

Promoting Teacher Professional Development: A Sociological  
Study of Senior Educators' PD Priorities in Ontario

*Ian Hardy*  
*Charles Sturt University*

*Wagga Wagga*  
*New South Wales, Australia*

This study investigated senior educators' viewpoints on teacher professional development (PD). To examine the nature and source of participants' perspectives, the study employed Bourdieu's notion of practice as socially constituted and contested. Interviews were conducted in southern Ontario with 24 senior Ministry officials, principals, and academics. Participants' current and prior experiences predisposed them to support profession-driven PD, as well as PD for systemic-accountability purposes. The study suggests PD policy directives for provincial foci should (a) incorporate approaches that begin with teachers' existing knowledge and understanding, (b) address specific school circumstances, and (c) be cognizant of broader conceptions of students' needs.

Keywords: educational practice, educational reform, Bourdieu, Ontario education

French Abstract: TBA (CJE will provide the translation)

Mots clés: TBA

---

---



Professional development (PD), an integral part of the life of schools and teachers, is an important mechanism to ensure educational reform and improvement in school settings. However, different viewpoints and perspectives on PD occur, with considerable tension between advocates of PD for broad, systemic (especially accountability oriented) purposes and PD for more localized, profession oriented purposes (Day & Sachs, 2004). Different perspectives on PD, and tensions between these perspectives, are important because they influence the nature of the education promoted in school settings (Bolam & McMahon, 2004).

In this study, I investigated the viewpoints on PD of a group of senior educators in Ontario during a period of significant educational reform. I drew upon interviews with a variety of senior educators during a period of intense interest in improving, *inter alia*, students' literacy and numeracy outcomes. These educators with considerable experience of PD in Ontario included provincial educational administrators, principals, and academics. I used Bourdieu's (1990a; 1998) theory of practice to interpret the viewpoints of these educators and to make sense of their viewpoints in light of current understanding of the different perspectives on PD.

#### BOURDIEU'S APPROACH

For Bourdieu (1990a), social practices are a product of power relations between individuals and groups who compete with one another over specific, valued resources. As a result of these struggles, practices exhibit their own peculiar characteristics, or "logics." These practices, never static, are the product of a constant state of tension between these competing positions and dispositions. Practices are hierarchical and exist in a contested – either dominant or subordinate – relationship with one another.

This contestation occurs within specific social spaces, or "fields," of practice, and characterizes these individual fields (Bourdieu, 1990a; 1990b; 1998). For Bourdieu (1990b), fields and their stakes are ". . . produced as such by relations of power and struggle in order to transform the power relations that are constitu-

---

tive of the field” (p. 87). Fields are characterized by a constant process of competition over the stakes to be realized.

The social spaces characterized by this contestation both influence and are influenced by the particular persuasions, or “habitus,” of those who occupy them. The habitus, the product of a long apprenticeship into particular practices, results in specific, durable qualities. Such qualities are a product of the accumulation of varied resources, or “capitals,” that individuals and groups build up over time, and upon which they can derive advantages under particular circumstances in which those attributes are valued. The differential access to varied capitals, and how different capitals are deployed, lead to contestation among different groups and individuals. Consequently, the practices that come to dominate any given field are a product of contestation among different agents and groups of agents, with access to different resources that they draw upon in seeking to dominate within these social spaces.

This study construes teacher professional development as a social field, characterized by competition over the specific capitals that those who comprise the field deem most valuable – all of whom are influenced by the particular positions they hold, their prior experiences, and their locations relative to one another within the field. However, the research does not seek to indicate simple associations among those involved, but rather endeavours to show the complexity of these associations.

For this research, I draw upon the perspectives of a variety of educators from senior and influential institutional locations to explicate how they negotiate tensions between competing approaches to PD.

#### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD)

I conducted this study in the awareness that PD is a broadly defined concept (Muijs, Day, Harris, & Lindsay, 2004). For example, Day and Sachs (2004) adopt a wide-ranging definition of professional development (or what they describe as “continuing professional development” (p. 3)) as “all the activities in which teachers

engage during the course of a career which are designed to enhance their work” (p. 3). Furthermore, PD is often understood in terms of a binary relationship between employer-instigated initiatives – designed to implement specific programs, reforms, or address accountability concerns – and more collective, profession-generated approaches and content, focused on more immediate, specific, localized concerns (Bolam & McMahon, 2004). Little (2004) argues that, although the different emphases represented by such approaches are potentially complementary, they may also be in conflict with one another. Eisner (1992) makes a personal observation that the consequence of such contestation results in a reification of traditional patterns of employer-instigated PD that involve information dissemination and teachers acting as passive recipients of knowledge generated elsewhere.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Although much PD discourse and practice in Canada is framed in relation to differences between profession-led and more systemic-account-ability oriented approaches, there are nascent attempts to work across these tensions. Levin (in press) indicates that although substantial PD, aligned with a province-wide focus upon literacy and numeracy, is evident and important in Ontario, alternative approaches to PD are also necessary. Similarly, Fullan (2007) argues for professional learning that addresses both teachers’ everyday working conditions, and more general and generalizable standards of practice. In the context of their research on teachers’ literacy assessment practices in British Columbia, Schnellert, Butler, and Higginson (2008) argue that pressures of accountability can be addressed meaningfully through teachers’ collaborative construction of their own teacher-generated assessment practices, and inquiry into these school-based practices.

However, evidence also exists of explicit tensions between systemic and profession oriented approaches, particularly in the context of increased pressures in Canadian educational policy for accountability (Ben Jaafar & Anderson, 2007). Giles and Hargreaves

---

(2006) argue pressures of accountability have led to public education systems fostering teacher learning communities for example, that are narrowly focused on improving standardized measures of learning, rather than supporting broader conceptions of learning. Investigations of these communities indicate they may act as “add-ons” (Hargreaves, 2007, p. 183) to the daily work of schools. Campbell (2005) describes such communities as sometimes promoting unethical behaviour. Earl (1999) expresses concern about whether centrally driven accountability requirements lead to productive, meaningful teacher and student learning in general. In the context of high-stakes tests, Volante (2004) worries that teacher learning may be limited to activities narrowly focused on “teaching to the test” (p. 1). Consequently, although evidence indicates the complexity of associations between more systemic-accountability and profession oriented approaches to PD, more recently, arguments premised on more general tension between the two continue to be significant.

#### EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN ONTARIO

A variety of factors have influenced professional development in Ontario, including provincial legislation and associated policies for educational reform. The 1990 Ontario Education Act specifies that, as part of their duties, teachers must participate in six “professional activity” days per year, as specified by their local board (see section 264[1 h], Education Act, Regulations and Statutes of Ontario, 1990; Canadian Legal Information Institute, 2008). Two of the six days are designated specifically for key provincial foci, and the Ministry advocates for individual and collaborative PD within professional learning communities (Ministry of Education, 2007). PD is also offered in the form of short courses of “Additional Basic Qualifications” and “Additional Qualifications” (AQs), approved by the province through the Ontario College of Teachers, and delivered by approved providers, including universities, teachers’ federations, subject organizations, school boards, and principals’ organizations; attainment of these qualifications is reflected in

teachers' salaries. The professional development provided within the province is also in keeping with Ministry of Education curriculum policy documents, and the Ontario College of Teachers' policies, including *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession and Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (Ontario College of Teachers, n.d.). Other educational stakeholders in the province, including teachers' subject organizations and teachers' federations, also influence PD content and processes.

Some of the relevant legislation and associated policies relate to students' literacy and numeracy capacities. Since 1998, increased interest in Ontario in students' literacy and numeracy capabilities has been reflected in the Education Quality and Accountability Office's (EQAO) collection of data from standardized tests at the school level. In response to concerns about the results of these tests, the Ministry of Education has actively supported PD targeted at improving students' literacy and numeracy.

As part of this process, the Liberal Government, elected in 2003, injected substantial additional funding into education, focused particularly upon literacy and numeracy. This led to the establishment in 2004 of a separate body – the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat – within the Ministry of Education, answerable directly to the Deputy Minister of Education. The government also set a province-wide target of 75 per cent of students graduating from elementary school at a satisfactory standard, described as “level 3,” on a four-point scale. The government has also provided additional resources to assist “turn-around” schools, which consistently perform well below province-endorsed benchmarks, to attain satisfactory outcomes. As a result, education in Ontario has come to be characterised by a mantra of pressure and support: pressure for improvements in literacy and numeracy outcomes, and significant financial support to assist in effecting such change (Fullan, 2007). At the same time, there is a province-wide focus upon more qualitative indicators associated with care, culture, and school climate: the “3-Cs.” Teachers and school-based administrators are

---

encouraged to ensure schools are caring institutions that provide beneficial learning environments for all students in the province.

School boards require schools to develop “School Effectiveness Plans” that constitute local contractual agreements between boards and schools, outlining how to address provincial emphases. More specific “SMART” goals – goals that are “specific,” “measurable,” “attainable,” “realistic” and “timely” – are set within individual schools to enact these policies. Boards group schools into “families” within districts to assist in the cross-school fertilisation of ideas, and at the same time, schools are encouraged to foster school-wide professional learning communities.

Collectively, these contextual factors provide the backdrop against which professional development practices are promoted in Ontario. In this study, I have sought to provide insights into how senior educators negotiated complex and competing PD emphases, under these circumstances.

## METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

### *Site*

In this study, I report a case study of senior educators in southern Ontario who were located in the Ministry of Education, universities, or schools. All participants were located within or adjacent to the Greater Toronto area. All participants voluntarily consented to be involved in the study, and the research was granted ethics approval by the author’s university.

### *Participants*

Participants, whom I selected to reflect a range of educational leadership roles across a variety of institutional positions and affiliations in southern Ontario, included six senior provincial Ministry of Education personnel, twelve principals, and six academics.

*Senior Ministry Personnel.* I selected several Ministry of Education personnel in conjunction with a senior member of the Ontario Principals’ Council (OPC), who knew and had worked in his



school board with many of the Ministry officials. Ministry personnel, who occupied senior positions, were drawn from multiple divisions that had some responsibility for, or influence upon, the professional development practised within the province. Ethical and confidentiality considerations preclude more explicit elaboration of these participants' roles.

*Academics.* Academics were selected on the basis of professional interest in and experience with PD in schools in Ontario; some were academic colleagues of the author, while others were known to these colleagues. Academics were drawn from three universities within southern Ontario; several had had recent or previous experience as consultants or other leadership roles (including the principalship) within school boards or districts. One academic was a professor of education, who has provided advice to national and provincial governments, including the Ontario government. A second was a full-time, tenure-stream academic who has worked in pre-service and in-service programs with teachers throughout his career. A third was a recently retired lecturer whose primary focus during his career was the area of teachers' professional development. Another academic, a part-time, contracted lecturer, has spent much of her career working as an educational consultant in a local school board prior to spending more than a decade working full-time and part-time in several university pre-service and in-service teacher education programs. Two academics were seconded from a school board on a medium to longer term basis (more than two years, and with the capacity for extensions) to engage in both teaching and research in a university's pre-service program located in their school board. One who worked fulltime at the university had had extensive prior experience working with teachers as a literacy consultant. The other worked on an almost full-time basis at the university, but, as a former principal, also undertook some work with principals in his school board for several weeks each year.

*Principals.* I selected experienced principals from one school board in collaboration with a senior member of the Ontario Princi-

---

pals' Council (OPC) who worked in this board. Although I selected this board because of its stability, as evident in its relatively affluent, primarily urban and well-established clientele, schools within this board were chosen to reflect the variety of socio-economic (lower/middle/upper class) and geographic (urban/rural) circumstances of residents within the board's catchment area.

#### *Data Collection*

I interviewed each participant once during the first six months of 2007. Each semi-structured interview, which was audio-taped and transcribed, was approximately one hour in duration. The interview questions invited participants to offer their views on (a) the nature of current professional development practices in Ontario, (b) how the provincial emphasis upon literacy and numeracy influenced PD practices, (c) whether respondents considered this emphasis beneficial or problematic, (d) how PD has changed over the previous decade, (e) how respondents would like to see PD enacted in future, and (f) who should be involved in such decision making. Specific questions included: (a) how the province's focus upon PD for literacy and numeracy related to and influenced more site-specific PD and teacher-generated PD in school settings; (b) the nature of tensions between these positions; and (c) how educators responded to these tensions. Although I provided participants with a list of questions to act as stimuli to consider these issues, the semi-structured nature of the interviews provided opportunities for interviewees to expand upon particular issues they believed important.

#### *Data Analysis*

Methodologically, interest in a "singular case" defines the parameters of the study (Stake, 2005), specifically the PD perspectives of senior educators with significant administrative and/or academic authority in southern Ontario. Although I acknowledge that the particularity of any given case limits the capacity to generalize beyond the specific case or to replicate the study (Hough, 2002), as Bourdieu (1998) argues, only by studying social practices in detail

does it become possible to understand such practices. It is this process of engaging in detailed research that may be replicated to better understand social practices in other contexts.

I employed an emergent thematic analysis approach, involving searching for patterns within the data (Shank, 2002), to analyze the findings. These patterns were identified via an intensive, manual coding process that involved systematically listing individual themes within, and then across, each of the individual audio transcripts. Although this process was time-intensive, it ensured that I did not miss nuances within the data, and that I obtained a particularly intimate understanding of the data. To provide the opportunity for a more reflexive interpretation of the findings, I provided participants with a summary of the findings and invited them to comment on the outcomes of the research; however no substantive responses were received.

#### FINDINGS: PD PRACTICES IN ONTARIO

I used Bourdieu's (1990a; 1990b; 1998) notion of practice as contested, and productive of specific, durable dispositions to analyze the data, leading to the identification of multiple habituses among senior educators in southern Ontario. These habituses, which comprised a variety of competing and complementary discourses and social practices, are described as "conservative," "results oriented," "critical," "student-focused" and "inquiry oriented". These habituses, as the product of the accumulation of particular traits, resources, or "capitals,"<sup>1</sup> influenced the nature of the PD which respondents supported. The case for each of these habituses is outlined in the following subsections. All names reported in the study are pseudonyms.

##### *A Conservative Habitus*

---

<sup>1</sup> For Bourdieu, "capitals," are the particular resources which individuals and groups build up over time, and upon which they can derive advantages under particular circumstances in which those resources are valued.

---

For Ministry officials, principals, and academics who had worked previously in schools, a conservative habitus was evident in the way they supported the notion of PD as an activity focused primarily upon teachers as passive recipients of disseminated information. This position was reflected in the insights of one participant, seconded from a school board to work in a local university, who had previously been a principal for several years:

[PD] means making teachers better at their job in order that they can impact students and student learning, so giving them the skill set and the philosophy, in order that they'll be able to help students achieve the best that they can . . . (Graham, Academic/Seconded Principal)

As someone with extensive prior experience as a consultant and principal, the PD that Graham supported involved “making” teachers better at their job, and “giving” them information associated with particular skills and philosophies. As is often the case in schooling settings (Eisner, 1992; Day & Sachs, 2004), respondents framed PD as something “done” to teachers.

A Ministry official construed PD as something enshrined in provincial policy, to which schools then responded:

So, when I think of it in terms of what's going on out there right now, I would say that in terms of policy direction, it's pretty high level at this point . . . [And] as it filters down, there's more and more room for interpretation by the boards, by the schools, by the teachers themselves. The policies that we put in place tend to be more around higher level curriculum issues or, or directions as opposed to . . . the PD that then [results]. (William, Ministry official)

Although acknowledging teachers' involvement in decision making, these comments suggest a conservative educational habitus. This was evident in how respondents construed “high level” policy directions as influencing the PD that then transpired in

schools. I use the term conservative educational habitus because of the dominant, unquestioning way in which respondents understood PD as something issuing directly from policy, rather than construing PD as the product of multiple influences and aims. The province set the policy agenda; it was left up to the schools to determine the nature of the PD that fitted that agenda. This stance reflects this Ministry official's ("William") role to ensure that school boards and schools implemented policy. Similarly, and as a result of his experiences implementing policy initiatives at the school level, the academic/seconded principal mentioned above exhibited a conservative educational habitus in the way he promoted PD as something designed to "make" teachers better at their job, and "giving" them the skills they need, rather than advocating a process of more active inquiry.

#### *A Results Oriented Habitus*

A results oriented habitus, a product of exposure to PD designed to improve students' results on standardized measures of literacy and numeracy, was also evident among the principals, ministry officials, and academics seconded from schools. Although these respondents saw that the fear of sanctions associated with provincial benchmarks was diminishing, they noted that increased accountability pressures for improved student results on provincial literacy and numeracy tests continued to influence the kind of PD valued:

. . . the threat [of sanctions because of low EQAO scores] seems to be lifted. We do have that 75% number, but nobody has come to say we're going to close your school, or you're going to lose your job if you don't meet that. It's just information. So we're starting to use that information and as I said, the [Literacy and Numeracy] Secretariat has put up some professional learning programmes based on the results across the province and where they think teachers need some professional learning to improve the results, and I think it's working. We'll see. We'll see when these results, when this year's results, come out. (Elsa, Principal)

---

A results oriented habitus was evident when the principal, “Elsa,” explained the need to improve standardized test scores over a relatively short period, and how she validated PD initiatives designed to improve these results. Although she sought to frame PD in her school as being responsive to the accountability agenda without being overwhelmed by it, it was also apparent that she valued PD focused upon improvements in test scores

This results oriented habitus was also evident in concerns to ensure better use of EQAO data. From the perspective of a seconded principal working in an academic role in a university, teachers struggled to make use of such data:

The problem with it is that most people don’t know how to use it. So they’ve got all this evidence and they become overwhelmed with it, and they try to figure out how to use it, and in the end, they become inactive because it’s just too overwhelming. So they don’t do anything. (Graham, Academic/Seconded Principal)

This academic’s results oriented habitus reflects the influence of his previous administrative experiences of engaging with, and responding to, EQAO data. His concerns about whether and how teachers learned from EQAO data reveal how generic, standardized, provincial measures of attainment exerted influence.

#### *A Critical Habitus*

Some ministry officials, principals, and academics’ viewpoints and experiences of PD also make it possible to identify a more critical habitus, evident in the way participants were sometimes critical of the PD supported and enacted at a systemic level. Although responsive to (and sometimes overtly supportive of) provincial foci, participants were simultaneously critical of some aspects of the PD undertaken in Ontario. Experiences of PD on the part of a senior Ministry official, when she was a teacher, provided evidence of a more critical habitus. Much of the mandated PD encountered in

her experience was neither robust nor geared towards improving practice:

I know when I was a teacher, I used to get so upset, because some of it I thought was “Mickey Mouse,” you know, and a lot of the stuff on things that people know, [like] “wellness.” The “wellness” is fine, don’t misunderstand me, but I didn’t want [that] when I wanted to learn how to do my job better. I didn’t want people to take me out for a day to do something on “wellness.” (Kelly, Ministry official)

In reflecting on his experiences, “Tim,” a principal, argued that although there was considerable resourcing around literacy and numeracy initiatives, the professional development that supported these initiatives was often haphazard, and not sufficiently responsive to all teachers’ needs. He described a recent PD event as “. . . a one shot deal, in my opinion, it was a one shot deal . . . was there job-embedded learning for other staff at the school? No. . . there was not that opportunity” (Tim, Principal).

An academic/seconded, who had many years experience as a board-based literacy consultant, and who was generally supportive of the attention to literacy in the province, expressed reservations about how the strong focus on literacy and numeracy had an impact upon support for teacher PD in other areas:

I think where it’s also a real disconnect, is for classroom teachers who are in areas of speciality or are in areas where there hasn’t been the same kind of resource allocation and funding to support the learning that they need . . . .” (Nancy, Academic/seconded board consultant)

A critical habitus is evident in the subtle way in which “Veronica,” a Ministry official (and former principal), believed important and necessary changes had been made to how PD was enacted since she began working in the provincial office:

---

I guess one of the things that, in particular, that the Ministry did, as far as training, when the early reading, early maths, and literacy and numeracy began, was that they tended to do the cascade model . . . one teacher from each school was trained. And then, when we started in the first year, when we did some training, Marie<sup>2</sup> allowed us to bring teams from a school, which was of course, much more effective, . . . We've moved on again from there and the professional learning that we're doing is really very much within the school or family of schools, and so it's much more related to where teachers are exactly and what they need at the moment . . . We use a lot of the other things that have been produced to help. So we use pieces of [Internet] web casts to show, to demonstrate at the school level, if that's what they need. (Veronica, Ministry official)

Although “Veronica” still construed PD primarily as a process of province-sanctioned, information dissemination, her emphasis upon making PD more relevant to teachers, and employing models of teacher learning that took specific contexts into account, was evidence of a more site-responsive approach. As a former principal and teacher, “Veronica’s” response is indicative of a critical educational habitus, a product in part of her earlier experiences in schools, and at least partially attuned to the need to facilitate teacher learning to address school-specific needs.

#### *A Student-Focused Habitus*

A more student-focused habitus, reflective of concerns about the needs of particular students, is also apparent among several participants, especially the principals. Some principals, drawing upon their knowledge of the effects of standardized testing, expressed concerns that a culture of testing could become established within the province, and dominate decision making about the PD deemed most valuable. “Reggie,” an experienced principal in a low socio-

---

<sup>2</sup> Manager of the section in which this Ministry official worked.



economic school, expressed concerns about the over-use of such data: “I don’t want to see us get to the point that we’re completely driven by standardized tests because I think that’s, I think that’s a mistake they made kind of south of the [US/Canadian] border . . .” (Reggie, Principal). A student-focused habitus is evident in how “Reggie” drew upon her knowledge of testing in the US to caution against limiting conceptions of teacher and student learning to the outcomes of standardized tests.

At the same time, selective use of EQAO data was considered useful for promoting teacher-instigated PD focused more explicitly on student learning:

But there are some good things that's coming out of it . . . some teams in schools are doing a really good job at looking at a small piece of the data, so they're taking something that's really small, starting small, for example, maybe they . . . they're just taking the reading . . . they're just taking the writing piece . . . they're tracking kids, and where they are at the beginning of the year, and where they are in the middle and where they are at the end, and that's informing their instruction on how to move the kids towards other goals, that they've set for them, whether it's grade appropriate or beyond . . ., depending on how they started. (Graham, Academic/Seconded Principal)

For this participant, the use of EQAO and other standardized data served as a stimulus for PD which contributed to improving student learning relative to individual progress, rather than just in relation to provincial benchmarks *per se*. Support for the use of these data as a means to determine students’ attainments over time, and to make judgments on students’ abilities in relation to their initial levels of attainment, reflects a more student-focused habitus. Such a habitus is indicative of educators who have experienced, valued and validated context-specific PD approaches, even as it is simultaneously reflective of broader system-wide concerns. In this way, participants’ advocacy for PD that addresses employing au-

---

thorities' accountability concerns can also be nuanced to simultaneously foster more authentic and generative approaches to teachers and students' learning needs. Such a response may also be construed as providing at least some evidence of Fullan's (2007) claim that principals, educational administrators, and educators more generally within Ontario have bought into the reform agenda when it has been seen as good for students. Although there is evidence of "looking at students' work" for more accountability oriented reasons (Little, 2004), more profession-driven, educationally oriented PD practices are strongly supported within the PD field. A student-focused habitus is apparent that is not just oriented towards fostering student improvements in standardized tests, but also supportive of PD initiatives associated with a broad-based conception of student learning.

#### *An Inquiry Oriented Habitus*

An inquiry oriented habitus is evident in how participants – particularly the principals and academics – supported PD as inquiry into the peculiar circumstances of individual schools. The following quotation from "Susan," a principal, provides positive evidence of her experience with teachers in her school who inquired into their students' circumstances. This inquiry went beyond mandatory school-board endorsed SMART goals that guided her school's educational plan:

So when they were analyzing the data from our School Effectiveness Plan, they were still noticing that boys were not liking coming to school. And that was a hard knock for them, because they had worked hard to make sure [of] that – a lot of work around inclusion. And so, . . . they went back and they developed some in-school surveys just to get more specific, because the broad one was like, "Do you like coming to school?" So it was, again, very broad. So they developed some surveys to see if we can get more information from the . . . population as to specifically what areas of school they were finding troublesome. (Susan, Principal)

An inquiry oriented habitus, attuned to the specific concerns of teachers and students and the need to take such concerns into account, is evident in the way “Susan” valued and validated genuinely profession-driven, inquiry oriented PD, and active negotiation in relation to province-sanctioned initiatives. This habitus is reflected in her support for a sustainable professional learning community (Hargreaves, 2007) focused on the needs of a particular group of students.

“Elsa”, another principal, supported the proactive way in which teachers in her school addressed their learning needs in relation to literacy education, revealing an inquiry oriented habitus:

There's also been a lot of books come out on reading and writing skills and as a school - and it didn't come from me, it came from the teachers themselves - [who] have formed book study groups, by division or by grade, and focused on reading and putting these things into practice . . . (Elsa, Principal)

PD was valued when it was more than a one-way information dissemination process. Such advocacy provides evidence of contact with and support for the sorts of ethical inquiry communities that Campbell (2005) describes as foregrounding and focusing upon students' learning, rather than fostering an ethos among teachers of non-interference in one another's work.

“Lydia,” an academic who had had considerable previous experience as a consultant at the board level, also argued strongly against traditional approaches to PD:

I think typically, some of the challenges of the professional development that we've offered have been that, they're always defined by others and not necessarily defined by the people who are the recipients. And I think really only in the last, maybe 10 years or so, we've recognized that . . . we needed to work with people where they are. (Lydia, Academic)

---

This quotation illustrates a habitus supportive of PD as an active process focused on teachers' particular school settings. This situated, inquiry oriented habitus was forged from an earlier apprenticeship as a school-board based curriculum consultant who sought to encourage teachers to move beyond PD as 'delivery,' focused upon school-board priorities. "Lydia's" appreciation of the importance of local context is evidence of a disposition supportive of active, situated PD practices, standing in contrast to more traditional dissemination approaches that typify schooling practices within the field of PD practices (Day & Sachs, 2004).

#### DISCUSSION: PROMOTING PD PRIORITIES

Influential educators' responses to provincial pressure for reform provide evidence of the impact upon PD of broad, systemic-accountability focused, standardized, educational reform measures, and an accompanying conservative habitus disposed to comply with such demands. At the same time, the evidence indicates support for more situated approaches to PD among these educators. That is, there is explicit valuing of more site-specific PD beyond these foci. In Bourdieu's (1990a, 1990b, 1998) conceptual framework, such stances can be understood as a product of the competing and conflicted dispositions and positions of those who constitute the field of teacher professional development. Among participants in this study, research evidence indicates considerable consistency between individuals' current roles with their often very considerable attendant pressures, and participants' approaches to PD. However, and at the same time, participants' descriptions of their approaches to PD also show up the complexities and tensions inherent within current roles, including evidence of how individuals' peculiar professional histories influence the PD promoted.

How PD was understood as something mandated by government, which was then devolved to those in schools to enact, was evident in the responses of the Ministry officials, principals, and academics with previous school-based experience. Such a stance

reflects these educators' current (or former) roles, with their close proximity to the administrative arm of the state. The result is a conservative habitus attuned to the peculiar logics of Ministry practice, including accountability to high ranking Ministry officials and provincial politicians. This is borne out by an acceptance of PD practices associated with improved literacy and numeracy, and a belief that provincial foci should cascade down to, and be taken up by, those in schools. Such a stance also reflects a broader policy context that places considerable accountability pressures upon educators (Ben Jaafar & Anderson, 2007), pressures that, potentially, may lead to questionable teacher learning practices (Earl, 1999). The habituses of Ministry officials, principals, and some academics with school-based experience were heavily influenced over extended periods of time by accountability oriented matters and concerns within the field. The "capitals" of considerable value under these circumstances included improved test scores as proxies for student learning.

Educators' support of PD to improve EQAO scores also provides evidence of a habitus strongly influenced by a provincial focus upon results. Participants' concerns about how to respond to the provincial focus for PD designed to improve quantitative measures of students' literacy and numeracy capacities indicate a habitus attuned to demands for high EQAO outcomes; high stakes tests exerted influence upon the teacher learning deemed most relevant (Volante, 2004). The influence of such testing upon educators could be subtle. One principal, for example, was eager to downplay any potential negative effects of EQAO data collection in her school, but she was still very interested to see whether any changes resulted to the literacy and numeracy scores in her school from engagement in provincial-supported PD implemented in response to the previous year's results.

However, these habituses were not uniform as evident in some Ministry officials and principals' concerns about the relevance of PD instigated by employing authorities. Critical habituses were informed by more localized, educative concerns, sometimes origi-

---

nating from concerns about previous experiences/knowledge of PD in schooling settings. Importantly, such perspectives show that those educators under most pressure from central governments were able to promote profession-instigated PD, even as they responded to immediate administrative or political demands. Advocacy for multiple PD priorities provide evidence of a conflicted stance among educators who, nonetheless, seek to “reprofessionalise” rather than “deprofessionalise” teachers (Day, 2004). These contested positions are in keeping with prescriptive literature endorsing educators working across tensions between more profession oriented and system-driven PD practices (Fullan, 2007; Levin, in press). These efforts to promote teachers and other educators in decision making within the PD field are important to ensure that educators’ knowledge and experience are drawn upon as part of the educational decision-making process.

The complexity of these habituses is further evident in educators’ support for more context-specific, school-based inquiry learning. Such support is apparent in the way some educators were not only critical of an over-reliance upon individual, “one-off” PD learning initiatives that transpired within boards, but actively endorsed teachers’ efforts to undertake school-based inquiries to respond to students’ specific needs. The strong emphasis upon students’ learning, and of finding ways to inquire into specific schooling circumstances, indicates a habitus that has experienced and valued PD practices beyond those associated solely with more generic measures of literacy and numeracy achievement. Although pressure at the provincial level for PD experiences oriented towards particular provincial foci (and, at times, improved test scores) (Hargreaves, 2007) exerted influence on educators, and although the limitations of a small sample size mean it is not possible to generalize from the results, some influential educators in Ontario were clearly able to draw upon a broad range of experience to advocate for and support profession oriented PD practices. Such stances show evidence of complex, sometimes conservative, sometimes critical habituses, and more or less results oriented, student-

focused, and/or inquiry oriented habituses. Further inquiry into the validity, nature, effects, and origins of these multiple habituses, across a larger sample of participants, is necessary, and constitutes an important focus for future research.

## SUMMARY

Drawing upon Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, and capital, the research that I present indicates how senior educators' perspectives of teacher professional development were generated from their current and previous experiences, and that the competing and complementary nature of these perspectives reflects tensions and synergies between more systemic-accountability oriented and profession oriented PD practices. To explore the nature of PD practices, I asked senior educators in Ontario about their experiences with current and previous professional development practices, the nature of the PD they supported, and the influence on PD practices of provincial emphases upon literacy, numeracy, and improved standardized test scores. Distilling initial themes using an emergent thematic response (Shank, 2002), I undertook subsequent analysis using Bourdieu's concept of practice as socially produced, and contested.

The study provides glimpses into how educators may be caught up in a complex politics of professional practice that makes it difficult to be consistently supportive of PD focused upon students' learning needs in all their complexity, in specific school and related institutional settings. The findings indicate that, among this group of influential educators, there was significant pressure to ensure improvements in the areas of literacy and numeracy, and particularly as these were expressed in standardized test scores. Reflecting their location within the field of PD practices, the viewpoints of senior Ministry personnel, principals, and academics with substantive school-based histories indicate they attended to these provincial foci. However, and at the same time, the research also indicates that senior educators were concerned about and supported PD for more localized purposes. Senior provincial educators' re-

---

sponses or expressed views indicate they did not simply support systemic-account-ability oriented PD at the expense of more profession oriented, contextualized PD.

## CONCLUSION

Although this study indicates some educators who occupy positions of significant institutional authority were heavily influenced by broader administrative, accountability pressures, they did not neglect profession oriented approaches to PD. A key message from the research is that senior educators' prior experiences contributed to their being able to juggle competing pressures and to promote PD practices focused on localized needs of schools and students. The study suggests provincial policy directives should incorporate PD approaches that take into account teachers' needs, and/or address specific school circumstances, and/or broader conceptions of students' needs. Principals and consultants in school boards need to translate provincial PD foci so that they are relevant to local school circumstances. For teachers, the study implies a need to draw upon existing knowledge and understanding as a vehicle to engage with provincial foci, rather than treating such foci in isolation. More systematic recognition and alignment of provincial and profession oriented PD will contribute to better understanding students' learning needs. Finally, researchers have the important task of engaging in sustained and systematic research into the nature and effects of these efforts to contribute to current understandings about how to better align profession oriented PD and provincial approaches to PD.

## REFERENCES

- Ben Jaafar, S., & Anderson, S. (2007). Policy trends and tensions in accountability for educational management and services in Canada. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 53(2), 207-227.
- Bolam, R., & McMahon, A. (2004). Literature, definitions and models: Towards a conceptual map. In C. Day & J. Sachs



(Eds.), *International handbook on the continuing professional development of teachers* (pp. 33-63). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990a). *The logic of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990b). *In other words: Essays towards a reflexive sociology* (M. Adamson, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical reason: On the theory of action* (R. Johnson & Others, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Campbell, E. (2005). Challenges in fostering ethical knowledge as professionalism within schools as teaching communities. *Journal of Educational Change*, 6(3), 207-226.

Canadian Legal Information Institute. (2008). *Education act, regulations and statutes of Ontario* (1990). Retrieved November 22, 2008, from <http://www.canlii.org/en/on/laws/stat/rso-1990-c-e2/latest/rso-1990-c-e2.html>

Day, C. (2004). *A passion for teaching*. London, UK: RoutledgeFalmer.

Day, C. & Sachs, J. (2004). Professionalism, performativity and empowerment: Discourses in the politics, policies and purposes of continuing professional development. In C. Day & J. Sachs (Eds.), *International handbook on the continuing professional development of teachers* (pp. 3-32). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Earl, L. (1999) Assessment and accountability in education: Improvement or surveillance. *Education Canada*, 39(3), 4-6, 47.

- 
- Eisner, E. (1992). Educational reform and the ecology of schooling. *Teachers College Record*, 93(4), 610-627.
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Giles, C., & Hargreaves, A. (2006). The sustainability of innovative schools as learning organizations and professional learning communities during standardized reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 42(1), 124-156.
- Hargreaves, A. (2007). Sustainable professional learning communities. In L. Stoll & K. Seashore Louis (Eds.), *Professional learning communities: Divergence, depth and dilemmas* (pp. 181-195). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Hough, G. (2002). Going deep into an organization: Researching through a single case study. In P. Green (Ed.), *Slices of life: Qualitative research snapshots* (pp. 72-82). Melbourne, AUS: RMIT University Press.
- Levin, B. (in press). How to change 5000 schools. In M. Fullan (Ed.), *International handbook of educational change*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Little, J. W. (2004). "Looking at student work" in the United States: A case of competing impulses in professional development. In C. Day & J. Sachs (Eds.), *International handbook on the continuing professional development of teachers* (pp. 94-118). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Ministry of Education. (2007). *Report to the Partnership Table on teacher professional learning*. Toronto: Author. Retrieved June 8, 2009, from <http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teacher/pdfs/partnerReport.pdf>
- Muijs, D., Day, C., Harris, A., & Lindsay, G. (2004). Evaluating CPD: An overview. In C. Day & J. Sachs (Eds.), *International handbook on the continuing professional develop-*

*ment of teachers* (pp. 291-310). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Ontario College of Teachers. (no date). *The Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession and the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession*. Toronto: Author. Retrieved 12 June 2009, from [http://www.oct.ca/publications/PDF/standards\\_flyer\\_e.pdf](http://www.oct.ca/publications/PDF/standards_flyer_e.pdf)

Schnellert, L., Butler, D., & Higginson, S. (2008). Co-constructors of data, co-constructors of meaning: Teacher professional development in an age of accountability. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(3), 725-750.

Shank, G. (2002). *Qualitative research: A personal skills approach*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Stake, R. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 443-466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Volante, L. (2004). Teaching to the test: What every educator and policy-maker should know. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 35. Retrieved March 12, 2009, from <http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/articles/volante.html>

*Ian Hardy* is lecturer in Educational Studies, including the sociology of education, educational policy and the politics of education. His research interests include teacher professional development, education policy, and educational reform.

*Contact:*

Ian Hardy  
School of Education

---

Charles Sturt University  
Wagga Wagga  
New South Wales 2678  
Australia

[ihardy@csu.edu.au](mailto:ihardy@csu.edu.au)

Ph: + 61 2 6933 2493

Fax: + 61 2 6933 2888