

TEACHING AS A PROFESSION INITIATIVE

OECD/CERI Schooling for Tomorrow Project

Ontario Ministry of Education (Canada)

Instruction & Leadership Development Division

Teaching as a Profession

Introduction and Earlier Phases

Earlier phases of the initiative, from 2002-2004, included the adaptation of OECD-developed future scenarios to permit an expanded range of dialogue, testing the use of these scenarios to examine policy issues in workshops, as well as national and international dialogue and sharing of lessons learned with respect to using scenarios. Workshops were day-long experiments in fostering discussion and expanding thinking about teachers and the teaching profession in particular, using future scenarios.

A core study group has acted as an advisory panel to the Ministry in the project. The study group has diverse external and internal education experts of varying backgrounds, including educators, bureaucrats, administrators, academics, lawyers, political advisors and union leaders from across Canada. For the workshops, individuals from a broad range of positions and constituencies, such as education, labour, health and communications, contributed from across North America.

Feedback from workshop participants indicated that using futures scenarios was an effective way of opening up people's thinking and challenging entrenched biases and viewpoints. Employing the scenarios also gave participants the opportunity to discuss potentially contentious education issues in an open, non-partisan environment. Despite these successes, certain participants felt that there were limitations to using futures scenarios. Futures scenarios were useful for promoting discussion, but since they seldom capture fully the context and situational-dependent arena in which policy is designed, decided upon and delivered, its role as a tool in actual policy development seemed limited.

Phase III: Case Studies and Policy Work

The third phase of the Teaching as a Profession initiative, from 2005-2007, continued to examine the use of futures scenarios as a way to engage in strategic conversation and informed dialogue. It also began to use the futures scenarios to explore the robustness of actual policy. The aim of engaging stakeholders in dialogue on current thinking/perspectives on teaching as a profession and the future of teaching has continued along with a more ambitious attempt to contribute to policy development. Two different types of workshops were developed in Phase III: case study workshops and workshops contributing to the development of the ministry's leadership framework related to supporting school and system leadership <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/framework.html>. The workshops are best divided into three clusters that are described below. The first include several workshops using case studies, the second, two workshops focusing on leadership self review and finally a single workshop that considered the nature of distributed leadership in schools.

1) Case Studies Workshops

Case studies on several topical policy issues in Canadian jurisdictions outside Ontario gave workshop participants a sense of the complex, imperfect and sometimes disordered political and socio-economic context in which actual policy development emerges. This added a fresh dimension to the discussion both by considering an existing case and by recognizing the multiple perspectives that contribute to policy decisions. Because the policy questions were external to Ontario the participants could consider the issues while leaving behind any perceived roles or constraints inherent to the domestic political/policy environment, which might impede a critical and multi-faceted policy analysis. The topics of the case studies selected included:

- Raising the Mandatory School Attendance Age to 18 (Province of New Brunswick)
- Open School Catchment Boundaries (Province of British Columbia)

The case studies provided details on the key driving factors that attracted political attention to the policy issue, positions of key stakeholders, media coverage and public opinion, consultation and implementation strategies, alternatives considered, as well as a retrospective look at any resulting successes and shortcomings.

Outcomes

The workshops submitted the case studies to discussion using futures scenarios as a vehicle. In the spring of 2005 a first workshop used Study Group members as participants and considered the New Brunswick Mandatory School Attendance policy that raised the school leaving age from 16 to 18. Participants were given an overview of the case and the first part of the workshop was a detailed and lively elaboration of the case study, which explored the relevant policy's place in the social, economic and political context of the time. They were then asked to examine this policy in the context of each of the five futures scenarios using the following questions: "Would this policy make sense in this scenario?" "How would you change it?" "How would the policy affect teachers and teaching in this scenario?" and "What other policies would you consider or introduce in this scenario?"

In the second workshop in June of 2005 the other case study was added based on feedback from study group members. This session included a wide range of participants, including luminaries from the academe, teachers' organizations, media organizations and national education associations.

Feedback from these workshops indicated that utilizing case studies combined with futures scenarios was extremely useful and stimulating in terms of generating discussion and adding rigour to examining the robustness of policy ideas. Case studies were an "anchor, the grounding, needed before dealing with the abstractions of the scenarios"; (the mainly non-government actor) participants claimed to have a better appreciation of the complexity and nuances of the policy-making process; "the cases resulted in a more far-reaching and substantive discussion than the use of scenarios alone could have possibly provided"; "scenario/case work is an objective exercise, which stimulated dialogue that was not framed by ideology. . . provides a useful means to speak truth to power".

2) Leadership Workshops

The Ministry of Education was in the process of developing a new tool to assist school boards to assess their leadership capacity. This presented the futures scenario group with an opportunity to apply scenario thinking to a living issue in the Ministry. A draft of the tool had already been prepared with the aid of a "Think Tank" consisting of directors of education, school superintendents, academics and principals. It was decided to invite members of the think tank, along with the study group and a ministry officials group to consider school leadership in the context of the future scenarios. A workshop was designed to use the self-assessment tool as its own "case study." A document was prepared which gave an overview of current thinking about leadership and this was distributed to the group along with the self assessment tool in preparation for the workshop. At the workshop participants were asked to consider the nature of leadership in each of the scenarios.

The discussions were lively and the group felt that the day was interesting and useful. They found that the scenarios allowed them to gain a fresh perspective on the nature of leadership in schools and at the board level. It was not clear how the discussion impacted on the leadership self assessment tool, partly because a version of the tool had already been completed and partly because it was difficult to assess the nature of the impact. The open discussion of the whole group at the end of the workshop opened up some new

issues about leadership. It seemed that in at least some of the futures there was no role for leadership at the board level. Not only were there no boards, but it appeared that the educational leaders were for the most part at the school or in the class room. This led to the idea of continuing with a series of workshops that might be used to contribute to a new self assessment tool that would look at leadership in schools.

Two workshops were held, in October 2006 and March 2007, which used revised scenarios, the school board leadership tool, and several selections from research on leadership as background for a discussion of the nature of leadership in schools. The purpose of the meetings was to contribute to a self review tool for leadership in schools. A special emphasis was placed on the consideration of teachers' leadership roles in schools. The questions posed were: "What would leadership in schools be like in each future?" "What would contribute to a self review tool to assess leadership in schools?" Participants were also asked to consider the following as they reviewed the scenarios: "What would leadership in schools look like in each scenario?" "Who might lead and what will they lead?" "What are some critical factors in answering the above; which are specific to each scenario and which are relevant in all scenarios?" These questions enabled participants to identify characteristics relevant to a leadership self-assessment tool for schools that was under consideration for development at the time. This meant that when their conversations were relevant the participants were contributing to a live policy process.

Outcomes

Many of the participants came for both meetings. They seemed to find it useful to move away from their day to day work and spend time exploring current issues in the context of the scenarios. They also did not keep their initial views. Many found that the scenario they preferred and the one they considered to be most likely changed as a result of the new thinking. The discussion was intense and lively and consumed most of the workshop time. Many of the participants used the scenarios to clarify and connect to current leadership issues in their schools. The workshops were considered to be a success by the participants who found the discussions engrossing and useful. Many felt that the discussions gave them a richer understanding of the current nature of leadership.

3) Distributed Leadership Workshop

This workshop took place on October 2007 and was the last workshop in the program. It continued the discussion of school leadership but the focus was on distributed school leadership. It used the scenarios and a "leadership framework" for principals and vice principals – which identified the competencies (knowledge skills attitudes and practices) of effective school leaders. The participants included school principals, members of the study group and ministry staff. Most participants were already familiar with the leadership framework. The preparatory materials included some accounts of the nature of distributed leadership and the selections from the leadership literature used in previous workshops. The specificity of the material and its close connection to the participants led to an extremely rich discussion about the nature of distributed leadership. The leadership framework was subject to quite a lot of discussion and there were some concrete suggestions for changing it, by broadening its scope to include some less obvious circumstances.

Outcomes

This workshop was substantially different from previous ones. The discussion was not merely engaging for the school representatives, it also was extremely helpful for the ministry staff who were engaged in formulating policy on school leadership. The barrier between rich open discussion and genuine contribution to policy formulation was finally crossed. It was clear from this session that the use of futures scenarios in well-designed workshops that take into account the circumstances of the participants and are comfortable for the sponsors can be used to inform, enrich and contribute to policy development.