

OECTA advisor

Real life situations and solutions

By Joe Pece

In the last 10 years we have seen the Ministry of Education and school boards introduce a number of initiatives that are intended to boost student achievement. School Effectiveness Framework, Professional Learning Communities, and Schools Helping Schools are a few examples that focus on teacher professional learning and require teacher collaboration and evaluation.

Collaborative teacher inquiry is one of the latest professional practices that the Ministry is promoting to schools and boards. Initiatives implemented using this professional learning model, such as the Ministry's Collaborative Inquiry for Learning – Mathematics, and Early Primary Collaborative Inquiry, involve teams of educators conducting “in-class investigations” of students’ work and teachers’ lessons. While these types of initiatives can help teachers to further their professional practice through a deeper understanding of the connection between student learning and classroom instruction, problems can arise.

1. PARTICIPATION IN ANY INITIATIVE INVOLVING A TYPE OF COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY PRACTICE MUST BE VOLUNTARY.

Teachers are meant to work together to assess current practice, develop lessons collaboratively and develop implementation of the plan together. The spirit of collegiality and openness that underlines this practice cannot be achieved when participants do not enter into the process voluntarily.

2. BEWARE OF EVALUATION POSING AS INQUIRY. Some principals have incorporated the term “instructional rounds” to describe their version of the collaborative inquiry model. “Instructional rounds” involve groups of teachers moving from one classroom to another observing the practice of other teachers.

In some cases however, teachers are simply critiquing and reporting on the practices of other teachers. This constitutes an evaluation of teacher performance – it is not grounded in professional inquiry and does not include collaboration with the evaluated teacher. Teacher Performance Appraisal is the formal process for evaluating teachers, which can only be done by an administrator.

3. TEACHERS ARE NOT TO EVALUATE OR REPORT ON THE CLASSROOM PRACTICE OF OTHER TEACHERS.

When teachers begin to scrutinize the classroom practices of another teacher, professional lines begin to blur. Members are advised not to participate in the assessment of, or reporting on another member’s classroom practices. In some cases, members have been asked to participate in board review teams as part

members must refrain from making any statement and/or assessment that could be considered as evaluative regarding the classroom practices, discipline methods, or competence of another member.

Teachers sometimes differ in their professional opinions about teaching practices or discipline methods. However, criticizing the professional competence of another member is a serious matter, even when done appropriately, for example, through board officials. Teachers often neglect their obligations under Section 18(1)(a) and (b) of the *Teaching Profession Act*, which states: “avoid interfering in an unwarranted manner between other teachers and pupils;” and “adverse comments against another member be communicated in writing within 72 hours to the individual who is the subject of the comment.”



of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat’s initiatives. These teams visit schools and classrooms, making observations to assist schools in setting goals, and provide a report to the principal highlighting specific areas of need based on their observations. Whether required to participate in such teams as a consultant or coordinator, or participating in a voluntary manner,

One of the best strategies to manage conflict between colleagues is to know and understand your professional obligations towards your fellow members and maintain that professionalism at all times.

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