ASSESSMENT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BY TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE LITERATURE IN THE CONTEXT OF ONE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT. The focus of this article is teacher professional development. The article examines literature related to teacher professional development and methods of measuring its impact. In order to ground the discussion, the article focuses on a case study that captures the perspectives of Ontario secondary school teachers and their administrators as they implement a literacy program targeted at improving student achievement.

ÉVALUATION DU DÉVELOPPEMENT PROFESSIONNEL PAR LES ENSEIGNANTS ET LES ADMINISTRATEURS: UNE ANALYSE DE LA LITTÉRATURE DANS LE CONTEXTE D'UNE ÉTUDE DE CAS

RÉSUMÉ. Les stratégies relatives à la réussite des élèves sont souvent assujetties à la compréhension des liens entre le perfectionnement professionnel des enseignants et le développement de la littératie des élèves. En plus d'examiner la littérature portant sur le perfectionnement professionnel et les mesures relatives à son impact, cet article présente une étude de cas qui relate les représentations des enseignants des écoles secondaires de l'Ontario et des administrateurs scolaires durant le processus de mise en œuvre d'un programme de littératie visant l'amélioration du rendement des élèves.

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, government education policies and curriculum reforms expect educators to find new ways to enhance schooling and education in order to help all students succeed. Understanding the strategies used by teachers and administrators for professional development and identifying the ways to assess the effectiveness of professional development programs in schools are integral to improved teacher instructional practices in the classroom and, in turn improved student achievement.

The concepts of teacher professional development and teacher practices have changed substantially over the past ten years. Previously, professional development was viewed as a voluntary activity for teachers and teachers' practices were not subject to analysis or linked to student achievement. Since the 1990s, in Ontario, Canada, and many Anglo Saxon countries, governments have used

their authority to prescribe teacher professional development in an attempt to change teachers' instructional and assessment practices. Ingvarson, Meiers, and Bevis (2005) suggest that the term "professional development" now refers to programs that employ a range of delivery methods that are research-based, and that the term "practice" refers to the following: a) making clear links between teachers' teaching goals and classroom activities; b) managing classroom structures and activities more effectively; c) using more effective teaching and learning strategies appropriate to the content taught; d) using more effective teaching and learning strategies appropriate to the classroom context; e) using teaching and learning strategies that are more challenging and engaging and better able to meet the individual learning needs of students; f) linking assessment to the teaching and learning cycle more effectively; g) providing more effective feedback to students to support their learning; h) engaging students in higher order thinking; and i) assessing and using materials and resources more effectively (p. 10). Consequently, reforms to teacher professional development and practices require new ways of thinking, and the role of the professional educator and school administrator is critical to the implementation and assessment of the reform process. By its focus on teacher professional development, this paper engages the discussion on literacy development and the ways to ensure academic success for all youth.

LITEARCY DEVELOPMENT

Studies of literacy have offered insight into how teachers and schools might help all learners to succeed and thereby be able to understand social, political, and economic issues, participate more fully in society, and have better access to the job market. Research on literacy education must therefore consider strategies of effective teaching that enable young learners to succeed. These learning and teaching strategies can be promoted in schools to ensure success for all. These strategies have implications for the issues of teacher professional development and curriculum and instructional development. Teachers' knowledge of these strategies is fundamental for youth academic enhancement.

The National Academy of Education (NAE) of the United States of America (2006) found that an alarming number of teachers lacked grounding in the fundamental knowledge about literacy necessary to improve their instructional practices. The academy recommended that all teachers receive enhanced training in sustaining adolescent motivation in reading in all subject areas, and in assessment procedures that are explicitly integrated with instruction.

Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002) suggested that literacy development to enhance the academic success of youth depends, to a great extent, on the nature of the support teachers receive for their professional development. Teachers who pursue literacy training for youth must themselves be supported by resources, knowledge, and skills that will have an impact on young learners and help ensure their academic and social success.

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The existing literature discusses the supporting roles of teachers and administrators in professional development, identifies barriers to professional development, indicates several reasons why the impact of professional development is not understood, and suggests ways to assess the effectiveness of professional development programs in schools (Bandura, 1997; Fessler, 1995; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Goddard, 2004; Ross & Bruce, 2007).

A critical examination of the literature indicates that teachers can play a leadership role in professional development and act as a catalyst in forming a community of learners. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argued that teachers who take on the roles of consultants, curriculum developers, analysts, activists, and school leaders can and should articulate what and how things need to change in their own learning and in their schools. In order to improve the quality and effectiveness of professional development programs, teacher narratives of their reflections and assessments of professional development in progress need to find a place in the literature (Cochran-Smith, 2006; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004).

Within the school context, the school administrator's role in the design and implementation of professional development may be understood as one of helping to change the culture of the school by building relationships (Barth, 1990), by building school capacity (Lambert, 2003), and by creating the conditions for promoting teachers as leaders (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach 2004; Spillane & Timperley, 2004). Other researchers such as Borko (2004), Cochran-Smith (2005), Cohen and Hill (2001), and Guskey (2005) contend that it is the role of school leaders to coordinate policy levers, foster collaboration among the various sectors of the system, involve teachers in research, and help teachers to focus on student learning.

One of the main obstacles to the implementation of professional development is that governments, school districts, and professional development providers often do not communicate clearly the rationale for change and the direction in which schools are expected to move (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Lick, 2005). Other barriers associated with the implementation of professional development include cost, leadership shortcomings, length of teacher training, and program planners who often use one-size-fits-all or individualized approaches to teacher development. The one-size-fits-all approach may unite teachers around a shared vision but gives teachers little choice and autonomy in instructional decisions (Randi & Zeichner, 2004). An individualized approach results in fragmentation and does not serve the school or school districts well (Elmore, 2002).

The literature provides three plausible reasons for our limited understanding of the impact of professional development on teacher practices and student achievement. First, teacher knowledge is said to be tacit. Eraut (2000) argued that teachers need to make tacit knowledge more explicit and that doing so

would improve the quality of a person's or a team's performance. He suggested that some linkage is necessary between actions and outcomes if one is to take responsibility for one's actions.

A second reason for not understanding the impact of professional development is reform overload and the lack of resources for teachers. Majhanovich (2002) observed that many teachers are exhausted with having to cope with so many reforms at once. Leithwood, Steinbach, and Jantzi (2002) claimed that without resources such as time for collaboration and in-service training, teachers struggle to bring about even a portion of the planned government changes in pedagogy and practices as outlined in current reforms. In an environment of reform overload, it is not surprising that assessing the impact of professional development on teacher practices and student achievement would not constitute a high priority for schools or their school boards.

The third reason why the impact of professional development on practice is not well understood is because there is a considerable imbalance between the amount of funding given to the development of classroom measurements of student learning as compared to the resources channelled into large-scale assessments (Stiggins, 2002).

Assessment of teacher professional development in light of accountability demands and dwindling resources can no longer be considered an add-on component of professional development; it must be an integral part of the process. The National Academy of Education (2006) recommended that both pre-service and professional development programs adopt a "Learn-Enact-Assess-Reflect" framework. Guskey (2005) found that for professional development to be effective, providers need to assess student outcomes, note participants' use of new knowledge and skills, determine organizational support and change in participants' learning, and concentrate on participants' reactions.

Ross and Bruce (2007) noted that teacher "self-assessment can be a powerful technique for improving achievement" (p. 146). They found evidence that when the strategy of self-assessment was combined with other professional growth strategies, teacher self-assessment contributed to a teacher's ability to recognize mastery experiences, to find gaps between desired and actual practices, to communicate with peers, and to improve in-service training.

Levin (2003) and Little (2003), as well as Soulsby and Swain (2003) asserted that giving teachers the opportunity to carry out their own research into specific subject areas is vital to stimulate intellectual interest. They indicated that while it might be expedient for schools and governments to tailor professional development according to perceived short-term needs, in order to achieve sustainability, continuing professional development should be seen as a long-term investment in which teachers have a sense of ownership for their skills and professionalism.

Stiggins and Chappius (2006) noted that assessment for learning rather than of learning helps students succeed. In a similar manner, teacher professional development that focuses on learning rather than raising student test scores helps teachers achieve their own and student growth and development. As the epistemology of professional development stands, we know little about what teachers learn from professional development and the impact of professional development on their practices (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

ONE CASE WITHIN A CASE STUDY

What is the implication of the literature for actual on-the-ground cases of educators in action? In one particular case study, we utilized a critical ethnography approach to examine literacy education as pursued through teachers applying what they had learned in professional development sessions to their classroom practices. We then assessed the impact of the professional development based on educators' perceptions of what works or does not work. The critical ethnography approach allowed us to reflect on the broader theoretical and practical implications of teachers' professional development for the pursuit of critical education. Our methodology permitted us to study social interactions, power relations, and participants' perceptions of actual educational practice in action, thus providing opportunities to research and consider what it takes to produce educational success through, in this case, a literacy program.

In 2004-2005 we examined ways in which teachers' professional development programs were being pursued in a suburban Ontario high school. At the time of this study, the school housed 1400 students, with 580 in Grades 7 and 8 and 820 in Grades 9-12, and was experiencing a period of rapid growth. Ninety-four per cent of the students were from middle-class families and were Caucasian. The teaching and administrative staff previously had been with different schools and school boards; this was in part the result of the provincial government mandating amalgamation of school boards. Hence, there was a need to harmonize approaches and procedures in many areas. The teachers in the school were equally represented by males and females from ethnically diverse backgrounds, averaged seven years of teaching experience, and represented all subject areas in the Ontario curriculum.

The twenty teachers who participated in this seven-month case study described much of their professional development at the school and at their school board as fragmented and not meeting their learning needs, and by extension as not meeting the learning needs of their students. The literacy program, which is the focus of this article, was an exception to teachers' overall descriptions of their professional development experiences. For the six beginning teachers with 1-5 years of experience, the six mid-career teachers with 6-15 years, the eight experienced teachers with 16+ years, and the three experienced administrators, the literacy program brought together school research, educational policy, and

teacher practices that helped facilitate change both in student behaviour and in their own instructional practices. In individual hour-long taped and follow-up hour-long non-taped interviews, teachers and administrators reported that they held high expectations for their own teaching and their students' academic success and were dissatisfied with results from 2002-2003 Education Quality Assurance Office (EQAO) provincial testing. In what follows, we identify and discuss some themes that emerged from the study buttressed by narrative accounts of educators as they reflect on the literacy program and its successes, failures, challenges, barriers, and possibilities.

Planning to address a school-identified problem

In order to address the problem of low test scores in reading, the teachers formed a literacy committee and asked one of the school's administrators to be a member of the committee. The administrator, who had a background in mathematics and science, presented a breakdown of the EQAO reading test scores by gender for the staff, interpreted the results of the tests, and explained to the staff how, by using data-driven management and other strategies already validated by research findings, the student achievement scores could change. The administrator stated:

> *We [the literacy committee] carried out a mini-experiment. We had two classes of Grade 9 students that were tested before and after three months of silent reading for fifteen minutes a day. We found that there was a significant increase in student test scores. We showed that to the staff to indicate to them that a program of 15 minutes of silent reading a day could be worthwhile. The staff adopted a program called "Fever" the acronym for Free Voluntary Reading and adopted the theme song "Fever" by Peggy Lee.*

A second administrator commented that the literacy committee researched and read extensively on programs and software packages that were available to enhance student interest in reading. He noted that in addition to making presentations to the staff, the committee generated interest among senior students, who then expressed a willingness to mentor students in Grades 7, 8, and 9. The administrator went on to explain the differences between the school's approach to the test results and the school board's approach:

> *The school board was trying to change the English curriculum content and use one approach across all of the schools. Our school had already started a process and the kids were buying into a culture of reading. It wasn't directed by me. It was an initiative whereby the literacy committee and staff felt there was a need to do this. I said to the school board, "The grass roots level is really where change is effective because there is ownership, because that is something that is developed by your teachers so then they will promote it." The school board left us to proceed with our plan. The program has been very successful. We have a very strong librarian and literacy committee.*

The circumstances surrounding this literacy program, then, demonstrate that administrators' initiative and leadership and a willingness to work with teach-

ers to ensure effective implementation of educational programs is critical to students' success.

IMPLEMENTING THE LITERACY PROGRAM

Fourteen of the twenty teachers involved in the case study cited the literacy program as having a good design, with an ongoing implementation process focused on benefiting students.

The content of the literacy professional development program made teachers aware that a focus on literacy was not only a school goal but also a societal goal. The program's content clarified the concepts and underlying theory that enhanced teachers' knowledge and understanding of literacy and familiarized them with evidence–based methods, teaching strategies, and best practices. The content was more concrete than theoretical and its aim was the development of student skills; yet, it had sufficient theoretical basis and references to allow teachers to expand their knowledge according to their needs and interests. Supplementary literature gave teachers insight into the societal problems students can face when they are not literate, hence, the appeal to the moral side of teaching. The program clearly delineated the goals and objectives related to its implementation process. Teachers had a clear understanding of the desired teacher behaviours and applicable strategies that would make the program a success in the school. Teacher accountability and responsibility were part of the program and acted as incentives for teacher learning and program application throughout the school.

From the outset, the school administrators and school board consultants supported teachers with time, resources, and training and encouraged teachers to take on the leadership of the literacy program. The four lead teachers actively sought full staff participation and took a long-term view toward implementation. They included readiness activities to ascertain teachers' current skills. These were presented at the beginning of various parts of the program and later teachers took turns in presenting material as their "ownership" in the program increased. Ten teachers said they supported one another by sharing resources and information and working collaboratively as a team on the program. One teacher reported, "We have a committee whose members have attended quite a few workshops ... I am perfectly happy working with those people because I know that they already had the PD [professional development on literacy]." Throughout the implementation process, time was built into the schedule to permit teachers to discuss ineffective and effective instructional strategies. They also gave and received feedback from the literacy committee on next steps that needed to be taken in the implementation process.

To further assist with implementation on the recommendation of the literacy committee, the school administration changed the structure of the school

day to accommodate 15 minutes of daily silent reading, agreed to dedicate an extended period of the monthly staff meetings to literacy, and set aside reserve funds for the purchase of software to supplement and extend existing strategies and for success celebrations. Teachers also mentioned that having their own literacy manual and having groups of teachers present sections of that manual at staff meetings helped them with the implementation process. Eight of the twenty teachers stated that recognition by the administration, school council, and school newspaper helped sustain the momentum and validated the efforts of both teachers and students.

ASSESSING THE LITERACY PROGRAM

The overall contributions of the design and implementation of the literacy program to teachers' practice resulted in increases in teachers' personal knowledge, in their motivation to work as a team, and in their ability to solve, in part, the problems of boys not reading and a lag in EQAO test results (for a detailed discussion on boys not reading, see Beers, 1996, and the Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004 a & b). Furthermore, for some teachers, the literacy initiative added intellectual vigour to their professional lives, as teachers collected data, compared results over time, and examined factors that indicated reasons for improvement. Surrounding the literacy initiative was a norm of collegiality and of continuous improvement, that is, there was a shared purpose and a set of structures to create the working conditions that facilitated the improvement. As one beginning teacher explained:

> *I am constantly putting pressure on myself to perform the best that I can. There has been a big push for literacy at this school. At staff meetings we are constantly given resources concerning literacy, reading and writing. There is an emphasis on community. I have actually managed to get a lot of informal help through colleagues here at the school and administration has been very helpful. I think good teachers are ones who see theory in reality. In university, there was a major stress on learning styles. I take in anything and everything I can and try to assimilate all the information and incorporate it into my teaching.*

The provision of resources and having a supportive community of learners and educators all help create conditions conducive to the successful implementation of a literacy program. But the educators themselves must be predisposed to confront change and take risks. One can only understand the nature and extent of success accomplished through any change initiative if there is an appropriate strategy in place to measure the effectiveness of a program. One mid-career teacher commented:

> *The literacy program is enjoying varying degrees of success. I think a lot has to do with the attitudes of a teacher toward learning new things. There are so many things that I have implemented from attending a "Super Conference" in Toronto (conference for the public and teacher-librarians) on literacy: the school read-a-thon, the books for boys initiatives that received parent financial support, accelerated reader software for*

> *the library. Different initiatives that I have tried included making the library more accountable by collecting statistics. I had the kids do the surveys on my in-services and give me feedback. Eighty-five per cent of kids said they learned how to do in-text referencing and it was useful.*

Teachers must feel a safe comfort level with the initiatives they are involved in if success is to materialise. It is easy in such cases for educators to take control and ownership of a program. When educators assume responsibility and become accountable for the educational programs they initiate, they gain confidence in their ability to bring about change in education. One experienced teacher stated:

> *It [the literacy professional development] was really effective. We were all given Think Literacy Cross–Curricular Approaches Grades 7-12 and were responsible for knowing and presenting a section of the book to the rest of the staff at staff meetings. Now I feel much more comfortable that I am doing the right thing. Before I often wondered if I was taking time away from my subject. Teachers are now beginning to say, "you know that is part of what I do." I find it gave me confidence.*

In fact, the above perspectives reflected the views of many of the teachers. There was a strong sense of collective responsibility for the goals of professional development in the area of literacy. Seven teachers mentioned the school's scores in English were at 70% prior to literacy improvement initiatives, but the EQAO scores climbed to 93% in literacy within one year. The results from the EQAO tests and the increased numbers of students joining the reading clubs reinforced teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the literacy initiative and provided the administration with empirical evidence that job-embedded professional development can contribute to school improvement. To some extent, teachers were able to exert their professional judgment throughout this learning experience, were confident in transferring their knowledge and skills to students, and behaved as a supportive learning community.

From the perspectives of teachers and administrators, the literacy program was, overall, effective enough to change the institutional and assessment practices of many teachers. These changes provide some evidence of improvement in student achievement and student attitudes toward reading, and the focus of teachers on improving their instructional practices.

Generally, we see teachers' comments as a form of validation of the literacy programs in place in their schools. In fact, teachers' comments are an important measure of evaluating the impact of professional development because the comments demonstrate what has been internalized and what has been embedded into their practices. Burchell, Dyson and Rees (2002) argued that teachers' self-reports "form the bases on which unique individual patterns of professional learning and development, and the potential for impact, can be identified" (p. 220).

The patterns of expecting learning to be delivered, feeling the need to apply information right away, being motivated by the perceived need to fill a gap, and relying on colleagues or experts, must give way to being part of a hands-on learning process (with proper orientation); balancing training with education; learning for the sake of interest (depending on the stage of development), and balancing expert advice with knowledge of teachers' own preference, in order to acknowledge the increased complexity of learning in schools and the role of teachers as agents of change. Teachers and administrators in this study believe that the high challenges of reform implementation and the low support from government and other organizations affiliated with schools in the past have led to conflict, resistance, and demoralization. From their perspectives, it is time for teachers and administrators to reclaim their control of teaching and learning as they did with the literacy program in this case study.

CONCLUSION

Our case study has shown that the examination of the schooling experiences of educators can inform the ways we produce academic and social success among learners. The identification of the specific instructional and assessment strategies adopted in schools by educators to help youth achieve academic success, contribute to their social progress, and provide further direction for teacher and student learning is useful knowledge. Similarly, the identification of institutional and structural barriers that impede teacher learning and affect student achievement provides practical information for educators and policy makers. By identifying specific educational practices that enhance academic success and by offering suggestions for their implementation in all schools, this study has produced relevant knowledge for educational transformation. In the quest for educational excellence for youth through literacy, teachers need appropriate resources, support, and a decision-making role in professional development and its assessment.

By focusing on teachers' professional development and highlighting the perspectives of teachers on their own professional development in their school, the study has shed light on the nature of the relationship between educators' perceptions of resources and educational opportunity for learners. Similarly, by researching teachers' understanding of how structures and institutions enhance educational success, we see the limits and possibilities of how teachers can work towards particular ends in society.

This paper underlines the theoretical and practical foundations on which to base a rethinking of professional development and its assessment. We present these foundations as forming the basis of a more critical approach to rethinking how schooling and education would be most effectively formulated.

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