Welcome to the beginning of what promises to be another exciting year of educational leadership, teaching, and learning! Learning Forward Ontario is proud to continue this journey alongside educational leaders and learners throughout this province and beyond!

Learning Forward Ontario remains committed to continuous improvement, informed by data and research on student and educator performance. We continue to strive to support effective professional learning that improves educator practice and student achievement. We assist classroom, school, and system leaders in addressing and solving their problems of practice. We are guided by Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning, where the emphasis is on learning for educators that leads to improved learning opportunities and success for students.

The Standards include:

1. **Learning Communities**: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students... occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.

2. **Leadership**: requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.

3. **Resources**: requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

4. **Data**: uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.

5. **Learning Designs**: integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.

6. **Implementation**: applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long term change.

7. **Outcomes**: aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

Imagine the Learning Dragana Martinovic, Kelly Winney and Chris Knight

Engaging Thought Leaders: An Interview with Joanne Quinn – New Pedagogies for Deep Learning
Learning Forward Ontario’s professional learning leadership team is guided by these Standards and we are currently planning to support your learning needs as educators through the 2015/2016 school year. We will be initiating a pilot of a new national organization initiative called the Executive Leadership Program. Skillful education leaders in schools, school systems, and other agencies are essential to manage, lead, and facilitate full implementation of the multiple complex changes occurring today in education. Learning Forward’s Executive Leadership Program: Transforming Professional Learning, is specifically designed to develop a leader’s capacity to leverage successful change through effective professional learning. Secondly, we will be offering some professional learning sessions for staff developers throughout the province, led by some of the preeminent educational learning leaders in North America. Stay tuned for more details in the coming weeks and months!

Wishing you a very successful start to a promising year of new discoveries and deep learning! May you continue to give life to the vision of Learning Forward: Excellent teaching and learning every day!

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT cont’d

In Katz’s (2015) report that examined learning about learning, one of the conclusions drawn was that “Using a structured learning conversation protocol ensures that the group adds value to the work of each individual, well beyond what each individual could accomplish on his/her own.”

Learning Forward Ontario provides a valuable resource entitled ‘The Power of Protocols’.

Written by Margot Heaton, this resource is designed to support facilitators who wish to engage teams in meaningful learning based in teachers’ daily practices. Facilitators can use this resource to employ strategies and structures to move teams to deeper levels of thinking and reflection. As noted by Katz (2015), professional learning sessions that are structured with the support of protocols tend to be more productive and efficient. Using protocols assists teams to build a trusting culture for collaborative work. Protocols, when used consistently, have the power to shape a team’s culture since they promote behaviours and habits that eventually become adopted as norms. When appropriate protocols are selected to guide teacher talk, the resulting dialogue is more likely to inspire teacher action and to impact change in teaching practices.

Facilitators must plan intentionally when designing professional learning. This resource is perfect for teams whose members share facilitative leadership. Shared tools provide a scaffold that helps team members to develop their capacities as facilitative leaders. The protocols in this resource are clear, concise and easy for busy professionals to apply.

This resource contains a collection of protocols to support the work of teacher teams. Each protocol is accompanied by a brief introductory article. In order to best support the professional inquiry of teacher teams, the organization of this resource aligns with both the stages of collaborative inquiry. Protocols could be embedded into various stages of professional inquiry to enrich the dialogue and the learning. In addition, varying professional learning goals are identified and matched with protocols that would likely facilitate movement towards those goals.

REFERENCE:
Katz, S. (2015). What are we learning about Supervisory Officer learning? Learning about how the SO school visit can build Principal and Vice-Principal Instructional Leadership capacity. Ontario Public Supervisory Officers’ Association.
In 2014-2015, the Greater Essex County District School Board and the University of Windsor partnered once again to support teams of educators as they engaged in the process of collaborative inquiry (CI). Sixteen proposals were selected that included 12 within-school and 4 between-school teams. Overall, 65 educators from 21 schools participated, in addition to 8 program staff, 2 faculty members, 4 graduate students, and 3 teacher candidates.

Teachers received four half days of release time to participate, and also participated in a half day launch session in October and a full day Learning Fair in May of 2015. A school-board consultant and/or university researcher joined each team to provide ongoing support. Graduate students helped with data entry and analyses, and attended some of the team meetings. All three teacher candidates were assigned to one CI team which was particularly enthused to induct teacher trainees into the inquiry process. Teams met through the year to identify inquiry questions related to their teaching practice, to collect and analyze evidence, plan for next steps, and report results.

Topics included:

- 3 projects about mathematics
- 4 projects about Michael Fullan’s (2013) “6 C’s” and student inquiry
- 2 projects about teacher/librarian collaboration and the learning commons
- 2 projects about mindfulness
- 1 project about habits of mind
- 1 project about flipped classrooms
- 1 project about inquiry in music
- 1 project about literacy
- 1 project about post-secondary pathways for students with exceptionalities

During the Learning Fair, teams presented their inquiries and findings in visual displays of their learning (see Figures 1 and 2 and the appendix).

Lessons learned

The majority of the teachers who were involved in the project perceived the CI as highly beneficial not only for their professional development but also for the advancement of their students. Educators valued this project as an opportunity for sharing their knowledge and learning from each other’s experiences. By working together, they were more willing to take risks and implement new teaching strategies/techniques (e.g., inquiry-based teaching approach) in the classroom. Moreover, the vast majority of the teachers thought that the support of the administration and the school board was a pivotal element that motivated them to take part in the CI project and try relevant teaching approaches. The administrators and the support staff found the project very beneficial to the CI teams and to their individual professional development. They highly appreciated the teamwork and the relationship with the university:

“Working with researchers at the board and university level has been instrumental in moving us forward. Their support, mentoring, and willingness to work with us gave the team the outside perspective we needed.”

According to many teachers, their research had a positive impact on the students’ achievement in terms of literacy/numeracy components. They highlighted the collaboration between the GECDSB and the University of Windsor as very important for the continuation and success of this valuable work.
At the end of this year’s inquiry cycle, the teams wrote reports describing their experiences, findings, and providing recommendations. We have identified the following themes in their texts (see the reports at https://publicboard.ca/Staff/Teachers/Pages/Action-Research-and-Collaborative-Inquiry.aspx) for which we provide supporting quotes.

**Shifting Role of the Teacher**

- **Educators feel empowered through this structure.** “Often as a music teacher I don’t feel like my voice ‘counts’ as much; this process has made us feel like we had something important to share and that we are valued.”
- **Innovative practices emerge through this work.** “[This work] enables us to better know teachers and students; to tailor how we teach mathematics and tailor how we learn together.”
- **Supports differentiated, responsive pedagogy.** “The findings show an elevated level of teacher calmness, connectedness to the emotional state of their students and an increased feeling of contentment in their work... They also felt that they moved closer to student-driven teaching as they were more willing to diverge from the lesson plan to attend to the students’ curiosity and interest. There is teacher commitment to stay tuned to the immediate needs and feelings of their students leading to stronger teacher-student connections and is reflected in the choice of explicit teaching strategies.”
- **Supports effective assessment practices.** “Taking the time to listen, observe and learn from the students was a stance that didn’t happen often because of time [restraints]. A huge movement to slow down and take the time to make student observations had a huge impact on how the curriculum was addressed and what we learned about the students and their ability to embrace challenging tasks. The focus of our observations went to what students were able to do rather than what they couldn’t do.”

**Shifting Role of Facilitators**

As facilitators of this project, we were concerned about whether we could deliver the level of support to each team that they might need to be as successful as possible in the work. There was a tension between a team’s autonomy and self-direction and having a critical friend or facilitator to help guide. We wanted teams to be independent in their work, but there were times when we needed to support them in this. The scaffolded approach, gradual release of responsibility was at play, but who was the one that determines the necessary level of support — the participants or the facilitators? How could we be involved and not to be overpowering? How could we balance our time and the expectations of others? We believed that we were genuine in supporting and learning with teachers; with problem solving and challenging ourselves. We strived to be available and resourceful, being aware that we are working on a new, level playing field where we were cultivating relationships in which all of us were vulnerable. We were knitting together the community of teachers as researchers!

**Shifting Role of Learners**

- **Knowing self as a learner (How do I learn? Learning skills, habits of mind, self-assessment).** “One of the students in this process discovered that she required independent time to focus and practice before collaborating with a group. She figured out her own learning style.”
- **Improved confidence, attitudes and mindsets.** “A struggle for our students and sometimes for the adults is that math is difficult. We have moved from a very mechanical structure for math teaching and learning to a structure that requires conceptual understanding, creativity, and communicating. We want our students to believe that their basic abilities can be developed through hard work and they should view their challenges and failures at problem solving in math as opportunities to improve their learning.”
- **Students learning through inquiry.** “I had to rework the way I was used to teaching and rework the way they were used to learning from me.”
- **Student voice is highly valued.** “Looking ahead, student voice will be at the center of our work, to tailor how we teach math and how we learn together.”

**Shifting Role of the Learning Commons team**

- **Opportunity to explore powerful resources and instructional practices.** Number Talks by Parrish (2010), Fountas and Pinnell’s (2009) Leveled Literacy Intervention System (LLI), flipped classrooms, student inquiry learning, leveraging the learning commons, etc.
- **Promotes collaboration and professional learning communities.** “Opportunities to conference with colleagues about students on a consistent basis enhanced the learning agenda for the students... We shared our pedagogy and learned from each other as we questioned each other and our teaching strategies... As colleagues we became a team of learners where the benefit is personal learning and a life-long impact on students.”
What to do now that a new school year has arrived

- **Bring together your colleagues – assemble a CI team.** Our teams felt that it was essential to seek out colleagues who will come together to build trusting working and learning relationships.

- **Brainstorm and identify some question of practice that you would be interested in investigating.** Your questions should be manageable for the limited time and within available resources.

- **Obtain your Principal’s buy-in.** Our teams highly valued the Principal’s and Vice-Principal’s involvement, sage advice, and support in aligning possible resources and mobilizing the learning across the school and system.

- **Learn more about the issue.** Look into some existing literature about the topic, which will inform your next stages. Often summer has been a great time to catch up on professional reading. Your team may have insights to share from what they have uncovered, or you may have new material to explore. Based on the initial research question and the brief literature review, together with your team, you may revise and rework your research question.

- **Make a plan, attending to all the steps in CI cycle – develop a strategy.** When will you meet and what work will you do at each meeting? Initially, your team will need to come up with the operationalized definitions for each concept in the research question. Also, determine the kind of data you will collect, how will you determine baseline values and if the change has happened; how often will you collect data, and so on. Develop or select a proper research instrument (survey, rubric, etc.) and assign duties for each team member. Do not forget the power of technology tools – they can help you efficiently document and collaborate using online tools, such as Twitter, LMS, or Google Docs.

- **Inform your students about the inquiry – obtain the necessary consent forms.**

- **Keep the data confidential and protect the students’ identity.**

- **Organize a team meeting to reflect on and analyze initial data and adjust your plans, if necessary.**

- **Keep track of your processes, document, and get into a habit of writing a research journal.**

- **Share with your colleagues what your team had learned.** Look for opportunities for funding. Celebrate your work and let others know how your CI affected your practice and benefitted your students.

- **For facilitators of CI projects, make plans to meet periodically through the year to reflect on the work of each team and consider how you might respond effectively to support each team’s work.**

---

DR. MICHAEL FULLAN O.C.
OTTAWA - NOVEMBER 15-16 2015

**Leadership in a Digital Age**

Based on the latest knowledge in Fullan’s recent book *Freedom to Change: Four strategies to put your inner drive into overdrive* and the work in new pedagogies for deep learning, this institute will narrow in on the dilemmas of change.

**FOR MORE INFO VISIT WWW.PRINCIPALS.CA**

We truly believe that a project like this is a place where system innovation happens. We still had projects that were focused on implementation, or proving the success of ideas and resources that we already knew about, but many of the projects were developing new and deeper understandings and informing system improvement. In our ongoing work, we need to consider how do we mobilize the knowledge created in this and future projects to further improve the system – who do we still need to engage? What is the role of senior administration in this learning? We are already exploring ideas for next year in linking more purposefully with the Ministry of Education, with parents, with students, and with other potential partners, as well as getting even stronger in our links to the faculty. We are ready for the 2015-16 school year and for the new round of CI. Are you going to join us? ■

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

**REFERENCES**


Learning Forward Ontario: What is the most important lesson you’ve learned in regard to school improvement?

Joanne Quinn: I think the most important thing is that you have to focus on very clear cut areas. There are four areas which seem to make the most difference in most schools. The first one is about being really clear and focusing your direction. Schools get mired in too many priorities and too many directions. People feel overloaded. They feel that they are being pulled in so many different directions. What it takes is having a small number of goals, a really clear way for achieving them (whether it is at the school or at the district level), and a way to deal with some of those distractors – all of those things that can get in the way of keeping the focus on improving student learning.

The second big area is building a collaborative culture. We know that bringing people together and cultivating their collective expertise is the biggest driver for change that we have. It is not about having a lot of rules, a lot of mandates, or rigorous performance appraisal systems that make the difference. It is about getting people to work together to build a shared purpose, to cultivate their collective capacity because that is what builds ownership. People get more excited and motivated because they are starting to see results and that is what really drives change.

The third factor that seems to matter is really keeping the focus on quality learning and what we refer to as ‘deep learning’. I think we have focused on literacy in Ontario for more than a decade now and we’ve made phenomenal strides in addressing the needs of all children, but if we remain focused on just those foundational skills it is not going to be enough to prepare our kids for 2030 and beyond, those who are entering junior kindergarten now. So what we really need is to not just have incremental gains in those areas – we have to maintain those gains, but we really have to transform the whole learning process by developing deep learning competencies.

The fourth area we have to keep aware of is being accountable. I think that if we focus on those first three – we are clear about where we are going, we cultivate collaborative expertise and get everybody on board, and we keep our focus on improving learning, not going in multiple number of directions, then we will build this accountability because internal accountability comes from building that internal capacity. When we do that, we can handle whatever sort of external accountability we need to address.

Learning Forward Ontario: Could you describe the term coherence as it relates to system or school improvement? Why is it important that we achieve coherence?

Joanne Quinn: Coherence is a word that describes a movement that we need to make with our entire organization in a direction that will get us results. It is more than just aligning the structures and the resources – it is about connecting the mindsets of everyone that need to be engaged in moving things forward. So we need that alignment, but that’s not sufficient. You can have alignment on paper, but it is not going to get a lot of movement going in the schools or in the district necessarily. What you need are people who are in a continuous process of making and remaking meaning by doing the work and doing
the work together. That way you are continuously improving, building momentum, ownership and a sense of accomplishment while you are working on it. The framework that I just described helps you do that by looking at those four components – focusing direction, building collaborative culture, deepening learning, and securing accountability. Those four components are linked by the actions of leaders, both formal and informal, because they are the glue in strategizing just how those four elements can come together.

Why is it important to get coherence and not just to get alignment? I think it is essential because if we don’t have coherence, we are not going to get the results we are after for students because we won’t have the degree of connectivity, synergy, and ownership that we need. What we are after is equity and excellence. The equity part is that all of our learners have to be learning. What we know about school systems is that there is often more variation within a school than across the schools – even within a school district. We need to build a coherent approach so that we have a common language. We have some common foundational approaches that we are using in all classrooms in all schools and in all districts if we are really going to make sure that we provide quality learning for every child. At the same time the excellence factor is making sure it is of the highest quality – it is working on deep learning.

If we don’t have coherence, it is pretty easy to fall into the trap of the wrong drivers. We get drawn into competing priorities; trying to do too many things, following innovations which may be interesting but are not central to where we are trying to go at that point in time and can actually be distractors. If we are not really coherent, people feel pulled in many directions. They are overloaded with too many things and it is fragmented because they don’t see the connections between them. You don’t get that ownership and collective purpose. People are working hard but they are not achieving results. To put that on a positive note, if we build coherence we have people clearly knowing where they are going. They are engaged in working with one another. They know that their focus is about student learning. They are accountable and they are getting results.

Learning Forward Ontario: What is the most impactful actions that system leaders could take to improve learning for students?

Joanne Quinn: I think from the experience that we’ve had working with numerous districts and schools, what it comes down to is leadership and I use that in the most inclusive way. That means all leaders, both formal and informal, and especially teacher leaders are absolutely critical to the process. What we need are people who are consistent in direction, in vision, in values, in actions, and are pulling all of the parts coherently in one direction. I think what sets apart successful schools and districts isn’t money, time or the socio-economic status of its students, although if you have more time and money it obviously helps. It is about people who take on leadership and act as lead learners and that means we need leadership at all levels. We need all the educators to be leading and learning for themselves and for their students and we need students to be learning at those deep levels.

There are three ways we can act as a lead learner. The first is to model being a learner. That means that we are always participating; we make it a priority. We espouse it as a value and an underlining principle of everything that we are doing in our schools or districts. Secondly, we shape that collaborative culture. As a leader we are the ones who can create the structures and the processes for it to happen. We can make sure that we are building leadership skills in every teacher; that we are building that within our students as well so that they are responsible for their own learning and connecting and doing that learning with others. The third way that lead leaders influence is by maximizing their impact on learning so that every time they are making a decision, every time they are setting up a process in the school or the district, they are thinking about ‘How does this really contribute to improve learning for our students?’

Interview conducted by Jenni Donohoo.

Joanne Quinn and Michael Fullan’s book
Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems
is available at http://www.corwin.com/books/Book244044/reviews

You can follow Joanne on Twitter @joannequinn88

For more information on New Pedagogies for Deep Learning visit http://www.npdl.global
Learning Forward Ontario is publishing a special edition of its newsletter, providing an opportunity for collaborative inquiry teams to publish information about their work for others to learn from what is being done in the field.

Deadline for submission: Friday, February 26, 2016
Guidelines: 1400-1600 words

When reviewing numerous books, articles, and reports written over the past few decades by leading education experts about systemic change and the transformative potential of professional development, three themes permeate: teacher leadership, collaboration, and inquiry. Here is an opportunity to publish your story based on these themes. Please include what your team learned about student learning, professional practice, and the collaborative inquiry process. Your piece should focus on what others need to know and include information about where you plan to go next.

In this edition of our newsletter, readers had an opportunity to hear about a partnership between the University of Windsor and the Greater Essex County District School Board. Learning Forward Ontario welcomes your collaborative inquiry team to share your story with others.

Please send submissions and inquiries to editor@learningforwardontario.ca