



UNIVERSITY OF
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WERKLUND SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

New Teachers Implementing Professional Practice Standards

Research Brief

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Introduction

New teachers need additional supports to strengthen their teaching competencies when hired on probationary or limited-term contracts. The aim of this study was to document the impact of a professional learning intervention designed particularly for new teachers as they engage in career-long learning and meet expectations according to the Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2018). Partners from a school authority joined faculty from the Werklund School of Education and professional learning facilitators from the Galileo Educational Network to engage in a research-practice partnership. A design-based research approach using quantitative (pre- and post-surveys) and qualitative data (artifacts of learning, field notes, classroom observations) were analyzed over one year. There were over 450 participants involved in the professional learning series.

Although there is much evidence for the fact that support for beginning teachers across Canada is increasing, it remains that some of those supports are inconsistently implemented (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2018; Campbell et al., 2017; Kutsyruba & Tregunna, 2014). Documenting the effectiveness of existing induction supports in order to improve their effectiveness represents an important part of improving support and their implementation (Kirincic, 2017; Rass, 2012). Research about how new teachers are supported in their work towards improving student learning outcomes while strengthening their own teaching capabilities is needed.

Key Issues

- Transitioning from pre-service education programs into the “field” of teaching is a critical period in a teacher’s career (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; McCormack, Gore, & Thomas, 2006).
- In Canada, as many as 40 - 50% of teachers leave in their first five years (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009; Clandinin et al., 2013; Kutsyruba, 2012).
- New teachers need support to continuously increase their professional competency (Brody & Hadar, 2015; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Howe, 2006).

Background

Starting in Fall 2018, a school authority, Galileo Educational Network and faculty from the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, collaboratively designed and a year-long intervention - professional learning series for new teachers focused on nurturing effective teaching practices to meet the Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2018). This study was supported with funding from Alberta Education's Research Partnerships Program (2018-2019).

Using a proven design-based professional learning (DBPL) intervention (Friesen & Jacobsen, 2015; Chu, Brown & Friesen, in press), the partners organized a DBPL series for new teachers as a place and space to come together to connect and collaborate to learn about current research practice and district support.

Using DBPL, teachers engaged in professional learning communities to collectively design learning and:

- Ascertain the problem by identifying what deep understanding their students must build to make learning advances;
- Generate ideas through collaborating with colleagues, researchers and mentors to design worthwhile tasks and assessments;
- Receive feedback through analyzing evidence of student learning to examine how students are building deep understanding; and
- Evaluate instructional effectiveness by discerning promising instructional practices and through assessing the impact of changed practice on student learning (Friesen & Jacobsen, 2015, para. 4).

Induction is a critical time period in a teacher's career for continued learning and growth.

Purpose

The purpose of this design-based research study was to explore ways to design, implement and sustain professional learning for new teachers to engage them in the process of improving student outcomes with each other while strengthening their own teaching capabilities.

Executive Summary

This design-based research project explored how to design, implement and sustain professional learning for new teachers in order to engage them in the process of improving student outcomes with each other while strengthening their own teaching capabilities. Three methods of data collection were used: (a) online pre- and post-surveys; (b) workshop observations and field notes; and (c) researcher team notes from three classroom observations. There were over 450 participants involved in the DBPL series. All teachers who were invited to be involved in the DBPL series were also invited to participate in the research. The pre-survey was administered during the first DBPL session and 366 teachers agreed to participate in the survey part of the study (approximately 80% response rate). The post-survey was administered during the final DBPL session and 284 teachers agreed to complete the survey (approximately 63% response rate). There were 280 surveys from respondents that were matched and used for the pre- and post-survey analysis.

Key Findings

- DBPL sessions had a positive impact on teacher learning and practice.
- New teachers were observed demonstrating TQS competencies.
- New teachers used discipline-based inquiry, formative assessment strategies, and were well-supported with a network of colleagues who checked-in regularly.
- Design-based professional learning positioned new teachers as active learners and leaders in designing optimal learning and providing a safe and supportive learning environment for all their students.
- New teachers demonstrated statistically significant growth in competencies outlined in the TQS:
 - Demonstrating professional body of knowledge (through planning and designing learning activities, using instructional strategies to engage students in meaningful learning activities, applying assessment and evaluation practices);
 - Engaging in career-long learning,
 - Establishing inclusive learning environments when designing learning, and
 - Applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

Participant Quote

When sharing teaching practices with colleagues I always walk away with some inspiration that I can enact in my own class! I love the feeling of knowing that others are facing the same challenges as me. The opportunity to explore these challenges as a group allows me to ensure that I am addressing the issue in a way that ensures the success of my students and also encourages my own professional growth.
[Survey Respondent]

“...ensures the success of my students and encourages my own professional growth.”

Research Partnership Lessons Learned

- Partner relationships are important and take time to develop.
- Ensure continual communications with all team members throughout the project.
- Plan for sharing workload and providing sufficient time for team members to provide feedback and complete reports.
- Plan for changes in levels of commitment to the project.
- Take time to reflect on the research and celebrate progress together with partners and within the cohort.

Conclusion

Findings from this research partnership study indicated new teachers were supported through the design-based professional learning sessions and this intervention had a positive impact on teacher learning and practice in relationship to the Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2018). All teachers need the opportunity to establish professional learning networks inside and outside of their schools in order to connect with others and build a supportive professional learning network. New teachers should be supported at the school level and at a systemic level.

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More Information

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