Learning Forward Ontario’s (LFO’s) executive leadership has been engaging in a process of reflection in an attempt to set a renewed course for our future support of professional learning leaders. We are committed to support those who facilitate professional learning with their colleagues, examining their own practice collaboratively as a key part of the journey of pedagogical improvement. As stated in Learning Forward’s definition of what we understand to be professional learning, Ontario affiliate leadership is striving to build a “comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement.”

As part of our reflection process, we have been re-examining the Standards for Professional Learning, including learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning designs, implementation and outcomes. We are discussing the need to ensure that any future professional learning opportunities or professional development sessions be clearly and explicitly grounded in one or more of the Standards for Professional Learning. We are realizing that chosen standard(s) need to be made clearer to participants and woven through any sessions or extended periods of professional learning that we offer. The task of reviewing all past sessions listed on the LFO website and making explicit links to the standards is being completed so that we are clear about how we have been addressing some of the standards.

As a professional learning organization, we are in the process of exploring the possibility of a pilot of the Executive Leadership Program. This program has been
developed by leadership from our national Learning Forward organization. The Executive Leadership Program is designed to develop leaders’ capacity to leverage successful change through effective professional learning. Participants would be afforded the opportunity to acquire skills, practices, strategies and resources to develop their expertise as agents of change, create cultures of continuous improvement, and build collective responsibility. They would work collaboratively with colleagues on current, authentic situations where complex change is required, studying and applying the Standards for Professional Learning as a framework for leading change. We are considering the scale of such a pilot and who might be involved both as program leaders and participants. Clear links would be made between Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning and the Ontario Leadership Framework’s Five Core Leadership Capacities. This pilot would be clearly grounded in the Learning Communities, Leadership and Implementation Standards.

We are also considering a continuation of our commitment to ongoing professional development in the form of one-day sessions based upon clearly identified learning need priorities across the province and explicitly linked to specific Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning. These sessions would be spread out throughout the school year and hosted in different locations in the province.

We remain committed to supporting professional learning structures or designs that help to de-privatize practice which hopefully results in increasing consistency in research-informed practice where the determination of professional educator learning needs is based on clearly investigated student learning needs. Part of the challenge inherent in this learning is helping educators develop an increasingly deeper understanding of students’ learning needs and how best to support them. Learning Forward Ontario is committed to supporting professional learning leaders who are striving to understand and achieve such goals.

On behalf of our entire executive team, I welcome any feedback you may wish to offer us in response to our thinking and planning that I have shared with you here. All of these plans are still being considered and your input would be valued in helping to inform our collective learning going forward! Feel free to contact us at editor@learningforwardontario.ca.

Best wishes for a successful spring of teaching and learning and a rejuvenating summer!
A blog post I read recently suggested that three important words all leaders must be prepared to say to move learning forward are “I don’t know” and to follow that with “but let’s figure it out together.” There were many moments in my leadership in a large public school district where I had to admit that I needed time to research and find answers to issues, but I did learn through experience that the answer was often ‘in the room’ when staff had the chance to collaborate. Supporting teachers with moving inquiry learning forward is an example of a challenge that is best addressed by using a collaborative approach. Leaders create the conditions which allow deeper learning to flourish. This article seeks to highlight some of the important supports and dispositions that principals, vice principals, and teacher leaders will want to consider in helping their staff move forward with inquiry.

Leaders create the conditions which allow deeper learning to flourish.

Calls for deeper learning abound in articles about meeting the goals of modern learning and in applying pedagogies that promote innovation, creativity, and critical thinking. Deeper learning includes building knowledge, reflection, and application of what is learned in different contexts. Inquiry processes are now clearly part of revised curricula such as Science and Technology and Ontario’s new Social Studies, History and Geography (SSHG) curriculum. As one of the success criteria for indicator 4.32 in the School Effectiveness Framework 2013 promotes, literacy and numeracy instruction needs to move “towards inquiry-based, intellectually challenging instruction which is developmentally appropriate for all students” (p. 27).

Inquiry can be looked at from several vantage points including inquiry as a teaching strategy – infusing questions as a focal point of instruction, the ability to do inquiry as a process of learning and how professionals such as scientists, historians and geographers do their work (scientific inquiry, historical inquiry and geographical inquiry). Adding a layer of professional authenticity to curriculum design supports the introduction of disciplinary thinking in our new Social Studies, History and Geography Curriculum (2013). What is exciting about developing or enhancing an inquiry mindset as a way of instruction is that the integration of literacy and other subject expectations is quite natural. When big ideas or concepts are able to drive student interest, discussion and learning, I believe we need to open the door to having conversations about the compartmentalization of the day and to the fact that change can add value. Inquiry lends itself to interdisciplinary work and integrated learning. What has to catch up is how we plan for inquiry, organize timetables, structure the day, and make room for collaborative learning designs.

Developing inquiry mindsets towards instruction also aligns with the development of collaborative inquiry as a form of adult professional learning. As administrators, it is very important to participate in the opportunities to learn more about constructivist approaches with students and staff. The “leader as a learner and ultimately a co-learner” sets a message and tone which is supportive of the refined teaching practice we increasingly hope to see in Ontario classrooms. Common to collaborative inquiry experiences for staff and inquiry-based approaches for students are the opportunities to integrate higher-order thinking challenges.
The following are five suggestions for moving schools toward a culture of inquiry:

1. **Seek clarity of terminology as a staff.**

   Take the time to discuss and clarify terminology and to build consensus on how terms will be used in your school setting or learning community. The Monographs on Collaborative Inquiry and Student Inquiry from the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat in Ontario are a great resource for starting conversations. There are many text and digital resources as well. Not doing so can add to the confusion that some staff feel, but might not wish to express publicly. Take the time to discuss what is truly new and what is not but may have resurfaced with a new focus.

   The following are terms that administrators may wish to explore with their staff as a starting point. A word wall in the staff room can be built over time and revisited during discussions. Exemplars can be examined together. Inquiry processes can be moderated for deeper understanding. It is important to note that terms can be defined in a variety of ways and that our understanding of the terminology deepens over time and practise: inquiry, inquiry stance, inquiry mindset, inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, problem-based learning, design-based learning, constructivism, collaborative inquiry.

   - Inquiry
   - Inquiry Stance
   - Inquiry Mindset
   - Inquiry-based Learning
   - Project-based Learning
   - Problem-based Learning
   - Design-based Learning
   - Constructivism
   - Collaborative Inquiry

2. **Debunk emerging myths or misconceptions about inquiry learning by addressing them as a staff.**

   “Inquiry is about doing projects.” “We have no time to do inquiry.” “Students can’t develop good questions.” “We can’t assess inquiry like we do other types of work.” These are just four examples of misconceptions that I have experienced and there are many more. These are perceived barriers for teachers and it is important to put them on the table and discuss them as they surface. The underlying issue is that many teachers will be concerned about how they manage expectations of curriculum coverage in a more experiential approach to learning. An inquiry experience involves developing a focussed question which is aligned with big ideas in the curriculum and where learning expectations are integrated into planning processes.

   In reality, any traditional lesson can be enhanced by the teacher’s ability to insert thought-provoking questions into the delivery process and to welcome student questions and interests into learning experiences.

   Through an inquiry process, students ask questions, organize and analyse information, and critically evaluate their findings (p. 23, Ontario SSHG Curriculum, 2013). Sharing their conclusions and/or final products with an audience or in a public way adds considerable motivation.

3. **Expect that teachers will begin their journey into inquiry learning at different entry points.**

   Inquiry approaches can be but are not necessarily linear. There are many entry points possible. Beginning with a more teacher guided inquiry cycle is going to be a more comfortable starting point for some teachers. Inquiry can run the gamut of guided, modelled, shared and independent forms of work. Student prior knowledge and readiness will impact the degree of teacher direction needed.

   On staff, administrators will recognize those teachers who are life-long learners ready for new learning, those who like to break barriers and try innovative approaches, those who are just building the foundation of their professional repertoire, and those who are more reluctant to change practice. Support needs to be differentiated and strategically teaming collaborative inquiry opportunities is a part of that differentiation. Demystify the exploration into inquiry approaches by having staff share learning on a regular or ongoing basis, cultivate a risk-taking culture, and avoid the language of comparison or judgement.

   In a guided inquiry process, the teacher is a part of the process, observing, asking questions, clarifying, adding information, giving feedback and encouragement. Being involved helps the teacher plan for addi-
4. Foster a collaborative inquiry approach to professional learning about inquiry and be a co-learner.

Co-planning big ideas and impactful questions to spark or begin an inquiry can develop important shared understandings about how questions are the underpinning of an inquiry mindset. Co-planning can also include establishing norms for engagement, what criteria we should lead students to consider as we develop success criteria, and how an anchor chart can facilitate student understandings of expectations. Co-teaching parts of the inquiry process will help to unpack what prior knowledge students have or need to develop. Co-debriefing a co-teaching experience will help teachers determine important feedback for students and next steps for teaching. Mini-lessons represent “just in time teaching” for “just in time learning” in an inquiry process and determining the outline of mini-lessons collaboratively will deepen knowledge building efforts. Co-reflecting on an inquiry and moderating student work together provides the fuel to create effective rubrics and exemplars for future inquiries.

5. Share your learning as a group with other staff or colleagues.

It is the fortunate staff member who is invited to be a part of a professional learning community or a learning network across schools. There are, however, many staff members in schools who, due to the restraints of release funds and the availability of occasional teachers, are not able to participate. The leader’s task is to find ways to engage all teachers on staff in meaningful learning by creating opportunities for professional dialogue and sharing. Using a purposeful inquiry cycle as the process to engage adult learners is a great way to make the school a community of learners. We can expect that some participants of these discussions will not have much to contribute until they begin practising new learning designs. However, they will listen and be influenced by the enthusiasm that leaders express as learners. Inquiry cycles require facilitation, active listening, encouragement and great respect for different learning speeds.

Risk-taking grows in a culture where learning is valued and public judgement is not experienced. Thoughtful, respectful observations and questions about student learning move our thinking forward and invite engagement. Tangible support like time to collaborate is always going to be first and foremost on the wish list of staff, but modelling an inquiry mindset and a learning lens as a leader offers a valuable intangible support – “I value questions and continuous learning and I value learning collaboratively with you.”

“I value questions and continuous learning and I value learning collaboratively with you.”
The Power of PROTOCOLS

MAKING MEANING: A Process for Reflection and Analysis

This protocol is extremely effective in building professional capacity to analyze the process that individuals follow to engage in high quality learning and to examine the outcomes of that learning.

Traditionally, when a History teacher, for instance, teaches about a significant historical event, the teacher might ask students to read an assigned chapter, watch a film, or listen to the classroom lecture and then simply copy the notes the teacher prepared before class. More recently some teachers have attempted to teach students how to create notes by modelling the strategies they use and teach students to independently apply the note-taking strategies. This shift from feeding students information to teaching students how to use texts to make meaning and organize their understanding represents a philosophical shift. While in both scenarios students are learning about the historical event and they may even be using the same texts, the second approach develops students’ skills by teaching them processes and strategies that can later be transferred to new learning situations.

Teachers, regardless of their area of instruction, can build capacity in students by focusing the majority of their explicit instruction on teaching students how to use strategies. Strategies can help individuals arrive at a specific outcome, for instance, to solve a problem in a systematic way, to synthesize ideas and build on a current schema, etc. When teachers share their own thinking processes or encourage students to share their personal strategies with classmates, students are encouraged to try on strategies and they can then adopt these practices to their personal repertoires. Instead of teaching and drilling facts, these teachers model and coach students to use a variety of processes to successfully accomplish a task. By teaching strategies and processes, students become more skilled and have more tools in their metaphorical backpacks to help them maneuver through new learning situations.

Just as these teachers can teach students to use processes and strategies, staff developers and facilitators can use protocols to support teachers in developing effective processes that enable them to first work collaboratively and to subsequently think through problems independently or in less-structured settings. Implementing protocols to support schools in moving towards their improvement goals is about more than tweaking a lesson that a teacher is planning for Friday’s period 4 class or boosting students’ scores in a particular strand of Mathematics. Incorporating protocols into team meetings helps groups to dig deeper, unpack and question tacit knowledge and practices, and adopt alternative ways of thinking. By moving through the steps outlined in a protocol, team members are building skills and mental processes. Protocols support both teams and individuals in developing additional pathways and processes for reasoning through problems, exploring other perspectives, generating new ideas, as well as a myriad of other skills. So while teams collaboratively move through these processes, individuals can later apply the steps to new professional situations to learn, problem-solve, and reflect.

The Making Meaning: A Process for Reflection and Analysis protocol is extremely effective in building professional capacity to analyze the process that individuals follow to engage in high quality learning and to examine the outcomes of that learning. This protocol has the potential to help participants incorporate new methods of learning and engage in regular reflection both independently and in less structured settings.

by Margot Heaton

Dr. Margot Heaton works as a Vice-Principal for the Greater Essex County District School Board. Her research interests are in professional learning communities.

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**PURPOSE**

This protocol was developed to:

- bridge the gap between our knowledge of effective practices and our implementation of these practices
- develop as a learning community that shares and implements common practices
- develop a better understanding of our personal learning preferences and proclivities
- support us in implementing metacognitive practices to reflect upon our learning, growth, and next steps

**PREPARATION**

Provide writing material for each member of the group. Assign a timekeeper. Post the following definition to help participants in their reflection:

"Understanding " is defined as being able to use what you know flexibly in unfamiliar situations or to address new problems. (Perkins ’98)

**GETTING STARTED**

1. **Identify a new or more developed understanding (10 minutes)**
   Reflect on and then write a short description of one new understanding that you have developed or deepened this week. (Consider asking participants to focus on an item that relates to the school improvement plan.) As you reflect, think about these questions:
   - What about the process took me to a new level of understanding?
   - What confusions emerged and how did I overcome them?
   - What is my current understanding?
   - What questions do I still have?

2. **Presenter describes the understanding and the process (3 minutes)**
   In groups of three, the first person shares his or her "new level of understanding" and the process that helped the individual arrive at this understanding.

3. **Group asks clarifying questions (3 minutes)**
   The rest of the group asks clarifying questions about the new understanding and details of the process that led to the development or deepening of that understanding.

4. **Group reflects on the presenter’s learning and the process of understanding (3 minutes)**
   Participants share a few responses to the following questions:
   - What was significant to you regarding this presenter’s new understanding?
   - What was interesting to you about the process the presenter described?
   - What probing questions might you want to pose to the presenter?
   Note: Presenter does not participate in this part of the discussion.

5. **Presenter responds (1 minute)**
   The presenter briefly responds to any part of the group’s discussion.
   Note: Presenter does not have to respond to questions raised in Step 4.

6. **Protocol begins again for next group member (10 minutes for each member)**
   Repeat steps 2 through 5 for each member of the group.

7. **Taking the understanding home (10 minutes)**
   As a group, talk about the strategies you can use to continue to nurture the development of these understandings once you’ve gone back to your setting.

8. **Appreciate!**
   Take a moment to appreciate and celebrate the new understandings you and your group have developed.

9. **Debrief (5 minutes)**
   Debrief this protocol and how it worked for your group.
An Interview with Ron Canuel,
President and Chief Executive Officer
of the Canadian Education Association

by Jenni Donohoo

Ron has over 34 years of experience in the public education sector, most recently as Director General of the Eastern Townships School Board in Quebec. You can reach Ron on Twitter @ RonCanuel.

Learning Forward Ontario: What are your observations about the current approaches to professional learning in schools across Canada?

Ron Canuel: In the position that I am in, I have a lot of fortune that I work very closely in school districts, ministries across Canada, and schools directly both in the public education system and also in First Nations communities. My background is that I spent 34 years in public education in Quebec and almost five years as the Chief Executive Officer for the Canadian Education Association so I’ve had a lot of opportunities to see professional development. One thing that I’ve noticed over those 30-40 years is that there haven’t been a lot of changes happening.

When I look back at the models of professional development that I was provided when I was a teacher in the 70’s, things haven’t changed much. School districts still use subject consultants and they still bring large groups into rooms where they are presented with materials and documentation and are shown different ideas. Then ultimately, teachers are asked to go back to their classrooms and take care of their own devices or approaches. This doesn’t address what teachers continue to identify as problematic and that is the time to integrate a new practice in their classroom. That is always a barrier.

One difference I have seen is that there is a lot more talk about working collaboratively amongst a group of educators and creating some sort of synergy but this doesn’t seem to extend very far. There is a certain sphere of influence but overall the establishment of these types of approaches is not being withstood.

From my point of view, in terms of the current approaches, it would be nice to see something more intensive in classrooms, allowing the teachers to actually see and observe and work with the students while they are learning new teaching practices. People will definitely argue that this approach is much too slow and too expensive and my reply usually is, “As opposed to going too fast and being less costly but ineffective – Is that less costly in the end?”

We have to make a choice that if we really want to create this type of support for professional development that we are going to have to invest a lot more into it. It would also require changing the model. I know consultants in school boards have a huge mandate. It’s a tough one and they work in good faith. Just last week I was talking with a couple of subject consultants at a school board in Ontario and one of them told me that she was assigned 14 schools. That person is doing an outstanding job to the best of her abilities but the whole thing is set up for failure in a way. You have to look at the effect and the impact.

Learning Forward Ontario: What needs to be done/changed/put in place in order to support the implementation of more effective models for adult learning in schools and school boards?

Ron Canuel: What I noticed in a lot of professional development initiatives and models in Canada is that the evaluations used to improve and/or measure the effect of the professional development are actually quite weak. This makes it very difficult to come up with better approaches to professional learning when the assessment models or evaluation forms that come back from teachers really do not get to the heart of the issue. Exceptions exist in some school boards but overall the assessments are quite weak. From the planning point of view, district leaders and the Ministry of Education personnel
need to review their assessments and try to get closer to the heart of the matter in terms of implementation after the event. Have teachers been able to integrate new learning in their classrooms? This information would be more valuable than getting immediate feedback that is typically completed at the end of a session.

Secondly, adult learning is fundamentally different from child learning. I’ve observed that often in professional development we use the same principles for child learning as opposed to adult learning. With adults we know that we are going to be dealing with issues related to mindsets, established paradigms, prejudices that are present – a series of elements that are engrained in adults that we don’t see in children. So when we move forward with professional learning, we need to take these things into account. Do we use pedagogical structures rather than structures that focus on andragogy?

Finally, coordination needs to be considered in order to support the implementation of more effective models for professional learning. Typically, schools develop their own improvement plans. Then the school boards themselves have their own orientation. Then the Ministry of Education has their orientation and their priorities. Sometimes we do see alignment and sometimes we see no alignment. When I go into certain districts in Canada, they tell me their focus is ‘this’. When I visit the schools in these districts, I find out that they are tending to ‘this’ but no where near what the district thinks they are. The schools have prioritized something else.

One of the key shifts that need to take place is to identify what the schools need before arriving with a wheel barrow of stuff (and by ‘stuff’ I mean materials, approaches and programs that you would like to introduce). It becomes a more valuable exercise if you go to the school first and ask what their needs are. Next, ask what you can do to address those specific needs.

The notion is that what we bring forth to a school is always to improve and to help, but often we don’t ask the schools, “Just exactly what are your needs?” Very often what you find out is the schools have a whole set of other needs that they want to attend to first – that they believe are far more important because it’s their immediate needs, their community needs. If you can do something to respond to those immediate and current needs identified by the school, then you create a much better platform for people to say, “Now that we’ve tended to this, let’s look at what you’re talking to me about in terms of what’s in your wheel barrow.”

When schools identify their needs, it complicates the matter. It complicates the issue. It complicates the solution path. I recognize this. However, we have to get out of the focus on ‘economies of scale’ – doing something with the biggest bang with the least amount of investment. An ‘economies of scale’ head space undermines professional learning.

Ron Canuel: My take on the issue is that when we are looking to ask teachers to improve on their pedagogy, we are not taking into account that some teachers are actually struggling with their whole pedagogy – they are still not at ease. I am referring to teachers who have been teaching less than five years. For the most part, these teachers are still trying to figure out their classroom management skills, their evaluation systems, their set of beliefs as it pertains to instruction. When we introduce something new and ask them to consider it and think about it, we have to take into account that these teachers, particularly the younger teachers, are still just trying to figure out their own pedagogy. So it’s almost like adding a burden on their back. Inevitably, they revert back to addressing their own immediate needs.

What we discovered at the Eastern Township School Board when I was there and we did our laptop initiative is that we had the initial presumption that everyone would attain an outcome over a certain period of time. We provided laptops to all of our teachers in 2003 and professional development in classrooms but within a matter of months the acceleration of the teachers in terms of those who were embedding new pedagogies versus those who were slowly embedding versus those who were hardly embedding became so diverse that our trainers recognized that we needed to address all these groups. School districts need to take that into account.

School boards need to recognize that some teachers will take off with new ideas like a lightening bolt. Others won’t. Some will go slowly and others even slower. There is an expectation that everyone will attain an outcome over a certain period of time – but it doesn’t necessarily happen this way. The different rates of adoption force a diversification of the approach for professional learning. Professional developers must take into account that the needs of individuals are multi-layered. You need to somehow keep the accelerated teachers excited. You have to get the medium level teachers moving a little faster and you have to get the laggards to move as well and that requires three different approaches. I had lunch with Michael Fullan on Monday and we were talking about this. Michael agreed with me – “We can’t assume that everyone is on the same page and will move at the same pace.”
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by Michael Murphy (senior consultant for Learning Forward and an educational coach and consultant) on July 16 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**THE COACH’S CRAFT AND TRANSFORMING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING: APPLYING PROVEN STRATEGIES AND TOOLS TO ELEVATE EDUCATOR PRACTICE AND STUDENT RESULTS**
by Kay Psencik (senior consultant for Learning Forward) on July 17 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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