

Professional Learning in the Learning Profession

On February 4, Linda Darling-Hammond and a team of researchers from Stanford University released a groundbreaking study titled *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad*.¹

Their report (the beginning of a multi-year research program), examines what research has revealed about professional learning that improves teachers' practice and student learning. The report describes the availability of such opportunities in the United States and high-achieving nations around the world, which have been making substantial and sustained investments in professional learning for teachers over the last two decades.

Although the report is obviously focusing on the US, I found it very exciting that many of the recommendations in the report mirror recommendations that were made here in New Brunswick in October 2007 when Nancy Roach and Janice Moore submitted their report, *Educator Excellence: A Balanced Professional Development Program*. As many of you may recall, NBTA partnered with the DOE and Nancy and Janice to administer a

survey to our members in August of 2007. The responses received helped guide the authors as they wrote their recommendations.

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A similar process was employed to inform this US study.

One part of the Darling-Hammond study that I found fascinating was their look at professional learning in several European and Asian nations that are considered to be “high-achieving”. Several common factors were noted:

1. Offer extensive, sustained learning opportunities for teachers that are embedded in practice.
2. Provide beginning teachers with intensive mentoring. (Sadly, NB has taken a step backwards on this one with the recent

announcement that the BTIP program has been cut.)

3. Extends well beyond workshops and conferences - teachers engage regularly in lesson study, action research, peer observation and coaching to evaluate and improve practice.
 4. Netherlands, Singapore, and Sweden support at least 100 hours of professional development per year, in addition to regularly scheduled time for common planning, collaboration and individual preparation time.
 5. Regular time (between 15 and 25 hours per week) is allocated to support joint planning and professional learning - Activities include developing curriculum, evaluating student learning, observing classrooms, and engaging in study groups and seminars.
- In summary, Darling-Hammond sums it up quite nicely on page 28 of their report when they note that, “internationally, time for professional learning is built into most teachers' work hours. More than 85 percent of schools in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland provide time each week for teachers' professional

collaboration. And in South Korea, Japan, and Singapore, teachers spend only about 35 percent of their working time in the classroom; the rest is for sharing, planning, and working together.”

Needless to say, this focus on professional learning requires a

significant investment of public funds as well as a significant mind shift on the view of the “teacher” work (after all, what do *those* teachers do when they don’t have children in front of them?)

I end this month by asking the question: Are we truly prepared to

do what it takes? Are taxpayers, policymakers and society in general willing to invest in education, to the extent other countries have, in order to get the results we claim we want? I wonder....

1Funding for the multi-year research effort comes from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, MetLife Foundation, NSDC, and The Wallace Foundation.

Full report available at: <http://www.nsd.org/stateproflearning.cfm>

May I Recommend?

Put *REAL Learning First – It’s Time to Hold Accountability to Account* by J.C. Couture (ATA Magazine, Spring 2009). Although a very short read at just two pages, I found this exploration of Alberta’s assessment practices an interesting read. Linda McNeill’s quote from the article, “measurable outcomes may be the least significant results of learning”, best sums up this exploration between standardized assessment and authentic assessment and the irony that policymakers waste so much time and money focusing on assessments that cannot truly measure “REAL” learning.

In their article, *Let’s Talk 2.0* by Michele Knoble and Dana Wilbur, (*Educational Leadership*, March 2009), the term “Literacy 2.0” is explored and questions are raised about how well our traditional classroom can prepare students for their future.

The authors challenge educators to take advantage of the many tools that are available on-line and that students regularly use outside school to learn. The authors note, “Many students are accomplished authors, filmmakers, animators and recording artists but are not allowed to use these talents and tools on assignments.”

In *Stepping Beyond WIKIPEDIA* by William Badke, (*Educational Leadership*, March 2009) the author explores how significantly the world has changed for teachers and the students we teach. “The internet is the biggest revolution in information since the printing press and we

must help students navigate the sea of information that surrounds them.” The article continues with six tips for teachers to adopt in their regular teaching that will prepare students for the fact that, “The ability to work with information may well be the most important skill of the 21st Century.”



Websites of the Month

1. Blogger (www.blogger.com): A free blog hosting service.
2. Jing Project (www.jingproject.com): A free application that allows you to capture whatever is happening on your computer desktop as a video with voiceover.
3. Google Docs (<http://docs.google.com>): A free, but private, writing space that lends itself to collaborative writing and reviewing on-line.
4. VoiceThread (www.voicethread.com): A user-generated content hosting site that enables users to leave audio and video comments on posts.



Closing Quote:

“The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”
- Alvin Toffler