

# Vernon Teachers' Association VOICES

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## Professional Development Day—Feb 2009 Dr. Laugh Presentation (need we say it was interactive?)



I kind of like this, sitting with my buddies instead of being behind the desk.



You can't all go to the bathroom at once!

Honestly, you'd think she'd learnt to dress by kindergarten



See fun and learning, wish the kids could see us now!

Yeah, I remember this part of university.



*Speaking for Teachers in the North Okanagan*



# *Reflections.....*

## ***Greetings colleagues!***

Well, another Spring Break has come and gone. I hope that you had an opportunity to slow down, renew your energy and reconnect with family and friends. The weather may not have helped much in this regard locally, so hats off to those of you who were able to track down some heat to warm body and soul.

And speaking of heat, I hope that this Professional Development issue of Voices acts as a catalyst to heat up the staff room as we step into April. That isn't to say that the intent is to anger anyone (though I suppose some of the articles might), but we certainly hope it will stir up some vigorous conversation.

Inside of this edition you will find a number of short articles on topics related to questions and issues around professional development. The articles are meant to prod each of us and to get us thinking about, maybe even **arguing** over, professional development: debating with ourselves, our teacher colleagues and our administration at the school and district level.

We call ourselves professionals, and we do so with pride. So be it – our status as professionals is something of which we should feel proud. I would argue, though, that one of the things that is at the core of any true profession is a on-going commitment to growth and development. If we wish to embrace our calling as professionals then we must also take seriously our responsibility to engage in vital professional development.

And it is not enough to address this obligation as a corporate body. Just because WE as the VTA put together Prod opportunities for teachers, does not mean that WE as individuals are off the hook. Each of us has an individual responsibility to take charge of our own Pro-D. Now that doesn't mean that all of us need to sit on the school professional development committee (though clearly some of us do, and maybe all of us should consider it at some point in our careers). Engagement will look different for each of us, but at its centre will be an attitude – an attitude that says I will not hand that which is my responsibility over to others.

So read and enjoy. My hope would be that each of us would find something in the articles that follow to stimulate our growth and development as professionals.

Cheers,

**Barry**

## The Emerging Trend in Professional Development

Most teachers think of professional development in terms of PD days. This often means that professional development is treated as an event that is externally planned. It could be a set of workshops or a program offered on one or more specific dates rather than a daily part of our job. There is a strong movement throughout the profession that encourages a shift away from this mindset. The shift fundamentally involves the goal of ongoing, job embedded, daily professional learning by an individual teacher.

This approach, often called *professional learning* instead of professional development, avoids the “one size fits all” approach and acknowledges that teachers in different stages of their careers have different learning needs. When the goal of the Pro D committee is to find interesting presenters with something to say it is completely understandable that the focus is on topics and presenters, how the day will be organized, and how much the coffee and muffins will cost. Imagine if the Pro D committee could be empowered to focus on the learners, just as we do in our classrooms, and allow for informal learning guided by the individual or a small group to meet their own needs.

So what does this look like? There is a wide range of activities from post graduate courses and large scale conferences to informal conversations with a colleague and internet searches. Thomas Guskey puts forward the idea that there will never be “one right answer” (Guskey, 1995, p.117). This argues against the idea of bringing in yet another educational guru to convince teachers to adopt yet another new approach. It is critical to have a balanced approach to enhancing teacher learning and he offers the following options:

### **Guskey’s Seven Models of Professional Development**

1. training
2. observation/assessment
3. involvement in a development/improvement process
4. study groups
5. inquiry/ action research
6. individually guided activities
7. mentoring

Teacher training is the most cost effective and the one most often chosen by boards and committees with in-service days devoted to the transmission of new ideas or teaching practices. This is often driven by administrators with board or school goals and plans that need to be implemented. Guest speakers with PowerPoint presentations (Webcasts anyone?) have become the norm. Teachers wanting informal time to share ideas and work together is often viewed with suspicion. It is clear that teachers want more choices.

Most of us want to be able to choose how to grow as teachers. We need different things in order to learn and feel that we really do know what we need to improve. One year it might be the latest assessment techniques or teaching PE, and the next year it might be setting up a science program or including parents as educational partners. We all have individual goals. We all know our own weaknesses. This means that informal, job embedded peer learning opportunities need to be valued as much as workshops and training sessions.

As one teacher put it:

*I can be trusted to learn without someone coming in and telling me what I need to know. I can be trusted to work on improving my practice, solve problems, and discuss things with a colleague or two that I really feel compatible with. It seems like the trust that we will use Pro D days to better ourselves is gone. It’s as though we might just sit and do nothing if we didn’t have a day that was filled for us.*

Teacher learning is a complex process that cannot be solely addressed through the traditional approaches of conferences with the latest guru and Pro D days or after school sessions made up of a series of workshops. It also cannot be addressed by mandating professional learning community groups and their tasks within a school. Instead, a rich mix of individualized and ongoing learning needs to be taking place. This could be done within the school, respecting the individual differences and needs of the teachers. There is work to be done to encourage colleagues, administrators, and boards to broaden the approach, to allow for individualized learning experiences and to find time within the school day and year to do so ( but that’s another article altogether!).

### **References**

Guskey, Thomas (1995) *Professional Development in Education: In Search of the Optimal Mix in Professional Development in Education: New Paradigms and Practices* (Guskey and Huberman, N. Eds): Teachers College Press 114-132

## This is the story of “Go with the Flow Jo”

Now Jo loved his teaching job. He worked hard everyday doing his best to teach his kids. He thought about his lessons, his practice, and made every effort to collaborate with his other Flow colleagues.

Jo was pretty new but he knew what he did well and what he needed to fine tune. However, Jo only knew his current situation regarding PD. He thought that it was common to be able to buy what you needed with PD money, he thought summer PD was what everyone else did and figured that all schools everywhere spent time collaborating on school goals rather than focusing on individual teacher needs.

Unbeknownst to Jo, in faraway lands there are specific guidelines on how one can spend PD money. Some places keep summer PD as part of individual plans and not those of the collective. And finally, one last shocking revelation: PD days in other places were days where professionals could take time to reflect on their practice and learn about strategies etc. relevant to their professional needs!

Jo was shocked on the day that he learned all this. What a novel idea! Let the professionals identify their needs and let them pursue an educational course of action. Might this include collaboration with others? Perhaps. Would be it OK to go it alone? Sure.

Jo decided that he was tired of being “Go with the Flow Jo”. He sat down that day and wrote out his new PD plan, thinking about these questions:

- What is an area of strength in your teaching?
- How does it contribute to student learning?
- What is an area of focus for your teaching for this year?
- What will you do to pursue this?
- With whom might you collaborate?
- What workshops will you attend?
- How will you know if you have made progress in your learning?



Jo learned that day that while going with the Flow can be great for morale, it didn't really address his need as a professional to be in the driver's seat of his practice. Jo is no longer going with the flow and he's not going against it either. He's now “Be in the Know Jo”.

## Professional Development and Social Justice

Professional development and social justice are inextricably intertwined. Teacher reflection, teacher learning and teacher empowerment, the result of teacher development, improve education for everyone's children. Teachers are the most critical piece of educational change and, for their voices to be recognized, they must be connected to the overarching aims of education and to issues of equity and social justice. Philosopher, Israel Scheffler [1968] says it well, 'Teachers cannot restrict their attention to the classroom alone, leaving the larger setting and the purposes of schooling to be determined by others. They must take active responsibility for the goals to which they are committed and for the social setting in which these goals may prosper. If they are not to be mere agents of others, of the state, of the military, of the media, of the experts and bureaucrats, they need to determine their own agency through a critical and continual evaluation of the purposes, the consequences, and the social context of their calling'

Kenneth M. Zeichner, professor in the Department of Education and Instruction, University of Wisconsin- Madison, is a senior researcher with the National Center for Research in Teacher Learning. He says, 'Furthermore, instead of merely discussing teaching and learning for understanding for everybody's children we also need to ensure that everybody's knowledge and everybody's cultural heritage is represented in that which we seek students to understand. Unless we do these things, the likelihood is that many students will continue to be bypassed by innovative school practices and continue to be denied, with the complicity of the school, access to decent and fulfilling lives.'

The voices of teachers need to be at the center of the dialogue and debate surrounding current educational reform and research, however we have to ensure that teacher development does not become an end in itself. Teacher development needs to be genuine and not a fraud, and it also needs to be a means toward the education of **everybody's** children. It needs to support teachers' efforts to reflect on and change the practices and social conditions which undermine and distort the educational potential and moral basis of schooling in democratic societies.'

## Pro-D: What Does the Contract Say?

Whenever we think about an issue that we face as teachers it is helpful to see if it is covered in our Collective Agreement. This principle certainly holds true for professional development as the contract has a lot to say about the topic, at least in some respects. According to our agreement this is what we need to know about **school-based** professional development:

*F.2.4 Each school staff shall elect a Professional Development Committee.*

*2.4.1 The committee shall be chaired by a teacher.*

*2.4.2 The principal may be an ex officio member of the committee for the purposes of paragraph 2.5.1*

*F.2.5 The primary functions of the Committee shall be:*

*2.5.1 To plan school-based professional development activities and staff development projects which involve the whole staff or groups of staff but not individual association membership.*

*2.5.2 To disburse monies allocated to the school staff from the District Professional Development Fund. The committee shall disburse money in accordance with the principles and procedures established by the District Professional Development Committee and shall provide such accounting as the D.P.D.C. may require.*

So, what does this mean to teachers in this district? What are the implications of this language for us all?

At its core, the language tells us this: Teachers have both a right and a responsibility to play a major role in determining their own professional development. We chair the committees and we are the stewards of the funding. Principals have a role on the committees as **one** voice only, no more no less.

The next question that follows logically from the principle above then is this: How are we to discharge this responsibility? We don't get a lot of guidance in the language above, but we do get some help in the section of the contract that precedes this. Article F.2.2.c tells us that the District Professional Development Committee is responsible to "*develop and maintain a Professional Development Handbook outlining the principles, practices and procedures for professional development in the District.*" Ah, another source of direction for teachers. Turning then to the Pro-D Bible we discover this: Point four of the responsibilities of the school professional development committee has this to say about how the Pro-D committee is supposed to provide for school-based professional development. The committee is to "*develop plans for school based non-instructional days based on needs assessment of the staff and ratified by the staff.*"

Clearly, this language tells us that **teachers** are in the drivers seat when it comes to planning for **our** professional development. The handbook is clear. Pro-D is supposed to meet a staff's self-identified and collectively accepted needs, not a list of topics that comes from another source whether it be school goals, district initiatives or ministry mandates.

Taking control of school-based professional development is a teacher's right ..... and a teacher's responsibility.

## Did you know?

Look at what we do as teachers to continue our education. In this district we have Professional Days. 4 school based and 2 teacher directed. Consider the hours that amounts to; anywhere from 36 to 54 hours of hard work and this does not include the work that many of us do individually.

What are we doing during that time? What is our goal? Generally, we are attempting to gain more knowledge on our profession, insight into our expertise and possibly to fan the fire that is our passion for this career. Throughout the year, we share ideas and techniques, develop new lessons and strategies sometimes alone, sometimes with other educators.

Teachers are not the only professionals that must fulfill continuing education requirements. Many other professional associations have their members complete and document Continuing Professional Development hours. The BC College of Teachers does not require us to report our Pro-D, however; many professionals including engineers, accountants and lawyers must report the completion of their requirements to the association they belong to annually.

Engineers are required to complete 150 hours of professional development averaged over 3 years to stay a “specialist”. Members of APEGBC, The Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists, can participate in conferences or university or college courses. They may partake in employer training programs or pursue self-directed PD. The goal is to encourage interaction with professionals in the field and to expose them to new ideas and technology. ([www.apeg.bc.ca](http://www.apeg.bc.ca))

Accountants are also committed to lifelong learning. Members of the International Federation of Accountants invest 120 Pro-D hours over 3 years, at least 20 a year. This helps keep credibility and professionalism both nationally and internationally. ([www.cga-canada.org](http://www.cga-canada.org)) It may be comforting to know that our accountant is as dedicated to continuing education as we are, especially come tax season!

*Contd. On next page...*

## Comparison of the Teaching Profession to Other Self-Regulating Professions in BC

(Source: [www.bcct.ca](http://www.bcct.ca))

Some Self-Regulating Professions in BC	Continuing Education Requirements
BC College of Teachers	No
Certified General Accountants Association of BC	Yes. 120 CPD hours in each 3 year moving total period. 60 hours must be verifiable.
College of Dental Surgeons of BC	Yes. Dentists: 90 credit hours every 3 years
Association of British Columbia Forest Professionals	Yes. Members voluntarily complete 150 hours of CE & Pro-D activity during 5 year period.
College of Licensed Practical Nurses of BC	Yes. Competency review every 5 years. Registrants must maintain a professional portfolio and complete data collection practice questionnaire.
College of Physical Therapists of BC	Yes. 1200 practice hours in 5 years and yearly completion of professional portfolio.
BC Veterinary Medical Association	Yes. Minimum of 15 hours per year or 30 hours over 2 years of CE.

*Contd. from page 6....*

Lawyers devote 12 hours each year to continuing their education. Two must be devoted to professional responsibility and ethics. They can do this by mentoring or teaching less experienced colleagues, working in study groups, or learning through online courses. The goal is to benefit clients by improving the service they provide. Failure to complete their training on time will result in a \$200 fine. ([www.lawsociety.bc.ca](http://www.lawsociety.bc.ca))

There are similarities in the Pro-D requirements we complete as teachers and those of many other careers. Even our strategies for satisfying those needs are comparable. Whether it is the lawyer teaching the lawyer, the teacher attending a conference, or the dentist going to a workshop we share worthy goals. We are striving to build our professionalism in a world full of complacency. Teachers are passionate about learning!

## THOUGHTS ON PRO D FROM A TOC

When I think of the topic of a Pro-D day in Vernon, I have two different reactions: “Oh no, I don’t want to do this” and “I can’t wait”. What’s the difference then? It depends on what type of Pro-D day it is. I look forward to the district/inter-district Pro-D days and I cringe at the thought of the school based ones. And this is all because I am a TOC.

The district/inter-district based Pro-D days are something I always enjoy. I think the speakers are great. They bring new philosophies or reforms and help encourage us to be the best influence we can be on a child’s education. The variety of workshops allows me to learn more about something that interests me or an area of education that I feel strongly connected to or concerned about. I love the free materials (our type of SWAG!) that are distributed. This past Pro-D in Winfield I got a free grade 6 Math Makes Sense textbook which I’m pretty happy about. I also like the educational publisher displays. This is also a great time to reconnect with my former university classmates who are now strewn about different districts. To me, this is a refreshing day. I feel more energised about teaching after such a Pro-D event.

Pro-D days that are school based are a low point for me. To be honest, I am a TOC that is yearning to have my own class; to be part of an educational team where I fit in. Being “alone”, so to speak, is hard enough and it’s challenging to find a school that really wants me to be a part of it. When I ask about participating in a school based day, responses have been something like this (and I’m sorry, I have to paraphrase), “Oh, we’re just working on grade group stuff” or “We’re talking about

our school-goals, so you won’t get anything out of it” or “Why don’t you try ‘such and such’ school and see what they’re doing?”. Finally, I just stopped asking.

Lately, I have been working on my own materials: getting my “TOC bag” together and up to date, getting some much-needed filing done of all the materials I’ve begged/borrowed/stolen off teachers for my own future class. If this is the way it is, I suppose I can be alright with it.

To sum up my thoughts, I love Pro-D days when I feel included and am learning more about the profession that I chose. However, as a TOC, I find no benefit to the school-based days as I don’t find myself developing professionally. I have this idea that if teachers get together to work on school-specific issues, goals, etc., why can’t TOCs get together and work on stuff that will develop us professionally where we are as professionals? There are many issues we face, that regular classroom teachers do not (classroom management comes to mind immediately). A lot of us are beginning teachers and we could learn so much from sharing ideas with each other, a TOC workshop, or some sort of guest speaker that will help us with an issue that is specific to TOCs.

As a TOC, I really want to look forward to any Pro-D day and, as I write this, I realise that it is up to me as a TOC to make that happen. I hope that there are other TOCs out there that feel the same. If you are one of them, please email OCTAV (On Call Teachers Association Vernon) at [vernon-toc@hotmail.com](mailto:vernon-toc@hotmail.com) and get involved!

## Who? Me?

“There’s nothing here for me!”

“Same workshop I’ve seen a hundred times!”

“Not another needs assessment!”

“Why don’t they offer what I need?”



Ever hear these comments in your staffroom? Does this sound like you? You’re not alone. Every year we are expected to grow professionally and every year we are faced with choices of where our professional development emphasis will lie. Some of us are teachers of specialized areas and we rarely find a useful workshop that pertains to our expertise on the Pro D days. Some of us have been to so many workshops; it feels like we are just repeating the same old thing over and over. Others of us simply are tired of trying to find the perfect solution and have given up trying. We just want people to leave us alone to do our jobs.

If you find you have seen more workshops than most of the people on your staff or you seem to have perfected your skills in a certain area, it may be time to get out there and share some of your expertise. You are an excellent candidate to host a workshop yourself and pass on some of that knowledge to the new folks that are coming along behind you. You would be paid an honorarium of \$250 for the day to prepare the workshop and share what you have learned. Perhaps you don’t like to present workshops and you still don’t see what you need being offered. Here is yet another opportunity for action. Make sure you make your request known to your school PD chair and possibly to the district PD chair as well. Be heard! Fill out the needs assessment, but follow it up with personal contact. The early bird gets the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese. Moral of the story, you are in charge of your own PD destiny.

If you have a specialty area, join a Local Specialist Association. There are at least 13 active ones in our district and many more that just need someone to step up and take charge. The VTA will help you get started with \$50 a year to buy some snacks and encourage a social get together so you can plan some events for your specialist area for the October LSA day. Once that day is planned, you can apply for more funds specifically to help with the costs of that day.

**Roland Riedstra**  
**VTA ProD Chair**

### *IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER.....*

<b>April 6, 2009</b>	<b>BCTF/VTA Induction</b>
<b>April 6, 2009</b>	<b>District ProD Committee Meeting</b>
<b>April 8, 2009</b>	<b>VTA Executive Meeting</b>
<b>April 9, 2009</b>	<b>VTA/SD#22 TDP Social</b>
<b>April 10, 2009</b>	<b>Good Friday</b>
<b>April 13, 2009</b>	<b>Easter Monday</b>
<b>April 17-18, 2009</b>	<b>BCTF Zone Meeting</b>
<b>April 22, 2009</b>	<b>Nomination Deadline for VTA President</b>
<b>April 20 - May 12, 2008</b>	<b>School Visits - Politics and Pizza</b>
<b>May 6, 2009</b>	<b>VTA AGM</b>

