

TEACHER INFORMAL LEARNING AND TEACHER KNOWLEDGE: THEORY, PRACTICE AND POLICY

Harry Smaller

*York University*¹

This chapter draws heavily on an empirical study which examined the ways in which elementary and secondary school teachers across Canada see and engage themselves, and each other, as informal learners. While “informal learning” has been explored for some time now in a number of social contexts, unfortunately there has been very little research undertaken in relation to teachers themselves, and therefore little literature in this area to draw on for comparative analysis. Other relevant studies are examined, particularly in relation to informal learning more generally and to comparisons between formal and informal learning undertaken by teachers and those in other occupational groups. While there are strong similarities between teachers working in Canadian public schools and their counterparts in classrooms in other “western” nations – at least in regard to formal and informal learning – hopefully the rather detailed descriptions provided in this study will allow readers to judge for themselves on this matter.

The research, spread over three years (1998–2001), involved a succession of activities: a national survey, a collection of teachers’ weekly diaries, and a small number of in-depth interviews. In addition to data about formal and informal learning beliefs and activities, information about workload and general workplace conditions was also collected. Further, the initial survey was undertaken in parallel with a similar study involving the general Canadian population, which allowed for comparisons of the two groups in a number of important areas. In many ways the findings of this study seem to stand in significant difference to both received wisdom and official policy/practice in the areas of teacher learning, and teachers’ professional development, and it is the purpose of this chapter to explore these differences. The chapter ends with a discussion of possibilities for the development of new/alternative policies and practices which might more appropriately align the present-day realities of teachers and teaching, with improvement of schools to better meet the needs and interests of an increasingly diverse student populations, living in increasingly complex socio-economic times.

Before engaging in a more detailed description of the procedures, findings and

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analysis of the research, it is important to explore some of the underlying themes which informed the development of the overall project.

First, this study is grounded in a critical understanding of a juncture between the discourses and realities of the schooling “reform” and “restructuring” movement rampant across most nations, north and south, and the shifting roles for teachers within this context. Discourses of “teacher change” and “teacher development” underpin both the rhetoric and reality of this domain of schooling “renewal” – in fact, it might be understandable why one might conclude that “need for change” in schools and schooling translated directly, and solely, to “need for change” in teachers and teaching.

Criticism and critique of state schooling systems, and the teachers within them, is not a new phenomenon. As revisionist historians have long since shown, centralized, compulsory schooling itself arose through a carefully calculated regime of condemnation of earlier, more community-based forms of education in many nations (Curtis, 1988; Gardner, 1984; Katz, 2001). Given this etymology, and the concomitant argument that the main purpose of these state schools was (and to a large extent, continues) to inscribe a particular, dominant culture of gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and ability, it is not surprising that these systems and settings have been under critique almost since their inception. However, there is an argument that the schooling “reform” movement of the past two decades has been qualitatively different than previous eras, in at least two significant ways.

First, schooling reform is now more closely linked to transformations in the larger political economy of states, provinces and nations – a move to more globalizing, neo-liberal economies, including tighter control over, but less funding for, public sector social institutions (Ball, 1993; Economic Council of Canada, 1992; OECD, 1992).

Secondly, while the recent reforms in education continue to range across the many aspects of schooling – funding, governance, curriculum, resources, facilities, etc. – a strong argument can be made that the ways in which teachers have been singled out for special attention is quite unlike anything that has occurred before. Formerly, teachers were often addressed as a collective entity, and improvements to education were often associated with the need to improve material and intellectual conditions for teachers – resources, libraries, class sizes, salaries, benefits, pensions and job security. Even where and when teachers were seen to be in need of further education themselves, governments at various levels often moved to expand and improve teacher education programs, and/or to offer incentives for teachers to engage in further study, whether pre-service or in-service (see, for example, Althouse, 1967; Fleming, 1972; Tyack, 1976).

Today, however, teachers seem bathed in a different, and much more individualized, light. Individual teachers themselves, it is widely claimed, constitute the main “problem” in education, and need to be more carefully selected, trained, directed, evaluated, tested and controlled (Holmes Group, 1990; Labaree, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Darling-Hammond & Ball, 1998; OECD, 1998; Ontario Government, 2000). Often, these initiatives are being promoted through

a rhetoric of a “need” for increased professionalism, and in at least two Canadian jurisdictions (British Columbia and Ontario), government-initiated and controlled “colleges of teachers” have been established, with a mandate to control the training, certification and practice of teachers (Ontario Government, 1995; Popkewitz, 1994). In many jurisdictions in Canada, the USA and Great Britain (among others), salaries, promotion, and even basic job tenure for individual teachers are increasingly being determined by teacher testing regimes, increased external evaluation of teacher practice, “success rate” of students on standardized examinations, league tables, etc. (OSSTF (Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation), 1999).

Underlying this thrust for new controls over teachers’ classroom practice has been the insistence of the need for “improvement” of teachers skills and knowledge, the increasing calls for the introduction or expansion of compulsory in-service “professional development” programs for teachers, and the closely-related phenomenon of regular, and compulsory, teacher re-certification programs. In Ontario, for example, a compulsory re-certification program has been introduced, requiring engagement in arbitrarily-defined courses and programs, based partly on an official regime of “Standards of Practice” (Ontario Government 1999). Much less discussed, however, are the underlying foundations and parameters of such endeavors. Who, for example, controls the content and process of these plans? What are the assumptions about necessary or important knowledge? Are they based, and build upon, existing teacher knowledge, or otherwise?

The phenomenon of “teacher knowledge” itself sparked increased interest among educational researchers in the past decade, and research in the area has taken a number of directions, including explorations about what it is, what it should be, how it is acquired and/or enhanced, and the nature of its relation to student and school success (Briscoe, 1994; Donmoyer, 1995; Gibson & Olberg, 1998; Klein, 1996; Ontario College of Teachers, 1999). To date, however, there has been much less attention paid to how teachers themselves see these matters personally – what they think is important to know and to learn, how they would like to engage in this learning process, and what they are already doing in this regard. These precise questions have born directly on the purpose and methodology of this study.

Directly linked to issues of control over teacher knowledge and teacher education are issues of professionalism. While there are many (differentiated, often oppositional) theoretical perspectives of this phenomenon, social stratification theorists such as Larsen (1980) and Derber, Schwartz, and Magrass (1990) suggest that professionalization has been, and remains, an ongoing historic process, both concrete and ideological, whereby the status and authority of particular middle-class occupational groups have been enhanced through state intervention, in exchange for their social regulatory work in society overall (not to mention their own self-regulation). Teachers have historically not been part of the “inner circle” of the most-favoured occupational groups. To be sure, the official rhetoric surrounding their work has often been based on their purported

“status” in, and importance to, society. Ironically however, precisely because of their importance as “proper” role models for future citizens, in most western nations the control over their selection, training, certification and practice has generally remained very much in the hands of government and/or its closely monitored agencies (see, for example, Atkins & Lury, 1999; Duman, 1979; Gorelick, 1982; Labaree, 1992; Lawn, 1996).

The contradictory nature of professionalism has been demonstrated in the recent context of neo-liberal schooling reform initiatives promoted and undertaken in many western jurisdictions. While the rhetoric of professionalism is often used in these contexts, the general import is usually that of the “need” for the “upgrading” or “retraining” of teachers. Given these strong ideological messages, it is not surprising that a recent Ontario survey found a significant percentage of parents (75%) in favour of requiring teachers to submit accounts of their learning activities to their principals (rather than being allowed to use their own professional judgements about their own in-service learning), and an even higher percentage (83%) in favour of principals being required to use provincial guidelines and methods to evaluate their teachers (Livingstone, Hart, & Davie, 2001, p. 32). To be sure, very few teachers, and certainly none of their unions, are opposed to on-going opportunities for further education and training. Many, however, are very concerned about the control over teacher learning being taken entirely out of the hands of teachers – leaving others with the power to determine unilaterally what shall be learned, how much, when, and in what manner. Among other aspects of this debate is the issue of “informal learning,” and whether it will also be recognized in the mix.

Informal Learning

Few would argue that informal learning is not an important aspect of knowledge and skill acquisition, particularly at the workplace. For example, we often hear the expression “a steep learning curve on the job” – learning which seemingly occurs quite independent from any particular formal workshop or course. But what is it more precisely? When does or doesn’t it happen? How is it recognized? Can and should it be measured? If so, how?

David Livingstone suggests that informal learning is

any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs outside the curricula of institutions providing educational programs, courses or workshops. ... Explicit informal learning is distinguished from everyday perceptions, general socialization and more tacit informal learning by peoples’ own conscious identification of the activity as significant learning. The important criteria that distinguish explicitly informal learning are the retrospective recognition of both a new significant form of knowledge, understanding or skill acquired on your own initiative and also recognition of the process of acquisition (1999, pp. 3–4).

Similarly, Watkins and Marsick suggest that

informal and incidental learning is learning from experience that takes place outside formally structured, institutionally sponsored, class-room based activities. Informal learning is a broad term that includes any such learning; incidental learning is a subset that is defined as a by-product of some other activity. Informal learning can be planned or unplanned, but is usually involves some degree of conscious awareness that learning is taking place. Incidental learning, on the other hand, is largely unintentional, unexamined, and embedded in people's closely held belief systems (1992, p. 288).

In both cases, these definitions suggest that informal learning occurs apart from formal courses or institutions, but at the same time they carefully designate "explicitly" informal learning as that learning which is intentioned and/or identified by the learner, as compared to "incidental" learning which is unintended (Watkins & Marsick) and/or unidentified (Livingstone) by the learner. As written, these two statements summarize concisely much of the discussion and debate, at least concerning definitions of the term informal learning. At the same time, however, implicit in concise definitional statements like these are a multitude of nuances and complexities. Given the relative informality of these forms of learning, one can appreciate the difficulties in attempting to research the ways and extents to which they take place. However, the past three decades have seen a growing number of studies in this area (see Livingstone, 1999; also Boje, 1994; Garrick, 1996; Knowles, 1970; Penland; 1977; Tough, 1978). The research project described in this chapter is one attempt in this regard – both to document such learning among Canadian teachers, and to explore ways in which informal learning can be taken up more seriously in the context of schooling reform initiatives.

Canadian Teacher Learning Research Project – The Survey

The Canadian Teacher Learning Research Project was planned and undertaken in order to explore a number of interrelated issues: first the ways in which Canadian teachers see and engage themselves, and each other, as learners; secondly, the material and social conditions in which they undertake these learning activities; thirdly, the ways in which government policies and programs have served to influence these formal and informal learning activities.

For the first phase of this study, an eight-page survey questionnaire was mailed out in 1998 to nearly 2000 elementary and secondary school teachers across Canada. These teachers were randomly and proportionately sampled from the membership lists of the statutory teachers' associations in all ten provinces. (Given the mandatory membership legislation in place in all but one province, virtually every teacher working in a publicly-funded elementary and secondary school in Canada is included in these data-bases). The questionnaire surveyed respondents' activities and opinions about a range of their own learning activities: their engagement in formal workshops and continuing education courses, and their engagement in their own informal learning in their workplace, home, and

community. In addition, there were the normal respondent background demographic questions, as well as questions relating to their engagement in the workplace, and their own computer/internet use. Many of the questions were developed in tandem with a parallel national public survey on formal and informal learning, undertaken by the New Approaches to Life-Long Learning (NALL) research collective in order to allow data comparisons (Livingstone, 1999). From the response rate of approximately 40%, a number of intriguing aspects were found worthy of analysis (see Smaller, Clark, Hart, Livingstone, & Noormohammed, 2000; Smaller, Clark, Hart, & Livingstone, 2001).

Teachers' formal learning pursuits. 86% of respondents stated that they had participated in one or more courses, workshops or other formalized learning activities in the past year. Of this group, 38% had taken one or two, 35% had taken three or four, and the remaining 27% had participated in anywhere from five to twenty such organized activities. It is interesting to note, by comparison, that in the general NALL Project survey of Canadian adult residents who are not in school, only 44% of respondents, and only 49% of those in the labour force, reported that they had engaged in similar pursuits in the past year.

Seniority and Learning Pursuits. Contrary to a general stereotype that teachers are less engaged in their own development as they get older, participation rates suggest that teachers overwhelmingly continue to engage in their own further formal education, regardless of their years of teaching experience. While there is a slight reduction in educational pursuits among those with more than twenty years of teaching seniority, well over eighty percent of these senior teachers said they were still participating in formal courses and workshops to enhance their own learning (and, as will be noted in the following sub-section, these senior teachers said they actually spent on average more hours per week in these educational pursuits). This pattern is in marked contrast to Canadian adults and the labour force in general where older, more experienced people are very unlikely to take further education courses (Livingstone, 1999)

Areas of Formal Learning. While the content of the courses and workshops taken by teachers varied significantly, a high percentage related directly to their work. Over three-fifths (61%) of all respondents reported engagement in "work-related" courses (curriculum, assessment, classroom management, etc.). In addition, over a third (37%) indicated they had taken computer related courses, 27% had taken academic courses, and 21% had taken recreation-related courses. In addition, 5% had taken language courses, and 7% indicated other kinds of courses.

Time spent on formal learning activities. On average, full-time classroom teachers (N = 506) reported spending 32 hours in actual attendance at courses and workshops over the past year. However, when work on course assignments, preparation and studying time was included in the overall amount of time taken up by these courses, teachers reported that they spent much more time on such formal,

organized learning activities. Understandably, this time varied considerably among respondents, depending upon how much engagement they had had in the past year with such activities. However, overall teachers spent an average of over eight hours per week on formal learning activity.

Intragroup Variations. Within the overall respondent group, there were some significant variations in their engagement with these pursuits – depending upon gender, years of teaching experience, work location, elementary/secondary school, family status, and region of the country. In brief, teachers who taught secondary (as compared to elementary) school, those who had children at home, those who lived in the Atlantic provinces, those who had responsibilities outside of the classroom, and those with more than twenty years of teaching experience, were, on average, more likely to be engaged each week in their own further education activities. In addition, women teachers were more engaged in these activities than their male counterparts, and women with children at home were the most engaged of all sub-groups of teachers. However, there were no significant differences based upon rural-urban location of teachers.

Reasons for taking courses and workshops. Motivations varied for engaging in these formal courses and workshops. 19% of those respondents taking courses stated that one or more of the courses they had taken were part of a degree, diploma or certificate program at a university, community college, technical or business school, while 20% stated that one or more of their courses qualified them for additional certification related to their teaching credentials. Almost half (47%) of those taking courses reported that one or more of the courses and workshops were required or recommended by an employer (e.g., school board, principal), while 27% noted that one or more of these engagements had been required or recommended by some “other work-related organization (e.g., professional association, federation).”

Related to the matter of motivation, 54% of all those taking courses reported that they themselves had paid the fees for one or more of these activities. By comparison, 44% stated that fees had been paid at least once by their employer, 14% reported that courses had been paid by their union or professional association, and approximately the same number (13%) participated in courses which were paid jointly by their employer and union/professional association. 17% of respondents taking courses and workshops reported that one or more of these activities had no fees attached to them.

Future Plans. While 86% of responding teachers reported that they had taken one or more formal courses or workshops in the past twelve months, an even larger percentage (88%) stated that they would definitely (61%) or possibly (27%) take one or more courses in the future. Again, these numbers compare favourably with the general Canadian labour force, where only 70% indicated they would or might be so engaged (Livingstone, 1999). Those who were undecided, or stated that they would definitely not take further courses in the next

few years, cited one or more reasons for this reluctance: too expensive (31%), courses held at inconvenient times and/or places (19%), family responsibilities (18%), no relevant courses available (17%), lack of employer support (14%), and health reasons (3%).

Teachers' Informal Learning

In addition to questions about teachers' engagement in formal courses and workshops, the survey questionnaire also asked respondents to think about the various ways they had engaged in informal learning, and the kinds of knowledges and skills they had acquired in this manner. For the purposes of facilitating responses in this area, respondents were asked to consider, in turn, learning which had taken place in four distinct locations: in their workplace, in their home, in their community, and elsewhere.

Informal learning in the workplace. Teachers were asked to identify any ways in which they had informally acquired new skills and/or knowledge over the past twelve months (that is, other than through organized courses or workshops) – things that would have assisted them in their present job, and/or would assist them in assuming new job responsibilities. Virtually all respondents (98%) stated that they were “learning on the job.” 89% had informally gained new knowledge and skills about computers, while over 60% of all respondents indicated that informal learning had occurred in each of a number of other work-related areas – team-work/communication skills, teaching a particular grade/subject, classroom management, student problems, and keeping up with new teaching-related knowledge. (Among other themes, learning about extra-curricular student activities, and supervisory/management skills, were selected by 49% and 34% of respondents respectively.)

In a separate question, teachers were asked whether, in the course of their work in the past twelve months, they had informally engaged in learning in any of six specific work-related themes which were listed in the questionnaire. From this list, “Curriculum policy/development” was selected by well over two-thirds of all respondents (70%), while about one-half indicated they had acquired knowledge in each of “employee rights and benefits” and “teacher education/development” (54% and 47%). In addition, many respondents also indicated they had acquired knowledge and/or skills in the areas of “occupational health and safety” (35%), “environmental issues related to your work” (29%) and “equity/gender issues” (21%).

When asked what single most important knowledge, skill or understanding they had acquired informally, related to current or future paid employment, over one-quarter (27%) identified computers, approximately one fifth (19%) stated teacher education/development, 17% selected areas relating to curriculum policy/development/implementation. The remaining 37% of respondents to this question selected among 21 other themes (including student issues, team work/problem solving, employee rights, personal development, etc.).

When asked how this informal learning took place, 82% indicated that significant amounts took place collaboratively with colleagues. In addition, 63% also stated they engaged in informal workplace learning on their own. Other modes of informal learning included: interactions with students (24% of all respondents), with principals or school board administrators (27%) and with parents (14%).

Respondents were also asked to estimate the number of hours per week they were engaged in new informal learning activity in the course of their work. Overall, the average amount of time spent on informal learning on the job was almost four hours (3.9) per week. As compared to rates of formal learning activity, there were no gender differences indicated. However, elementary teachers were somewhat more active in this area than their secondary school counterparts.

Informal learning in the community. Among other questions, teachers were asked whether they were involved in volunteer community organizations, and if so, how frequently. Over three-fifths (61%) indicated they were involved, and of this group almost three-quarters (73%) stated that these activities had also provided them with an average of two hours per week of informal learning opportunity. When asked the most important knowledge, skill or understanding acquired as a result of this volunteer engagement, responding teachers cited 28 different themes, with “interpersonal skills,” “community knowledge” and organizational/leadership skills” among the forefront (35%, 13% and 10% respectively). Interestingly, when asked if any of this informal, community-based learning could be applied to their paid employment, 90% expressed concurrence – with most stating that this learning was directly related to school-based education and teaching practices.

Other informal learning opportunities. Finally, teachers were asked if, in the past year, they had engaged in any recreational activities, either alone or with others, which might have occasioned informal learning of things they couldn’t do, or didn’t know, a year previous. A number of possibilities were listed for their consideration. 95% of all respondents indicated they had engaged in learning in this way. Again, computers rated high, with three-fifths of respondents, while four other themes were each selected by 40 to 45% of respondents – leisure/hobbies, sports/recreation, health issues, and finance/investing. On average, respondents reported that they had engaged in learning in this manner, for four hours in a typical week.

Related to these matters, it is certainly interesting to note that 86% of all respondents stated that they used computers at home, for an average 2 hours per week of computing time. In addition, over half of all respondents (53%) also reported using Internet as well, for an extra two hours per week. By comparison, data from the NALL national survey suggest that computer use at home among the general adult population is 56%, and by the general labour force, 64%.

Formal vs. informal learning preferences. When asked about preferences for modes of learning (course-based, or more informal), only 12% clearly favoured formal

course-based learning, while a quarter preferred learning informally (whether on their own or with others). By comparison over 22% indicated that they favoured both modes equally, while almost half of all respondents (49%) stated that the decision depended in each instance upon what is to be learned. However, when asked to choose outright between “formal courses” and “outside formal courses” (i.e., informal learning) as the more preferred mode for further learning, 58% selected informal modes, as compared to only 20% favouring formal approaches (14% wrote in “both” and 8% did not answer the question).

Future learning interests. Finally, teachers were asked what they were most interested in learning about in the next 12 months, both through formal and informal means. Over 80% (81%) of all respondents indicated that they had a definite interest in engaging in further formal learning activity, and over 80% of those expressed interest in further teacher development, either broadly or more specifically defined (e.g., teacher education, curriculum development/ implementation, further academic pursuits, student issues, ESL, computers, etc.). The remaining 18% of respondents selected from among 30 other areas of interest, ranging across the fields of work, further academic pursuits, and general interest areas.

While almost the same number of respondents (79%) also indicated they were interested in engaging in informal learning over the next 12 months, their selections of topics were somewhat more widely distributed. While 14% selected computers, and a further 11% expressed interest in pursuing further teaching and academic-related learning in informal ways, the remaining three-quarters of respondents selected from among the 27 other areas of informal learning interests.

Two further phases of the research project were undertaken, in order to generate more in-depth, qualitative data to provide further substance for overall analysis.

Second Phase – Teacher Diaries

The second phase of the research project involved the use of teachers’ diaries to collect and analyze data on their daily activities. This is a method which has been used successfully in a number of jurisdictions, with a range of respondent types (teachers, housewives, other workers, etc.), for a variety of research purposes, and the work of a number of researchers was drawn upon to conceptualize and plan this project (see especially Peters and Raaijmakers 1998; Michelson, 1998; Harvey, 1984).

Respondents were selected from those who had participated in the first phase of the study, and who had agreed to identify themselves for this purpose. From this group, all 28 identified secondary school teachers working full-time in the province of Ontario were sent letters explaining the second phase of the research; 19 initially agreed to participate, and 13 eventually completed the tasks required. (This particular cohort was selected, partly because of its manageable size, partly because the project was based in Ontario, and partly because the Ontario

Secondary School Teachers' Federation was willing to fund this phase of the project.) Respondents were asked to record, for seven consecutive days, every activity in which they engaged over the 24 hours of each day of that time period. In particular, the informal learning aspects were emphasized, with the request to note, wherever possible, "when you believe that you have gained any new knowledge, understandings and/or skills, as a result of your activity during any specific activity," including "what you believe you have learned during that interval." Participants were also informed that an honourarium of \$75.00 would be paid to those returning complete diary logs. 13 teachers submitted completed logs after a week's collection in November of 1999. In February of 2000, ten of these 13 respondents completed and submitted an additional week's diary. An analysis of these 23 weekly diaries proved very informative.

Given that these diary log forms required specific details for each activity undertaken during each 24 hour period, it was relatively straightforward to develop quite detailed reports and calculations on the kinds and amounts of activities undertaken each day by respondents. In total, these 13 respondents spent an average of 48.4 hours per week on duties directly related to their paid employment (with a range from 36.6 to 61.1 hours for those weeks reported). Of this total work week, the two most significant aspects were direct student instruction (19.8 hours) and course preparation/marking (17.6 hours). Other aspects, including student and parent counselling, student supervision, student extra-curricular activities, and administration/professional development activities, totalled a further 11.0 hours per week.

Informal learning. The entries in these diaries suggest that the life of a teacher – both at work, at home and elsewhere – is constituted as a never-ending series of informal-learning activities. For virtually every respondent, interactions with colleagues and students constituted the major engagement – in most cases, many times each working day. The content of these discussions ranged widely – from specific school matters, to more general educational themes, to a wide variety of non-schooling-related issues. However, there was no question that much of this daily informal and often spontaneous interaction related directly or indirectly to the acquisition of new information and knowledge about the job at hand. In the words of one teacher, explaining a spontaneous late after-school discussion about upcoming report cards and parent interviews, "Our lunch and after school times are tantamount to [department] meetings."

On the one hand, these discussions often involved the specific issues of the moment. Typical and numerous were reports on information sharing about the interests and needs of students in their charge, such as Alice's "Lunch with colleagues – talked about some students at risk," and Dan, who "talked informally with V[ice] P[incipal] – picked up from him a few bits of information about students who are having difficulty in my 10g [grade 10, general level] class." Equally numerous were discussions about course and program matters, such as John's report of having "Discussed law program with [student] counsellor," and Jim's "discuss[ion of program] problems and how they can be minimized re. failures." In this context, there were also a number of examples of

respondents assisting colleagues directly with new learning. Jim, for example, was soon to leave the school, and spent much time one afternoon in a collaborative informal learning activity, “instructing teacher who will take my place upon retirement. This will be an ongoing procedure 3–4 times a week during this instructional time.” Similarly, Eric reported on being in the school’s “autoshop helping a colleague use a computer analyser to trouble shoot engine of Dodge van.”

Also very numerous were reports on discussions relating to schooling issues more broadly. Understandably, given significant changes imposed by the provincial government during this time, many of the comments concerned these changes, and how they might affect existing courses and programs, teachers’ workload, and the overall welfare of the students. Some reports, such as Eric’s “Lunch with colleagues – primarily G[ra]de 9 curriculum and its implementation in g[ra]de 9 tech[nical subjects]” were noted in a fairly neutral manner. Other notations included explicitly stated concerns arising from their new understandings: “Lunch with tech teachers – discussion of effects on tech programs because of G10 new compulsory “civics” course – decimated G10 tech courses,” and Jane’s “discuss with colleagues Gr 9 material and cuts to Education – discussing how cuts to education will affect our work situation.”

Finally, many other “informal learning” reports with colleagues involved themes and issues of more general interest and knowledge, such as Robert, who reported spending “15 minutes in staff room,” during which time they discussed the “Nature of Things” program on prosthetics to be shown tonight,” and Jeanne, who had a “Lunch/Sharing with colleagues – Learned about a couple of Internet sites.” In addition to interactions with colleagues, many of the respondents also reported upon informal school learning which occurred for them in the context of their engagement with students, and in some cases, in phone conversations and meetings with their parents. As one respondent put it, these parent interactions provided opportunity for developing “listening skills and experience – not everything in counselling is as it first appears.”

In addition to informal learning which took place at the school site, many of the respondents also reported on collegial interactions and related learning away from school and outside regular school hours. Sharing rides to and from school was a common venue for such activity. Eric reported that, “On route to work [we] discussed curriculum ... kids on my course, parent interviews, etc.,” while Jane noted that in “travelling home with colleague – discussed Gr9 poetry and OAC Novel Study.” Eric also reported on one evening at home, punctuated by “phone call from two colleagues – one off long term illness – other to advise me he will not be at work tomorrow – Thursday – not feeling good. Asks me to help organize lesson plan.” Even evening and weekend social events seemed to involve discussion and sharing of knowledge and opinions relating to schooling and work. Jane reported on an evening “social; spent time at friends – discussed T[oronto] D[istrict] S[chool] Board budget,” while Jeanne’s “Staff Xmas Curling Tournament and Dinner” included “Informal learning, with colleagues on Time/Stress Management.”

Other home activities were also often the source of new learning for our respondents. Computers constituted a major venue for such self-learning – both in relation to the acquisition of new skills and knowledge about the equipment and programs themselves (“help my spouse with computer – learned to format labels”), as well as using computers and the web to seek out new information on an infinite range of topics (“did my regular search for programming ideas – how to draw a transparent bitmap”; “check e-mails and info on school board network”). So-called “recreational” activities also served as learning opportunities for a number of respondents – particularly hobbies for respondents such as Jim who, on one occasion, was “preparing photo exhibit for May 2000 – learning framing technique so I can frame all work,” while on another, was “read[ing]” – learning woodworking projects.” Overall then, it is not difficult to conclude that home and community both served as important sites for informal learning for our 13 diarists.

The four most dominant “recreational” pursuits of these respondents were, in order, TV/video viewing, computer/internet use, reading books and magazines, and reading newspapers. TV/videos averaged 9.8 hours per week, and were fairly evenly balanced between programs which could be considered “entertainment,” and programs such as news, documentaries and films, including films which were being previewed at home for school classroom use. Nine of the respondents reported on using computers at home, on average for 4.7 hours per week. In most cases, computers were used for “school work” – preparing course and lesson materials and tests, writing administrative reports, entering and processing student marks, and e-mailing colleagues and school administrators. Similarly, Internet use was highly related to searching for course material, books, etc. In addition, one respondent reported using e-mail for corresponding with family members, and another reported significant use of computer and Internet for writing, downloading and exchanging computer programs. In virtually every case, annotations were replete with many comments about the extent to which self-learning was taking place in the context of this computer use – “learned new computer skill” (Jeanne), “found new reference sites on Internet” (Jeanne), “learned how to program P.C. to use voice recognition software. This will take some time” (Barry), and so on. (These data certainly reflected findings of a recent national survey of the general Canadian public which indicated that teachers had the highest rate of access to computers and the Internet of any occupational groups in the country (Livingstone, 1999).

Books and magazines were read on an average of 2.7 hours each week, while newspapers were read 2.3 hours. In addition to general knowledge acquisition, several respondents punctuated their reports with comments about how this reading assisted them directly in their teaching work – articles on recent government, financial, scientific, and other events, fiction and non-fiction reading material for students in language courses, and so on.

In addition to their informal learning pursuits, nine of the 13 respondents indicated that they had participated in one to three “formal learning” events

(e.g., workshops, presentations, meetings) over the course of the one or two weeks of diary reporting.

These diaries portrayed teachers who were all on-going, formal and informal learners, in both their paid workplaces and in many of the other sites in which they lived their lives. While these diaries provided a distinct picture of both the types of learning, and amount of engagement in each case, the third phase of the project, in-depth interviews, provided a very significant analysis of how respondents saw themselves as active learners in their workplace and elsewhere.

Phase Three – In-Depth Phone Interviews

For the purposes of further exploration of the data provided in the first two phases of the project, four of the 13 diarists from phase two of the study were sampled by categories of gender, age and geography; when contacted by telephone, all agreed to participate in individual telephone interviews. These interviews, conducted during 2000, ran between 45 and 60 minutes. All were taped and subsequently transcribed.

In order to provide a framework for exploring issues of learning with these four teachers, the interview questions focused on the provincial government's enactment of sweeping changes to the province's school system during the previous three years. Among many changes affecting secondary schools, teachers and students, specific province-wide initiatives were referenced: a) the complete revision of all syllabi and all courses for secondary schools in the province; b) introduction of a compulsory, standardized student assessment process, including revised standardized report cards; c) mandatory teacher involvement in student extra-curricular activities; d) a provincial statutory body to control teacher selection, training, examining, certification, registration, standards of practice, professional development and discipline (the Ontario College of Teachers); and e) an earlier, and short-lived, provincial government initiative to de-stream grade nine programs in the high school system. These government reforms served as a useful medium for exploring issues of teacher learning because they were universally applied across the province, and certainly well-known to all teachers.

Interviewees were asked to identify provincial government reform measures which they felt were particularly notable (if none came spontaneously to mind, then the initiatives described above were mentioned and the respondent asked to select one). They were asked to explain their understanding of these reforms and then to reflect on the ways in which they had come to learn about these undertakings. They were also asked to explore how it might have been that their colleagues in their respective schools came to be knowledgeable about and engaged in these initiatives. During this part of the interview there was considerable prompting to elicit reflections on ways in which learning may have taken place – “formal” opportunities such as workshops, meetings, presentations, circulars, and school announcements, as well as the more informal discussions among teachers, administrators, students and parents.

In spite of the enormity of these curricular, assessment and reporting changes,

all four teacher interviews suggest that there was very limited, if any, formal opportunity to learn about the changes and what was required to implement them. Only two of the four respondents, for example, could recall any in-school staff meetings organized specifically to deal with curriculum and reform – one such event for each. In Jeanne’s case, “the only formal session I’ve had was given by one of our teachers at school last year about evaluation and the new curriculum, but that’s the only formal training I’ve received.” John reported that his only formal meeting “was one on teacher advisory groups – [they] shortened the teaching day and extended the period of [workshop] time so we could learn how to do teacher advisory groups.” Otherwise, reference to these reforms at formal staff gatherings seemed to consist only of announcements, such as Jeanne’s summary that “it was all just documents received. Like our [team] leader said, they are now available in the office and the consultant, and he’s there if I have questions.” In short, as Barry noted, the entire curriculum assessment process for teachers in his school “just kind of fell in their laps.” John’s school seemed to be very similar to that of the other three schools being reported on – in his case, only one school-wide meeting on the subject of schooling reforms. As he frustratingly noted, the official approach to these reforms seemed to be, “Here’s the change. Do it! And there’s really little in-service ... you’ll get memos stating that there’s all this in-service available but the in-service never comes.”

Given the dearth of access to structured professional development possibilities, and the immensity and significance of changes imposed on Ontario schools, it is not surprising that these interviews indicated that an immense amount of informal learning had taken place – not only with these four respondents, but also, to the extent that their observations are valid, with many or all of their colleagues as well. This informal learning about the reforms occurred in a number of ways, individually and collectively, and involved print materials, television and video, computers and the Internet, and discussions with others. While virtually all of these learning activities were intentioned by those involved, they occurred in a number of circumstances – from a long-planned-for evening of reading documents, to both planned-for and spontaneous meetings with one or two colleagues between classes, at lunch time, and before and after regular timetabled work hours.

All four respondents reported their own and colleagues’ significant involvement in the reading of print materials related to the province’s schooling reforms. Official reports, syllabi, guidelines, course profiles, booklets, memos, etc. turned out to be the main, if not sole, source of direct information. Jeanne, for example, talked about spending a month of her summer holidays reading all of the relevant guidelines and profiles she could obtain, and of the other respondents similarly reported on such activity. More than one respondent commented on how this individualized approach to learning about, and working on, the new mandated curriculum and assessment programs constituted a dramatic shift from an earlier mode of more engaged, collective activity. Barry remarked on this new phenomenon in the context of having to develop a new course of study for his guidance program. Similarly, John noted that these recent schooling

reforms meant a distinct change from earlier times when professional development, in-service training and curriculum development involved a more formal, organized, collective way of learning. Now,

primarily you're on your own, if you need to figure stuff out you ... and again, I don't have a lot of problems with that, as long as the resources are available, the materials, I don't mind doing the self-teaching thing. ... It's a gradual process trying to get your head around that because you're so accustomed to doing it the other way.

Informal interactions with their colleagues appeared by far the most significant source of learning for all of the respondents interviewed. For example, although Jeanne had devoted a significant part of her holidays to reading government publications, she noted that "the document doesn't tell me a lot of details, doesn't give me a lot of information, and I do have to go to someone else to find out." One of several examples she gave occurred when she was attempting to understand the new requirements for assessing students in her program.

Right now also I feel I'm learning a lot informally regarding the new curriculum – just by sharing with my colleagues. When I was making the new rubric ... I went to my colleague from the English department who has basically the same kind of program, a language program, and so I asked her advice on what she does ... and we discussed it and I was able to come to a better understanding. So that's the way we do it, just by discussing in the staff room.

All four respondents also reported on their use of computers and the Internet to access information and programs related to the schooling reforms being introduced. In some cases, this use involved downloading text materials which were not otherwise easily available, for subsequent reading. In many other cases, however, the computer was used more significantly to engage in learning about specific programs. For John, this new approach of self-learning involved a number of approaches, including

a lot of work just on the Internet basically. I mean, that's helpful. I much rather learn, sort of, when I have the time and the more stuff that's posted on the Internet, the better. And I'm finding some stuff, like, on the Educational Network of Ontario. I mean, just having the course profiles on-line is very helpful too.

Jeanne as well reported on significant computer use, even though she was also frank about the challenges which she herself faced in dealing with this medium.

Myself I find I'm doing a lot of informal learning on the computer, tons of it ... for instance [there] is a program that's offered that has the four areas, and so on, and I downloaded it on my computer, well with my husband's help because also all that stuff is informal learning – the husband even helps

– and I realized how complex the program was. I couldn't make it work by myself.

The data collected in the three phases of this research project suggest that a vast majority of elementary and secondary school teachers are highly engaged in their own, on-going learning – through formal as well as intentioned and spontaneous informal activity, both alone and collaboratively with colleagues. On the basis of comparisons with the parallel general population study undertaken concurrent with this project, the amount of time spent in these learning activities significantly exceeded those of virtually all other groups in the Canadian labour force, including those with similar educational backgrounds (Livingstone, 2000).

Teacher Knowledge and Informal Learning, Professionalism and Schooling Reform: What are the Connections?

In what ways can the understandings gleaned from this study be used to enhance schooling reform initiatives to ensure that schools can better represent the interests and needs of both an increasingly diverse student population, as well as our evolving communities? The data collected from this study already provides us with some important clues to this dilemma, to the ways in which teacher learning can be enhanced – or diminished – by the larger contexts of the workplace. Two will be explored briefly here, both in the context of their effects on teaching learning – first, teacher workload, and secondly, professionalism and relations of power.

Teacher Workload

Full-time respondents (n = 637) to the original questionnaire survey reported an overall workload of 47 hours per week, comprised of timetabled and non-timetabled work. On average, they were assigned 28 hours per week for working directly with students as well as such additional tasks as school administration, library coordination, administration, hall supervision, preparation and marking, and so on. Teachers reported that, on average they spent a further 19 hours per week on school related tasks – approximately 10 hours at school, and 9 hours at home and elsewhere. Such work included preparing courses and lessons, marking student work and extra-curricular activities; to communicating with students and parents; and participating in subject, school, board and federation meetings. This 47-hour average work-week is not unusual for teachers, as these findings are similar to those of studies of teachers in other jurisdictions – consistently, work weeks range from 45 to 53 hours for teachers across Canada, the USA, and Great Britain (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation 1995; School Teachers' Review Body 2000; see also Drago, Caplan, Costanza, & Brubaker, 1999; Michelson & Harvey, 1999). In fact, the diaries of the second phase of the research revealed that virtually every one of the 13 respondents had been engaged in significantly more teaching-related work that they had self-reported on their

survey questionnaires – in two cases, both women with children at home, by 75% and 35% respectively! This suggests that a number of recent studies in a number of jurisdictions that assess teacher workload on the basis of similar generalized estimations may also significantly under-represent actual work loads for teachers (see, for example, Alberta Teachers' Association, 2000; Harvey & Spinney, 2000; National Centre for Education Statistics (USA), 1997; National Union of Teachers, 2001; Raykov, 2001; Statistics Canada, 1994).

The diaries indicated clearly that a “normal” 8–5 work day, with time off for lunch, was certainly the exception rather than the rule. Lunches, if they happened at all, were often punctuated with ad hoc calls on teachers' time. Brian's comment exemplifies this situation: “12:10–12:30 – Eating lunch – dealing with students re. co-op application sheets – and with staff – seldom do you ever get to sit down for a sandwich.” These diaries also revealed that much of the course preparation, and student marking and evaluation work undertaken by these teachers was performed in the evenings and on weekends. All respondents found it necessary to undertake such additional work, and on average, five days of each week were burdened with these extra hours. In total, a weekly average of 10.7 hours of work was undertaken outside of the regular 9 to 5 work day, with a range of 5 to 21 hours. In addition to working at home, during the two reporting weeks several teachers had noted that they had stayed at, or returned to their schools for evening events, including parents' nights and supervising at student dances and sport events.

The effects of this workload were certainly evident in relation to possibilities for organizing in-service activities related to the reform initiatives – all four interviewees commented, in one way or another, on the inability of school administrations, or teachers themselves, to develop successful collaborative learning opportunities. Barry, for example, expressed particular frustration of the attempts made in his school in this regard.

The first time we went through that, in Guidance, we took it upon ourselves to do a lot of in-servicing with students and the staff. But, it came down to a timing issue. There's not enough time going around for anybody – It was essentially, 'here's the dates [for implementation], here's how to do it. ... We tried to do it through ... a concerted effort in some ways to free up the students on various themes and that would then free up the staff so we might have forty minutes here or there, and it worked for a while but then it just sort of disintegrated because it just became overwhelming ... it came out a logistics nightmare ... I don't think we really got a handle on it. and I would guess that we're probably just an average kind of example of what's going on out there.

To be sure, this is not a new issue for anyone involved with schooling. Too often, however, analyses of past professional development “failures” seem to venture no further than simply blaming teachers for poor planning or inappropriate prioritizing. If the findings of this study can be generalized in any way, it

would appear teachers spend a lot of time in their own formal and informal learning related both to general professional development and the more immediate perceived needs related to changes in their classrooms and schools. What is lacking, perhaps, is any systematic, department or school-wide approach to organization for at least some of these learning activities. Could the workplace be organized (somewhat) differently, to take more advantage of teachers' learning interests? (Sleegeer's chapter in this section considers this issue.) Traditional school structures are enduring entities, but is this an impossible challenge?

Professionalism and Relations of Power

Another intriguing theme arising out of this study was the way in which respondents talked about their learning in the context of their social relations with employers, government, students, parents and the "public," and the ways in which their own identities were continually being shaped and reshaped by their experiences with these reform measures. None of the interviewees had experienced any opportunity to participate in the conceptualization and planning of these initiatives, and judging from their comments, it was clear to them that their own knowledges and understandings were of little value or interest to those in charge of the change. What they had "learned" in this context was that the traditional ideology of professional engagement – certainly one which they believed in – was absent. John's observation that "we are being totally de-professionalized" equated, in this regard, with Norma's lament that teachers, "who have intelligent minds," were being totally ignored in this arena.

Jeanne was particularly explicit in her beliefs about this issue, and used the term "professional" more than once to explain her obligations in this regard. When initially asked in the interview about her understanding of the new schooling initiatives, she responded that "The government has a new reform, so it's my responsibility as a professional to make myself knowledgeable of what the reform is all about." She had engaged in considerable "professional reading ... [in order to] make sure that I'm abreast to these changes." However, this sense of occupational responsibility in the context of these schooling reforms seemed to turn out to be very much a two-edged sword for Jeanne. As she explained,

the feeling is also that it [the reform] was done very quickly, and that there were some big mistakes made on the part of the government ... and we had reaction from parents and students. They don't like it ... and then we end up with having to defend the mistake, and saying 'yeah we would prefer to say [that as well]' ... and so there was a lot of dissatisfaction there among the parents, and so we took a bit of the slack for that, and a lot of teachers don't like that of course, 'don't shoot the messenger' – that idea.

As she noted, this series of events had significantly affected her understandings of professionalism and identity. Even more problematic, perhaps, in the context of teacher development, were the direct references to power relations and the

unilateral imposition of reform measures which teachers believed were fundamentally wrong for their students and for schooling generally. In fact, more than one respondent alluded to the clear statements made by the government in this regard. John noted, for example, that as compared to previous government reforms, where teachers felt they had some space to shape changes in ways they thought best,

this time there's more attitude, just by the nature of the government, and when it says it's going to do, there are more people complying, and a lot of it, some of it's out of fear. It's a lot more, "cover yourself." ... [Teachers are finding] a whole lot more pressure on them. They're really under the microscope as far as they perform.

Given these findings relating to the complexities of teacher learning and teacher knowledge in our era of pervasive schooling reform, the recent work of Gitlin and Margonis (1995) in the USA is particularly informative. Intrigued by the ways in which teachers often came to be blamed for the failures in schooling reform initiatives over the years – often being portrayed as covertly resistant or openly opposed to change, either because of harbouring traditional (and therefore outmoded) views of education, or simply because of laziness and/or obstinacy – they began exploring other possible reasons for these reforms not being successful.

In spite of the purported differences in the literature between “first wave” and “second wave” schooling reformers, Gitlin and Margonis suggest both groups seem to concur with the general belief, as exemplified by studies such as Lortie’s (1975), that most teachers are basically conservative, presentist, individualistic and “oversensitive to criticism.” Not surprisingly, then, the ways in which both groups of schooling reformers prescribe change reflect these beliefs, albeit expressed in different ways. While the former group advocate “mak[ing] strong demands on the users” through “benevolently authoritarian forms of management” that create the need for teachers “to swim in new waters,” develop commitment for the reform, and “accept it and even like it” (p. 383), the latter group tends to stress “engagement” with teachers through so-called “collaboration” – developing “collaborative school cultures” which, they claim, will help overcome the purported “isolation and alienation of teachers, making teachers more receptive to and engaged with educational reform” (p. 380). School collaboration, for this latter group, is seen as “a guiding approach for education reform” (p. 383).

Based on their close reading of this literature, however, Gitlin and Moralis suggest there are fundamental similarities. In both cases, changes are initiated and instituted from the outside, from the top down, and are designed to be implemented and monitored through the existing authority structures of the institution. For both “waves,” teacher resistance and opposition is to be “overcome” one way or the other and the change process is to move ahead.

What is not present, argue Gitlin and Margonis, is any deep understanding

or recognition of “teachers’ knowledge” – teachers’ deep understanding of schooling cultures and authority relations, the material conditions of work in their schools, and the nature, effects and outcomes of earlier attempts at change in their schools. Concerns raised by teachers about proposed changes are often viewed as representing an “habitual and emotional” attachment to traditional schooling routines, rather than ones engendered by reasoned analysis based upon their intimate knowledge of schooling. Overall there is a lack of any real understanding on the part of school reformers about the ways in which reform initiatives are taken up and analysed by teachers, and thus these reformers harbour considerable misunderstanding about reasons why teachers might seem unmotivated by specific externally-initiated calls for change, and may even challenge or resist such changes (see Bailey, 2000; Bascia, 1994, Blackmore & Kenway, 1995).

As further theoretical support for this position, Gitlin and Margonis draw on theories of resistance developed by Paul Willis (1977) and others to suggest that resistance, whether practiced by teachers or students, “is a political act that reflects an understanding of the hidden implications of schooling.” This knowledge and understanding cannot always “be fully articulated by the actors,” and as Gitlin and Margonis note, in relation to teachers’ responses to top-down imposition of reforms,

[T]he meaning of resistant acts ... is likely to remain ambiguous. On the one hand, resistance may be nothing more than laziness or an excuse of some kind; on the other hand, it can reflect important political insights. [However,] this ambiguity is used by school change researchers to discount resistance (p. 392).

Schooling reform initiatives often fail because educational reformers and school administrators fail to understand and incorporate the “good sense” of classroom teachers into their reform projects. In addition, in most if not all cases, important issues relating to existing authority relations in the school are definitively not part of the reform agenda – or even taken into consideration as a potential factor in determining the success of the proposed project.

The pragmatic acceptance of school hierarchies in the school change literature reinforces the prevalent tendency to define teachers’ resistant acts as unreasonable and obstructionist. It is ironic that overlooking these potential insights leads to a re-enactment of the push-pull cycle school change researchers hope to overcome. Thus, while resistant acts are likely to be ambiguous, they should not be immediately disregarded. They can direct our attention beyond the limits of the school change discourse to the fundamental institutional relations and school structures that help define relationships, roles, and the nature of teachers’ work. Resistance can signify a political form of good sense (p. 393).

Gitlin and Margonis’ empirical work for this study involved two aspects. First,

they undertook a detailed examination of attempted changes in structures and accountability which had occurred in a particular school district over several years, and found (among other things) that these events had increased both bureaucratic relations, and workloads, for teachers. Secondly, they engaged in an ambitious program of interviews and ethnographic observations with teachers and administrators in one particular school in this same district, during the time when a new specific change initiative was being implemented. In many cases they found active opposition and resistance from teachers to what was being proposed and implemented. Based on these observations and follow-up interviews they concluded that teachers had, in fact, largely responded to this reform initiative on the basis of their knowledge of the existent material, social and authority relations in the school and district, and of the effects of earlier attempts by the district to induce top-down changes and reforms. Like Willis, they also found that among teachers interviewed there were those who could not always “fully articulate” these understandings. However, they concluded from this study that the earlier learning processes undergone by the teachers had certainly been both extensive and deep, and that their position on the current reform initiative was developed rationally through an intensive learning process. Certainly, the data from our national survey of teachers clearly substantiates these findings (see also, Bascia, 1994; Blackmore & Kenway, 1995).

Concluding Remarks

How can policy be informed by the kinds of findings apparent from this national survey of teachers’ learning, and from similar studies? Can the theory and practice of teachers’ informal learning be incorporated into – conjoined with – policies and programs designed to promote good teacher education and good schooling reform? Clearly, the data suggested in this study present a stark contrast to conventional notions of policy-driven, top-down teachers’ professional development. Does the concept “policy” apply at all to something as intricate and complex as the ways in which teachers daily – both intentionally and spontaneously – go about learning new knowledges and skills related directly and indirectly to their work? Is this question itself an empirical one? Is it possible, for example, for a set of policies and programs for teachers’ professional development to be developed which could successfully incorporate – build upon – existing teacher knowledge, teachers’ perceived interests and needs, teachers’ professional identities, and pragmatic workload issues?

If this question applies to professional development programs intended to be general in nature – that is, to enhance teachers’ learning and knowledge/skills more holistically – the answer is perhaps more straightforward and positive. As just one example, a province-wide program has recently been initiated in Nova Scotia, developed collaboratively and carefully by representatives of the ministry of education, the boards of education, the faculties of education and the teachers union in the province (a unique accomplishment in itself, given a traditional history – like that in many other jurisdictions – of suspicion, tension and even

conflict – see Bascia’s and Sachs’ chapters in this section). Under this plan, each teacher in the province is required to file an annual report – to their local board and to the union – on their professional development activities for the previous year, listing their engagements in both formal and intentioned informal learning in a number of content and process categories. While a minimum number of 100 hours are required for continued certification each year, the first two years of reporting suggest three highly beneficial outcomes: first, a vast majority of teachers are now (or were already) far exceeding this level of expectation; secondly the existence of this teacher-centred approach to learning has encouraged even more self-engagement in this regard; and thirdly, that it has resulted in a more systematic and sustained self-learning regime for many teachers (Nova Scotia Teachers’ Union).

If, however, the question applies to “desired” or “required” teacher learning in relation to a specific schooling reform initiative, the possibilities for success are much more complex. As suggested by the findings and analysis of the Canadian Teacher Learning research project and a number of similar explorations, chances of success might be highly predicated on a number of factors underlying the initiative – what is being “desired,” and by whom; the extent to which teachers are involved with the conceptualization and development of the overall project (assuming they concur at all with its means and ends), including its “teacher-learning” components; and most importantly, the ways in which their workplaces might necessarily be altered to accommodate the concomitant formal and informal learning deemed necessary for the task at hand.

To be sure, such seemingly stringent requirements may well seem to be out of the realm of practicality or even possibility, especially in relation to schooling reform projects involving entire regions of a country. However, the sordid history of schooling reform in many jurisdictions, in both the recent and distant past, suggests that a qualitatively different approach is required. The studies explored in this chapter suggest that new initiatives must include a much more sophisticated understanding of the complexities of teacher formal and informal learning, teacher knowledge and teacher professional self-identity.

Notes

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