

Supporting new teacher development using narrative-based professional learning

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Narrative-based professional learning processes were employed within a collaborative partnership involving eight educational institutions to support teacher induction. Methodologies and pedagogies that honour the *lived* experience of beginning teachers and mentor teachers were selected and created for use within this inquiry. Various narrative-based approaches were created and implemented with beginning and mentor teachers to enhance the practices and professional insights of these educators. A provincial resource kit was created using the written narratives of the beginning and mentor teachers involved in this project. These educative resources are being used within teacher education and professional practice to support beginning teachers.

Keywords: induction; narrative; professional learning; beginning teacher; mentor; inquiry

Narrative-based writing approaches validate, connect and empower beginning teachers. They help move teachers from feelings of disillusionment and isolation to feelings of hope, confidence and a sense of connectedness to a meaningful profession. A collaborative inquiry project involving beginning and mentor teachers revealed the cognitive frames, feelings and reflections of these educators as they participated in a two-year narrative-based professional learning experience. The following reflections from two beginning teachers illuminate the impact of employing cases, vignettes and commentaries as narrative professional learning processes to support teacher induction:

I have been empowered. The affirmation I received tells me I am on the right track. I have made connections and support networks that did not exist prior to these sessions. The most useful component was reflecting in writing and discussing my experience.

And:

How much more liberating it is to see the shackles removed, to learn from our mistakes, to see out limitations as opportunities towards future success!

Mentor teachers also recognized and identified the benefits of these forms of professional learning. Professional learning experiences employing narrative writing

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and dialogue inform, affirm and extend the perspectives of mentor teachers. As teacher leaders they valued the narrative processes because they methods were beneficial and empowering for both beginning teachers and mentors. Written narratives processes also revealed the thinking and experiences of the mentor teachers. The power of narrative for mentor teachers is highlighted in the following reflection by one mentor:

The most useful component of the session was to read and write responses to the vignettes written by beginning teachers. I liked listening to my colleagues' opinion and interpretation of the different cases and commentaries. It's nice to look at things from a different perspective and also have my own ideas validated.

I. A collaborative professional learning project

This professional learning project focuses on the collaborative processes employed by a self-regulatory body for the teaching profession in Ontario, a faculty of education and six district school boards to support teacher induction. Methodologies and pedagogies that honour the *lived* experience (Dilthey, 1985; Van Manen, 1990) of beginning teachers and mentor teachers were selected and created for use within this inquiry. Various narrative approaches were used with beginning teachers and mentor teachers to enhance the practices and professional insights of these educators. Case writing, case discussion, vignette writing, vignette commentary writing and vignette discussion were the narrative-based processes used to inquire into and explore the experiences of 12 beginning teachers and twelve mentor teachers from six district school boards in Ontario. This project began when the eight different organizations decided to partner together to support teacher induction using narrative-based professional learning processes.

The participants in this project included educators new to the profession, experienced mentor teachers and staff from the partnership organizations. Participants were recruited through their respective school boards. Participation in the professional learning project was voluntary. Only those who met the following selection criteria were eligible: one to three years of teaching experience (for beginning teacher participants) and more than three years serving as a mentor teacher (for mentor participants). All the beginning teachers were paired with a mentor within their district school board. These mentors were not involved in the project as we wanted the beginning teachers to feel free to openly discuss their transition into the profession without feeling influenced by the presence of their own individual mentor colleague. Participants were from the three elementary school divisions (primary, junior and intermediate) and from diverse school contexts. All participating school boards in this project offered provincially supported induction programs as mandated by the Ministry of Education and Training.

The collaborative construction of an inquiry-based induction resource was a key focus of this provincial project. The core elements of this resource would be based on the actual *lived* experiences of both the beginning teachers and mentors. The story of this professional learning project will be told through each of the inquiry processes employed with the beginning and mentor teachers.

Writing about practice

Inquiry-based institutes were facilitated with beginning teachers and mentors. The beginning teachers were invited to discuss and reflect on the dilemmas, issues and tensions that they encountered during their first year of teaching within the structure of a written case and vignette. Mentor teachers engaged in reflective discussions related to the cases and vignettes written by the beginning teacher. These teacher leaders also reflected on the written records of experience through responding to the cases and vignettes written by beginning teachers by writing commentaries. The commentaries served as a process of making meaning of the beginning teachers' experience. The mentors' own wisdom of practice emerged through their writing. These written reflections offered alternative perspectives, suggestions and insights into teaching.

Beginning teachers were also provided with an opportunity to respond in writing both to the vignettes and commentaries during the joint institute. The beginning teachers participated in a two-day institute, the mentor teachers participated in a one-day institute, and then a joint one-day institute was facilitated for both beginning teachers and mentor teachers.

Discussing and critiquing practice

As the teachers wrote and shared the cases, vignettes and commentaries they became aware of the many challenges and tensions associated with being a beginning teacher and mentor teacher. At the joint institute, the beginning and experienced educators collaboratively discussed and analyzed the dilemmas, issues and experiences that were encountered during initiation into the teaching profession. They also wrote, discussed and critiqued the complex processes involved in supporting colleagues through a mentoring role.

The mentor teachers drew upon their own beliefs, philosophies and experiences as they reflected upon and responded to the cases and vignettes written by the beginning teachers. The cases, vignettes and commentaries privileged the voices, wisdom and leadership embodied by these educators as they negotiated their roles as beginning or mentor teachers. The guided reflection and narrative-based professional learning processes used in this professional learning project enabled these educators to engage in collaborative teacher development processes using their own *lived* experiences as the catalyst for shared inquiry. These processes affirmed the value of using educators' *lived* experiences as pedagogical, professional learning and educative resources.

Creating an induction resource

An inquiry-based professional learning resource was developed from the cases, commentaries and reflections written by both the beginning teachers and mentors. The resources mirror the narrative writing and discussion processes used in this project. This provincial resource supports teacher education and induction practices within district school boards and teacher education programs. The implementation of this resource within these professional educational contexts illustrates the potential power of narrative-based professional learning and the value of partnership approaches for connecting teacher education, induction and professional learning.

Exploring the significance of the project

Reflective dialogue and narrative writing enabled the voices, perspectives, experiences and wisdom of both beginning teachers and mentors to be illuminated. The beginning teachers and mentors were invited to reflect on, discuss and identify, in writing, the significance or relevance of the professional learning project and the narrative processes for their professional learning. All the educators identified the significant value of the narrative processes for their own individual learning and for teacher education and induction.

The reflective writing and dialogue sessions provided an opportunity for the practitioners to explore professional practice both individually and collectively while simultaneously contributing to the creation of a professional learning resource designed to support teacher induction in the province of Ontario. This resource was based on the *lived* experiences and written reflections of the practitioners.

These teachers were invited to reflect on the significance of the professional learning experiences in which they engaged within the institutes through written feedback forms, group reflective charts and journal notes. They also participated in an online focus group regarding the impact of the experience for their own professional practice and ongoing learning.

II. A foundation for professional learning

The conceptualization for this joint work was informed by a shared belief that teachers' *lived* practice and experience (Dilthey, 1985; Van Manen, 1990) is a valuable source of wisdom and knowledge that can be mined to improve individual, collective and institutional professional practice (Smith, 2008a, 2008b). This belief also underpinned a great deal of the educative work that had recently been engaged in by the institutions involved in this induction partnership (Ciuffetelli Parker, Smith, & Goldblatt, 2009; Ontario College of Teachers, 2003, 2009). To support this belief, the theoretical framework for this inquiry was rooted in the traditions of narrative (Bruner, 1986; Clandinin, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Witherell & Noddings 1991;) and case work (Goldblatt & Smith, 2005; Shulman, 1992; Shulman & Colbert, 1988; Shulman, Whittaker, & Lew, 2002; Smith & Goldblatt, 2006, 2009). These traditions honour the *lived* experience of teachers as valuable sources for understanding professional practice.

Narrative

Teacher knowledge is both personal and professional (Cole & Knowles, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Teachers store their knowledge in narratives (Doyle, 1990) and appear to feel comfortable sharing those stories (Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001). The inquiry team for this project was comprised staff representing each of the institutes involved in the partnership. This team believed that the facilitation of dialogic interchanges (Bakhtin, 1981) would support the identification and construction of collective knowledge regarding essential elements of effective induction practices. Educators in this project were invited to reflect on, write about and enter into collegial dialogues about their own induction into the profession and the dilemmas they encountered in practice, and to identify their own individual professional learning needs. This dialogue and sharing of teaching stories informed understanding regarding the *lived* experiences of beginning teachers and

mentor teachers. It also provided valuable information regarding effective induction processes that reside in the lived stories of educators.

Case work

Case learning is holistic, constructivist and active. As an experiential learning process, case work offers an alternative approach to knowledge formation. The case method acknowledges that effective professional practice is not only informed by research but also by experience. The beliefs, dilemmas and tensions inherent within teaching become unveiled as teachers write about their practice in the narrative genre of a case. Knowledge about teaching practice can also be revealed and constructed through case writing and case discussion.

Teaching cases have long been a cornerstone of professional learning in schools of business, law and medicine. Educators have also begun to explore their narrative value in the preparation of teachers (Goldblatt & Smith, 2005; McCarthy, 1987; Shulman, 1987) and educational leaders (Goldblatt & Smith, 2004, 2005; Smith & Goldblatt, 2009). Interest in this methodology has grown steadily in teacher education and in a variety of professional learning contexts. The use of cases in teacher education compels educators to go beyond what they know in a given situation (Gideonse, 1999). Case approaches offer teacher education and the induction of new teachers with authentic and representative illustrations of professional practice (Goldblatt & Smith, 2005; Porter & Smith, 2011; Smith & Goldblatt, 2009). This pedagogical approach supports the ongoing construction of professional knowledge and judgment and reveals the complex nature of teaching (Merseth, 1991).

Cases reflect teaching reality and help teachers learn to connect theories and concepts to the complex and idiosyncratic world of practice. Discussions of cases enhance analytic thought, reflection, inquiry and professional knowledge (Goldblatt & Smith, 2004, 2005; Smith & Goldblatt, 2006, 2009). The growing interest in teaching cases stems from an increasing appreciation of the value of 'narrative' forms of thinking as opposed to abstraction and generalization (Bruner, 1986). Narrative forms of thinking are far more compatible with the ways in which teachers actually organize their experiences and develop professional knowledge. Cases are a narrative structure that enables educators to capture and explore their *lived* practices in an organized format that resonates with how they actually experience and think about practice.

Professional knowledge in teaching and in other fields largely consists of the accumulated *lived* experiences of these professionals in the form of concrete cases. Experienced professionals develop knowledge of the kinds of dilemmas they are likely to encounter, what these dilemmas actually look like, what usually causes them, and which approaches are likely to be productive in solving the issues. By providing vicarious experiences through a variety of concrete cases, the case method as a narrative form expands and sharpens educators' understanding of the dimensions inherent within professional practice (Goldblatt & Smith, 2004, 2005).

Case methodology also provides models for educators of how to think professionally about issues. Educators learn how to use theoretical concepts to illuminate a dilemma from practice (Goldblatt & Smith, 2004, 2005; Smith & Goldblatt, 2006, 2009). They learn how to identify the larger issues implicit in what might seem to be a minor decision or action from within the context of practice. The case method

helps educators to think differently and deeper about experience. The case method thus enhances the ability of educators to learn from their own *lived* experiences.

As educators read and discuss a written case, they consider questions and actions that teachers actually think about in practice: through ‘unpacking’ or ‘deconstructing’ this *lived* experience, they become aware that such concrete educational situations reflect pedagogical dilemmas, and issues of ethics, politics, professional learning, professional identity, professional knowledge, social justice and educational policy.

III. Learning from the data and analysis

Data collection and analysis occurred during all the inquiry phases and processes. Written cases, written vignettes, written commentaries, feedback forms, group charts, journals, focus group transcripts and a poem comprised the data sources that were collected and analyzed throughout the project. A collaborative data analysis process was co-created and employed by the inquiry team.

Several layers of analysis were necessary to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the essence of the *lived* experiences of both the beginning and mentor teachers. The analysis process included multiple readings and joint reviews of the following dimensions of each data source: meaning, language, concepts, content, genre and structure. Team members individually and then collaboratively coded, categorized and discussed each data source. The challenges, issues and tensions that were revealed and responded to in the written accounts of experience were also analyzed and categorized.

Themes were identified from the narrative data sources and then used as conceptual organizers for the development of a provincial teacher education resource using the narrative writing of the participants. The construction of these narrative resources provided an additional analytical lens for exploring participants’ written *lived* experiences. The various forms of narrative writing that were employed in the project were also used for the purpose of analysis. These narrative forms included vignettes, commentaries and cases.

IV. Constructing a narrative-based professional learning approach

A narrative-based professional learning process was constructed with beginning and mentor teachers as a professional learning method to enhance understanding of the *lived* experiences and needs of beginning teachers. This process focused primarily on vignettes written by beginning teachers. Each vignette provided a window into the thoughts, issues and questions contemplated by educators. Some of the ways in which beginning teachers make sense of their experience were also revealed through these vignettes, and mentor teachers also engaged in this narrative-based inquiry process as they responded to the vignettes through written commentaries. This process emerged as an effective andragogy for exploring and supporting teacher induction.

The narrative-based professional learning process that was constructed involved four dimensions: *experience*, *reflection*, *analysis* and *synthesis* (see Figure 1). These four dimensions supported individual and collegial investigations into professional practice. Each dimension was used to foster further exploration into the experiences and practices of beginning and mentor teachers. Deep examinations of practice fos-

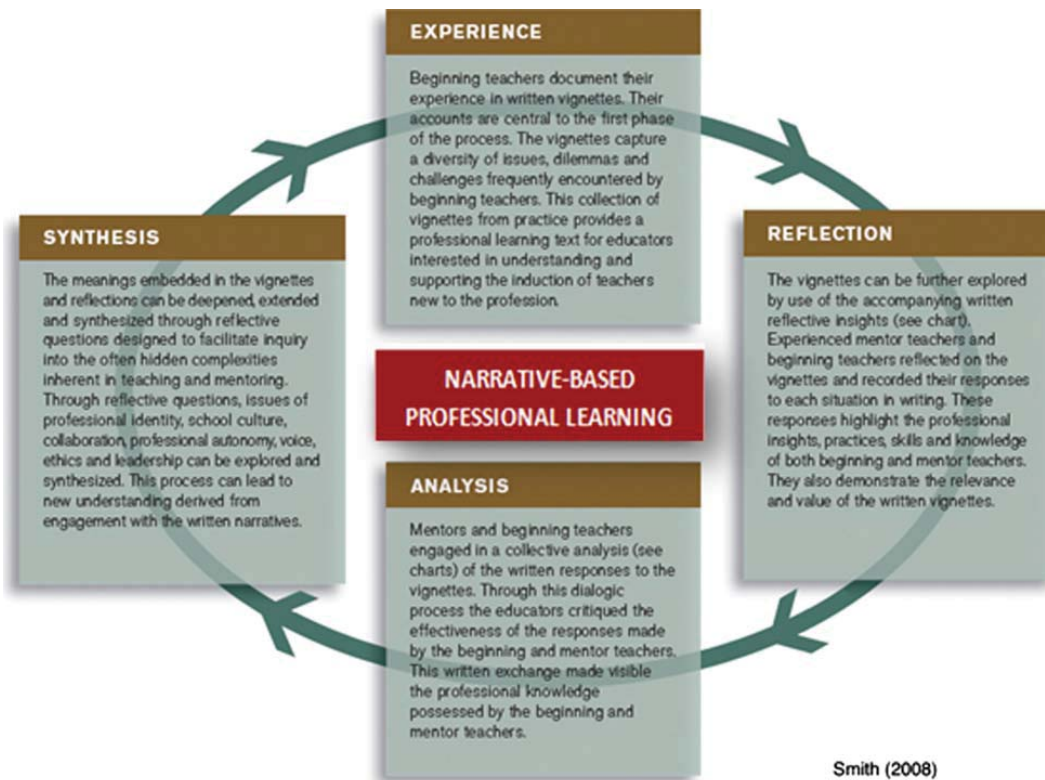


Figure 1. Narrative-based professional learning process.

tered enhancements in professional knowledge, skill, beliefs, understandings, practices and perspectives.

The cyclical inquiry process that was used as a professional learning approach with both beginning teachers and mentor teachers was strongly recommended by participants as being a valuable andragogy for inclusion into teacher education and school-board induction processes. The teachers indicated that the process explicitly revealed the individual needs, thinking and challenges of beginning teachers that contributed to deeper understanding and insight regarding induction. Reflection and analysis were identified as key components for fostering changes in individual perspectives and practices.

The case inquiry process resonated with beginning teachers. They recognized the professional learning value in exploring their dilemmas of practice with colleagues:

The case approach has countless opportunities. The layers of analysis are multi-faceted. Just like peeling away the layers of an onion, there is yet another layer or strata of discussion (possible dilemma) to be examined. This leads to extremely meaningful and focused dialogue among colleagues.

Mentor teachers also embraced the inquiry process as an effective approach for professional learning:

Writing about our practices is a powerful way open dialogue, share our values and beliefs, form a learning community and help support enhancements to practice. The

vignettes helped me to internalize the concerns of beginning teachers and to become more aware of how to better support them.

V. Insights for practice

The various forms of writing (vignettes, cases, commentaries) and inquiry processes (discussion, reflective writing, and written analysis) that were utilized in this project helped to illuminate the professional practice, knowledge, skills and dispositions of both beginning and mentor teachers. The challenges, issues and tensions encountered by teachers entering the profession were also made visible in the written accounts of practice. The new insights and understandings acquired by mentor teachers regarding more effective approaches to support the induction of their beginning colleagues were clearly revealed in the mentors' written commentaries. Both the beginning teachers and mentors stressed the importance of the narrative-based processes for supporting and advancing their individual professional knowledge and efficacy. All participants described these professional learning processes as being highly reflective, engaging and powerful. They also reinforced the value of the written records of practice as being highly relevant for use within a provincial induction resource.

The professional learning processes employed in this project revealed a number of dimensions of practice that dominated the thinking, energy and attention of educators new to the profession. These dimensions included issues, challenges and tensions, feeling overwhelmed, isolation, and responding to student needs.

Issues, challenges and tensions

A commentary written by one of the mentor teachers crystallizes the issues, challenges and tensions that all the beginning teachers identified and subsequently wrote about. This mentor is reflecting on one written case; however, it has relevance and applicability for other cases and vignettes recorded by beginning teachers. This mentor reflects:

As a first year teacher, Sal displays certain characteristics common to many teachers early in their career. As I read through her case, I had the sense that the thoughts I was reading could have been my own, or any number of other beginning teachers, for her thoughts seemed to characterize a period of initiation into teaching. Among her statement, I find the expression of the following to be of note: feeling overwhelmed; sense of helplessness and inadequacy; questioning the ability to balance personal and private life; self-doubt; disillusionment; sense of failure and concern that others might view her as a failure.

The written narratives by beginning teachers clearly illuminated the integrated nature of the issues, dilemmas and tensions encountered within the experiences of these new educators. The multiple ways these challenges permeated the thinking, perspectives and judgments of beginning teachers is clearly revealed in their written narratives. The narratives serve as an educative tool for all those involved in supporting new teacher induction. The narratives enable the reader to acquire deeper awareness and insight into the thoughts, feelings, concerns and anxieties of beginning teachers. This insight and understanding can shed considerable light into the

forms of cognitive, emotional and practical support that could be effectively offered to novices entering the teaching profession.

Feeling overwhelmed

The following narrative excerpts written by beginning teachers reveal the emotional fragility that can be experienced by educators as they enter the teaching profession. The overpowering feelings of being totally consumed with one's new profession can impact upon an individual's judgment and ability to act. In the first narrative excerpt, the beginning teacher has totally devoted all her/his time to thinking and worrying about teaching that s/he actually became immobilized,

The next 72 hours were a complete blur. I lived and breathed my classroom. How was I supposed to do this? How was I supposed to get my room ready in time for my students? Read the curriculum? Find resources? Make dinner? Plan lessons? And the list goes on. . . . An overwhelming sense of 'uh oh' hit me and I remember feeling totally paralyzed.

The second narrative selection illustrates how intense feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt can dismantle a new teacher's confidence and belief in self:

I hung up the phone and burst into tears. I had not even spent a moment teaching and I already believed I could not do it. Of course, how could I have overlooked the importance of a fire drill and a bussing schedule?

Uncertainty, insecurity and indecision can also impact on a new teacher's ability to act and think clearly. This can occur as the result of not being able to maintain a healthy balance between one's personal and professional life. The following beginning teacher reflection provides a glimpse into how this lack of balance can impact on one's thoughts:

After inhaling my dinner, I realized it was the night before school started and I had absolutely no idea what I was going to teach tomorrow. You teach on the first day right? I mean, what is supposed to happen on the first day?

Isolation

Feelings of isolation can also influence beginning teachers' thinking and perspectives. The beginning teacher in the next vignette identifies her/his desire to be included in discussions with colleagues. Unfortunately, it appears that fear may have prevented her/him from approaching colleagues. The fact that this beginning teacher identifies that s/he is very tired and too busy to stop and eat might offer some explanation for this beginning teacher's view that other colleagues might be 'talking about' her/him. This teacher describes her/his experience in this manner:

It was a very tiring week. I did not stop, not even to have a bite to eat. At the end of every day, like clockwork, Ms Hampton and another colleague gathered in Mrs Brunie's classroom. I looked on with envy, hoping that I would be included in their gathering one day. 'Are they talking about me?' I wondered, paranoid. I could have just wandered over to their secret meeting, but the thought scared me to death.

The next written extract from a beginning teacher reinforces the high level of self-doubt, uncertainty, fear and suffering that can occur when isolated new teachers are left alone with little feedback or support. This solitary teacher explains her/his situation with the following words:

I stayed in my own classroom and prepared lessons every night. I was still very uncertain about what I was doing but I was too afraid to ask. 'Do the other teachers think I am not a very good teacher? If I ask the wrong question, will they wonder how I ever got this job?' I had so many questions, but I felt like I had no one to ask. So I continued to suffer in silence, asking for no help or advice.

The ability to reflect on experience can enable beginning teachers to extend their perspectives. After writing, reading and discussing a narrative, a beginning teacher reflected:

The issue for this new teacher is balancing private/professional life. Personal health and wellness is critical. How do you know where the balance between personal and professional life lies? How is the teacher meeting the aspect of emotional wellness as demonstrated under the ethical standard of respect? How is student learning affected by the teacher's emotions, difficulties and thoughts?

Responding to student needs

A significant influence, stressor and pressure point identified by many of the beginning teachers was their perceived inability to effectively respond to student's needs. Identifying student needs, adapting curriculum for diverse learners and seeking assistance for supporting student learning appeared to weigh heavily on the minds of the new teachers. One beginning teacher explained her lack of confidence with integrating theory and practice by using the following illustration:

Everyone is unique, and they learn differently. I learned this in a lecture with 30 other teacher candidates. It was one thing to write a reflection paper on this. It is another thing to be responsible first hand for the well being of twenty children!! How in the world do I actually do that?

The need to develop a repertoire of skills for dealing effectively with the challenging behaviours of students was a strong recurring theme for many beginning teachers. The impact of dealing with issues related to students' with significant behavioural needs upon beginning teachers' emotional wellness can be glimpsed in the following narrative vignettes.

I felt powerless and I was worried that I could not stop another fight from happening. I ended up using a threat, but I was desperate.

Everyday my patience wears thin and the vein in my forehead gets a little bigger. These three students who find school extremely challenging consume my energy and my spirit.

Having a child like Angela in my class has made me feel upset, angry, frustrated and anxious. It's not fair that when Angela needs to go the washroom, another student needs to go with her. It is not fair to the other students that I spend so much time reviewing concepts with Angela. It frightens the other children when she wets herself or screams. I wish someone would finally get her the help she needs.

If beginning teachers are not provided with the resources and support necessary to respond effectively to student needs, it can have a profound impact on their professional identity and sense of efficacy. One beginning teacher who had been an information technology consultant with the government explained the impact on him:

In consulting I never questioned my abilities or felt like I was in the middle of the lake in a sinking canoe. This year, I am constantly feeling like I am in that canoe!!

Another beginning teacher highlights the importance of colleagues being present, available and supportive to new teachers:

It was the end of the day and I heard a knock on the classroom door. I looked up with questioning eyes to three teachers standing at my doorway. Mrs LeClaire spoke first: 'We just wanted to come down and see how you were doing? I know how it feels to be a first year teacher; you question what you are doing and wonder if you are up for the task.' This is all I needed to hear. I was not alone or feeling differently than most new teachers. The floodgates began to open: 'Actually. . . .' I started to speak. . .

Mentor insights and understandings

The mentor teachers gained considerable new insights and understandings about the complex nature of supporting colleagues new to the profession. Being exposed to the inner thoughts, concerns and feelings of beginning teachers through written cases, vignettes and commentaries significantly enhanced their knowledge and perspectives regarding new teacher induction. The mentor teacher commentaries reveal the skills, philosophies and practices of experienced teachers.

Support

The mentor teachers recognized the importance of, and were deeply committed to, supporting colleagues entering the profession. The value of creating a collaborative helpful culture for all teachers is reinforced by a mentor:

This case proves that it is paramount to have supports for new teachers in place so that when these overwhelming feelings are experienced, they do not hesitate to reach out to that support system. All teachers need confirmation, feedback and guidance in order to feel appreciated, and also to grow as learners and educators.

The wisdom and lived experience of mentor teachers were captured in the written commentaries. The holistic formation of beginning teachers is understood and expressed by the mentor who wrote the following commentary:

I would reassure this new teacher that the other two teachers are not talking about him or her. The final step would be to get this teacher to slow down, to eat and to get out of the classroom – go to the staffroom, meet people and visit classrooms after school. Once he/she gets out and gets the chance to receive support from other teachers, the suffering in silence will end.

And:

I think the teacher would have gained some general knowledge and insight by speaking with non-teaching staff at the school about the children. A lunch supervisor can

provide information for a new teacher about the number of children who come without a recess snack or a lunch. Resource teachers, health nurses, youth counsellors, and administration can help to give an overview of the general school population.

The importance of actively seeking support and guidance from one's colleagues was repeatedly stressed by the mentor teachers. The value of engaging in dialogue and collaboration with colleagues was viewed as a professional norm by many mentors:

Teachers, new and experienced, need to understand that asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but rather an indication that one is willing to learn and grow from dialogue with others – something we ask our students to do every day. All teachers need someone to dialogue with on a professional level, remembering that colleagues are a resource: a vast one at that!!

Reflecting on the written narratives of beginning teachers and the written commentaries of mentors can inform mentorship practices. The following reflection was written by a mentor after reflecting on and discussing the experiences of new and mentor teachers:

What can I help put into place so new teachers can feel more open to discuss their problems and not worry about judgment from others? Who can I talk to without fear of judgment? How can I help beginning teachers balance their feelings with their professional obligations? How can I help them balance the standards of practice with the ethical standards?

Ethical standards and standards of practice

Beginning teachers and mentors recognized the value of Ontario's *Ethical standards* and *Standards of practice for the teaching profession* for supporting the induction process. The standards provide a shared vision of teacher professionalism. These inspirational principles are intended to guide and inspire ethical professional practice. The standards helped both the beginning and mentor teachers to communicate effectively about teaching. They also provided a shared lens of teaching that enabled both to remain focused on the dimensions of effective teaching and learning.

The relevance of the standards is expressed by the following mentor in a commentary written in response to a case written by a beginning teacher:

For me as a mentor, I believe that open and honest dialogues are, in fact, the *Ethical standards for the teaching profession* in action.

Another mentor, in analyzing the professional practice of other mentors reflected:

In this way, we as mentors can act in accordance with the ethical and professional practice standards to demonstrate dedication and commitment to the teaching profession; shared responsibility and collaboration; dialogue and reflection as learning resources; in trust and the other ethical standards.

A beginning teacher indicated that the processes of case writing and case discussion helped to

...make me think about how I apply the ethical standards in my day to day experiences. I am now aware of these standards and I realize that I am living these standards and I can see how knowing these standards can help me as a teacher.

The standards provided a common language for exploring the concepts embedded within effective teaching. In this project, the standards were used as a framework to guide new teachers and mentors in meaningful and relevant discussions about teaching, reflective practice, professional learning and collaboration. The teachers naturally incorporated the structure, words and concepts from the standards to express, interpret and understand the meaning of their *lived* experiences.

VI. Value of narrative-based professional learning

The cases, vignettes and commentaries that were developed, discussed and analyzed by the group of beginning teachers and mentor teachers involved in this research project provided rich descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the types of dilemmas, issues and experiences that may be encountered during initiation into the teaching profession. These narratives of experience also illustrate the multiple dimensions of teacher leadership embodied by these educators as they negotiated their roles as beginning or mentor teachers.

Facilitating professional inquiry through the use of narrative processes supported these beginning teachers in how to professionally think about and frame issues from practice. It also encouraged the use of the professional language of the standards in discussions of the issues encountered in practice. As one beginning teacher stated:

The casework provided us with the language required to have a professional conversation.

The case and vignette processes helped prepare these teachers for future representative dilemmas. When these teachers encounter similar dilemmas in practice they will have already thought about and discussed comparable situations in depth. This is professional knowledge that can be drawn upon when needed. The narrative writing processes also helped connect teachers to one another and their collective profession. A beginning teacher highlighted this:

We are not alone. I'm not alone. I feel more confident in what I do and what I know.

This research project revealed many insights regarding beginning and mentor teacher experiences that can be used to enhance beginning teacher development and induction processes. Specifically, this project:

- illuminated the professional issues encountered by beginning teachers and mentor teachers,
- highlighted the multiplicity of perspectives held by beginning teachers and teacher mentors that can impact upon practice,
- identified the significance of professional ethical and practice standards for supporting beginning teachers and mentors,
- revealed the positive impact of various narrative processes upon educator's professional practice,

- illustrated the power of inquiry-based professional learning; revealed the professional needs of these educators, and
- offered alternative lenses to understand and reframe the experiences of beginning teachers.

Engaging beginning teachers and mentors in a dialogic written critique of professional practice enables previously hidden dimensions of practice to be illuminated, analyzed and changed. The beginning teachers described the narrative approaches to professional learning that were used in this project as non-judgmental, valuing of their inner wisdom and professionally liberating.

Narrative-based professional learning processes validate, affirm, connect, support and empower beginning teachers. They help move teachers from feelings of disillusionment and isolation to feelings of hope, confidence and a sense of connectedness to a meaningful profession. The processes employed also honoured the importance of self-directedness within professional learning within a supportive and reflective community of practice.

Educational significance

Engaging educators in meaningful reflection and dialogue regarding the dilemmas inherent within beginning teaching, learning and mentorship contributed to the collaborative development of an inquiry-based resource that has been made available to programs of professional teacher education and district school boards to support induction processes in Ontario. The inquiry models used in this collaborative research partnership have significance for professional learning, induction, educational research, educational partnerships, teacher education, teacher leadership and the implementation of professional ethical and practice standards. This research project also sheds light upon the messages and images usually associated with beginning teachers and mentor teachers.

The inquiry-based professional learning processes used in this research present much hope for the use of narrative-based processes (cases, vignettes and commentaries) as both pedagogy and curriculum for teacher education, induction and teacher leadership. The impact and promise of narrative-based professional learning is highlighted in an email received from one of the participants, a beginning teacher, following the last joint session of this project:

What an incredible day I had today. I feel extremely fortunate to be in such excellent company and feel the future of education has never shone with such exuberance in my heart and mind as it does now.

The practices and perspectives of mentor teachers can be significantly enhanced through engagement in narrative writing processes (cases, vignettes, commentaries). These processes enable the actions, reflections suggestions and philosophies of mentor teachers to be made visible thus allowing them to be revisited, critiqued and reconstructed if necessary.

Inquiry-based professional learning using narrative writing holds the power to rebuild the confidence of beginning teachers, break down feelings of isolation, strengthen reflective practice, reinforce positive images of professional identity and

enhance professional efficacy. The following reflections by beginning teachers illuminate the value of narrative-based professional learning for induction:

These sessions have had a profound impact on my confidence and with regards to gaining insight into all that a new teacher goes through and realizing that you are not alone.

And:

I feel less alone. I have been empowered. The affirmation I received tells me I am on the right track. I have made connections/support networks that did not exist prior to these sessions.

Participation in this collaborative narrative-based professional learning group for the beginning teachers was liberating, enlightening, affirming and growth enhancing. The power of narrative to support the professional practice and perspectives of beginning teachers and mentor teachers was powerfully illuminated in this partnership project. The use of the inquiry-based resource kit *Learning from experience* (Cherubini, Smith, Goldblatt, Engemann, & Kitchen, 2008) developed from the narratives of beginning teachers and mentors has been employed by over 100 school boards and many of the teacher education programs in Ontario. The feedback regarding the relevance of this narrative-based resource for teacher development and education continues to be extremely positive. The value of it for supporting reflective practice has been affirmed through the feedback received.

Future research in this area might involve explorations into the significance of inquiry-based writing and dialogue for positively influencing the cognitive frames used by beginning teachers to analyze their own sense of professional efficacy. Writing about and discussing practice holds the potential to help beginning teachers re-construct their *lived* experiences.

The significance of narrative-based professional learning for understanding the internal and external world of beginning teachers was stressed by this educator:

There is a need for understanding the world of a beginning teacher, the results of which will profoundly affect future students and education.

Notes on the contributor

Déirdre Smith is the manager of the Standards of Practice and Education division of the Ontario College of Teachers. In this capacity, Smith has led the collaborative development, with 10,000 educators and members of the public, of a set of ethical standards and standards of practice for the teaching profession that provide a collective vision of teacher professionalism in Ontario, Canada. These standards or principles of professional practice are a foundational core of teacher education programs in Ontario. Smith has also co-ordinated the policy development of over 300 Additional Qualification courses and programs for teacher and leadership education. As well, she has led the development of provincial multimedia inquiry-based resources and educational texts to support teacher education and leadership formation programs.

Smith teaches graduate courses in Educational Leadership with Niagara University and facilitates educational sessions across Canada. She is co-editor of the following three books: *Exploring Inclusive Education through Professional Inquiry*, *Exploring Leadership and Ethical Practice through Professional Inquiry* and *Cases for Teacher Development: Preparing for the Classroom*. Smith has presented nationally and internationally on ethical standards, stan-

dards of practice and the relationship of these to teacher education and teacher professionalism. She has been published in the areas of cases, teacher education, leadership, inclusive education and ethics. She received the Principal of the Year award from the Geneva Centre for Autism for her commitment and leadership in the area of inclusive education. Her experience as a school principal, education consultant, special education administrator, teacher educator, youth counselor, classroom teacher and professional facilitator inform her work in policy development, teacher education, leadership formation and professional learning.

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