



Building teacher capacity within the evolving assessment culture in Canadian Education

Article Summary

Lost in the focus on large-scale educational assessments for accountability purposes is the important role of teachers' classroom assessment practices. Teachers must understand the use of both large-scale and classroom assessment practices and theories, and professional development remains the primary method to develop these assessment capacities. However, traditional models of professional development typically have little, if any, effect. In recognition of the importance of building teachers' assessment capacity, and the limitations of traditional professional development, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Canada, developed a Classroom Assessment Workshop Series to begin to build a systemic assessment framework for teachers. Through pre- and post-series surveys with 300 participants, and interviews and focus groups with facilitators, the authors' review and research explored the impact of the series on teachers' beliefs, self-efficacy, and knowledge of assessment practices and theory. The authors also explored the challenges that teachers experienced as they worked to understand and implement current conceptions of assessment. While teachers certainly valued the community created through the series and the opportunities to share their experiences, the findings found that teachers struggled to understand the theoretical foundations and use these foundations to further develop their own assessment practices. The research highlights the need for teachers to embrace a philosophy that integrates formative assessment practices and theories into their teaching and learning while also identifying the challenges associated with creating such an assessment culture. Current models of professional development may be more aligned with principles of effective professional learning, but truly changing teachers' classroom assessment practices may require a much more prolonged effort than those being provided.

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