as an organization: provide learning opportunities for members and foster teacher leadership across the province. We have been able to expand ETFO programming and opportunities already underway and to create new projects that respond directly to the needs of members and their students. In the year to come we will be developing a number of special projects. You will find a full list on page 20.

In making possible this special additional issue of the magazine, ministry funding also allows us to tell the world about the exemplary professional development work our members do both as participants and as leaders.

We value the support we have received from the ministry. It shows that the government recognizes the excellent work that we do. Just as importantly it shows that the government recognizes that teachers themselves are best suited to determine what their professional learning needs are and that teacher federations play a crucial role in delivering this learning to members.

When ETFO was formed in 1998 we faced a government that had little respect for teachers and worked to undermine public education in this province. The education system has not yet fully recovered from the damage that government did. And while there is a long way to go, we have seen improvements, particularly in the respect shown to teachers and their federations. We now have a foundation on which to build an exciting future for our members.



KATHLEEN WYNNE

Ontario Minister of Education

A Message from the Minister of Education

AS the Minister of Education, it is my privilege and responsibility to visit as many schools and classrooms as I can across the province. By experiencing your classrooms first-hand, I can begin to see the impact of decisions made by government at Queen's Park.

Your work and dedication are inspiring. Our government has a vision of publicly funded education that is focused on student achievement, and we understand that it is the relationship between teachers and students that fosters learning. The role of government must be to support that relationship, including appropriate opportunities for professional development.

We are providing those opportunities, adding two more professional activity days, and an additional \$23 million to teacher federations and school boards, to help them offer more professional development.

I know that you are working hard on assessment and instruction and that your experience informs your discussions in these areas. My hope is that the financial resources we have provided will allow more of you to benefit from these opportunities.

I have also heard from new teachers that the New Teacher Induction Program is a great support to them in their first year in the classroom. This annual investment of \$15 million is well spent if it encourages new teachers. Similarly, we are working closely with the federations to examine the professional development needs of occasional teachers, including a pilot project with ETFO in partnership with the Hamilton-Wentworth DSB.

New practices in professional development are emerging, and I want to thank ETFO for taking such an active role examining what works best at the Working Table on Teacher Development.

Teachers are lifelong learners. Each of you came to teaching because of a unique set of circumstances – but I would hazard a guess that a theme that runs throughout your stories is a love of learning. It is in the best interests of all our students that we foster that love of learning. If our teachers are passionately engaged in their own learning, that enthusiasm will transfer to the classroom and to each student. Our goal is to reach every student, and it is through you that we can do that.

In *The Passionate Teacher*, author Robert Fried quotes educational reformer, writer and activist Deborah Meier: “Our schools must be the labs for learning about learning. Only if schools are run as places of reflective experimentation can we teach both children and their teachers simultaneously.”¹

You are first of all the teachers of your students, but your practice is informing your school and the entire system.

I look forward to continuing to work with you. We have made real progress in our publicly funded education system during the past three years. Public confidence is on the upswing – students, teachers, and families are benefiting from peace and stability in our schools. We have rekindled the natural partnership between a government that is responsible for the entire provincial school system and the teachers who are responsible for every student in that system. That relationship is critical to the success of our students.

I know that we have much more to do. Education will never be static; we recognize there will always be new challenges. With your help, we will continue to provide excellent opportunities for teachers to improve their practice.

Thank you for your continued commitment to Ontario's students.

¹ Robert L. Fried, *The Passionate Teacher: A Practical Guide*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.

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GENE LEWIS

General Secretary, ETFO

Professional Learning: Closing the Gap

AS a teacher federation ETFO supports your work in many ways: negotiating salaries and working conditions; promoting and defending your status as a professional; providing opportunities for professional development.

This issue of *Voice* focuses on the work ETFO does in supporting your professional growth. The articles are written by ETFO members who themselves are actively engaged in the activities described. These are practical, workable, tested programs that support you in your work in the classroom, your school, and your board. They should help lighten your workload and enhance your ability to meet the needs of students.

The professional learning highlighted in this issue exemplifies all of the qualities that ETFO believes the best programs should possess. They are:

- voluntary
- self-directed
- interactive
- directly related to the work you are doing
- what your professional judgment tells you students need
- mainly scheduled within the school day.

Above all, they are professional learning programs that teachers themselves decided to undertake. As a professional your learning should be your decision: it is up to you as a leader in your classroom, your school, or your board to determine what will benefit you – and your students – most.

Quality professional development should make it easier for you to help your students to become not only better readers, writers, and mathematicians but also more confident in their physical and artistic capabilities and their ability to relate to others. Whether we believe in the usefulness of artificial targets or not, we all want to see our students succeed. And we want to maintain our physical and emotional health while supporting them to do their very best.

Stress is a fact of life for many ETFO members today as a result of heavy workloads and of the number of new initiatives you are expected to incorporate into your practice. As I speak with teachers, it appears to me that this stress in teachers' lives is exacerbated by a lack of administrative support and a lack of resources.

You should expect more of your school administrators. Their job is to support you in your role. You should expect them to respect your professional judgment, to provide the resources that your students need, and to ensure that preparation time missed while you are away from your class on a school day for professional development is reimbursed. You should expect the highest level of support and accept nothing less.

A significant part of the resource problem is the funding gap: elementary teachers are expected to make do with less. There are fewer resources to support you and your students because the amount of funding that the government provides for each pupil at the elementary level is considerably lower than the funding it provides for secondary students. This is in spite of the fact that the work that you do at the elementary level lays the foundation for the rest of a student's academic career.

The \$8 million in funding that the provincial government has provided to ETFO for professional development helps to close the gap between your PD needs and the opportunities available to you. It allows the federation to enhance existing offerings and to provide new and exciting programs for teachers, occasional teachers, and education support workers. More members are able to participate than ever before. It increases your ability to support your students' learning. Based on the calibre of the programs, and their impact on student success, I am hopeful that the Minister will want to continue this partnership in professionalism beyond next year.

Professional Learning with

This issue of *Voice* is about the changing nature of professional learning. Effective professional learning is about you and your needs, and the needs of your students. It is learning you choose and direct for yourself, and it occurs every day in the course of your work.

We live in an information age, a time of rapid technological change and continual transformation of what we think we know to be true. Like everyone else in today's society, schools and teachers struggle to keep pace. Education must not only provide students with a body of facts; it must also give them the tools to solve problems creatively and to communicate their thinking. Students must learn how to find the information they need, and to synthesize, analyze, and critique it.

The changing expectations of and increasing demands on students fall squarely on the shoulders of teachers. Improvement in education depends on teachers, and change will not occur without changes in teacher practice. Like their students, teachers need to be lifelong learners. They need to enhance their practice to increase their ability to meet students' needs.

WHAT KIND OF LEARNING IS MOST EFFECTIVE?

There are several different types of professional learning. Some training responds specifically to the priorities of principals, school boards, and the Ministry of Education. ETFO believes that to be effective, professional learning must also take into account teachers' priorities and must be directed by teachers. Demanding that teachers change their practice or expecting them to copy and adopt new methods uncritically works only if the teachers have determined that the new practices are more effective and will improve their students' learning.

When teachers engage in professional learning that is voluntary and specific to their needs and those of their students, educational change and systemwide improvement will occur. Change also comes about when teachers take what they

have learned into the classroom and put it into context, into daily practice.

Professional learning as defined, supported, and encouraged by ETFO has you the teacher at its core. It is learning you choose based on your needs in the classroom. It is learning that motivates you to do something differently. At its very best, it changes you: your values, belief system, attitudes, and behaviours combine with new knowledge and skills to change your teaching.

WHAT MAKES EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING?

In this issue of *Voice*, you will read stories by teachers who took part in a variety of professional learning activities that inspired, excited, and changed them. The activities and programs they write about are examples of the kind of professional learning that research has shown to be successful.¹

Effective professional learning respects and incorporates the knowledge that you already have in a wide variety of areas: pedagogy, children's emotional and physical development, and instructional approach. It allows you to incorporate new skills into your existing practice. It provides an effective mix of theoretical and practical knowledge that you can take into the classroom when you need it. It is the kind of learning you will experience as a participant in an ETFO professional learning program. ETFO's Summer Academy offers this kind of approach, whether the topic is literacy, numeracy, arts education, or daily physical activity, as in Fanitsa Housdon's article on page 38.

Effective professional learning involves inquiry and experimentation. You learn how to ask questions about your classroom practice, how to collect data, and how to determine if what you're doing is improving student learning. If you determine that your practice is not enhancing student learning, you are offered effective programs that suggest possibilities for change. For example, Brian Harrison and a small team at his school have used lesson study to ask questions

h You at the Centre

about their teaching (page 49). In the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, teams of classroom and special education resource teachers are working together and experimenting with integration as a way of enhancing student success (page 29).

Effective professional learning respects the adult learner. It adapts to all the ages and stages of teachers' careers – including the needs of occasional teachers – and recognizes their many different roles. It allows you to choose what issues or topics best suit your needs at any particular stage of your career. ETFO's *Strategies for Surviving While Smiling* (page 36) meets the needs of new and occasional teachers. *PD on the Fly*, (page 33) devised by the Greater Essex Occasional Teacher Local, allows teachers to learn on their own schedule. Rhea Perreira-Foyle, a participant and facilitator in ETFO's *Reflections on Practice* program also shows how technology can assist in allowing you to learn with others outside of your school (page 31).

SHARING YOUR KNOWLEDGE

If we are to be accountable as a profession, then we must be able to explain what we do and why we do it to our colleagues, and to students, parents, school administrators, and the public.

Sharing our professional learning with each other is one of the best means of creating new knowledge and of changing our practice to enhance student success. Collegial collaboration allows us to move from theory to practical application in ways that make sense in our classrooms. It allows us to fine-tune practice to achieve better outcomes. Collaboration can take the form of professional learning communities, as described by Pat Milot (page 22), or grade-team planning as illustrated by Deborah Pitblado and her colleagues (page 47). It can also take the form of small teams of teachers working at the same school, as illustrated by the book club at Armitage Village Public School facilitated by Joanne Myers (page 44).

Every teacher is a leader in her or his classroom. But leadership need not be confined to the classroom or to the more traditional route of school administration. Sometimes, as Susan Drake and her colleagues found (page 12), leadership isn't immediately recognized by those who engage in it.

Leadership opportunities abound. Teachers can be leaders in their school working with colleagues. They can be leaders in ETFO in areas of professional development, professional relations, collective bargaining, and equity. Mini Dawar used the leadership skills she polished at ETFO programs to make a difference in her school (page 18). There are leadership opportunities in district school boards, at faculties of education, in the Ministry of Education, and at universities. Ruth Dawson and Jane Bennett share the stories of teachers who have taken on a variety of these leadership roles across the province (page 14). As Sukayna Dewji shows, there are leadership oppor-



Photo: Jorge Uzon

tunities for teachers wanting to share their skills with colleagues around the world (page 26).

Teachers who are developing and broadening their leadership skills provide the school and the education system with an important perspective that connects classroom teacher needs to training and resources.

YOU HAVE MANY CHOICES

Effective professional learning offers a variety of content, styles, and formats. In this issue, you will find accounts by teachers who have broadened their horizons. All are professionals who took a risk, opened up their classrooms and their practice, agreed to share their knowledge with colleagues, and have decided to share that process with you.

We thank the Ministry of Education for providing funding that helped make it possible for us to bring you their stories and to encourage you to continue your lifelong journey of professional learning. We hope you enjoy reading about their experiences. ♥

Ruth Dawson, Anne Rodrigue, and Johanna Brand are executive assistants in ETFO's Professional Services department.

1 Lynne Hannay, Ron Wideman, and Wayne Seller. *Professional Learning to Reshape Teaching*. Toronto: Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2007.

Collective Bargaining Supports Professional Development

For the first time, albeit under unusual circumstances, every current teacher collective agreement contains a negotiated lump sum to support individual professional growth. More occasional teacher collective agreements than ever contain provisions to support professional growth. Today there is also growing recognition that teachers themselves are best placed to design their own learning. Collective bargaining can help to improve the environment for professional learning for members.

The need for professional learning does not end when the newly minted teacher emerges – bleary-eyed and massively in debt – from the doors of the faculty. PD will be a survival tool until retirement. Effective PD, the kind that results in additional or improved employee skills, is pure value-added from the employer's perspective. Despite this, in practice our new graduate can still expect to pay for much of her or his PD over the years. The challenge for collective bargaining is to continually reduce that unfair and unwarranted burden on the individual.

PD is not simply a question of money; it is also one of professional autonomy. If the battle over recertification taught us anything, it is that teachers have a clear idea of what they need to learn to best enable them to do their jobs. There is a well-established precedent for this emphasis on teachers controlling their own learning. As Barbara Richter noted recently in *Voice* (December 06, Vol. 9, No. 2), elementary teachers' federations began developing their own in-service programs in the early postwar period, in response to the government's lowering of standards for entry to the profession. The federations provided what teachers needed to be successful.

School boards, of course, have always offered PD opportunities *outside* of the collective bargaining framework. For example, a number of boards have moved to a web-based report card

system and are training teachers to use it.

However, this kind of targeted training does not address the many factors that drive the need for professional learning: changes in curriculum, increased paperwork, the focus on narrowly based assessment tools, changes in student and community demographics, limited resources in areas such as ESL, and the general downloading of ever more responsibilities onto teachers. Any educator who takes a dip in the alphabet soup of today's schools—DRA, AEP, EIP, IEP, CASI—will recognize the gap between the training that is available and the training that is needed.

The scope of bargaining for PD is fairly broad. For example, the number of professional activity days is set by Regulation 304 of the *Education Act* (the number has fluctuated over the past 10 years). The present regulation provides both mandatory and discretionary days (i.e., days a board must designate as PA days, and days it *may* designate). As long as negotiators stay within the limits of the regulation, they enjoy considerable latitude in bargaining. Locals are also free to negotiate for union input into the *programming* of PA days.

Designated funds for professional learning is another bargaining issue. Funding typically takes the form of a negotiated lump or per capita sum that members can access. Governance mechanisms vary from agreement to agreement; many funds are jointly administered by the board and the union, while others are administered solely by the local. One teacher local, Hastings-Prince Edward, has even negotiated a special technology fund that members can access periodically to help defray computer costs.

The funding that every teacher collective agreement now contains came about as part of the provincial framework agreement reached in April 2005. A \$500 "teacher development account" was made available to each teacher as reimbursement for purchases of computers,

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software, professional materials, and professional development courses.

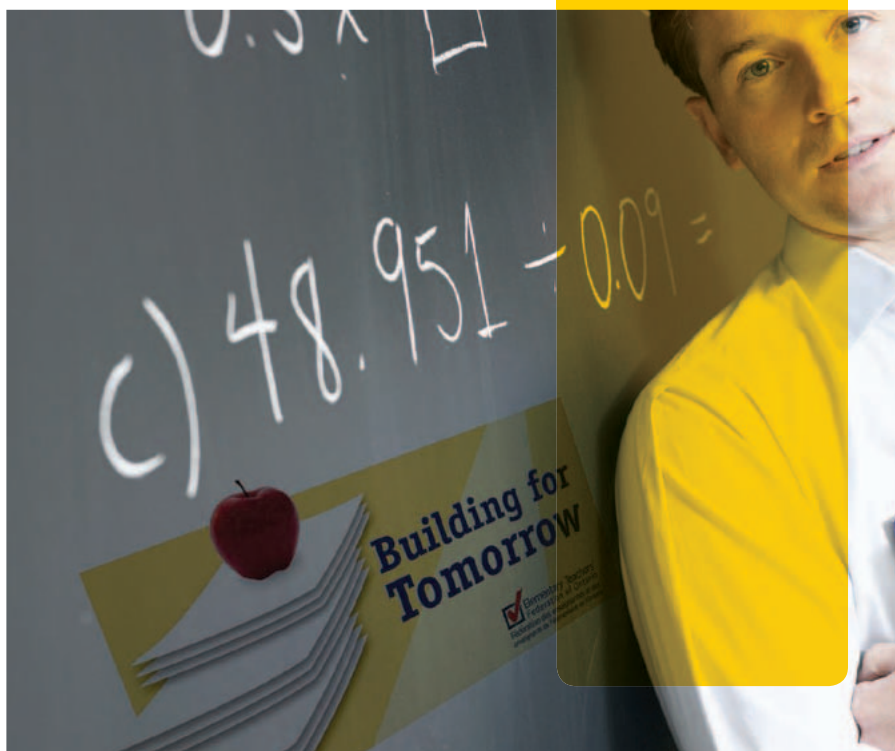
In part, this money was a sweetener to the overall negotiating package. But it was also a recognition that for a long time teachers have been subsidizing their employers by funding their own professional learning.

The teacher development account, however, was a one-time event. While PD funds have been a feature of many collective agreements for decades, they have continually been prey to larger economic forces.

For example, the Social Contract in 1993 froze yearly increments for three years. For teachers not at maximum salary, this was a considerable financial hit. It was, however, possible to “buy” the increments back, by negotiating savings in other parts of the collective agreement. Among other measures, a few locals and boards started putting their PD funds on hold.

By 1996, locals had more or less bought themselves out of the freeze, but were quickly faced with a new funding model, school board amalgamation, Bill 160 – and Mike Harris. In the district school board teacher agreements covering 1998–2000, 21 out of 31 contained some form of negotiated PD funding. Since then, three of these funds have been somewhat increased, two have been somewhat reduced, nine have stayed the same, and seven, or one-third, are no longer in the agreements. In each case, these provisions fell victim to funding pressures.

For occasional teachers, the overall trend has been somewhat better. Far more so than their teacher colleagues, occasional teachers have had to fight for professional recognition and respect. Teaching is not the only occupation in which a pool of replacement employees is deployed. No one would accept the notion that a replacement nurse needs any less training than a nurse who works every day. Yet counterintuitive as it is, that



has sometimes been the employer mindset with respect to occasional teachers.

One way to counter this attitude is to negotiate for more PD opportunities for occasional teachers. In a couple of cases, this has taken the form of one, or one-half, paid PA day per year, though this type of provision has been quite rare.

For collective agreements covering 1998–2000, there were only two occasional teacher locals with negotiated PD funds. Today there are 10, with funds generally administered by the union and including funding for individual PD and/or PD days sponsored by the local. While not large, these funds have been growing in both number and dollar amount. They represent a significant achievement in occasional teacher collective bargaining.

It may well be that for all ETFO members the increased profile gained for professional development in the last bargaining round will carry over to next year’s negotiations. We can only hope so – for the sake of the new teacher, the teacher mid-career and the teacher nearing retirement. ♥

Christine Brown is a research officer in ETFO’s Protective Services department.



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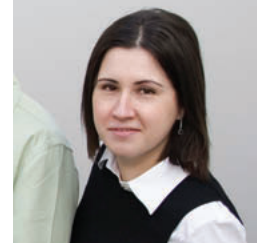
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IMAGINING LEADERSHIP

Teachers are leaders in their classrooms. But for many their self-image as leaders stops at the classroom door. If they do think about leadership it is in terms of school administration.

But the leadership role for teachers can be much broader than that. Throughout this issue of *Voice* you will read stories by teachers who saw themselves as leaders. In this section we focus specifically on leadership – how leaders develop, what education and career paths they have taken, and the role that continuous professional development plays in their daily lives.

As well, two ETFO members write about specific leadership roles teachers have taken on, in one case formally as coaches in their schools, and in the other less formally as activists around equity issues.

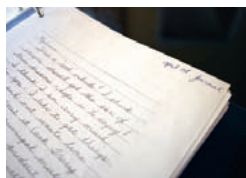
SUSAN DRAKE

Discovering an Identity as a Teacher-Leader

Leaders are a valuable asset to any organization. But what makes a teacher-leader and how do we recognize that person in our system? How can we encourage teachers to take on such roles? This is the story of an informal study group that found answers to some of these questions.



Photos: John Hasyn



For over 10 months, Sonja Upton, Melissa Dixon, and Ellie Phillips, teachers with the District School Board of Niagara, gathered around my dining room table on Saturday mornings. They were in their first five years of teaching and were completing an internship for a master of education degree. We intended to create a fully integrated grade 4 curriculum and to present a paper on this experience at an academic conference. But long after the internship was completed, we were still meeting. The sessions were so rewarding and stimulating that no one wanted to give them up.

The meetings were similar to those of a study group. A key component was the double-entry journal that we decided to write after each session. On one side of the page, we wrote stories, often about classroom experiences, that were connected to the topics we explored. On the other side, we connected our stories to educational theory. We reasoned that in this way we could connect practice with theory and that the journals would provide data for our academic paper.

We read the journal entries aloud at the beginning of each session. Our reflective dialogue was triggered by the journal entries and revolved around topics of central interest to new teachers. They were curious about how to

teach most effectively, how to assess, how to manage their time, and how to develop leadership skills. The weekly journals provided a focus: each individual was encouraged to try out further ideas for the next session, which resulted in our conducting a mini action research project each week.

Our discussions directly related to improving day-to-day practice. Melissa, for example, was swamped by her marking practices. Sonja was keen to “teach for understanding” and was distressed when her students wanted to be told the answers rather than solve the problem themselves. Ellie was leading a schoolwide integrated curriculum on the Olympics and was encountering obstacles.

During the course of our discussions, teacher identity emerged as a burning issue. Bright and eager, these teachers were all involved in activities outside their own classrooms, which led them to experience internal conflict. They were bringing new ideas to their schools. They questioned how far they could or should go, and how veteran teachers would respond to them. They questioned their own authority to suggest improvements in practice and to initiate innovative programs involving their colleagues. Where was their involvement in boardwide initiatives such as the Four Blocks literacy program (part of DSBN’s Windows of Opportunity) leading them? They weren’t sure that they wanted to take the administrative path, but they sensed that others held this expectation for them.

The study group process provided some answers. Sonja praised the process: “Each of us had a guiding hand and no one person led. On occasion conflict arose, but that only made our work better.” As new teachers, they found that the study group was an important forum. Ellie pointed out she “joined this group wanting to build relationships with other teachers.” She felt like the new kid on the block and particularly liked the fact that she and the others were all new teachers at the same grade level and “were willing to assist, mentor and learn together.” From Melissa’s perspective, “The Saturdays were a great way for us to reflect on and discuss our practice and empower each other to improve it.”

My original purpose for the group was to work out some of the kinks in developing an expectations-based integrated curriculum. I knew these students from my university classes and was impressed by the calibre of their thinking about education. The three women responded to my confidence in them. Although teacher leadership was not on the agenda, we all identified instances in which they were acting as leaders. Sonja echoed the thoughts of the others when she said, “You identified many of the things that I was already doing as leadership, such as taking part in school decisions, mentoring new teachers, and forming partnerships with our school community.”

The study group process helped these teachers recognize and acknowledge their leadership, and it changed their concept of leadership. As Ellie said, “We saw others as leaders, but did not recognize it in ourselves.” Sonja acknowledged that she had “held negative (and misguided) ideas around the concept of leadership as a stand-alone person with his or her own agenda and dictating to others rather than working as a team.”

Near the end of the 10 months, an event occurred that dramatically shifted the teachers’ self-concepts. Recommended by her principal, Melissa attended *Leadership from the Roots Up*, a provincial conference for budding

Susan Drake



leaders in their first five years of teaching. It was here that she heard the term “teacher-leader.” She returned, excited by this concept and by an emerging definition of it that had been shaped, in part, by educational consultant Jean Hewitt, one of the keynote speakers. Melissa wrote:

To be a leader is independent of having a position in a large organization. In many cases it will be more difficult to be an effective leader if you hold a position in a highly structured organization . . . where the culture of control remains. Real leadership is reshaping the world around us by moving beyond a management orientation. True leadership involves new ways of thinking about innovation in all areas of the school system. A true leader has authority in intent, knowledge, and character. Choosing to be a leader is a lifelong commitment. Leadership is about making a difference, standing up for what is right and facing obstacles.

The concept of teacher leadership resonated for all of us, yet accepting the mantle of teacher leader was not easy for any of the teachers. We spent a long time discussing how it connected to them.

For Melissa: “We can be leaders regardless of position . . . it’s not the title.”

For Ellie: “My eyes are opened now and I see I might be a leader.”

For Sonja: “I don’t see myself as a leader but as a partner. I encouraged my teaching partners to participate in an environmental project and became involved in leading the school’s Green Team.”

Our collaborative study group is over, but the professional development that occurred is deeply rooted. These teachers are true leaders who continually strive toward making education better for all students. ♥

Learning While Leading



Graduates of education faculties embark on an exciting learning journey. Teachers have the opportunity throughout their careers to teach in a variety of roles in their school. A leadership role appeals to some. At one time, this meant becoming a principal. Today, however, there are numerous routes that teachers can follow as they consider roles of added responsibility.

Leadership and professional learning go hand in hand. In this article, ETFO members who are teacher leaders describe the essential role that continued professional learning plays in their work. Each began by taking on small leadership roles in their school or board. They found that each leadership activity was also a professional learning opportunity.

Like others looking for an opportunity to share more formally with colleagues, Jennifer Paziuk, a teacher librarian in the Halton District School Board, found teaching Additional

Qualification courses to be a natural next step. She had been a workshop leader in her board and throughout the province for a few years. As an AQ instructor Paziuk has found that being aware of current research and new instructional approaches is essential, and now professional reading plays a key role in her learning and preparation. Because she may teach Parts 1, 2, and 3 together she must differentiate the various topics, and dig deeply into the research and pedagogy to have enough interesting and relevant materials for each course.

Sue Pasian, a Literacy Improvement Project Teacher in the Hamilton-Wentworth School District, has also found that keeping current is critical to her work. During the last few years, some boards have introduced new coaching roles so that a school-based teacher leader can work with other teachers in the school. Pasian was excited about this role. "It is such a wonderful oppor-

tunity to work with educators in many different settings and see what works or doesn't work in their particular situation," she said. She has found that visiting other teachers' classrooms has helped her gain significant insight into her own practice and enhanced her professional growth. She has also participated in numerous professional activities to acquire new knowledge in the area of literacy. Now when she participates in professional learning, she thinks about the content as well as about how she will integrate what she has learned into her own presentations with teachers, a significant new approach for her.

Curriculum consultants or coordinators are teacher leaders who focus on curriculum implementation and facilitating professional development, a role that requires continual learning. Kristi Manuel (Peel District School Board), Sheridawn Maloney (Rainbow District School Board), and Michelle Skene (Ottawa-Carleton District School Board) have found that working as consultants has led to numerous professional development opportunities. Maloney believes that to be prepared, she has to be familiar with current research and professional resources so that she can share them with teachers. Skene has attended presentations by influential education leaders and has integrated knowledge of new research and strategies into her work. Manuel experienced significant learning in provincial level sessions with other math leaders that "stretched and deepened" her own understanding of mathematics and helped her become a more effective facilitator.

Maloney did not anticipate the professional learning that resulted from teamwork with two consultant colleagues. In the classroom she had mostly worked alone. The three consultants plan and deliver professional learning sessions as a team and provide each other with feedback. They enjoy the challenge of analyzing and synthesizing new ideas and illustrating them in practical contexts so that they are able to inspire and empower teachers. They have also found that working at the board level has necessitated learning about a wider range of topics – other grades, divisions, and subject areas – so that they are able to work with teachers from kindergarten to secondary school.

These teacher leaders now look at new professional development from two perspectives: the content and how to bring that back to their work



Sheridawn Maloney



Kristi Manuel

with teachers, and the strategies used to engage adult learners. When, on occasion, workshop participants are negative or uninterested, consultants have to use a variety of interpersonal and conflict-resolution skills. By observing other presenters, these consultants learn new ways to work with their colleagues as they promote and deliver professional development.

Expanding her horizons and skills has been "the most enjoyable, and rewarding" experience of Krista Walford's career. She is currently seconded to the faculty of education at OISE/UT from the York Region District School Board. At OISE she has developed a better understanding of how the education system works as an integrated whole, and as a result of attending international conferences has gained a more global perspective of education. Being part of a committee developing an international mentoring conference has provided her with an opportunity to enhance her organizational skills and learn from experts in the field. Working at the faculty has also made her more aware of online learning – something she has come to love!

Expanding her educational horizons has also been a benefit for Dianne Riehl after being seconded to the Ministry of Education. Prior to her secondment from the Toronto District School Board, Riehl was an instructional leader and her focus was Toronto. Her work at the ministry overseeing the revision of the kindergarten program gave her provincial and global perspectives. Assimilating current research and creating a program document stretched her professional learning, and focusing on one area of education allowed her to go to a deeper and more complex level. Riehl believes she was well prepared for her role thanks to participation with colleagues in action research and book clubs.

Ongoing professional development enhances the knowledge and skills of all teachers and most certainly of those who take on leadership positions. Their professional development occurs every day in the course of all their work. It takes a variety of forms and helps them stay attuned to cutting-edge strategies. They examine the professional development activities they attend through lenses that help them learn new content as well as enhance the ways they work with adult learners.

These teacher leaders have discovered leadership opportunities in their schools, at district boards, and at the provincial level. As research plays an increasingly greater role in instructional decisions, there will be an increased need for teachers to take on these roles. Leadership and professional learning go hand in hand: the opportunity exists in every role. **V**

Jane Bennett and Ruth Dawson are executive assistants in ETFO's Professional Services department.

Being the Best You Can Be... ...with the Help of a Coach



Bobbie Chatha and Trish Betts-Malcomson

Photos: Brian Pickell



Last year Bobbie Chatha became a coach at her school, supporting colleagues as they looked for ways to improve literacy instruction.

Chatha's school, W. T. Townsend, in Kitchener, was one of 15 schools in the Waterloo Region District School Board that began to use coaching to support student learning. The board's consultants became interested in the coaching model after hearing from teachers who felt they never had time to implement the new strategies they learned about at professional development sessions.

The teachers' experience reflected what research has shown. Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers, among others, have demonstrated that about 5 percent of teachers apply what they learn in professional development activities to their classroom practice. However, when coaching accompanies professional development, the level of application increases to 90 percent.¹

Coaching offered the Waterloo teachers a chance to have professional conversations about student learning. Many teachers felt that they needed strategies to help them navigate change and polish existing skills while they were trying to use the ideas expressed in the ministry guidelines and curriculum.

THE COACHING RELATIONSHIP

The coaches were volunteers, teachers who were interested in supporting learning at their school in one of three areas: Primary literacy, Junior literacy, and Primary mathematics. Bobbie Chatha shares this background: "I worked very closely with a number of teachers at my school even before I became a literacy coach. The staff recognized me as a supportive and knowledgeable colleague who was always willing to listen and help."

Trish Betts-Malcolm, a senior kindergarten teacher, volunteered to work with Bobbie Chatha last year. She and Chatha met once a week for coaching sessions. “She worked with me to help me improve my literacy program and she shared many ideas and strategies. As a result I was able to put in place literacy work stations and guided reading in my classroom,” Betts-Malcolm says.

“With her help, my shared reading and writing lessons became much better organized, as did my running record data. Her ability to break huge tasks down into manageable pieces was one of the key reasons my program grew to be so successful. She demonstrated a variety of ways in which I could track my assessment, and how to plan using that valuable information.

“Bobbie Chatha listened patiently to my questions and concerns and creatively sought ways to answer them. She provided the opportunity for me to watch her teach a small-group guided reading lesson and for her to watch me do the same. She planned our sessions so we were able to maximize my learning goals during our meetings while still maintaining flexibility in dealing with situations that arose for me during the week.

“She made suggestions and set measurable goals, all without making me feel overwhelmed. I always left meetings knowing exactly what was expected from me for the following week.”

DIFFERENT SCHOOLS, DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Each school in the Waterloo program had a distinctive coaching model shaped by teachers’ needs. Because they were working at their own schools, coaches understood the school’s culture and goals and knew what resources were available.

One school focused on improving reading instruction. What started off as “everyone implementing guided reading” soon meant something different for every teacher. One teacher wanted to understand how to use data for flexible grouping; another wanted to really understand what the MSV analysis of running records was for. One teacher wanted to get a better understanding of what the other students were doing when the teacher was engaged in small group instruction; another teacher felt she wanted her students to experience a range of graphic organizers during shared reading before she felt ready to embark on small group instruction.

OPENING THE DOOR

A group of grade 7/8 teachers agreed to try a different model, one they called “Open Door.” Five teachers from five different schools visited and coached each other and are now developing a shared instructional focus.

Carolyn Baechler, a grade 7/8 teacher at Courtland Public School, started with an exploration of books on adolescent literacy. From that discussion, her group has worked on developing a common class profile. “The Open Door model means that we open our practice to a ‘trusted other,’ planning teaching strategies for specific learning needs, and observing the teaching and learning that results,” Baechler says.

“One of the greatest benefits is that it lets the fresh air of renewed teach-

ing energy in! We can remind each other of effective strategies that we’ve forgotten about, ask guiding questions about the teaching and learning assumptions that we’ve been making, and generally encourage each other’s strong points.

“The intentional conversations help to keep our perspectives on students from becoming entrenched.”

Mary Martin, who has been exploring teaching strategies with Baechler, explains: “It’s always beneficial to see the actual practice of a teaching/learning strategy, in a dynamic setting, rather than simply reading about it, or listening to it in an ‘eager beavers’ teacher workshop. It allows me to say, ‘I could do that!’”

COACHING THE COACHES

The coaches were themselves mentored by a lead coach, one for each of the three focus areas. These three teachers coached at their own schools and supported other coaches. They helped shape the role of the coach and the protocols of coaching, as well as developing strategies for tracking all the coaching activities.

Every coach was released for a half-day once a month, to engage in book study, role-play, problem solving, facilitation skills and relationship building, to refine their coaching skills. Coaches met monthly to share strategies and techniques.

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

Coaching is successful when coaches recognize that teachers who invite them into their classrooms are taking a risk. The coach provides a gentle mirror of reflection to help teachers recognize their strengths and help them make choices. The coach does not evaluate teacher performance. Discussions between the teacher and the coach remain private.

Many teachers who were initially skeptical have warmed to this professional learning strategy. They are welcoming the opportunity to learn and to have a second set of eyes and ears as they worked with their students.

We all want to embrace hope as we face the exciting, unknown tomorrow in education. A coach can help many of us reach that goal. **V**

1 Quoted in *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*, L. B. Easton (ed.), Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council, 2004.

Kelly Snow is a literacy consultant at the Waterloo Region District School Board.

MINI DAWAR

Working Together to Promote Inclusion

My experiences as a teacher from a minority culture pushed me to become an activist in my school. The result has been a change in our school culture and an improved learning environment for our students. Here's how this change happened.



Photos: Anne De Haas



I have always wondered about how diversity affects learning and to what extent our curriculum supports diversity. Does our education system prepare students to embrace diversity and take pride in their own heritage? As teachers we are driven by curriculum expectations. It is easy to lose sight of how students' classroom experiences will shape them as members of society and of how to make learning more meaningful in the long term.

Growing up in the metropolitan city of New Delhi, India, I was always aware of diversity, as people from my native country's various provinces represent a variety of cultures, religions, and races. My perspective however, was that of a member of a majority cultural group.

After I immigrated to Canada, diversity took on a different meaning for me. I was no longer part of the majority culture and became more aware of my race and ethnicity. In 1999, as a new classroom teacher, I attended several workshops focusing on teaching ESL students where I was often one of the few visible minority teachers. During both the formal and informal discussions, I heard new immigrant families referred to as "basement people" and their clothing called "costumes." I also heard comments like "Immigrant families should be forced to learn English"; "They all come to Ontario just to benefit from the welfare system"; and "English is a much more advanced language than their heritage language and that's why they have difficulty learning it." It wasn't long before I realized that I had to take a proactive approach to deal with various "isms" I was encountering.

My students were a diverse group. Research suggests that students who see themselves reflected in the curriculum are more engaged in their learning¹. But I found a big gap between my students' cultures and those depicted in the teaching resources and picture books in my classroom.

Providing students with authentic experiences from various cultures allows them to take pride in their own heritage and to better understand other cultures. A safe environment where they can express their ideas freely enhances their chances to be successful in various subject areas. I will never forget the first time I wore a sari to school for the Hindu festival of Diwali and brought sweets, artifacts, and storybooks to share with my students and colleagues. My students, irrespective of their own cultural background, were excited and interested. In the following weeks several wore their own cultural dress with much pride. I began purchasing books and other materials that dealt with equity issues.

My colleagues and I, with the help of our vice-principal, formed an equity committee. We surveyed students, staff, and parents to determine the needs of our school community. We learned that there was a need for more information to be translated for immigrant parents. Many asked for



more information on government services for newcomer families. Our teacher survey suggested we needed resources and materials to provide for more inclusive education. One result of our work was that the public health nurse at our school, with the help of translators, delivered workshops to help recently arrived families access services in the community.

In the meantime I began looking for training to help me deal more effectively with responses like “Sounds good but I don’t have time to cover equity” or “Look at our school population, we already are so multicultural and we don’t need to worry about equity” or “I can’t read a book that deals with homophobia, especially in our conservative school community.” I attended a conference for racialized and marginalized groups offered by ETFO’s Equity and Women’s Services where we discussed the concerns we faced in our schools. Despite our different backgrounds, we faced similar equity issues and we all felt the need to address these strategically. We also learned about opportunities for involvement and leadership in ETFO.

A few months later I was accepted into ETFO’s *Leaders for Tomorrow* program. This program had a profound impact on me personally and professionally. I had the opportunity to work with other ETFO members, develop strategies, and grow as a leader. Participation in various workshops

enabled me to polish my leadership and public speaking skills. I learned how to approach equity issues strategically and to handle difficult situations more effectively. I learned to persevere and appreciate small gains. The progress that the other participants reported having made at their schools made me more determined to continue working for more inclusive education.

After completing the program, I took part in ETFO training to become an equity workshop presenter and got involved in writing projects to create equity resources and materials. I brought these resources back to the equity committee at my school, and together we are creating many resources – including picture books and teacher resources – that deal with equity issues. Our school library has a rich collection of equity-related books. Guest speakers from various ethnic backgrounds have visited our school assemblies. Diverse cultural art projects have become part of our everyday teaching.

As a school, we take part in community events such as the Antiracism Day organized by the York Region Police Department. Our school organizes special events during African Heritage Month and South Asian Month. They are a first step towards greater inclusiveness. Our equity committee is now creating resources that incorporate equity issues into the board’s *Character Matters* program to enable teachers to provide an equitable approach to this focus. All these initiatives were acknowledged by our school board, which honoured our school with an Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity Education Award.

I see a difference in the quality of work produced by students when an activity is based on their personal background and experiences. When students in my grade 2 class presented their cultural heritage projects, the effort they took and the detail they provided were immense. In my daily read-alouds, I consciously choose a book that helps students deal with prejudice or helps them find a personal connection to a story. Their writing responses are very powerful.

The equity training provided by ETFO has enabled me to understand my own biases and areas of ignorance. It has been an important tool in helping me to work with my colleagues to improve our students’ learning experiences. ♥

Mini Dawar is a teacher at Wilclay Public School in the York Region District School Board.

¹ R.G. Tharp, P. Estrada, S. Stoll Dalton, and L. A. Yamauchi. *Transformed: Achieving Excellence, Fairness, Inclusion and Harmony*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000.

NEW PROGRAMS FOR ETFO MEMBERS

In the next two years, thanks to provincial funding, ETFO will offer members across the province a variety of exciting new professional learning programs and expand existing programs.

EDUCATION AND POVERTY PROJECT

This project examines what educators can do to improve learning outcomes for students from poor families.

Contact: Jim Giles or Kalpana Makan.

SCHOOL-BASED COLLABORATIVE TEAMS

Fifty teacher teams of five members each from locals across the province will participate in a collaborative learning project.

Contact: Ruth Dawson or Jane Bennett.

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT

A new resource book and DVD, a two-part workshop series and three provincial conferences will focus on best practices.

Contact: Janet Millar Grant.

ARTS RESOURCE AND SERIES

A resource book and training opportunities will help Junior generalist teachers integrate arts experiences into their program. Contact: Jim Giles.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT FOR OCCASIONAL TEACHERS

A new resource and a workshop series in each local will highlight best practices for occasional teachers. Contact: Jerry De Quetteville.

MENTOR PROJECTS

Training will be provided for mentors involved in the New Teacher Induction Program. Contact: Joanne Languay.

INNOVATIVE PRACTICES NETWORK

Facilitated learning with 10 online modules featuring innovative practices or programs. Contact: Stephen Mau.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

A Special Education Handbook and a learning community for Special Education Resource teachers will be created. Contact: Nancy Baldree.

OTHER NEW INITIATIVES INCLUDE

Projects focusing on global education, international teaching, teaching for deep understanding, leadership training, ESP/PSP support, and consultant coordinator support; an *Arts Summer Institute*; and two special issues of *Voice*.

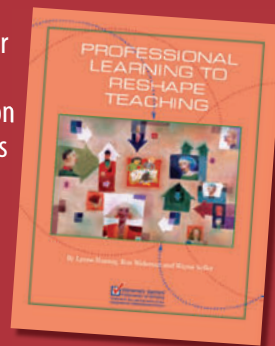
Existing programs will be enhanced to allow more members to participate. This includes: *New Teacher Series*; *Presenter's Palette*; *FSL Funding for Local Initiatives*; *ICT Conference and ICT workshops*; *Book Clubs*; *Ultimate Teaching Strategies*; *Summer Academy*.

If you are interested in participating in these opportunities, please call the provincial office to contact the staff listed. Look for further information in steward mailings and on the website, etfo.ca, throughout the next year.

Professional Learning to Reshape Teaching

shows teachers how to take charge of their own professional development, focus on their own experiences and strengths, and become problem-solvers rather than consumers of knowledge.

Published by ETFO, it is available from shopETFO.



SUMMER 2007

PQP Part I

Partnership with **Upper Grand District School Board**

Monday - Friday: July 9 -20

Parkinson Centennial Public School

120 Lawrence Ave. - Orangeville

PQP Part II

Partnership with **Bluelwater District School Board**

Tuesday - Friday: July 3 - 6

Monday - Friday: July 9 -13

Meaford Community School

186 Cook Street - Meaford

For details and application forms go to etfo.ca or contact Joanne Languay at provincial office; jlanguay@etfo.org.

Become a Monarch Teacher

Teaching and Learning with Monarch Butterflies

– a three-day workshop for JK to grade 8 teachers.

July 31 - August 2: Durham • August 8 -10: Ottawa

Visit monarchcanada.org for more information, or email monarchteacher@msn.com

ETFO supports the Monarch Teacher Network-Canada.



PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND LEADERSHIP

Professional learning communities have been growing in number and popularity in the last few years. Almost 60 percent of those who replied to an ETFO survey last year indicated that their school had put a PLC in place. The vast majority had been in operation for two years or less.

PLCs can raise numerous issues for teachers, among them concerns about workload and mandatory participation. These concerns led delegates to the 2006 Annual Meeting to endorse an ETFO policy statement on PLCs (see page 28).

In the stories that follow, teachers who chose to participate show how school- and board-based PLCs have changed their teaching. Technology also plays a role as teachers embrace it to establish province wide collaboration. Expanding the traditional definition of a PLC, a Toronto teacher describes a project that helps build a global learning community.

PAT MILOT AND GLYNNIS FLEMING

Increasing the SUM of Our Knowledge

For the past year a group of teachers in the District School Board of Niagara has been working together to increase their understanding of math and math teaching. Their venture has had unexpected spinoffs.



Photos: Courtesy of the District School Board of Niagara



It is an exciting time for mathematics education in this province! Ministry initiatives have linked sound research with classroom practice. Teachers across the province have been provided with a variety of professional learning opportunities designed to explore the growing body of literature that highlights both the mathematics that teachers need to know and the instructional strategies that *really* lead to improvements in student achievement. All District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) teachers, kindergarten to grade 6, have participated in up to seven half-days of math inservice related to research-based instructional strategies and ministry support documents.

It was the vision of the DSBN math team to investigate models that would begin to bridge the gap between large-scale inservice opportunities and the practical implementation of researched-based instruction. We are a group of elementary teachers who accepted an offer to continue to study

together in a less formal, more collaborative setting as part of a professional learning community. We are engaged in professional research-based reading, thinking, practising, and dialoguing – and we are loving it!

Through collaboration, we are learning about mathematics and mathematics teaching. Together we research, dialogue, plan, reflect, revise and, most importantly, analyze the impact of our actions on the children that we teach. Helping children understand, question, and see themselves as mathematicians was our goal and is becoming our passion.

We met for the first time in February 2006 and began to develop a framework for our work. We decided to call our group the SUM Teachers.

SUM is an acronym for Supporting Understanding in Mathematics. Although our previous professional development experiences had been very congenial and we had developed a strong sense of community with the facilitators, our learning had been very much led by their agenda. The learning in the SUM teachers' group was going to be generated and guided by our questions, by the kinds of learning we felt we needed. The knowledge we had gained through board-directed PD was a springboard for our own collaborative inquiry.

We decided to divide into three grade groupings: kindergarten to grade



1, grades 2 and 3, and grades 4 to 6. Meeting sometimes as a large group and sometimes in these smaller groups gave us the flexibility to meet the needs of our grade groupings while still capitalizing on the large group's diversity and expertise.

Our learning is facilitated by following the three elements of the SUM acronym:

SUPPORTING The facilitators from our board team help us focus our inquiry. They are able to suggest and seek out professional readings based on the most current research. By accessing various funding models (Ministry of Education, DSBN and ETFO), our facilitators provide classroom release time so that we can gather to co-plan, co-teach, and discuss what we are learning about teaching and learning. Sometimes the facilitators suggest modes of inquiry, such as Japanese Lesson Study, the Math Congresses of Cathy Fosnot, or the work of Marilyn Burns or John Van de Walle. But

Teachers talk about the impact of the group on:

...their professional learning

"It is easy to attend workshops and get new ideas. It's not always easy to implement what you learned. Because we share experiences and discuss and problem solve together, I am 'forced' to carry my weight as part of the team. It is much easier to try something new when you have worked with other teachers right from the planning stages and when you can, without fear, discuss failures and successes."

"It has increased my awareness of new pedagogy (and made me unafraid to try it), scaffolded my learning of the new curriculum and Early Math Strategy, which probably would have sat on my shelf if not for the time and support given by SUM."

...their teaching

"I think a lot more about where my lessons are headed and how one lesson might influence learning of another math concept (or Big Idea!) many weeks or months from now."

"My students love mathematizing, thinking about mathematics and solving problems."

...student achievement

"The students seem excited about math activities. They even cheer when it is a day for group work, on the floor with chart paper and markers."

"They are now very comfortable with the fact that there may be many different ways to figure out an answer. They are not looking to do it my way. In fact, they take pride in 'discovering' a strategy that I may not have thought of."

"Each student is more willing to take risks and say, in front of the whole class, that they completely blew their math or didn't get it. I see less avoidance behaviour and students more willing to help each other."



the facilitators' involvement is not directive: they support our collaboratively developed plans. The facilitators have also deliberately fostered positive interdependence, so that we become supports for one another. The SUM group does not rely solely on the expertise of the facilitators; we also respect the expertise that each of us brings, whether it is teaching experience, mathematical understanding, knowledge of young children, or expertise related to students with special needs.

The most powerful aspect of the SUM experience has been the opportunity for meaningful collegial support. Through working together, and by observing and reflecting on our students as they learn, we are moving forward, instructionally and mathematically, in directions we could never have foreseen.

UNDERSTANDING Everything we do and talk about is focused on developing conceptual understanding and strengthening the interconnections of both student and teacher learning. We find ourselves asking deep questions: What is the role of context in our math lesson and how important was it in engaging children in the lesson? Did the writing distract from the math? How could we have planned better for the kinds of questions students asked, to prompt them to think more deeply about the interrelationships

they saw? How does this lesson contribute to developing a particular mathematics concept or "Big Idea" throughout the Primary and Junior grades? We are all noticing a significant improvement in our students' deeper understanding of the Big Ideas.

MATHEMATICS We understand that we need to learn more about mathematics itself and to have the kinds of conversations that build our own deep conceptual understanding. Sometimes we have trouble connecting to concepts, we may make errors in our thinking, and occasionally we need a buddy to explain his or her thinking to us yet again.

We have found – and research has supported our perception – that we are far more effective teachers when we really "get" the math, and when we know better how to guide students' conversations toward understanding the Big Ideas. With this understanding, we know better how to

- differentiate instruction for learners who need more support
- identify questions that will lead students to think more deeply or differently about the mathematics
- challenge student thinking in developmentally appropriate ways
- make rich interconnections to other math strands and other subjects
- use communication in mathematics to richly and contextually support our literacy programs.

One of SUM's most valuable spinoffs has been the excitement and staff room conversations that have led to other teachers approaching us with questions about math instruction. This interest has opened the door for informal coaching and co-teaching and fostered the initiation of school-based professional learning groups focused on mathematics.

Are we math nerds? Well, maybe. We prefer to think of ourselves as teachers who are excited about making strong gains in student understanding and achievement. We are willing to challenge the ways we have approached math instruction in the past. We are thrilled to engage as professionals in genuine, productive, student-centred, respectful collaborative learning. We are comfortable allowing mathematics and student understanding to drive the instruction in our classrooms. And that pretty much SUMs it up! ♥

Pat Milot is a mathematics consultant (K to 6) and Glynnis Fleming is a special assignment teacher (Numeracy, K-6) with District School Board of Niagara.

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Building a Global Professional Learning Community



Photos: Jorge Uzon



A wonderful opportunity presented itself a couple of years ago when I applied to take part in Project Overseas. This is an excellent professional learning opportunity where teachers can learn and teach at the same time, while they help to build a global professional learning community.

The journey began with filling out the application that is available on the ETFO website. The application, along with the phone interview, gave me an opportunity to describe my strengths and ability to work with others. A couple of months later, I learned I would be travelling to Sierra Leone with three other teachers from across Canada.

Community building started well before departure. Our team leader helped bring us together through emails and phone calls. Each of us brought his or her own expertise, and we divided the task of preparing for the project. We contacted the team from the previous year and connected with the Sierra Leone Teachers Union to get help with planning.

Our first face-to-face meeting as a team was a couple of days before our departure for Sierra Leone. The Canadian Teachers' Federation brought all 49 Project Overseas participants from across Canada to Ottawa for a

Sukayna Dewji (ETFO), Dan Leclair (MTS) and Mike Tyldesley (BCTF) pose with a group of students at a school visit.



Team Leader Debbie Arts (OECTA) facilitating a cooperative learning session.

Photos: Sukayna Dewji

three-day orientation that helped prepare us for the experience. Along with attending excellent workshops, we had opportunities to hear from previous participants and to meet Canadians who had lived in Sierra Leone.

Upon our arrival in Freetown, Sierra Leone, we were greeted by several representatives of the Sierra Leone Teachers' Union. We worked together to plan a program to best meet the needs of the teachers we would be working with, teachers who had not had the opportunity to go through any professional training. The teachers would be with us for two weeks of intensive work. We would then have a week of travel and visits within Sierra Leone, followed by another two weeks with a new group of teachers.

Our day started with having breakfast with all of the participants. This was a great time to network and get to know each other. We then formed two groups of about 20 participants each. We had two sessions before lunch and two after. Each of us worked with a local teacher leader to facilitate workshops on teaching English, math, social studies, and science. We also presented sessions on HIV/AIDS, gender equity, workshop presentation, and peace education, modelling teaching strategies as we conducted the work-

shops. Participants had a chance to work together to prepare lessons that they could take back and use in their classrooms.

At the end of the day we met as a whole group to reflect, and the official part of our working day ended. (The local participants, however, continued with a session about the Teachers' Union.) In the evening there were several opportunities to socialize and get to know each other better.

Every day we learned a great deal from each other. We were welcomed with warmth and appreciation. The participants, initially shy because they were not accustomed to an interactive model of education, slowly started actively participating and sharing. Their stories spoke of their resilience and survival during the course of the country's civil war. From 1991 to 2000, the people of Sierra Leone lived in turmoil as rebel forces clashed with the government in a bid to control the sale of diamonds. The recently released film *Blood Diamonds* sheds some light on what happened there. Due to the war, many teachers had had their own education interrupted, and they were eager to spend every minute learning and making the most of their experience.

For the Canadian team, flexibility was the key to this rewarding experience. We realized quickly that some of the ideas we had brought along for cooperative work would not be suitable in the kinds of classrooms our participants worked in – classrooms of between 80 and 100 students confined in a small space. Most classrooms had only one chalkboard and, if the teacher was lucky, a few pieces of chalk. We slowly started adapting our lessons to the environment. For instance, we started using soda bottle caps to make counters to help with math.

Along with many rewarding experiences, we faced some challenges. One of the biggest was trying to gear our workshops to the curriculum the teachers had to follow, even if we did not agree with the content or the methodology used. We also had to learn to adapt and be flexible. Things were not as organized as we were used to. Being away from familiar surroundings and not having much personal space was difficult for some Project Overseas participants.

Sukayna Dewji teaches at Thorncliffe Park Public School in the Toronto District School Board. With 1,700 students, it is the largest elementary school in North America.



Working on lesson preparation.

Photos: Sukeyna Dewji



A Sierra Leone family.

We felt helpless at times, realizing that we could not change much and would be gone in a couple of weeks. We had to remind ourselves that by working together we were creating bonds that would continue to grow through the years. I wondered sometimes if our few short weeks could have any impact. A recent letter assured me that they did. A participant wrote: "Although I am not yet a qualified teacher, the knowledge of teaching methods I obtained from you have qualified and fortified me to carry out my work positively."

This project helped me realize the impact our teacher unions have. They work together to equip teachers to educate themselves and others. I found myself wanting to learn more and get

further involved with the federation. Many of the federation committees and professional learning opportunities provide a platform to collaborate with colleagues and to continue to work and learn together.

Participating in Project Overseas has had a profound impact on my life. The lessons I have learned I could not have learned anywhere else. This experience has broadened my professional knowledge and allowed me to better appreciate the needs of my many newcomer students, especially those who have survived hardships before their arrival to Canada. I share the knowledge I gained with other teachers, and together we advocate for the needs of others. We look for ways to fundraise and help.

Our Canadian team continues to keep in touch. Being so far from home, we were each others' pillars of support. We appreciated each other and learned from each other personally and professionally. We share different heritages and joke about how we had to go to Sierra Leone to appreciate the diversity within Canada. ♥

ETFO POLICY STATEMENT

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

- ▶ That a group of education professionals who share common visions, values, and goals, and work collaboratively using inquiry, experimentation, and innovation to improve teaching and student learning be described as a Professional Learning Community.
- ▶ That teacher participation in a Professional Learning Community be voluntary.
- ▶ That a culture of collegiality and respect for member professionalism and autonomy be fostered by a Professional Learning Community.
- ▶ That a teacher's ability to generate knowledge regarding teaching and learning be recognized by a Professional Learning Community.
- ▶ That all aspects of the functioning of a Professional Learning Community be based upon an evidence-based, shared decision-making model.
- ▶ That teacher empowerment and leadership development be integral components of a Professional Learning Community.
- ▶ That professional development opportunities during the school day on the role and function of a Professional Learning Community be provided by district school boards prior to and throughout the development of a Professional Learning Community.
- ▶ That funding for a Professional Learning Community to access professional learning opportunities and resources, and enable teachers to meet and collaborate during the school day, exclusive of teacher preparation time and nutrition/lunch breaks, be provided by district school boards.
- ▶ That provision for teacher self-directed learning be included in any professional development associated with a Professional Learning Community.
- ▶ That all areas of the curriculum, with emphasis on the development of the whole child, be included in the objectives of a Professional Learning Community.
- ▶ That no aspect of teacher participation in a Professional Learning Community be used for teacher performance appraisal.

Collaboration Creates an Inclusive Classroom

Members of a professional learning community in Kawartha Pine Ridge are discovering that inclusion is good not only for students, but that it benefits teachers as well.



Photos: Jorge Uzon



Last spring the special education resource team at Newcastle Public School volunteered to participate in a professional learning community project that paired special education resource teachers (SERTs) with classroom teachers. The initiative transformed the traditional role of the SERT with the aim of improving learning for all our students, but in particular for those with special needs.

This was a boardwide initiative: we were among 87 teachers at 41 schools in the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board taking part.

Newcastle PS has been involved in pilot projects for a number of new research-based learning initiatives. We welcomed this project as another opportunity to be “leaders in learning” in our board. We have received two Positive School awards from the Kawartha Pine Ridge ETFO Local, in recognition of our collaborative work and our school spirit. We were fortunate to have several interested staff members with similar professional outlooks and a wealth of experience.

A VISION OF INCLUSION

Traditionally the special education resource teacher has needed to work with small groups of students in a resource classroom because the students were being withdrawn from more than one class. In this new model, both the SERT and the special needs students are integrated into specific classrooms. The result is increased teaching capacity in each of these classrooms.

To create the teaching partnerships, individual SERTs approached classroom teachers. Newcastle PS has 620 students and three SERTs. Although the emphasis was to be on grades 3 and 6, we were able to also include a grade 1 and grade 1/2 class, giving us two two-person partnerships and one three-teacher team. The grade 5/6 class had 24 students; the other three classes had 20 students each.

THE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

Each partnership creates its own way of working together. Students work in groups and individually, as appropriate. Special needs students may be in the class for the whole day or just part of it. One teacher may lead the class with the other providing support. One or both may be working with small groups while still other students work independently. Both may facilitate whole-class small group work. The roles are defined by the needs of the students, the requirements of the curriculum, and the teachers' goals. The SERTs work with all the students in the room and share the responsibility for special needs students with the classroom teacher.

We ensure our programs meet students' needs by varying the way we teach and what we expect of students as they demonstrate what they have learned. The choices we make are based on students' interests and multiple intelligences. We allow for student choice.

Diagnostic assessment guides our instructional practices. With two and sometimes three teachers involved in the planning (we also involve teacher candidates), we find we are not lacking in ideas. The increased contact with individual students and small groups of students allows us to see quickly what concepts we need to introduce or reinforce, and enables us to stretch the students' thinking. Our students' oral and written reading responses have become more sophisticated.

HOW STUDENTS BENEFIT

All students benefit from the increased contact with teachers: they cannot fly under the radar or hide in the crowd. An individual student's difficulties can be dealt with immediately, not when the classroom teacher has time or when the resource room is open. Partners can share concerns about individual students' needs and quickly put in place a plan of action, including accommodations or referrals to other services.

Because we work interchangeably with the students, the stigma of "special education kids" is less prevalent. The needs of students who require enrichment are also easily accommodated. Inclusion gives students opportunities for leadership, peer modelling, and support.

WORKING TOGETHER BRINGS BENEFITS

Members of the PLC within each school meet regularly as a group. We continue to learn from each other. We are able to problem solve and work through concerns together and decide how to tackle new challenges. There are also boardwide meetings that bring together all the participants. Over time we have developed deep respect for and trust in each other.

Working collaboratively does present challenges. Both partners must be committed and prepared. Finding additional time to plan together is not always easy. Our busy lives make after-school scheduling difficult and often compromise is required. Making decisions about specific responsibilities requires good ongoing communication.

It also takes time to learn to work together as effectively as possible:

This article was written by Marion Huffman, Darryl Whitney, and Jan Skillen (SERTs), in collaboration with classroom teachers Ruth Gray, Lisa Sproule, Jeanette Sage, and Judith Pach.

the classroom setup, the transitions between activities, and noise management must all be considered. And it helps to have a good sense of humour!

SUPPORT FROM THE BOARD AND ADMINISTRATION

The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board had specific goals in facilitating this PLC. But we are convinced that our PLC has been a success because we volunteered to take part, volunteered to be partners, and took ownership of our personal and professional growth.


When the project began in the spring of 2006, the board provided professional development sessions focusing on identifying needs and goals, understanding collaborative communities, inclusive programming, and differentiated instruction.

Our administration paid for each teacher to attend a Bureau of Educational Research workshop on differentiated instruction. (During a recent professional activity day we shared with our colleagues some of the practical strategies we learned and recommended a variety of professional resources.) Over the course of the project, all participants received ongoing professional development. Each team received \$500 to purchase teacher and student resources.

Parents have supported the increased integration of special needs students into regular classrooms. They know their children benefit from having an additional teacher in the classroom. Our administrators helped by strategically placing students and by locating partners in classrooms close to each other. As well, they developed teacher schedules that made it possible for partners to have joint planning time.

LESSONS LEARNED

Teaching collaboratively is enjoyable and continues to renew and motivate us. Bonding with like-minded colleagues is not only supportive, but fun. No one laughs more than we do! We delight in sharing student successes. One of our team is even considering deferring retirement because of the new energy this project has instilled.

As a team we are excited about continuing our group efforts and expanding the professional learning community here at Newcastle Public School. 

Collaborating and Communicating Online



Photos: Jorge Uzon



Reflections on Practice is a women's leadership institute based on the concept of professional learning communities (PLCs). Forty female teachers from all over Ontario come together for four days in the summer and two days each in the fall and spring, to learn more about PLCs, to collaborate with each other, and to refine their teaching practices. Each participant is expected to complete an action research project on a topic of her choice.

When I became a participant in the first year the course was held, I had just completed my master of arts degree at OISE. After so much academic study, I needed a space where I could truly reflect. I needed to figure out how I was going to implement all the wonderful ideas I had learned

about, and to decide which best practices really resonated with me. *Reflections on Practice* gave me the opportunity and the time to digest what I had been studying. To be honest, I had no idea at the time how much I would eventually learn about online communities, reflective practice, and facilitating skills as I moved from being a participant to being a facilitator.

One of the challenges of the institute is making the transition from interacting with a face-to-face community to interacting with an online one when the first four-day session is over. By the end of the intense summer session, I experienced a genuine feeling of community. It is difficult for teachers to maintain those positive and collaborative feelings once they return to the classroom in September. We quickly become swept away by



the intensity of our classrooms, by the demands of our boards, and by the diverse needs of our students. These factors, combined with adapting to new school initiatives, can create feelings of stress and isolation.

But traditional face-to-face interaction is only one of two kinds of learning communities that the institute creates. The second is the online community that we are building through Internet-based networking. The participants commit to visiting the *Reflections on Practice* Internet site weekly, where they can share pictures, post messages/questions, do research (there is an e-library for referencing), and connect with people through discussion boards or emails. There are also two chat rooms, and the participants are required to meet there at least once a month, usually at a prearranged date and time, when they can discuss assignments and/or the progress of their research projects with their group in real time.

Chat groups set up in the institute's second year have been a boon to communication among participants. Monthly online meetings gave us an opportunity to learn about each other and about our research projects, to discuss challenges related to assigned tasks, and to share ideas. Having an online community allowed teachers in Kenora to communicate, problem-solve, and share with colleagues in Kitchener and Toronto.

In our first year, my teaching partner Helen Vlachoyannacos and I developed very strong ties with two participants from Thunder Bay, and we would have benefited greatly from regular online chats, had they been available then. We had to rely instead on email. Online chats are much more immediate and they are a powerful tool for true collaboration.

Rhea Perreira-Foyle teaches at Joyce Elementary School in the Toronto District School Board.

The online chat groups have also allowed participants to raise concerns with their facilitators. I have to admit that during my first year as a participant, I found the website intimidating. Checking the site regularly for online assignments, announcements, and so on required time, but it did help to keep me on track. Not being able to chat with other participants, however, meant that I did feel isolated. This problem was solved this year, and now groups of five participants and their facilitator each have their own space on the site.

I became a facilitator in the institute's second year, and my role changed considerably when I became responsible for guiding a group of adult learners. My tasks were to help them formulate their research projects, to facilitate our monthly online meetings, and to deal with any major issues regarding the assignments.

This past year, we have also begun to have separate monthly facilitator chats, which have been integral to running the program. These collaborations help us deal with any challenges we may be facing in our groups. We are able to brainstorm effective solutions and to share successes, making the group's interactions that much more effective. We are also able to discuss how to improve the site itself.

Each year our roles have become clearer and the site has improved considerably. Part of the challenge of working this way is the range of comfort levels that participants have in using the computer. Of course, when you have a group of professionals working together, there will always be major differences in abilities and experience with technology.

The beauty of the website lies in its ability to cater to the needs of both those who are very adept at using the computer and those who tend to avoid it. Our technology advisor, Stephen Mau, set up an onsite tutorial to help us all become more computer literate.

Monthly online meetings can play a major role in helping teachers to become less isolated from each other, to share best practices, and to create a professional community of learners. Last year, one of the members of my group and I interacted constantly. At that time, due to the nature of our teaching assignment, we both were experiencing a sense of isolation within our schools. Our online communications helped both of us deal with our situations in a constructive way.

Online collaboration does involve a degree of commitment and time. The more that the participants interact with each other, the greater the learning potential. My experience is that by building this interaction into my routine, I get much more out of it than I put in. This year, some groups have been posting discussion items daily, while others have been communicating weekly or monthly. The level of participation is completely up to the individual's willingness to share her thoughts and ideas. We know that we are putting ourselves out there in cyberspace, opening ourselves up to our peers' criticism, but also to their encouragement. If the interactions are positive and people are sharing ideas, better classroom practices are sure to evolve.

In my three years of online networking, I have developed strong personal and professional relationships with colleagues in Thunder Bay, Niagara Falls, and Toronto. These online collaborators have helped me to improve my teaching practices, to reflect on some of my practices, and to gain considerable knowledge about networking and online chat groups. What I have learned will have a positive impact on my interactions with my colleagues and with the children that I teach. ♥

PD on the Fly



Photo: Catherine Cocchio

Cynthia Graydon

PD on the Fly is a great way for teachers to grow professionally, easily and on their own time. So often teachers get that “late for school” feeling as they rush to join after-school professional development sessions already in progress. *PD on the Fly* gets rid of all that.

PD on the Fly is designed to provide quick, meaningful professional development for members unable to physically attend workshops due to family responsibilities, second jobs, or other commitments. It is a new initiative of the Greater Essex Occasional Teachers’ Local professional development committee and just one of a number of professional learning activities the local has sponsored.

“Just because our members can’t attend workshops doesn’t mean they’re not interested in professional dialogue,” says Cynthia Graydon, *PD on the Fly* moderator. “This allows them to have meaningful experiences at home on their own time.”

The concept is simple. The local accesses the elementary occasional teachers’ electronic conference through the board’s website, where registered members can post and read messages that pertain only to occasional teachers. *PD on the Fly* was introduced to the conference last November. New sessions are posted twice a month.

Each session raises one current issue in education, suggests one book for further reading, and gives one website worth investigating. Topics have included How Can I Make Them Listen? What Makes a Good Teacher Great? What Is Equity Anyway? What Is Character Education? and Your Collective Agreement, Did You Read It?

“It’s a means of self-discovery,” Graydon says. “People can take it as far as they want. Some might go out and buy the [recommended] book, others just move on to the next message.” She believes self-directed learning is more meaningful: “It’s easier to understand and retain knowledge that means something personally.”

Recognizing that teachers’ time is too valuable to waste, the online sessions offer an alternative to teachers frustrated with the limitations of board-directed group professional development. Online sessions explore trends such as character education and look at why the board adopts related policies.

Participation has grown from about 30 participants in the first session to more than 100 in the last session. That’s as good as or better than attendance at any workshops offered for occasional teachers this year.

Participation in the conference occurs before, during, and after school hours, unlike regular PD sessions, which were largely restricted to evenings after school. With the growing popularity of the online sessions, the local is exploring the idea of creating a blog to accommodate professional discussions.

The local executive believes that our project will have achieved its purpose if people read it and become more aware of issues, or if it helps them become more effective teachers. ♥

Catherine Cocchio is the president of the Greater Essex Occasional Teacher Local.

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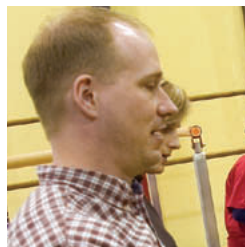
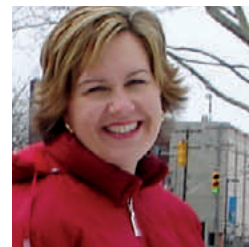
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TAKING TIME TO LEARN

A good idea, an effective new strategy – improving your practice depends on them. But incorporating these new elements into your everyday teaching practice can be a challenge. Just simply learning about them is not enough. That's why ETFO programs professional development opportunities over several days.

The three-day workshops that are part of ETFO's Summer Academy or a workshop series spread over several weeks allow participants to learn about good ideas and give them an opportunity to work on incorporating them into their daily practice. Participants have a chance to build on their knowledge and share with colleagues. ETFO's Kindergarten Institute expands those opportunities by providing participants with an online community and a follow-up conference six months later.

DONNA CHAPMAN, ANNAMARI POUTI-FLETCHER,
AND MARION MUTTON

Strategies for Surviving While Smiling



Photo: Catherine Cocchio

Like learning to skate, becoming a successful teacher is easier with a helping hand, according to Annamari Pouti-Fletcher. The Windsor area teacher has reaped a lot of benefit from ETFO's new teacher workshops.

While new teachers face unusual challenges that require extra support, the challenges for occasional teachers are even greater: isolation, lack of a peer network, and the ongoing difficulty of adjusting to different school environments and different student groups can make the life of an OT an ordeal that has to be endured on the way to a permanent contract.

"Occasional teachers are often isolated out in the schools," says Donna Chapman, vice-president of the Toronto Occasional Teacher Local. "They have traditionally received little support and had limited access to professional development."

To address that need, ETFO has launched a four-part professional learning program to support both new full-time and occasional teachers as they begin their careers.

Facilitated by teacher members, "Strategies for Surviving While Smiling" is full of practical ideas and strategies to help new teachers develop

a positive, effective learning environment in their classroom. The program focuses on

- creating community and building relationships through cooperative learning, understanding equity, and differentiated learning
- developing classroom management and conflict resolution strategies
- promoting effective communication and ongoing assessment and evaluation practices.

The decision to run a four-part series was intentional: this format offers new teachers a chance to network, discuss their issues and questions, and develop collegial relationships with their colleagues.

Annamari Pouti-Fletcher, a member of the Greater Essex New Teachers' Committee, was a participant in the New Teacher Series in Windsor last fall. She feels she was fortunate to have been able to attend. "During the four evenings we were able to share, reflect, participate and build confidence. We also each received a resource binder filled with useful information and ideas," Pouti-Fletcher recalls. "The atmosphere was supportive. The singing and dancing (and laughter that resulted) were definite indicators of our enjoyment and willingness to learn new things."

The multisession format of this program has proved particularly ben-

eficial for occasional teachers.

The Toronto Occasional Teacher Local has over 3,000 members, many of them new to the profession. It was the first OT local to take part in the new teacher workshops. This four-part series helped members feel connected not only to their local, but also to other members and to the provincial office.

"We see the benefits of professional development for occasional teachers. Our members who participate fully are usually the ones who have a 'leg up' in getting a contract position and long-term occasional contracts," said Chapman.

"We are here to support our members on many levels, including professional development. By offering quality PD, we discovered that our members became more connected to their union. A loyalty developed."

Annamari Pouti-Fletcher likens the experience of participating in the workshops to putting on skates after many years off the ice: "It had been a few years since I'd been out there, the ice looked terribly intimidating and I worried about looking and feeling wobbly on my skates.

"I put on a brave face and reminded myself that I had what it took to get around without falling. My ankles did feel like rubber, but I paused to tighten my laces and after a few more times around, I felt that things were going fairly smoothly.

"That was when I happened to notice someone else preparing to venture out on to the ice. She was holding her friend's arm but she looked so fearful of being wobbly that I stopped and, reaching out my arm, offered to help. With support, a few quick tips and lots of encouragement, she forgot her fear just long enough to feel herself gliding along. Within a matter of minutes she was skating all by herself.

"She was, as a matter of fact, surviving while smiling, while my outstretched arm acted like our ETFO local – providing the supportive hand.

"For new teachers who may at times feel 'wobbly,' I highly recommend this ETFO workshop series as a valuable way to help explore strategies for surviving while smiling within an atmosphere of fun and support." ♥

This article was prepared with the assistance of Janet Millar-Grant and Jim Giles, executive assistants in Professional Services.



Photo: Jorge Uzon

eficial for occasional teachers. The Toronto Occasional Teacher Local has over 3,000 members, many of them new to the profession. It was the first OT local to take part in the new teacher workshops. This four-part series helped members feel connected not only to their local, but also to other members and to the provincial office.

"With this series, our members feel a part of something," said Donna Chapman, who coordinates the program. "Networking became a valuable spinoff as our members on long-term occasional contracts found other members in similar situations. Through networking and dialoguing, members supported each other and problem-solved while validating what each teacher was doing well.

"From our local executive's point of view, we were hearing and learning about what our members needed – they became the eyes and ears of our

FANITSA HOUSDON

Don't Sweat the Active Stuff

A collegial approach helps teachers overcome fear of physical education.



Photos: John Hasyn



ETFO's Summer Academy workshops are a great learning and networking opportunity for both presenters and participants. Our workshops highlight the wealth of knowledge that we stand to gain from our interactions with one another.

These are active three-day sessions. Our slogan is "Come prepared to participate," though we stress that it's okay to sit back and simply observe at various times throughout the day. Participants have an opportunity to work in both large and small groups. We encourage them to share their own experiences, whether they've just stepped into the profession or they have 25 years or more under their belts.

Our typical day starts off with an assortment of ice-breaker exercises that participants can easily adapt to any audience, such as leading a group

of students or facilitating a professional learning session for staff or colleagues. We get the participants up and moving, using tried and tested games and activities that are sure to get even the most hesitant of students active.

Throughout the day we investigate various models for putting in place daily physical activity (DPA) and challenge participants to decide for themselves which ones best suit their unique needs. We have small groups look at a variety of scenarios and encourage them to discuss safety guidelines and recommendations for each situation.

For the generalist teacher, knowing where to go for help is half the battle. After facilitating various health and physical education workshops I realized that many teachers are not familiar with the wealth of resources available to them. The OPHEA (Ontario Physical Health and Education Association) curriculum binders, and programs and resources provided by CAHPERD (Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance) and CIRA Ontario (Canadian Intramural Recreation Association), are but a few of the many we highlight. We provide the group with time

Guest presenters give us an innovative look at the most recent publications and resources. This part of the session is fun-filled and energetic, as we all get involved in a variety of rock, paper, scissors games and fitness circuit training stations that challenge each of us to beat our personal best!

We also look at integrating physical activity with the development of literacy and numeracy skills as we play games of Tennis Ball Scrabble, Math Match, Number Sentence Balancing, and Active Storytelling. Teachers particularly enjoy this portion of the workshop, since they are the curriculum experts who can easily link various activities to their grade-specific curriculum expectations. The possibilities are endless, as we brainstorm and share an assortment of great ideas. We encourage them also to have their students make suggestions for variations of games and activities.

We discuss creative timetabling, and participants get an opportunity to share the model used in their school. The group looks at pros and cons of the various models, and we encourage them to take a little of this and a little of that to create a model that works best for them. With their rotary timetables, intermediate schools often choose whole-school DPA and designate a specific 20-minute time slot each day, to ensure that all students are active. The schoolwide focus sets a great tone and underlines the importance of DPA. On the other hand, giving teachers the opportunity to incorporate the 20 minutes into their own timetable where it best fits allows for greater opportunities for integration with other subject areas, sharing of equipment and creative use of space.

At the ETFO Summer Academy workshops we highlight the importance of involving parents and the community at large, and we investigate strategies that help promote professional learning communities. Whatever the focus, working in partnership with all parties results in a strong commitment to a shared vision.

We like to finish off our Summer Academy session with a “make and take” opportunity for participants. A tarp-sized Snakes and Ladders fitness game, a large deck of cards, clothesline fitness, and a bagful of freebies from our friends at OPHEA and CAHPERD are among the many goodies participants take home. Our Summer Academy printed handout is comprehensive and



Photo: Bernard Weil, Toronto Star

to familiarize themselves with various websites, agencies, and health and physical education links that can assist them with their teaching.

Raising participants' comfort level in the area of physical activity helps them to implement programs and make a genuine impact at their school. At our sessions, teachers learn from us and from each other, sharing ideas and strategies for using the space and resources they have at hand. We demonstrate activities that use the school hallway, the playground and even the smallest classroom.

Fanitsa Housdon teaches at Osprey Public School in the Peel District School Board. She has been a Summer Academy presenter for four years.



Photo: John Hasyn

highlights the various activities that we cover over the three-day session.

Finally we exchange email addresses, so that the networking and friendships don't end with the session. One of the most rewarding aspects of leading the Summer Academy is receiving an email from a past participant who simply wants to say hello and to share a success story of how her class is now participating in 20 minutes of chair aerobics each day, or how he used DeBono's *Six Thinking Hats*¹ to introduce the DPA initiative to the school's administrative team and staff.

At every workshop I've facilitated, the energy in the room has been contagious, and in a short three days we end up making lasting impressions, not only in our teaching but also in our circle of friends. ♥

¹ Edward De Bono, *Six Thinking Hats* (revised edition). London, UK: Penguin Books, 2000.



ETFO's Summer Academy offers workshops for teachers at all stages of their careers and at all grade levels.

Check out the courses at etfo.ca > Summer Academy

Full details will be posted by May 15.



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Kalpana Makan (kmakan@etfo.org, ext. 2245) at provincial office.

JUNE CHANG-VOLLANS

Learning and Doing Together

A mid-career teacher updates her knowledge.



Photo: Patrick Doyle, CP Images

Junior kindergarten is a different world from any other grade. When I first started teaching at the junior kindergarten level nine years ago, I was shocked both by the demands of welcoming all these children attending school for the first time and by my own personal reactions to this new level. Having taught over half of the previous 10 years at the Junior level, I was really struggling to figure out my new role. My first year in junior kindergarten included physical injuries, such as being bitten on my face by a panic-stricken child who had never been left anywhere without mommy!

This memory was swirling in my head as I was signing in last year during the first day at the ETFO's Kindergarten Summer Institute: Learning and Doing Together. I kept thinking that if I had been able to experience this institute years ago, it would have made a great difference in helping to propel me into my new way of thinking about my role as a teacher.

I first learned about the Summer Institute from a posting on our school board's kindergarten curriculum online conference. Year after year, I have seen interesting conferences advertised, but because they were out of town during the school week, and/or because they conflicted with my responsibilities to my own family, I was unable to attend. It was very frustrating not to be able to pursue these opportunities. When I saw that the 2006 Summer Institute was going to be held in Ottawa, *and* that it was only

KG Institutes

ETFO's Kindergarten Summer Institute was funded by the Ministry of Education's Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. Following a 3-day workshop, participants continued to connect through an online conference. They met again face to face in April to share their learning and experiences.

\$25, I made it my first planned activity for the summer! I was excited about attending for several reasons. I enjoy both connecting with former colleagues and making new connections. I was also very interested in hearing how the ministry's newly revised (2006) Kindergarten Program document was going to be presented.

So often I have connected via board email with another kindergarten teacher, shared ideas, resources and encouragement, and hoped to some day meet her or him in person. The institute gave me a chance to meet up with a few "new but old" friends, and I finally got to put faces to the wonderful souls I had come to know through email. They all brought with them different experiences and lots of excitement.

At the institute sessions, we heard new information and were reminded of key points related to child development, such as that children's early oral language skills have a long-term impact on so many other literacy skills, as well as on physical aggression and antisocial behaviour. As a result of attending the Summer Institute, I have lengthened times for oral language development and demonstrations using real-life scenarios, in my classroom. The students are now coming up with their own extension ideas that they want to incorporate into activity centres.

I found it most interesting to note the reactions and body language of my colleagues as we heard about the importance of the critical period in the development of oral language. People were sitting taller. I heard a few people comment that this reminded them about how important our role as "facilitators of destiny" is! A key quote I particularly liked and that has stayed in my mind is this: "Children and playdough are alike, in that you can not interact with them without leaving an impression."

Over the course of the three days, I made many new connections. New teachers were all abuzz with the excitement of wanting to try out their newly acquired ideas. Some experienced teachers were able to confirm that they were, in fact, right on track. An interesting article about change¹ provided food for thought, and it gave me ideas about how to approach people when we make changes to what we do and how we do it. I have used the information from that article for self-reflection and as a tool when I deal with others in the capacity of leader or mentor.

Some sessions were jam-packed with ideas I could use in my classroom. There were great new ideas for new teachers and familiar ideas were present-

June Chang-Vollans teaches at Parkwood Hills Public School in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board.

WORKSHOPS for JK and KG teachers will be offered as part of ETFO's Summer Academy.



► Go to **etfo.ca** for full details.

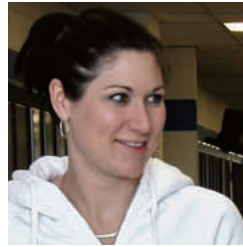
ed with a slightly different slant or approach. All of them expanded my To Do list – and the shopping list for my next trip to the dollar store!

The session on assessment reconfirmed the need to plan and record authentic assessment opportunities by observing children as they demonstrate what they know and what they can do. If observations show that children have not acquired or cannot demonstrate skills and/or information, then we need to teach again and give a variety of opportunities for them to demonstrate their learning. A memorable quote from that session: "You can not fatten a pig by weighing it." During this session I developed a new slogan, "Assess for Success!"

I have a wand that I use to give high-fives to students when they are "caught" doing something nice, solving problems on their own, or taking initiative. I also use it when I am welcoming them in or sending them home after a great day in class. The "wand" is actually a fly swatter, with a small flip flop sandal on the end and an electronic voice box. When I wave it, it says, "Gotcha!" and shows that I recognize their moment of success. I now use it more often.

All of us, both new and experienced teachers, need more of these opportunities to learn, share, and reinforce information and ideas. Since the ETFO's Kindergarten Institute, I have maintained contact with a few teachers in other schools and have mentored them informally. I have gained from sharing with others. At our followup workshop in April 2007, those of us who met last year will meet again to share changes and ideas. Thank you to all those who have worked hard to help us continue to grow as facilitators of these incredible young learners! "Gotcha!" on a great job. ♥

¹ Francis M. Duffy, "I Think, Therefore I Am Resistant to Change." National Staff Development Council, *Journal of Staff Development*, Winter 2003 (24). Available at nsdc.org/library/publications.



SMALL TEAMS WITH BIG IMPACT

Teacher collaboration helps create shared vision and purpose and often leads to improved student achievement. By promoting reflection and sharing, teachers learn together about new strategies and foster increased consistency in understanding the curriculum and interpreting assessment data. Collaboration can also increase teachers' job satisfaction and enjoyment.

Collaboration doesn't have to be formally mandated or structured. It doesn't have to be complicated. In this section, you will read about teachers who chose relatively simple ways to work together and achieved important results.

JOANNE MYERS

Connecting Theory and Practice



Photos: Anne De Haas



In the spring of 2005, I read *Teaching for Deep Understanding: Towards the Ontario Curriculum that We Need!*. By the time I had finished the book, I was inspired to write and facilitate a professional book study for the Junior staff at Armitage Village Public School in Newmarket, where I am the divisional lead teacher and literacy special education resource teacher. My major goal was to develop a strong foundation for professional collegiality, and I thought this was the book to do it.

Teaching for Deep Understanding is the result of a collaboration between faculty at OISE/UT and provincial ETFO staff members. This professional research partnership excited me for a variety of reasons. I have been a part-time Primary/Junior instructor at OISE/UT for 16 years and an active Presenter on the Road and course

writer for ETFO for 12 years. I love it when the two worlds of practical strategies and theoretical research unite. I was keenly interested in the recommendations about delivering the Ontario curriculum to students in more meaningful and more passionate ways.

To be honest, my excitement was challenged somewhat as I dove into the first of the book's five parts. It became obvious that this was not a poolside book that I could put down casually as I went to get Popsicles for the kids.

But I was encouraged to read and reread because each writer was validating theories and philosophies that I have believed in for a long time. They were reminding us all that our task as professionals is not to "plough through the skill expectations of the curriculum," but rather to take creative and thoughtful time to help our

students make meaningful connections between their daily classroom learning and their life experiences.

My principal, Nancy Lester, supported and encouraged the idea of this book study, which would be the first for the Junior staff at our school. I also had the support of staff at ETFO provincial office. I ordered 14 copies of the book for September and my principal wrote the cheque.

During the summer I worked on creating what I hoped would be a motivating and enriching



experience for my colleagues. Having developed my own “deep understanding” that this book was not a quick read, I needed some strategies that would assist my colleagues to read it thoughtfully throughout the school year, even while they were preoccupied with planning, assessing, and writing report cards. I wanted them to commit to the study and, more than anything, I really wanted to elicit thought-provoking, professional, reflective, and even controversial discussions.

I structured the monthly meetings on the model of a literature circle, I thought that modelling an effective instructional strategy that could be used in the classroom would help to make the participants feel safe, creative, and comfortable. Every teacher in the group would have an opportunity to experience each of the literature circle roles (discussion director, artful artist, pas-

sage picker, word wizard, and connector director). In the end, this structure worked well, even though it wasn’t a typical book club structure.

The challenging part of the study came after the books had been distributed and the structure and times of the studies had been announced and discussed. The teachers were initially pleased to receive the new resource, and they responded positively to the study format. But when they began reading the book, I started to hear rumblings of concern. At our first meeting, while in our literature circle roles, we vented a little about how “deep” the reading was. The second study meeting was better. Participants took their roles seriously and provided creative, thoughtful responses. As the study’s facilitator, I felt optimistic about the direction it was taking.

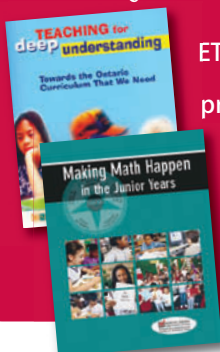
By meeting number three we were on a roll. Everyone in the study connected strongly with Michel Ferrari’s article “Teaching Wisdom through Deep Critical Thinking and Development of Character.” We all agreed this was an area that we felt very passionately about, and each of us reflected on our own feeling about the value of making mistakes in life, gaining wisdom from experience, and developing our own deep understandings.

We decided this process of developing wisdom was something we would like to explore further. We discussed ideas and strategies for demonstration lessons for all of our Junior students based on the concept of wisdom. I facilitated these demonstration lessons, with the assistance of the home-room teachers.

Called “Reflecting on the Meaning and Value of Wisdom,” the demonstration lessons began with a discussion of the definition of wisdom. *The Three Questions*, a book by Jon J. Muth, was read aloud. Based on a short story by Leo Tolstoy, the book is a rich work of children’s literature about life experiences, philosophy, and the search for meaning. Following a discussion of the book, students were asked to think about the concept of wisdom and to complete a reflective writing response. One task was to think about and describe the characteristics of a person whom they knew and thought was very wise. What had they learned from this person?

Students also wrote about a time when they gained wisdom through a specific learning experience. Finally, they were asked to think creatively

It’s easy to start a book club in your school.



ETFO has facilitator guides available for nine professional books that will help you guide your group. Contact Jane Bennett (jbennett@etfo.org) or Janet Millar Grant (jmillargrant@etfo.org) at the provincial office.

- 1 *Teaching for Deep Understanding: Towards the Ontario Curriculum that We Need*, Edited by Kenneth Leithwood, Pat McAdie, Nina Bascia, and Anne Rodrigue. Published by OISE/UT and the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, 2005.
- 2 Eric. Jensen, *Tools for Engagement: Managing Emotional States for Learner Success*, San Diego, CA: The Brain Store, 2003.

to develop a powerful statement or belief about the meaning of wisdom. These were shared and displayed as part of our culminating activities. One of my favourites was "Wisdom is a gift that you earn through experiencing life, and it is a gift that no one can ever take away from you." Students loved the lessons and, without a doubt, we helped each and every one of them think deeply about gaining wisdom in their lives and valuing it forever.

The teachers shared with each of the classes their own personal stories, and this helped to form connections and to build a learning environment that was honest, motivating, and real. The students reciprocated with their reflective written responses, which were shared and celebrated throughout the division. This sharing was definitely a highlight for everyone involved. The emotional intelligence of the staff and students was high.

As the book study drew to a close, we held a celebration and reflection at my home in June. The plan for a poolside party was recast when it rained . . . deeply! We did, however, have a very collegial and constructive discussion about our book

study process. Each teacher completed a reflective response and a constructive feedback sheet.

Overall, all of my colleagues liked the literature circle format of the book study. They appreciated the comfortable and relaxed approach to the meetings. They valued the more practical aspects of *Teaching for Deep Understanding*, and also felt positive about how it confirmed their own philosophies and beliefs. I read the word *validation* in many of the responses.

We all enjoyed the professional dialogue, the honest perspectives – and even the frustrations. We were pleased that we had demonstrated our own commitment and persistence in collaboratively completing the study. In the end, we all felt strongly about the link between deep understanding and student motivation.

Our experience with *Teaching for Deep Understanding* has led us into our next book study, in which we are using Eric Jensen's latest work, *Tools for Engagement: Managing Emotional States for Learner Success*.² This book is a perfect follow-up to *Teaching for Deep Understanding*. We have found that book study is a great way to get together and focus on teaching and learning. **V**



instant RECALL

a coaching workshop

ETFO is seeking five members who want to become coaches and help facilitate face-to-face and/or on-line professional learning communities. You will learn basic coaching skills, get an understanding of the coaching process, and learn how to work with adult learners.

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For more information contact
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- Have a strong desire and ability to instruct peers
- Promote the courses within the Local
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To ensure that its leadership positions are accessible to all members, ETFO will make additional spaces available for those who meet the selection criteria and who have self-identified as belonging to these designated groups: Aboriginal, disabled, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender. PD funding may be available through your ETFO Local.

For an application package call Jim McMahon or Melanie McClelland at 1-888-838-3836 or e-mail mmcclelland@etfo.org.

Sharing the Load, the Laughter, and the Learning

"Teachers do not learn best from outside experts or by attending conferences or implementing 'programs' installed by outsiders. Teachers learn best from other teachers, in settings where they literally teach each other the art of teaching."¹



Photo: John Hasyn

Seventeen years ago two new teachers, Deb Zeagman and Deb Pitblado, discovered that they would be working together as a grade team at Pinegrove Public School in the Halton District School Board. Since then we have changed schools, had babies, and raised our families. But the team is still together. Along the way, a third colleague, Katy Kelly, joined us. This article is our reflection about why working as a grade team is a special opportunity that provides a unique kind of professional development.

Many teachers arrive at school, go to their classroom, work with their students, briefly chat with other teachers at the photocopier or in the staffroom, go home after school, plan and mark on their own, and go back and do the same thing the next day. Working as a grade team can look and sound much different.

Our classrooms are side by side. When we arrive in the morning, we often greet each other

with a new story, share a laugh, or maybe a last-minute lesson if one of us is in need. We may discuss and get advice on something that happened the day before. When the students arrive, we greet them together and begin our day. The students know, respect, and listen to each of us because they see us working together every day. We are a team of teachers and our students see themselves as a team of learners.

We have an innovative arrangement. This year Deb Zeagman teaches grade 2, Deb Pitblado teaches grade 1, and Katy Kelly teaches grade 2/3. However, over the years we have rotated through the Primary grades, sometimes teaching the same grade, and have taken turns teaching a combined grade if needed. As a result, we understand the different grades and Primary students, and we can support each other more effectively.

Every day we build on each other's ideas. We reflect on what works, revise, try things out, and

watch how someone else teaches a lesson. If it was successful – great. If not, we analyze, modify, and change it before trying it in our own classroom.

This year we have our lowest class numbers ever, with 17, 21 and 20 students. This makes it easier to combine classes into one room, either two or all three, as appropriate. We use this arrangement when all of our students are going to be participating in similar activities (for example, art lessons, math centre activities, science videos). Only one of us is needed to describe or give the instructions for the activity, while the others are freed up to do a variety of tasks: preparing materials for upcoming lessons, doing one-on-one assessments with students; working with smaller groups to explain a modified version of the activity (enriched or remediated); or watching our colleague teach and providing help, when requested, with classroom management or with modelling the activity being explained.

We have created a safe environment that takes into account difference: if we think that something we are discussing as a team will not fit into our classroom, we feel comfortable enough to opt out. We share everything from our resources to our parent volunteers, who work for all three classrooms. Each of us photocopies for all three classrooms. For us, teamwork cuts down on our workload and reduces stress.

Between us, we have 40 years of experience, problem solving, and wisdom. Our programs, interactions with students and parents, and outlook on teaching are enhanced through our approach. As Peter Senge says in *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, “When teams are truly learning, not only are they producing extraordinary results, but the individual members are growing more rapidly than could have occurred otherwise.” As a group we are able to grow more rapidly and share that learning with others who may not be in similar circumstances. We have taught ETFO Summer Academy courses together, facilitated ministry training together, and modelled programs for other school teams. We have been successful because we work as a team.

1 M. Schmoker, “No Turning Back: The Ironclad Case for Professional Learning Communities,” in *On Common Ground The Power of Professional Learning Communities*. R. Dufour et al (eds.), Bloomington, IN: National Education Service, 2005. 141.

Work and Learn with Colleagues

Support is available for 50 collaborative teams whose members are from the same school or who have in common a specialized role (FSL, Special Education, etc.). Teams will attend a 1.5-day provincial symposium in August and receive up to four days per teacher for team collaboration. For more information contact Jane Bennett (jbennett@etfo.org) or Nancy Baldree (nbaldree@etfo.org), or visit etfo.ca.


To continue our personal growth, and to keep up with best teaching practices, we select a specific topic or learning strategy to focus on. We analyze that area together and determine what we want to change. We may go to different professional development experiences on that subject area. Together we make connections, think about what we already do and what the research says works best, and then determine how to make it work in our environment, with our students. Each of us decides what will work best for our grade level, and as a team we ensure that the activities the students are involved in are developed to suit their individual grade expectations.

Administrators past and present have recognized and appreciated the time and energy we put into our team planning. They have provided common planning times and adjacent classrooms, and have scheduled shared duties when possible. They have also supported initiatives that we bring to school council; they encourage us when we want to attend the same workshop and provide coverage if we are participating in a special initiative or event.

Kilbride Public School is our third school together. We have purposely followed each other here. We sought this opportunity out because we recognize the value in working and being together. We feel that we deliver our program three times more effectively than we would if we were on our own. Our collaboration benefits students and parents.

Our working arrangement didn't happen overnight, it happened over years. We learned and grew together, one bit at a time. At the beginning, we planned together over lunches and a working dinner once a month, and during our common planning times. This ensured that our programs and approaches worked together. We began with simple things, picking one small piece to develop and work on together each term and each year. It could be as simple as working on an activity for a new picture book, creating a set of math centres, or planning a new unit.

If you are currently working on a team but not as a team, approach someone and ask if she or he would be interested in working on something together. If sharing your love of teaching, your desire to learn, and your workload sounds appealing, then try the bit-by-bit approach. Start with a smaller focus and gradually try to incorporate a more collaborative approach to your teaching environment.

The best learning takes place when teachers walk into someone else's classroom. The three of us are lucky enough to walk into each other's classrooms every day. 

Katy Kelly, Deb Pitblado, and Deb Zeagman teach at Kilbride Public School in the Halton District School Board.

BRIAN HARRISON

Engaging in Lesson Study



Photos: Anne de Haas



The grade 6 students settle down as the lesson begins. A few scan the room, intrigued by the novel presence of three teachers and one administrator, clipboards in their hands. I begin the lesson; the topic is note taking and summarizing from informational text.

Why was I here? I don't normally teach grade 6; I teach a grade 7/8 class, along with intermediate history, on rotary. Although I often try to get over to Kim Arbour's grade 6 classroom to chat, to visit, to see what she and her students are up to, there never seems to be enough time. We squeeze in a few minutes for professional conversations on the fly, waiting by the photocopier, scrambling

up the stairs as the bell rings, or perched upon the edges of our students' desks for an end-of-the-day laugh – or on some days, a rant.

We teachers lead busy lives, often focused on the urgent. We try to steer our conversations toward the important and long-lasting ideas that drew us to teaching in the first place, but the time always seems to fly away. When and how will we be able to have the professional conversations we want and need to have, we wonder. How do we fit our professional interests and concerns into the rush of our school days?

This year, as part of a project funded by our district school board, groups of teachers across



our region have been participating in school-based action research designed to facilitate professional conversations to help improve teacher understanding and skill in teaching literacy. At our school, Jersey Public School in Keswick, we have decided to incorporate lesson study into our project, and our focus is on deepening our understanding of the role student engagement plays in the quality of their writing.

Lesson study is a process that originated in Japan. It involves the collaborative planning, teaching, observing and revising of a specific lesson by a team of teachers. It is designed to bring teachers together to observe, first-hand, the impact that a lesson is having on students as the lesson is being taught. The lesson topic is usually drawn from a concern or issue that teachers on the team have identified as important. The team plans the lesson, then one of the members volunteers to teach it while the others watch and record their observations of the students.

This opening up, or “deprivatizing,” of teaching practice is not common in our culture of teaching, and it can make some teachers uncomfortable. With this concern in mind, our lesson

Brian Harrison teaches at Jersey Public School in the York Region District School Board.

study team began with specific activities designed to build our trust in one another, help us understand the dynamics of effective teamwork and develop clear protocols on how we would carry out our research. We were able also to tap into the resources of district-level staff, to help facilitate our project and to ensure we were adhering to the protocols we had established.

At Jersey, we wanted to explore how we could improve our instruction in writing to boost the engagement levels and meet the needs of students who were having difficulty with writing. Our decision to focus on our struggling learners can be traced back to another central idea of lesson study: that we can learn a great deal about how to improve our teaching by looking at what is not working, which is best accomplished as the lesson is being taught.

The simplicity of the lesson study process is what makes it so effective. The observers collect and record data on what they hear and see from the students during the lesson, and these observations form the basis of the conversation the team has after the lesson. Part of that conversation involves revising the lesson, based upon the students’ responses to the activity. After this revision process, the cycle continues, with a new member of the team teaching the revised lesson while the others observe and collect data. Often this revised lesson is taught to a different group of learners. In our case, the fact that our focus was on the effectiveness of our shared writing lessons, and on a specific number of students, prompted us to conduct our research entirely within one team member’s classroom.

We planned a lesson for Kim Arbour’s grade 6 class. The students were working on researching and writing reports on the solar system as part of a cross-curricular science and language unit. We designed a shared reading and writing activity that demonstrated the use of the *It Says/I Say* summarizing strategy introduced in *When Kid’s Can’t Read – What Teachers Can Do* by Kylene Beers. As I taught the lesson the rest of the team – Kim; Shirley Ley, our special education resource teacher; and our vice-principal, Judith Livingston – acted as data collectors.

In the conversation we had after the lesson (with the support of facilitator Wendy Swaine), we were able to reach some conclusions based upon the recorded observations and the student surveys we had collected after teaching. We noticed that there were students who looked as if they were engaged in the lesson, but upon scrutiny of their surveys and observations, we could see that they were not, while a few students who didn’t appear to be engaged in the lesson actually were. We also found we had more questions – many more questions than answers, actually.

Our focus on engagement has led us to consider what engagement means from the perspective of our students. What does it mean to be engaged? What does engagement look like? Sound like? How is it that some learners are able to maintain and monitor their attention during shared writing instruction, while others seem to struggle, losing focus and creating gaps in their skills as writers? These are the professional questions we hope to talk about together as we go through the lesson study process, one lesson at a time.

Working together to study our craft, in the schools and classrooms we teach in, ought to be the foundation of our professional learning as teachers. Studying the impact of the planned instructional decisions we make, as they happen, is a logical context for this learning. As our small team continues on the lesson study journey, we look forward to the new insights and teaching ideas our work together will bring. **V**

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