

TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM CONSTRUCTED IN POLICY

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Abstract

The definition of the social construct of teacher professionalism is ever changing, influenced by the discourse generated by teachers themselves, policy and public perception. Through Critical Discourse Analysis, this study explores how teacher professionalism has come to be articulated in an Ontario Ministry of Education Policy, and shines a light on how the context of such a policy can foster dissonance in the social construction of professionalism through the enactment of the policy. The results suggest that all actors involved in policy development and enactment need to be aware that articulating professionalism in policy may actually negatively contribute to the ongoing discourse.

Introduction

The purpose of this critical discourse analysis is to explore how teacher professionalism has come to be articulated in an Ontario Ministry of Education Policy, and shine light on how the context of such a policy can foster dissonance in the social construction of professionalism through the enactment of the policy.

Teacher professionalism is a “socially constructed term that is constantly being defined and redefined through educational theory, practice and policy” (Hilferty, 2008, p. 161). Theresa Bourke (2011) explores the problem of using discourse to develop and implement professional standards as means to improve teacher professionalism. She and her colleagues have identified two themes of discourse in the literature: “new” professionalism and managerialism (Bourke, Ryan & Lidstone, 2011). They observed that Goodson and Hargreaves with the support of others such as Michael Fullan have repeatedly proposed a set of seven principles defining this “new” professionalism, encouraging teachers to embrace these ideas in order to be their own change agents (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996; Goodson, 2000; Hargreaves, 2000; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000). These principles encompass ideas such as discretionary judgement, moral and social purpose, collaborative cultures, continuous learning and care (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996).

The managerialism form of discourse approaches teacher professionalism from a perspective of enforcement through policies and teacher professional development (Sachs, 2001). Evetts (2009) who refers to this type of professionalism as “organisational,” suggests that teachers often prefer this type of discourse, not understanding that in these contexts professional values have been replaced by organizational ones. Goepel (2012) in her research found that some teachers were “steeped in compliant behaviours such that development of professional values and professional disposition or qualities can be stunted” (p. 495). Teachers working in these kinds of environments find their professional expertise is replaced just with technical skills to support classroom management and teaching (Bourke et al., 2011).

Texts reflect the context in which they are situated at the same time they create that same situation. This circular relationship can be described as language-in-action, a process in which we continually build and rebuild our world through language in conjunction with actions, interactions, symbols, and ways of thinking, feeling, believing, and being (Gee, 1999; Gee, 2011). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) explores these relationships between discursive practices, events and texts, social structures, relationships and processes. It also explores how texts construct social relationships and identities, and representations of the world, emphasising how they are shaped by power (Taylor, 2004). Discourse analysis describes, interprets and explains the relationships among language and the research topic. CDA takes this process one step further to understand the relationship between language form and function, the history of practices which influences current practices, and how the social roles are acquired and transformed. (Rogers, 2004)

CDA is particularly useful for critical policy analysis because it allows a detailed investigation of the relationship of language to other social processes, and of how language works within power relations. According to Fulcher (as cited in Taylor, 2004) policies are often seen as the outcomes of struggles “between contenders of competing objectives, where language – or more specifically discourse – is used tactically” (p. 3). CDA provides a framework for a systematic analysis – researchers can go beyond speculation and demonstrate how policy texts work.

As both Fairclough (2003) and Gee (2011) emphasise that their frameworks are not explicit blueprints but must be selectively drawn upon for each research study, this study employs Gee’s (2001) theory of form and function and selectively draws from his set of analysis tools. He describes his theory of discourse analysis as “tied closely to the details of language structure (grammar), but ... deals with meaning in social, cultural, and political terms” (p. ix). When analysing these objects of research individually and in conjunction with each other, the “critical” in CDA is to study not only the processes of language use but also the knowledge, ideologies and other beliefs shared by the social groups.

The Policy Window

Policy/Procedure Memorandum, PPM 155, *Diagnostic Assessment in Support of Student Learning* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a) is a policy document that is the result of what Kingdon (2003) calls the opening of a policy window which describes a period where issues become a focus causing government to generate decisions and actions. For a policy window to open, he suggests a change must occur within the convergences of three streams: the problem stream involving the identification of a problem often as a result of particular events; the political stream representing changes in shared beliefs, government administration or other related groups; and the policy stream composed of researchers and advocates who analyse problems and determine policy alternatives. He also identifies that policy entrepreneurs play an important role in this policy window, influencing government agendas and advocating policy alternatives.

These streams can also be described as what Fairclough (2003) calls chains and networks of social events. Within the context of discourse, he describes social structures as all possible outcomes whereas social events are the actual events mediated by social practices. These chains

and networks of social events encompass the events of political streams and the events which lead to problem streams. Conflict between teachers and government is not new in Ontario. Examining the chains or networks of textual events provides a context to understand the social practices of teachers and governments which led to the opening of a policy window resulting in PPM 155.

There are two themes of interest in reviewing the social events that led to the opening of a policy window. The first is the relationships between teachers and their federations, and government. The second is the growing practice of collecting standardised assessment data for the purpose of improving student achievement through the formal activity of board and school improvement planning.

The Events Leading to the Policy Window

Gidney (1999) provides a comprehensive history of the relationships between teachers and government in Ontario through most of the 20th century. Starting with the 1970s this analysis provides a sufficient picture of the challenges they have faced. Ontario saw enrollment declines in the 1970s, causing job insecurity that led to considerable unrest demonstrated through threats and strikes in the education sector. Aggressive tactics of the federations and teachers, and demands for large pay increases led to poor public opinion. People believed that federations were mainly interested in their own importance and that individual teachers cared more for their own needs than the needs of their students. Recessions occurring in both the 1980s and the 1990s contributed to further teacher unrest. By the 1990s, there was fear about the local economy of Ontario and the future of being able to compete in a globalised technological world, creating a pressure to cut costs while increasing productivity.

During the mid 1980s, in response to these building pressures, and in particular concerns of unacceptably high drop-out rates, the Liberal government commissioned George Radwanski's report, the *Ontario Study of the Relevance of Education, and the Issue of Dropouts*. The report concluded that the education system was no longer meeting the needs of students, as they were not interested in what was being taught, nor were they provided with appropriate skills and knowledge. One of the recommendations in this report was the use of province-wide standardised testing to identify learning needs (Royal Commission on Learning, 1994). Standardised testing had been notably absent from Ontario schools since the 1960s as it was contrary to the philosophy described in the 1968 educational reform report known as *The Hall-Dennis Report* (Klinger, DeLuca & Miller, 2008).

While the government changed from Liberal to the New Democratic Party (NDP) during this period, the new party retained many of the recommendations of the Liberals (e.g., destreaming in grade 10, integrating of exceptional students and developing a testing program). Several of these recommended changes generated fear and anger amongst teachers. Also during this period, two notable surveys found public support for the use of standardised testing. The 1993 Environics survey found that 7 out of 10 Canadians wanted nation-wide testing. *The Ninth OISE Survey* in 1992 suggested that 73% of Ontarians supported province-wide tests to assess individual students (Livingstone, Hart & Davie, 1993). The Royal Commission on Learning (1994), while recognising the complexity of measuring a student's true ability at one point in

time, acknowledged the need to provide parents and schools with consistent information about individual students. Therefore with caution, they recommended the formation of an agency independent of the Ministry of Education to construct, administer, score and report uniform Grade 3 assessments in literacy and numeracy.

Before a testing program could be implemented, Ontario saw another change in leadership. In 1995, the NDP government was replaced by Premier Mike Harris and the Progressive Conservatives, and Ontario entered a period of deficit reductions, cuts to taxes, and government program reforms and budgets cuts. The education sector was not immune to these deep cuts and reforms that led to further fear and distrust amongst teachers. Some of the many reforms implemented by this government included reduced power for school boards, standardised curriculum, the establishment of the College of Teachers, and province-wide student testing (Gidney, 1999). Teachers experienced significant unrest expressing their frustrations through a two-week strike, court challenges, and demonstrations (Bedard & Lawton, 2000). The Educational Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) office was formed and over the period of 1997 to 2001 province-wide testing of assessments of reading, writing and mathematics for Grades 3 and 6, the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, and Grade 9 assessment of mathematics were implemented.

The Education Improvement Commission (EIC), an arms-length agency to the Ontario Ministry of Education was formed in 1997 to oversee the transition to a new system of education governance. In their report, *The Road Ahead IV – A Report on Improving Schools Through Greater Accountability*, the EIC (2000) recommended that school boards be reviewed on a 3- or 5-year cycle. The review was to occur once during the cycle and was not to be punitive but rather to ensure improvement. The commission also recommended that the reviews be conducted by an arms-length agency such as EQAO.

EQAO did conduct the reviews for a number of years. In 2002, the Ministry of Education mandated that as part of these annual reviews, schools would set targets for improvement in reading (EQAO, 2002). As a result, one aspect of the improvement planning process required schools every spring to submit to EQAO, targets for the percentage of proficient students in Grades 3 and 6 reading assessments. The guidelines for this improvement planning process also recommended that other data be included such as other board data, board improvement plans, survey results, local research initiatives and feedback from various groups (EQAO, 2002).

Also during this period, in 1996, the College of Teachers was established. The formation of this organisation was originally recommended by Dr. Bette Stephenson, Minister of Education in the mid 1980s and then again in the Royal Commission on Learning (1994) report. The College of Teachers' main purpose was to "promote teaching to full professional status" (p. 68). One of its responsibilities was to "set and maintain professional standards" (OCT, 2013). The focus of these standards is with ethical standards, standards of practice, and a professional learning network.

In 2003, the Progressive Conservative government was defeated by the Liberals and Premier Dalton McGuinty began his 10 year period in office as the self-proclaimed "Education

Premier.” Immediately he developed a strategic plan “to deliver success for students, better health and a strong economy” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). In education, the promise was to deliver smaller class sizes and improve student test scores. Through the next years he strengthened relations with teachers by infusing significant money into the education sector. Staffs were increased in schools through smaller primary class sizes and the addition of secondary Student Success teachers and elementary specialist teachers (Olson, 2007a). Teacher federations were invited to provide input into the bargaining process and to discuss policies that affected teacher issues such as workload (Olson, 2007b). Overall, the Liberal government facilitated an environment of respect, shared understanding and buy-in from all levels of education (Olson, 2007a; Olson 2007 b). Day (2002) recommends that when professionalism is undermined amongst teachers it be rebuilt through dialogue, mutual trust and respect. This period in teachers’ lives was clearly a period of building teacher professionalism.

In 2004, the Ontario Ministry of Education instituted the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS). Its primary goal was to foster students’ reading, writing and mathematical skills. From the onset the LNS, through School Improvement Planning and more recently the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF), worked at supporting schools and boards towards greater student achievement (Canadian Language & Literacy Research Network, 2009). While the SEF and other supporting documents do not explicitly require target setting activities, they do recommend the use of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely) goals and EQAO outcomes were often used in these instances, as they are perceived as reasonably accurate and easily measurable.

The introduction of target setting for assessment scores and the increasing pressure to improve student achievement led schools and school boards to seek other sources of “standardised” assessment data to monitor school and board improvement of student achievement. In some schools and boards, large amounts of data were gathered from teachers. These activities required teachers to use principal or board determined tools on a regular basis to assess every student in the classroom, taking significant time away from classroom instruction (Laughlin, 2012).

Teacher relationships had been rocky through more than three decades of governments, escalating into the late 1990s. During the McGuinty era relations improved as the government provided extensive support through new teaching positions and building capacity. At the same time there was an increasing use of test-based educational accountability tools through top-down system-wide defined targets. Schools were encouraged to adopt their own targets with the goal to improve student achievement (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

The Policy Window Opens

By spring of 2012, the Ontario Liberal government was in financial difficulty. It was facing a \$16 billion deficit that year and a projected \$136 billion more over the following six years (The Fraser Institute, 2012). The education sector had or was in the process of implementing two expensive education programs: smaller primary class sizes and Full Day Kindergarten (FDK). Both of these programs increased the need for building and teaching staff resources. To resolve the growing deficit, including resourcing the expected increase in teaching

staff, the government needed to cut expenditures. Teacher salaries being the largest expenditure in education and as demonstrated in the Harris era, was seen as a quick fix to balancing budgets (Gidney, 1999). Teacher contracts were soon up for renewal and if an agreement was not in place by August 31st, many teacher pay raises would automatically come into effect. The Liberals claimed they had to act urgently to prevent teachers from “pocketing any automatic increases” (The Agenda, 2012b, September 4).

Rather than following the usual bargaining process for teacher contracts two things happened. First, Premier McGuinty posted a video on Youtube pleading with teachers to support him in the plan to cut back teacher salaries and benefits (The Agenda, 2012, March 12). Secondly, at the initial negotiation meetings with the federations, the government came with bankruptcy lawyers and a bargaining position of non-negotiation (The Agenda, 2012, April 12; The Agenda, 2012b, September 4). These actions set the tone and talks immediately broke down for the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) and Ontario Secondary School Teacher’s Federation (OSSTF). The Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA) and the French Language Boards stayed at the bargaining table and by mid-summer agreements with these federations were struck. Synowicki (PuttingStudentsFirst, 2012, November 2), a Toronto School Council Chair suggested that perhaps OECTA feared that the Catholic and Public boards would be forced to amalgamate if they did not comply. A memo from the Ministry of Education to Board Directors in May of 2012 reopened the discussion of Board amalgamations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012a). While the Ministry clearly states that they would continue to honour the constitutional protection of Catholic education, the then Minister of Education, Broten said, “We have two duplicate systems in every area of the province. We’re saying that those two groups could work under one umbrella” (Rushowy, 2012). The amalgamation discussions were quietly discontinued as contracts were enforced with public federations and boards the following December.

In July 2012, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2012b) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with OECTA. This memorandum was a framework intended to act as a guide for the upcoming local bargaining. OECTA agreed to a pay freeze, self-supporting grid increases through unpaid professional development days, loss of banked sick days and a move from 20 to 10 annual sick days. In return a promise was made for a fair hiring practice for Long-term Occasional Teachers and new permanent teaching positions, and a guideline for the teacher’s use of diagnostic assessments in the classroom.

In late August, not having similar understandings with the remaining federations, Bill 115, the *Putting Students First Act* (Broten, 2012) was introduced, intending to “ensure school contracts fit the government’s fiscal and policy priorities and ... secure two years free from labour disruptions” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012c). The intent of the Bill was to save the province \$2 billion and avert an additional expenditure of \$473 million in public education spending while at the same time ensure that these cut backs did not affect student achievement nor the current Liberal platform promise of Full Day Kindergarten. To meet this goal, Bill 115 would provide the government the ability to make several changes including stopping all salary increases for the following two years and eliminating the retirement gratuity payment for unused sick days (worth \$1.7 billion in liability to school boards) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012c).

The title of Bill 115, “Putting Students First Act,” while implying that the government has students’ needs at the center of its concerns, is about centralising power – taking bargaining rights from teachers and school boards and reducing income and benefits from education staff. When the Harris government tried to cut back board spending, including teacher salaries, they had problems with local board negotiations circumventing the cutbacks (Gidney, 1999). It appears that this government avoided the problem by taking away bargaining powers from the boards right from the start. Howard Goodman, a Toronto District School Board Trustee (The Agenda, 2012c, September 4), suggests that the Government approaches education issues from their own perspective – the bottom line is re-election, so remaining in public favour by balancing spending and appearing to be fiscally responsible is important. Teacher federations approach issues from their perspective – protecting the rights of their members. Both claim to have students as the center of their concerns. This trustee claims however, that it is really the school boards and school board trustees that advocate on behalf of the well-being of students and the *Putting Students First Act*, took power from boards in their ability to negotiate with teachers on behalf of students.

Examining the preamble of the *Putting Students First Act* is important in understanding how much the relationship between teachers and government had deteriorated. The text suggests that smaller classroom size and FDK has resulted in increased test scores and an increased number of students graduating: “The Government’s recent initiatives include investments in smaller class sizes, bringing more teachers and support staff into schools, and implementing full-day kindergarten. The Government believes that, as a result, test scores are higher and more students are graduating” (Brotten, 2012). What is not suggested is that increased test scores and graduation rates are the results of the *hard work* of teachers. As FDK is not yet fully implemented (initial implementation was in 2009-10 with 600 schools), none of the students in this program are old enough to have even written a grade 3 EQAO test, let alone graduate from high school. Smaller class sizes were fully implemented in 2007-08. The eldest students from that cohort would have just started grade 9 as Bill 115 was implemented. Neither of these programs could have had any impact on graduation rates. Even if these programs had been implemented long enough, it would be next to impossible to draw a conclusion of a direct causal relationship with test scores.

The goal of this discourse is to garner support from the public that it is government policy that is improving students’ successes, not the teachers themselves. Therefore, rather than cut these programs as recommended by The Drummond Report (2012), they should remain intact and teacher salary and benefit cuts implemented instead. An alternative discourse supporting this decision is the prevention of job loss – “and teachers should be happy for this decision,” says Minister Brotten (The Agenda, 2012a, September 4). However, FDK has not yet been fully implemented and some of the savings projected in cancelling this program would come from not hiring more teaching staff. The forward in Bill 115 is not factual, nor are the government’s arguments for the budget cuts chosen transparent. In a period of declining popularity, the government could not afford a loss of 7,000 jobs in the education sector nor the cancellation of a significant program they had promised.

The two teacher favoured items in the OECTA Memorandum of Understanding were eventually articulated in policy documents affecting all federations. Under Ontario Regulation

274/12, *Hiring Practices* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b), only the five most qualified applicants based on seniority can be considered for a position. One Toronto School Council chair notes this agreement does not give new teachers a fair chance at obtaining a teaching position (PuttingStudentsFirst, 2012, November 2). PPM 155, *Diagnostic Assessment in Support of Student Learning* provides guidelines on how the use of formal diagnostic assessments may be implemented in schools.

The Three Streams to the PPM 155 Policy Window

The three streams that led to the opening of the PPM 155 policy window are clear. The problem stream consisted of two issues: a serious provincial financial crisis and teacher workload challenges as a result of an increasing use of test-based accountability tools. As the government needed to find ways to quickly cut expenditures and needed the compliance of teachers, they became available to consider policy alternatives.

The political stream developed as the relationship between teachers and the Liberal government, in particular Premier McGuinty, changed dramatically. Despite the trusting and supportive relationship that had been enjoyed over the previous nine years, the teachers' memory of other governments and those conflicts, were not forgotten. The purpose and language of Bill 115 reflected the lack of trust that had developed between teachers and the government in just half a year. The Ministry of Education was using discourse such as Bill 115 to garner public support against teachers. Teacher and school board rights were being limited and teacher federations were not provided the opportunity to offer alternatives to meet the government's financial needs.

Finally, the policy stream developed from the relationship between OECTA and the Ministry of Education. Unlike other federations, OECTA remained in negotiation. They became policy entrepreneurs as they saw an opportunity for an alternative policy to address teacher issues. It appears that they did not have any flexibility with the issues of pay and benefits imposed by the government, nor did they have the ability to contest the negotiating arena that was thrust upon them. However, they were able to address an increasing issue of workload and gain some control over that workload in the classroom through the introduction of PPM 155.

While the explicit issues expressed were balancing budgets and teacher workload, the subtext of teacher professionalism had been building and became apparent in the text of the subsequent policy.

The Policy – Critical Discourse Analysis

PPM 155 is a five page policy document that outlines the use of diagnostic assessment tools and the collective responsibility in support of student learning. The document is not intended to replace any previously existing policy documents and is highly connected to the policy document, *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). In fact, approximately one quarter (23%) of the PPM consists of direct quotes from *Growing Success* related to definitions of assessment and

professional judgement giving the discourse what Fairclough (2003) describes as an authoritative voice.

The intended audience of this policy consists of the main actors identified within the text: teachers, principals and school board staff.

There are three main themes in this document: diagnostic assessment; within the frame of diagnostic assessment, the collection of data for school planning purposes; and professional judgement. For each of these themes, the author attempts to describe the purpose or intent of the policy, who is affected, and how it shall be implemented.

What are Diagnostic Assessments and Diagnostic Assessment Tools?

The title of this PPM, *Diagnostic Assessment in Support of Student Learning*, indicates that the policy is about educational diagnostic assessments. According to the *Growing Success* policy document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), which is quoted verbatim in PPM 155, diagnostic assessment is a process that falls under the umbrella of Assessment *for* Learning, an assessment process designed to gather information “for the purposes of improving learning” (p. 28). According to the policy, this process is defined as planning, communicating goals and success criteria with students, gathering information about student learning before the period of instruction, using assessment strategies and tools, using resulting information to inform instruction through analysing the data, and giving appropriate feedback.

PPM 155 additionally refers to diagnostic assessment “tools.” These tools are the actual instruments used to gather information about learning. Very little is provided to describe specifics of these tools. In reference to collecting data about student learning, PPM 155 lists “observations, student portfolios, and student self-assessment” (p. 3) as some types of diagnostic assessments. *Growing Success* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) provides a more exhaustive list of

formal and informal observations, discussions, learning conversations, questioning, conferences, homework, tasks done in groups, demonstrations, projects, portfolios, developmental continua, performances, peer- and self-assessments, self-reflections, essays and tests (p. 28).

Further, PPM 155 states that the memorandum “applies to the use of formal diagnostic assessment tools” (p. 2). The meaning of “formal” is never clarified within the text.

In this policy document, school boards are directed to generate a “list of pre-approved assessment tools” (p. 1). The first reference to this list at the beginning of the document is in the initial definition of the purpose, where the author states that teachers must choose tools from the board approved list. Readers must read the entire document to determine what this list is and who creates it. In the very last paragraph of the document, boards are told that they “shall establish and provide a list of approved diagnostic assessment tools that are consistent with their board plans for improving student learning and achievement” (p. 5). Earlier, while the list is not mentioned, they are directed, “[i]n developing their Board Improvement Plan for Student

Achievement, principals and school board staff must clearly communicate with teachers the purpose of the tool and how it is used” (p. 4). The reader might infer that “tool” in this directive is the diagnostic assessment tool described throughout the policy and therefore the board approved list must include guidelines on the purpose and use of each tool.

The PPM directs boards to create formal lists of diagnostic assessment tools that are acceptable and consistent for use in supporting their Board and School Improvement Plans, providing clear guidance on how they are to be used. Right from the beginning, teachers are directed to use tools that are on this list, stating they shall use “assessment and/or evaluation tool(s) from the board’s list of pre-approved assessment tools” (p. 1). Based on the lengthy list of appropriate types of classroom assessments provided in *Growing Success* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), it is not feasible for boards to provide an exhaustive list of approved diagnostic tools, describing purpose and use of each, and for every grade and every subject.

Several questions arise from this theme that remain unanswered. What is the purpose of the Board Approved List? What is a “formal” assessment? What situations require teachers to refer to this list and when do teachers use other kinds of diagnostic assessments that are not on the list? Not providing clarity could create situations of conflict between principals and teachers as each may have differing interpretations. For example, can a teacher choose to not conduct diagnostic assessment for areas of instruction that do not have a tool on the Board Approved List?

How is Improvement Planning Connected to Diagnostic Assessments?

The second theme is about Board and School Improvement Planning. While the theme is not articulated in the title nor in the definition of purpose, there are six significant references to this school activity within PPM 155. The first reference states that the policy document that guides this process, the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) is “not altered by the direction given in this memorandum” (p. 1). To have to explicate this fact hints at the dissonance that may exist between these two documents. The reader might wonder how the implementation of a classroom diagnostic assessment as directed in PPM 155, affects the implementation of school improvement planning as directed in the SEF. The second reference occurs at the end of the introduction of the *Use of Diagnostic Assessment Tools*. This section begins with two paragraphs that are either direct quotes or paraphrases of *Growing Success* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) describing what diagnostic assessment is and how it is used to improve student learning. The next and last paragraph states:

Research confirms the importance of using various kinds of information to develop and monitor plans to improve student learning (in Ontario the Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement is such a plan). School and board leaders are expected to use data to identify trends, strengths, and weaknesses that can inform specific actions for improvement in student achievement (p. 3).

The author begins with “Research confirms the importance of” thereby attaching a voice of authority to the text that follows. The text could have said, “The Ministry believes in the importance of.” Both statements would be true. However, research implicitly has a higher voice

of authority than the Ministry and also allows the author to avoid directly expressing the Ministry's opinion. This paragraph has no direct connection to the two previous paragraphs in the section. In fact the author never explains the relationship between the use of diagnostic assessment tools and improvement planning, despite 15% of the document being dedicated to the topic.

The third and fourth references to improvement planning are found in the section, *Guiding Principles of Selection of Diagnostic Assessment Tools*. Teachers, principals and board staff are told to review all existing data when determining what additional data and information is needed for planning. In the context of developing improvement plans, principals and board staff must also clearly communicate to teachers the purpose of a tool and how it will be used. Again, readers must infer whether these additional data that may be needed for improvement planning are the diagnostic assessment data teachers collect using formal diagnostic assessment tools.

The next reference to improvement planning is found in the guidelines for principal responsibilities. Principals are told,

Through the use of a variety of tools to support and monitor student progress, principals will continue to provide leadership when working in collaboration with teachers to gather information about student learning in support of school and board improvement plans for student achievement (p. 5).

What is interesting about this guideline becomes clear when looking at the instructions provided to teachers. It is the difference in communication for each of these groups that further highlights to the reader the existence of a subtext of dissonance between actors. The teachers' instructions are explicit. They will use diagnostic assessment tools from the board's list. They will decide which assessment will be used, with which student, how often and when. However, there are no explicit instructions on how they will participate in the collection of data for the purposes of improvement planning – an overarching responsibility of principals and boards. In the above paragraph, the theme is about principals using a variety of tools for monitoring student progress. Unlike the teachers' instructions, the principals' guidelines are passive. One could suggest the difference in details of instruction is related to the level of professionalism of the group. Principals being in leadership roles, or being more "professional," need guidelines rather than explicit instructions. Principals are told they "will continue" indicating no change in past behaviour. They are told they will "provide leadership" but what leadership looks like in this context is left for the principals to determine. Explicit steps of what "working in collaboration with teachers" looks like are not provided. The document begins and ends with instructions for teachers and ends with guidelines for the other two actors. Teacher information is provided first in this section. The positioning of actors within the text cues the reader that teachers dominate the discourse. Principals are left to implement their responsibility within the arena described as teacher responsibilities. The policy does not explicate how, what or when data will be shared for improvement planning purposes outside the classroom with the principal.

For assessment data to be useful for improvement planning these data must be consistent or "standardised," meaning the same valid measure for each student, measured at the same time, and a large enough sample to represent a school outcome. The tool used for such data would need to be the same across classrooms and is what is implied by "formal" in this policy. As many

schools do not have large populations, a sample of students within the same grade and measure would not be sufficient to generate a reliable school outcome (Hollingshead & Childs, 2011). In order to meet the data needs to track school improvement of student achievement as prescribed in the SEF, a consistent measure of all students would be required from a single period in time. Laughlin (2012) suggests that EQAO and report card data should be sufficient to meet these educational needs. There are a number of reasons why report card grades do not make a reliable source of data, one being that students with special education needs often have a modified program and their report card grades are not comparable with other students or even to each other. Additionally, EQAO data are only collected in grades 3, 6, 9 and 10. These points in time are insufficient in providing timely feedback to schools for tracking all students every year.

The last reference to improvement planning in PPM 155 is in the guidelines for boards. They are directed to “continue to collaborate to develop a common understanding of the planning process and the need for student data and information that can inform actions taken to improve student learning” (p. 5). Their role appears to be as mediators. Accepting the assumptions that the intent of the PPM is to guide the use of formal diagnostic assessment for the purpose of board and school improvement planning, and teachers have explicit instructions of choosing when and who to assess that overrides principal guidelines to collect data for improvement planning – these board guidelines make sense. Board staff will have to work with teachers to garner support for school improvement activities in order for principals to have access to the data needed. Does this mean that boards will need to provide, from a managerial perspective, guidelines on what teacher professionalism looks like in this context? This question leads to the last theme.

How Does Professional Judgement Apply?

The last and most important theme in this policy document is professional judgement. There are two statements in PPM 155 that describe through metaphor the importance of teacher professional judgement in assessment practices. These metaphors are the only rhetorical devices used in the document. Research shows that metaphors are most impactful when the comparisons are novel, appear at the beginning of the discourse and are consistent with other metaphors within the text (Sopory & Dillard, 2002). Metaphors are used in political discourse in order to persuade. The author states, “A teacher’s professional judgement is the cornerstone of assessment and evaluation” (p. 1) and then later quotes *Growing Success* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), describing teachers’ professional judgements as being “at the heart of effective assessment, evaluation, and reporting of student achievement (p. 28; PPM 155, p. 4). The uniqueness of rhetoric devices and the placement and repetition of use gives teacher professional judgement elevated importance in this document.

Professional judgement is defined in *Growing Success* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) and quoted verbatim in PPM 155 (p. 5) as

Judgement that is informed by professional knowledge of curriculum expectations, context, evidence of learning, methods of instruction and assessment, and the criteria and standards that indicate success in student learning. In professional practice, judgement involves a purposeful and systematic thinking process that evolves in terms of accuracy and insight with ongoing reflection and self-correction. (p. 152)

This definition relates to the kind of judgement required in using expert knowledge and in this case specific to conducting assessment of student learning. It reflects the teacher professional judgement that research has demonstrated as needed to generate valid and reliable assessment data (Maxwell, 2002; Black & Wiliam, 2005; Klenowski & Adie, 2010; Wyatt-Smith et al., 2010; Bolt, 2011; Allal, 2013). In the literature, teacher professional judgement is highlighted as critical to the validity and reliability of assessment outcomes. Harlen (2005) found evidence of low reliability in her literature review on teacher judgements in assessment activities. In exploring possible interventions she describes five steps it takes to complete a dependable assessment: define the domain of knowledge, gather a valid sample of student work and/or behavior, determine criteria for judging the sample, implement procedures for reliable and unbiased application of criteria and implement procedures for reporting and communication. These steps are similar to the criteria as quoted above: 1) professional knowledge of curriculum expectations, 2) evidence of learning, 3) criteria and standards that indicate success in student learning, 4) purposeful and systematic thinking process that evolves in terms of accuracy and 5) insight with ongoing reflection and self-correction.

In the PPM, teachers are directed both at the beginning and end of the document to use professional judgement in determining which tool, which student, when and how often. These instructions connected to expectations of teacher behaviour are about judgements relating to values and beliefs, otherwise described in the literature as teacher disposition (Oser, 1994; Reiman & Johnson, 2003; Biesta, 2009; Dottin, 2009). Disposition is the reciprocal nature of means-ends in professional judgement. It is professionals acting as they should (Dottin, 2009). Reiman and Johnson (2003) propose the core of teacher disposition is professional interpretation, judgement and action. It “is connected to agency; it depends on being able to decide freely on one’s acts and having the necessary knowledge – both planning phase and the phase of realizing a plan – for evaluating the possible negative influences on others” (Oser, 1994, pp. 57-58). Biesta (2009) illustrates disposition as two parts, one which is technological knowledge needed to create or do something such as knowing how to teach, and the other is ‘practical wisdom’ to support the decision processes such as understanding situations and knowing how to respond. Dottin (2009) contends that dispositions are what is between what a professional can do and what he actually does. He observes that professional judgement is not the same as decision-making. While decisions are made based on judgements, judgements involve evaluation and understanding and a judgement may be correct but the execution unsuccessful. He goes on to say that professional judgement requires “reflective intelligence” (p. 84) and notes like Biesta (2009) that while one needs knowledge, skills and the ability to act, to execute professional judgement, having such does not assure one will necessarily do so.

PPM 155 does not explicitly state how teachers shall use professional judgement to determine whether they will actively participate in improvement planning. This policy gives individual teachers the power of decision to determine what tools will be used when and with which students, thereby creating the possible arenas where principals and board staff cannot collect data appropriate for improvement planning purposes. Principals are to continue using assessment data for improvement planning, yet teachers can use their professional judgement to decide whether they will support this activity.

Hargreaves (2013) suggests that emotion is a key ingredient in being able to judge. He states, "Emotion always enters into judgement by narrowing down the otherwise infinite range of variables that underpin the choices we make" (p. xviii). He also suggests that emotion may undermine judgement when we are distracted through boredom or some sort of threat. "Even if teachers develop professional standards and codes of conduct, they may not be able to implement these in cases of conflict with public policies and decisions" (Sykes, 1999, p. 230)

Before PPM 155, the decision of instruments to use, with which students and what times for the purposes of school and board improvement planning was often determined externally from the classroom by the principal or board. Again, accepting the assumption that the intent of the policy is to guide the use of formal diagnostic assessment in such planning processes, it however, gives teachers the collective responsibility to execute professional judgement in determining whether to participate or not. Some or many teachers may choose to participate but in order to collect effective data for a school, all teachers must participate.

Conclusion

Placing the policy document into context – the network of events and relationships that led to this moment – teachers may be at risk of being perceived as making unprofessional choices, under the guise of teacher professional judgement. This policy was not generated to improve student learning, but as a response to conflict between government and teachers as reflected in Bill 115 and building workload issues. The author of PPM 155 uses professional judgement as a moderator. The policy shifts power to teachers but it comes with a catch – they must wield that power “professionally.” While explicitly giving credence to teacher professional judgement in policy may be appealing to teachers – it may come at a cost of further demeaning the profession. If teachers, as a collective through the decisions of a few, hinder school planning activities, they may appear unprofessional to school and board administration and maybe even community members.

Linda Darling-Hammond (1998) supports the idea of explicating professional development in policy as it will then facilitate resources to build capacity (as cited in Bredenson, 2001). On the other hand, Joel Springer (1993) argues that including such language or concepts of areas like professional development “may have unintended negative consequences” (as cited in Bredenson, 2001, p. 6). In some school and board contexts, professional judgement may be explicitly made important and valued as a result of this policy document. Some, clearly understanding the risks and challenges, may choose a path that nurtures teacher professionalism. In other contexts teachers may abdicate their own professional judgement (disposition) in favour of just implementing the bare instructions provided without, as Orser (1994) describes, considering consequences to others. There is a history of conflict that has resulted in a collective dissonance for teachers – that emotional ingredient in judgement - that may affect, not the professional judgement used in conducting assessment as explicated by the policy, but the judgement implied in teacher disposition. Will teachers as a collective, based on the explicit guidance of how to use professional judgement in Policy/Program Memorandum 155 impede school improvement planning activities, thus contributing to a negative discourse on teacher professionalism?

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