



We hope you can join us for our last Twitter chat for this school year on **Monday, June 7th, 2021 at 8:00 p.m. EST**. Our twitter chats begin again in October, 2021. Thanks to all who participated this year!

**Upcoming Professional Learning Opportunities for teachers, teacher leaders and school leaders include -**



(1) A **Co-Partnered Article Study Series** beginning in **September 2021**: **Learning Forward Ontario (LFO) and the Ontario Principals Council (OPC)** More details as well as registration information will follow soon on our website.  
([www.learningforwardontario.ca](http://www.learningforwardontario.ca))



(2) Join us virtually on Wednesday, **August 25th, 2021 at 9:45 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. EST** we launch **a four-part Literacy Network Series**. Our first guest speaker, **Dr. Kathleen Gould Lundy**, will discuss **how literacy programs impact both the hearts and minds of students**. As Dr. Lundy suggests: *"As students work with various kinds of texts, playing with words, imagining different scenarios, and sharing interpretations, students learn to "read the world" that surrounds them. Reading, writing, listening, speaking and viewing become the foundation for an inclusive, vibrant classroom community where students fall in love with the power of language. As they are encouraged to use words to make sense of themselves in relation to others, their*

*worlds become much larger: their thinking becomes more nuanced and their response to multiple perspectives becomes more critical."*

**Following our guest speaker, participants will network with colleagues across the province about hot topics related to supporting literacy in primary, junior and intermediate classrooms.**

Registration will be accessible through Eventbrite: Subsequent sessions are scheduled for: **Wed. October 27th; Wed. January 26th and Wed. April 6th**. Sessions are **\$10 each** or **\$30** for the four sessions in the series. Our website will open the registration soon ([www.learningforwardontario.ca](http://www.learningforwardontario.ca)).

**LFO's March Panel Discussion sparked great conversations:**

On March 24th, 2021, Learning Forward Ontario hosted a dynamic panel discussion on what educators were learning during their Covid/teaching virtually experiences. Sincere thanks to Patrick Sefa, Bernadette Smith, Zack Teitel and Michelle Parrish for their insightful contributions and to all those who joined us for this discussion. Three of our participants have generously shared further thoughts in the following section:

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**VIRTUAL PANEL DISCUSSION  
PANELIST SPOTLIGHT**



**Michelle Parrish**

**@MProom31**

Michelle Parrish is the Blended Learning and Digital Skills Curriculum Support teacher at Keewatin-Patricia District School Board. She enjoys learning and leading with colleagues both within her board and beyond. Although Michelle works in a central role, she often draws on her experience as a classroom teacher to ensure focus remains on the individual learner. Over the last decade, she has developed a keen interest in technology-enabled instruction and its relationship to global competencies. She enjoys reading, travel and spending time with family and friends.

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## Learning Forward Ontario - Reimagining Teaching and Learning for Tomorrow

**From Michelle Parrish - Consultant in Keewatin-Patricia District School Board**

After a year of transitions between physical spaces and virtual learning environments, we'd be remiss to not acknowledge the collective efforts of educators, support staff and school boards. These stakeholders engaged in teaching and learning in circumstances unimaginable just a short eighteen months ago.

Now, with the foreseeable end of COVID-19's constraints, we must carefully consider what we've learned about ourselves and our students. How might these taxing times help us reimagine tomorrow? How will they influence, shape and evolve teaching and learning? Moving forward, what high-yield strategies for reaching and engaging students should be influenced by our experiences in distance and remote learning?

At Keewatin-Patricia District School Board, we've joined our provincial counterparts in recognizing and responding to equitable access to learning, mitigating home circumstances of both students and teachers, and navigating technology platforms that both hinder and support learning. While these, and other issues, remain in focus and at the forefront of our efforts, we also acknowledge and celebrate the new skills and learning environments that have been shaped by COVID-19's restrictions. Recognizing that while teaching and learning didn't look the same, it did still occur as our educators, support staff, students and families stepped into new learning environments. People for Education's 2014 research noted that the learning environment might be seen as a "series of nested and interacting environments: classrooms within schools, and schools within communities", influenced by "complex interactions between school resources, processes and culture" (Basica, 2014). It was within these complex interactions that we ensured learning continued during the last year.

Having experienced this evolved learning environment and as this school year draws to an end, we see the future potential of blended learning, wisely selected technology and teachers as designers of learning in both physical and virtual spaces. Virtual pedagogy opened our classrooms to external providers and situated students as members of both their local and global community. During this school year, our classrooms hosted local Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, award-winning Canadian authors, the Canadian Human Rights Museum, and global water activist Shomy Hasan Chowdhury. Uninhibited by distance, travel time and

financial cost, our northwestern Ontario classrooms welcomed visitors from across Canada.

These moments, the blending of teachers' considerations for student learning combined with the expertise of external providers, has provided rich opportunities where our students see a world beyond the computer and pandemic restrictions. Community and global awareness is rooted in these experiences while at the same time individual citizenship is nurtured and developed. While educators anxiously anticipate the return to physical classrooms, we might consider how this past year has broadened our capacity to issue invitations, welcome others to our classrooms (whether they be there physically or virtually) and provide rich, engaging learning for our students. These invitations and the relationships we nurture, will not only add to students' knowledge and understanding of curriculum content, they will support their social relationships, promote well-being and establish deep understandings of who they are and how they can and will contribute to this complex world.


**References**

People for Education. (2014). Measuring what matters: Beyond 3 R's.


<https://peopleforeducation.ca/report/measuring-what-matters-beyond-the-3rs/>



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**VIRTUAL PANEL DISCUSSION  
PANELIST SPOTLIGHT**



**Bernadette Smith** @B\_ernadette

Bernadette Smith is currently the Regional Principal for the Elementary Virtual School in the York Region District School Board. As an innovative educational leader, she has navigated through the role of Principal for the past 15 years in the YRDSB; has recently completed a secondment as an Education Officer at the Ministry of Education with the System Planning, Research and Innovation Division and is a designer and course instructor for OPC. Through her collaborative leadership practices with staff, families, and community partners, she has been committed to deepening student engagement to promote equitable outcomes for underserved and underperforming students and building the capacity and consciousness of educators and leaders to create inclusive learning and working environments that are affirming of diverse social identities and voices.

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### From Bernadette Smith - Regional Principal for the Elementary Virtual School, York Region District School Board

As we in the York Region District School Board confronted the challenges of creating a digital learning platform for 36 000 K-8 students and redefined our identities as educators and leaders, we remained steadfast in our collective efforts through the guiding values of compassion, forgiveness and grace. A *Maslow before Bloom* approach to teaching and learning during this time of pandemic has fueled transformative pedagogical practices and classroom interactions to ensure learning continuity. Though feelings of isolation remain palatable and real, a sense of intimacy and connection has emerged giving rise to new interactions and social cues within the virtual learning environment. We've communicated less about returning to "normal" and more about resilience, being solution-focused and cultivating transferable skills including creativity, innovation, and collaboration in our students, our staff, and within our own leadership practices. Overwhelmingly, students have shared with us how much they love their teacher; the friendships they have formed with their virtual classmates and the way they have been able to access new forms of learning.

Our spheres of influence have widened tremendously. In many cases, the learning environment has become less inhibited by the constraints and distractions of the Face-to-Face schedule. We are grateful to our families who have redesigned living quarters into satellite classrooms resulting in greater autonomy for students and a new sense of sovereignty. Digital identities have shed some insecurities enabling students to present themselves and their thinking in a variety of ways. They are demonstrating more comfort, confidence, independence, and digital literacy fluency in the learning process. Live streaming and video conferencing of community members, politicians, artists and guests from a variety of disciplines have become regular interactive opportunities of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. These have enabled global awareness and connections; expanded perspectives, and opportunities for authentic interactions. Virtual tours have offered fully immersive experiences, anchoring students in personalized learning opportunities and stimulating greater engagement and depth in learning. Alternative processes for accountability stimulate greater student ownership, voice, and agency, including through the use of multi-modal presentation techniques; closed captioning with translations capability; timely feedback through audio and video conferences; and interactive tools for student engagement.

The recovery process is critical and will require transition plans to address losses, gaps, and keep pace with the gains. Educators and administrators will rise from this experience more skilled and equipped to better meet the demands of what comes next. We have a moral imperative to build on what we've learned and resist reverting to past practices that did not always meet the needs of our students, as we enter into a stage of renewal of our education system. The opportunity has arrived. Let's move beyond innovating within the box and make a valiant effort to penetrate systemic barriers, listen to diverse voices across existing hierarchies to inform future endeavours, and consider the possibilities that lie ahead. It's time.

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**VIRTUAL PANEL DISCUSSION  
PANELIST SPOTLIGHT**



**Zack Teitel** @ZackTeitel

When Zack Teitel isn't riding unicorn-cats with his daughter or complaining to his wife about how his knees just aren't the same anymore, he's usually thinking about ways he can make school more meaningful. Zack's been a public high-school teacher for 10 years and recently became the Department Head of English at Unionville High School in the YRDSB. As both a teacher and department head, he strives to work with a pedagogical frame that centers both equity and student voice. Zack has never been more excited about working in education than he is now. He thinks that the current generation of students are poised to change the world for the better, and he hopes that a stop in his classroom can help them to do so.

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### Responding to the “Unprecedented”:

#### From Zack Teitel - Department Head/Secondary Teacher, YRDSB

“Unprecedented.” It kind of became an immediate cliché, right? But this all *has* been unprecedented and it *has* now been over a year of “emergency learning”, whether via a fully virtual model or some type of “F2F” alternative. What’s been amazing to watch, however, is just how *precedented* the response from teachers has been. And no, I don’t mean teachers’ collective ability to revise and update their instruction to pivot between highly different learning contexts and models; that too was unprecedented. And no, I don’t mean teachers’ having to make those pivots constantly, whilst operating with no-guarantees that the next shift would be the last; that has also, again, been unprecedented. So then what *is* this amazing precedent to which I refer?

Quite simply: love.



Most teachers get into this profession because of love. The love for watching a fellow human being discover something for the first time; the love of generating excitement and curiosity about the things that make our worlds, well, our worlds; the love of the unique blend of humour, ingenuity, and hope that working with a class full of young people offers up on the regular. But equally, if not more, it is often for teachers all about the love encapsulated in getting to be a part of making a world that can be harsh, brutal, and cruel, a little less of each. Teachers do that on the regular. And this year, we did it again and again and again and again. Kindness, grace, patience, flexibility. Love. These were the precedented responses that helped students to navigate the unprecedented. And this year, I saw them on display like never before. Whoops. Guess that makes for an “unprecedented” reality too? Maybe an unprecedented version of the totally precedented love that teachers hold for their students? However we want to label it - unprecedented or totally predictable - all I know is that it was what was utterly needed from us and it will be again next year. So take the summer to recharge, fellow educators! Refill your reserves. Charge up the batteries. The kids will still need this from us next year, and this year we proved we could rise to that challenge. We can meet those needs. And as both a colleague and a parent, I thank you for doing just that. Have a rejuvenating summer, all; see you in September.

**One constant that has been reinforced over the past 18 months is that trust in our formal and informal school leadership is key to sustaining school learning relationships especially during challenging times:**

The following **Learning Forward** article from the LF journal, The Learning Professional, speaks some of the particular behaviors that build trust:

**“Let’s get specific about how to build trust” (Jon Saphier, 2018)**

As Jon Saphier outlines, visible practices of a strong adult professional culture include evidence of a learning organization, teamwork using school data for decision making, an obvious passion for the work and a collective press for improvement, a humane caring environment and critical feedback for learning. See Saphier’s article in the following link:

**<https://learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/lets-get-specific-about-how-leaders-can-build-trust.pdf>**

**(with permission to share from Learning Forward)**

**Are you a tech-savvy person who likes to do some volunteer work? We are looking for someone to help with website/tech management to join Learning Forward Ontario. Please contact us at the email address below.**

[membership@learningforwardontario.ca](mailto:membership@learningforwardontario.ca)





**We applaud the efforts of all Ontario Educators during this challenging year. May the road ahead be a healthy and fulfilling one for all stakeholders!**

**See you in August, 2021**

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**We would love to hear from you and the topics you are interested in having Learning Forward Ontario address through collaborative study, presentations and discussions. See the email address below to contact us.**

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