

# Editorial

**A**t no other time in our history has professional development been so important. Much of the future depends on education, and therefore, it is imperative that pre-service educators develop the most promising approaches for their classrooms and students. Teachers and school leaders must remain at the cutting edge of teaching and learning by creating opportunities for ongoing professional development that are research based, meaningful, and contextually and culturally relevant.

There are many different approaches to professional development. Traditionally, the most common one is the workshop that takes place over one or more days. Research suggests it is one of the least promising types of professional development because it is not tailored to individual needs, and there is no application and follow-up (Yoon, Duncan, Wen-Yu Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). This can be mitigated somewhat if educators can attend in teams and subsequently work together in their respective contexts. Moreover, “one-offs” are better than not attending professional development sessions at all. They can provide good networking opportunities, offer a variety of perspectives from those attending, generate an atmosphere of professionalization, and show, especially with the current digital possibilities, actual examples of how new ideas can be implemented. I would argue that the most serious drawback is when these sessions are not based on sound research and are, rather, just “popular quick fixes” and “band-wagon” recipes for teaching and learning.

Recently, professional learning communities, or PLCs, have garnered a lot of interest because they are learner based, build on existing knowledge, and embrace educator agency, inquiry practices, reflection, and collaboration. When they are mandated from the top down, and focused solely on student achievement, they miss the mark (Hargreaves, 2007). In our work on PLCs with school leaders (Butler-Kisber, Robertson, Sklar, Stoll, & Whittingham, 2007; Butler-Kisber, Sklar, & Stewart, 2012), we found that an inquiry-based, international professional learning community (IPLC) provides an excellent form of professional development. An IPLC must be structured responsively, created in a psychologically safe space, and made up of heterogeneous small-group, inquiry-oriented, hands-on work, and whole-group work activities. As well, a successful IPLC must have a common focus for the inquiry, juxtapose a variety of educational contexts in culturally and contextually relevant ways through observations, discussions, and reflection during exchange visits, and must take place over time. Our results have shown that when carried out in this way, an IPLC provides a profoundly significant

professional learning experience. Schnellert's (2015) work on collaborative professional development corroborates this. He posits four pillars of professional development, which include structural supports, cultural and social/emotional supports, learning and process supports, and teacher agency.

Interestingly, the range of submissions for this issue provides excellent and nuanced examples of professional development experiences that reflect some or all of these basic principles. The invited commentaries set the stage nicely for the subsequent articles which are clustered, for the purposes of this editorial, in a series of themes that emanated from the work of the authors. In the issue itself, however, the articles are arranged in alphabetical order.

### Invited Commentaries

**Linda Darling-Hammond**, Professor of Education Emeritus at Stanford University, and President and CEO of the Learning Policy Institute, in a compelling interview, suggests that the optimal occasions for professional development are when collaboration occurs among school staff both within and with other schools. She posits that successful schools are those which consider learners holistically and create relationships among teachers, parents, and community organizations to support students inside and outside of schools. **Avril Aitken**, Professor at Bishop's University in Lennoxville, Quebec, makes a strong plea, from a social justice perspective, for educators to get the necessary professional development in order to embrace and implement the important recommendations of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report. These recommendations are an attempt to redress the inequities that have existed for Aboriginals in Canada. She suggests that professional learning is emotional and thus, educators require an "emotional readiness" in order to act on the reconciliation practices in their classrooms. She believes this can be accomplished most effectively through collaborative and practitioner-based inquiry. **Megan Webster**, who is a teacher, teacher educator, and professional development consultant in Montreal, discusses in her interview how she considers that high-quality professional development is, "one of the greatest levers for change that we have." She advocates, from personal experiences, for professional learning communities that are practice focused, ones that give educators access to excellent models, provide feedback in a supportive environment, and are sustained over time. **Dean Fink**, international author and educational consultant from Ontario, contrasts market-driven, competitive educational models that lead to top-down, mandated professional development against those that put professionalization at the core of professional development and which reflect the qualities mentioned earlier. He shares with interesting personal experiences how his

involvement in both a professional learning community and a collaborative leadership program contributed substantially to his career-long professional learning.

## Emphasizing Equity and Social Justice in Professional Development

**Wiltse** and **Boyko** describe how they used a responsive reading approach, which focused on LGBT issues, with a group of teachers who considered themselves anti-homophobic, but resisted teaching LGBT texts in their classrooms. They share how one teacher in particular became impassioned by the exercise and encouraged the others to question their stances underscoring the potential of collaboration. The authors recommend strongly the need for moral and institutional support for professional development that confronts LGBT issues in classrooms and schools. **Jones** and **Browne** describe how they used ongoing professional development workshops and reflective practice with four urban pre-school teachers that helped them to understand and value culturally responsive pedagogy for their classrooms. They emphasize the need to start in the early grades and foster culturally responsive pedagogy to support and ensure the success of all students. **Connery** suggests that professional development that promotes social justice is best achieved through daily, ongoing reflective interactions with colleagues. She describes how her personal experience with her bilingual teaching assistant pushed her thinking about bilingual learners in ways beyond what she had acquired in workshops and at conferences. She advocates for including the intercultural experiences of colleagues to address social justice issues. **Schnellert**, whom I mentioned above, along with **Kozak** and **Moore**, describe The Aboriginal Early Literacy Project, in which two collaborative inquiry communities co-created professional learning spaces that encouraged the contributions of diverse group members. This form of professional development helped to transform practice as the teachers became “inquirers and possibilizers” and paid particular attention to social justice, equity, and student funds of knowledge as a result. **Richards** discusses a transdisciplinary research approach that she implemented with a group of PhD students. This approach integrates content, theory, and methodology from diverse areas of study to consider more broadly “life world problems rather than more specific discipline-oriented ones.” Their work together helped to focus on the social justice issues around economic inequities between the rich and poor in the United States. The author shares how her active involvement in the process forced her to reexamine her own thinking about conceptions of poverty.

## Valuing and Building on Personal, Practical Knowledge

**Macintyre Latta**, **Hamann**, and **Wunder** suggest, as others have before them (Connolly, Clandinin, & He, 1997; Elbaz, 1983), the importance of valuing and

building upon the personal, practical knowledge of educators, in this instance those involved in the Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate (CPED). This interesting initiative structures opportunities for local educators to develop their practices while participating in a doctoral cohort and maintaining their work commitments. The CPED study/work space creates “bottom-up” learning that emanates from practice and validates this knowledge. **Guerra, Hanratty, Onofre, Tedeschi, Wilenchik, and Knobel** share the lessons learned from their participation in an action research project that involved a group of reading teacher specialists in an urban elementary school in the U.S. The project was designed to involve multilingual parents in supporting their children’s literacy learning at home. The article highlights the professional learning benefits gained by the teachers by taking ownership for this work and also by collaborating with each other in the process. **Kubota, Menon, Redlich-Amirav, and Saleh** describe how through narrative inquiry into their own personal and professional learning, they were able to create a safe space for sharing as they worked alongside each other and built on their own and others’ practical knowledge. They helpfully acknowledge the tensions in the work and suggest that the closeness of the group allowed them to work through and benefit from what became learning opportunities for all.

### Including Art Making in Professional Development

The early work of Dewey, the thrust of inquiry or project-based learning, the role of multiple intelligences in learning, the role of the arts in creativity and innovation, and the burgeoning Maker or Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Movement, which has grown exponentially because of the capability of digital technologies, all emphasize the important role that the “doing,” or embodiment, brings to learning, including professional development. **Torzillo** presents a case for art making in professional development in her article about the importance of dance education in the primary school curriculum. She shares how her experience at the Dance Exchange Summer Institute contributed significantly to her understanding of the importance of art making for learning, for nurturing the self, and for the empowerment of teachers. The article by **White and Lemieux** describes a project in which pre-service, undergraduate teachers attempted to articulate their identities through the creation of three-dimensional art. In particular, it focuses on one project participant’s work that was produced with the accompanying reflections about it over time. The authors argue that there is a definite need for arts-based work in professional learning because it acknowledges and validates the material culture and the world in which pre-service teachers live.

## Illustrating the Role of Dissonance and Juxtaposition in Professional Development

**Thong** explores the relevance of reflection and reflexivity in promoting professional development. She argues that experiencing unfamiliar contexts is an excellent basis for reflection and growth. She shares her personal experience of studying abroad and how the juxtaposition/dissonance of experiencing the “strange” in contrast with her own “familiar” context pushed her reflections and provided an opportunity for growth and change. **Gulla, Pinhasi-Vittorio, and Lehner-Quam** share how they worked with a group of teachers and teacher educators to juxtapose and deconstruct the structure and language of the Common Core State Standards using inquiry and creativity activities within the context of a safe space. As a result, they were able to open avenues for dialogue and possibilities for growth and change within the group.

## Focusing on Professional Development for School Principals

**Fichtman Dana, Marrs-Morford, and Roberts** believe that sustaining the learning capacity of school leaders is critical for school success. They were involved in the Indiana Principal Leadership Institute (IPLI), which focused on teaching school leaders how to conduct action research. Each participant was involved in designing, implementing, and presenting the results of an action research project. Ongoing seminars facilitated this work and the school leaders were supported by mentors during the entire process. The three most important take-away lessons of the project were to start small; anticipate challenges that are associated with having principals focus on their own leadership practices; and to recognize that challenges are what produce growth. **Zepeda, Jimenez, and Lanoue** examined Principal Learning Communities (PLCs) in which school leaders participated in monthly meetings over a three-year period to work on processes, content, and skills to help transform their schools. Three major findings were that beliefs only matter if growth matters, effective professional development provides a safe haven for change, and that it takes transformational professional development to build the necessary culture for school change.

## A Final Word

It seems appropriate in this issue to give the final word on professional development to **Hargreaves**, who has been a major contributor to the scholarly work on leadership, change, and professional development for several decades. In this reprint of his pivotal article entitled, “Push, Pull and Nudge: The Future of Teaching and Educational Change,” he draws on recent research on teacher collegiality and professional learning communities to distill the nature, benefits, and drawbacks of collegial relations in

high-stakes reform. He suggests that the change will only work by inspiring teachers through appealing to the moral principles inherent in their work, or by putting them in situations that require changes in practice in the hopes that this will lead to changes in their beliefs. He argues that sometimes teachers have to be drawn or “pulled” into professional learning and sometimes they have to be “pushed,” but cautions that the pulling should not be so weak that collaboration does not occur at all, nor should pushing be so excessive that it is paramount to bullying. For successful collaboration and change to occur, he recommends “nudging,” a delicate balancing of the push and pull and providing deliberate arrangements that will enhance professional learning.

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