



Theme and Strands

Theme:

Leadership for professional learning in complex times: Asking new questions?

The relationship between leadership and professional learning has taken a 'complex turn' moving from its beginnings with principal leadership of professional development to an exploration of how leadership by principals, teachers, students and other stakeholders influences educator learning. This has taken place in the context of a reconceptualization of professional learning and leadership especially in the midst of chaos during COVID-19. While professional learning has moved from a focus on formal courses and workshops along a continuum to include learning that is situated and socially constructed, arguably new practices have emerged during COVID that warrant critical exploration and theorizing to advance the current field of professional learning. At the same time understandings of leadership have continued to move from a focus on the principal or administrator as leader to leadership as a shared activity/practice by principals, teachers, students, and other stakeholders. Leadership at all levels has been evident during COVID with key stakeholders using their agency to lead professional learning in their school communities and beyond. Leadership of professional learning is a contemporary issue with calls to action for substantive reviews of the knowledge base related to Teacher Leadership of Professional Learning Communities, Principal Leadership for Teacher Learning, and Shared Leadership for Teacher Learning. This is timely in the context of lessons learned in the past year, the impact of COVID on stakeholders well-being and the uncertain times ahead.

As a community of researchers and practitioners, the Leadership for Professional Learning network aims to convene contributors in a global dialogue around leading critical collaborative cultures amidst uncertainty. It aims to challenge our understanding of collaboration and explore both the collaborative practices and approaches that are effective at promoting educator learning, as well as the barriers that influence or constrain collaborative practices at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the system as we transition out of COVID. The symposium will convene a diverse group of educational leaders, practitioners, and academics for a collaborative dialogue focused on leading and enabling critical collaborative professional learning cultures in uncertain times. Session dialogue leaders are invited to provoke courageous conversations, critique innovations, and pioneer concepts. As such, you will be able to seek support and solutions to new challenges facing the field in uncertain times.

Strands:

1. Leadership for critical collaborative conversations

In order to advance critical conversations, shared leadership within and across wider school communities is necessary to create conditions for effective collaboration that can critically frame issues of social justice within the school community setting and advance enhancements to teaching and learning. Leadership research points to a number of factors that may be within the scope of influence of school and teacher leaders to promote collaborative cultures, including but not limited to the development of shared values, engagement over involvement, cultivating professional capital, and nurturing agency. Educational institutions are ideal sites for the interconnected activities of leadership as learning, and learning as leadership. Professional learning literature suggests a focus on cognitive dissonance and creating disruptions for transformative learning, both of which require a move from collaborative cultures focused largely on sharing ideas and experiences. **Provocations within this strand** will include attention to how collaboration is understood, the sophisticated skills needed for collaboration, and the tools, theories, resources, and strategies used by leaders to promote critical dialogue and cognitive dissonance for change, whilst supporting the mental health and well-being of all members of the school community.





2. Scaling up sustainable collaborative approaches to professional learning

School sites and school partnerships are complex ecologies for the learning of both students and educators. Accordingly, it can be challenging to discern lessons learned from one school context or community to promote effective scaling and impact of successful approaches. Arising from COVID, an exploration of if/why collaborative approaches are important warrant attention. Furthermore, a focus on what it means to collaborate in the context of leading, teaching and learning is important. **Provocations within this strand** will centre on approaches and theories that attend to the complexities of school environments, especially during COVID, and promote meaningful learning that can be recreated in other similarly complex settings. They will also explore the tensions between individual and collective autonomy, individual and collective agency, approaches that are mandated at district or national levels, online/blended learning and face-to face learning, and motivation and burn-out/stress. Challenges to the leadership of collaborative cultures within schools and systems will also be explored.

3. Professional learning, shared leadership and agency related to equity, inclusivity and student voice

Equity is taken to mean that the dimensions of educator and student identity are not negatively correlated with the outcomes we aim for education to achieve, such as student learning and quality of life, regardless of COVID. It is about understanding and creating opportunities for meaningful and relevant learning for all students even during uncertain times. This is achieved in part through the exercise of agency and the normalisation of inclusivity, collaborative leadership in and between school environments and networks, and cultural competence in teaching and learning. **Provocations within this strand** will centre on promoting approaches that broaden conceptions of leadership and collaboration, on developing shared values and partnerships with all stakeholders to promote more equitable outcomes and well-being for students in schools and communities. This may include a focus on tensions in how to engage and include students in the learning process, or professional learning related to recognising and addressing inequities in our schools.

4. Leadership learning to bridge the knowledge-practice and values-practice gaps

The notion of gaps between what we know is good practice and what we do, and what we value and what we do, is not unique to education. These are equally lamented by public health experts and economists, among others. The educational gaps are both a product of these gaps in other arenas of social life, as well as a contributor to these gaps. **Provocations within this strand** centre on leadership learning approaches, inclusive of in-person, online, and blended learning formats, that align practice with extant knowledge and aspirational values. This may include examples of problematising collaboration and learning from and within partnerships, among educators and schools as well as with communities and universities, in order to bridge the gap. Too often, there is an assumption that affording people time and space to collaborate is sufficient, without attending to the conditions and skills required to make the most of such opportunities. Tensions among theory, policy, and practice may also be considered in an attempt to bridge them. Additionally, conversations will explore the importance of critical collaborative conversations and other factors that support and hinder gap-closing practices.