

Chapter 10

Ontario (English-speaking system): the future of “Teaching as a Profession”

In the English-speaking school system in Ontario, the “Teaching as a Profession” initiative developed and adapted scenario tools for a series of workshops held with teachers, students, academics, principals, administrators, members of the private sector and civil servants. The new set of scenarios is: Redefining the Past, Breakdown, the Community-focused Model, Macro Models, and Breakthroughs in Complexity Science. The events promoted dialogue among the stakeholders after a tense period when dialogue and consensus had been difficult. The initiative showed the utility of futures scenarios in building policy capacity and in allowing for fruitful discussion on “teaching as a profession” among diverse groups of key individuals.

Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief description of the Ontario context, its educational system and the task at hand. It then analyses the Ontario research results distinguishing goals, process design, and scenario content. It draws some initial conclusions on outcomes and benefits of futures thinking, and describes the beginnings of the next phase of the English language Ontario project.

In Ontario the first two phases of the “Teaching as a Profession” work concentrated on examining the utility of futures scenarios in building policy capacity and in allowing for fruitful and open discussion on the topic of “Teaching as a Profession” among diverse groups of individuals. Workshops were held with teachers, students, academics, principals, administrators, members of the private sector and civil servants. They illustrated that scenarios are useful in enabling discussion, allowing individuals to think

about the future in a different light and in opening people's minds to be receptive of new perspectives.

The next phase of the project will seek to apply the scenarios to Canadian policy issues by using mature case studies and futures scenarios together. The hope is that by jointly connecting actual historic case studies from other jurisdictions with futures thinking and then applying the discussion to current Ontario policy issues, the quality of Ontario's policy development related to similar issues will be enhanced.

The reform context

The changing role of schools and schooling is a major concern to most OECD jurisdictions, including Ontario. There are many perspectives on the purpose of education, each of which prescribes differing roles and status for teaching and schools. Diverse visions of what education is supposed to accomplish include: preparation for work, personal development, transmission of a cultural heritage and other values. Similarly, teachers are also characterised in a variety of ways: from unionised workers to highly specialised professionals. The combination of these different factors results in a complex environment in which it is often difficult to achieve meaningful dialogue, let alone consensus. In recent decades, citizens in most jurisdictions have sought greater assurance that their schools are graduating properly-educated young people. As a result, intense efforts at education reform have taken place worldwide over the last 20 years or so.

Many of the reform attempts have been directed toward such areas as curriculum, early childhood education, assessment, accountability, and graduation requirements. Particularly over the past decade, education reforms have been largely standards- and results-based, with an emphasis on accountability. In Ontario, these reforms included a new curriculum for kindergarten to grade 12, a new emphasis on literacy and numeracy, standardised testing of students in Math and English, a mandatory "learning to age 18" strategy, a funding mechanism for school boards that provides a similar level of per pupil funding regardless of local tax base, standardised report cards, and greater and more meaningful parental involvement. The Ontario College of Teachers, a self-regulating professional body for Ontario's teachers, was also created in 1996.

Given the vital role teachers play in enhancing student outcomes, teaching and teacher education is an integral part of recent education reform efforts. Ontario's contribution to teaching reform has resulted in a set of initiatives aimed at supporting teachers and quality teaching. These initiatives include a teacher induction programme, enhanced supports for

teacher professional development, an entry to the teaching profession assessment for new teachers, a provincial teacher performance appraisal system (for evaluating teachers), and teaching excellence awards. (An additional reform brought in by a previous Ontario government that mandated professional development requirements for teachers was the subject of intense debate and controversy and has recently been revoked.)

The task

Governments and educational sector stakeholders invest valuable time, effort, and resources in their efforts to effect change and improve the education system. How can educational sector managers and stakeholders be convinced that the efforts that are being made today will meet the needs of tomorrow? This question resonates even more so when one takes into consideration that educational systems were developed to meet the needs of an industrial society. Today, as OECD countries move rapidly towards a knowledge society with its demands for a new model of the educated citizen, decision makers must make strategic choices to reform the educational system so that the youth of today can meet the challenges of tomorrow. Thus, it is useful to determine whether or not futures thinking adds to the policy choices and decisions faced by educational systems in anticipating the future education needs of an evolving, ever-changing society.

In Ontario, the initial task became to stimulate dialogue on the issue of teachers and the teaching profession and to build policy capacity. Ontario developed and utilised modified OECD scenarios to begin to address several issues, including:

- How does the issue of teachers as professionals relate to the quality of teaching?
- In order to maximise student learning and achievement, what would the status of the teaching profession be under the various scenarios?
- Should teachers be treated the same as other professionals?

The Ontario project uses “alternative futures” as an integral contribution to discussion. The methodology is based on a multiple-scenarios strategic planning framework that identifies desirable futures and the strategies for achieving them. The starting point for dialogue was the series of futures developed by the OECD.

Over the course of the project, Ontario has engaged an increasingly wide variety of experts, teachers and others with an interest in education in

order to clarify how various alternative ideas about schools and schooling will have consequences relating to teaching as a profession. It is anticipated that this process will allow a series of preferred scenarios to emerge, will enable the development of robust strategies to further policy discussion and decision-making, and build greater understanding.

The Ontario project is currently entering its third phase, which will continue to explore the issue of teaching as a profession and to identify and clarify how scenarios can act as a new methodology to support discussion and policy decision-making. This new phase also focuses on whether examining historic case studies of real policy issues, in tandem with examining the same issue using futures scenarios, can further enhance policy-making and allow for greater understanding of the contextual issues that can come into play in policy analysis, development and implementation.

The Ontario system

With a population of more than 12 million, Ontario is home to about 39% of the country's population, roughly one in three Canadians. Eighty per cent of the province's population live in urban centres, largely in cities on the shores of the Great Lakes. The economy of northern Ontario is highly dependent on natural resources, while southern Ontario is heavily industrialized, largely because of its proximity to the U.S. market. Contributing about 40% of Canada's total employment, employment in Ontario has shifted largely to the service industries, namely business services, finance, tourism and culture in recent years rather than on assembly lines.

Ontario's population growth has always been largely dependent on immigration. Today, Ontario is one of the most ethnically diverse jurisdictions in the world. Almost half of the approximately 250 000 people who immigrate to Canada each year choose to settle in Ontario. Toronto, the largest city in Canada, has been called the most multicultural city in the world, where more than 70 languages are spoken.

In Ontario, all permanent residents between the ages of 6 and 16 must attend school. The Ontario Ministry of Education is responsible for education from kindergarten through Grade 12. It develops curriculum policy, sets provincial standards for student performance, evaluates and approves learning materials for use in schools, allocates funds for the system, reports results to the public, and oversees the system's governance.

Ontario has a dual-system of publicly funded education, distinguished by language (English, French) and religion (non-denominational, Catholic). While English is Ontario's official language, French language rights have

been extended to the legal and educational systems. Most of Ontario's two million elementary and secondary school students study in English, however approximately 100 000 of these students have French as a first language and study in the French system. There are approximately 120 000 certified teachers, of which 105 000 teach in a classroom setting and the remaining hold various administrative positions.

A publicly-funded education system, Ontario's school boards operate and administer their schools using funding received from the province. Ontario's 72 District School Boards are made up of 31 English-language public boards, 29 English-language Catholic boards, 4 French-language public boards, and 8 French-language Catholic boards. As well, a small number of Ontario schools are operated by School Authorities which manage special types of schools, such as schools in hospitals and treatment facilities, and schools in remote and sparsely populated regions.

At the time of the engagement with the OECD "Schooling for Tomorrow" project, Ontario's education system was in the midst of heightened levels of tension. The government then in power was trying to deliver on an education agenda of which the content and manner of implementation were unpopular with most education stakeholders, especially teachers. The positions of various education stakeholders had become polarised and entrenched, with great suspicion of government motives and initiatives. The OECD "Schooling for Tomorrow" project was viewed by the Ministry as an opportunity to promote "safe" discussion and expand thinking about the topic of "Teaching as a Profession" with a diverse group of education stakeholders and other interested individuals.

In the fall 2004, a new Ontario government was elected. Since then many changes have occurred and significant steps have been taken which have improved government relations with teachers, school boards and other education stakeholders. The issue of "Teaching as a Profession" remains relevant. The current government specifically campaigned on a platform of enhanced respect for teachers. The government is also currently in the process of revitalising the Ontario College of Teachers, the self-governing entity for teachers.

The goals of the initiatives

The OECD project provides an opportunity to foster discussion about teachers and education amongst individuals within the education sector and beyond. In addition to exploring the value of scenarios to policy development, the aim has been to use the futures scenarios provided by the OECD to help individuals expand their thinking, and expand the thinking,

values and beliefs of their organisations and sectors; as well as to reflect on the future of teachers and teaching in Ontario. To this end, the project's initial goals focused on capacity building and the promotion of multiple perspectives, rather than necessarily solutions to policy issues. As the project has evolved, Ontario has become more focused on enhancing the quality of policy development and capacity by exploring new methodology through the use of futures scenarios in conjunction with other mechanisms (*e.g.* case studies).

Process design

Phases 1 and 2

One of the first steps taken by the Ontario Ministry of Education was to hire researchers to conduct a literature review on the topic “Teaching as a Profession”. Next, a core study group was created to act as a project advisory panel. Twelve diverse external and internal education experts of varying backgrounds – including educators, bureaucrats, administrators, academics, lawyers, political advisors and union leaders – were invited to form the study team for the project. This group tested out the scenarios and the workshop plans. A research team, with experience in futures scenario planning, was also hired at the end of 2002.

At the first study group meeting, the study team worked with the OECD's six scenarios. We found that the specificity with respect to the role of teachers in each of the OECD's scenarios impeded the scope of the conversation and dialogue, so the research team modified the scenarios to fit the purposes of the Ontario project and to meet the needs of the study group. The revised scenarios were written to be as broad as possible and to provide a set of social, political and economic environments within which to discuss the role of teachers. Background charts were created in order to build the necessary context. The charts examined the effects of multiple variables across each scenario, describing, for example, the focus of governing power (as one variable) in each scenario. Once the charts had been completed, the differences between the scenarios were exaggerated to create five highly differentiated futures. The new scenarios made little or no mention of education, as the intention was to provide a general framework within which to discuss the future of teaching and teaching as a profession. Once the study group had worked with five modified scenarios, and became comfortable with them, the process of organising larger workshops began.

Of the workshops, some were made up primarily of individuals from various organisations and sectors and some were made up of groups

representing similar organisations/interests (*i.e.*, teaching regulators, Ministry of Education employees). Approximately 150 people, from across the education and other sectors, have taken part in the project up to 2005.

The original workshop programme was based on a seven-hour time frame. In the morning, participants were divided into groups of five or six and each group was assigned one of the scenarios to discuss and asked to focus on the question: “What would teachers and teaching look like in this future?” In the afternoon, the participants moved on to a second scenario and endeavoured to isolate some actions that would maximise the positive aspects and minimise the negative aspects of the scenario. The selection of participants for the workshops was largely based upon recommendations of the study team and previous workshop participants. Three of the workshops were purposely composed of individuals of varying interests and backgrounds. These groups were geographically and sectorally diverse, with individuals from various constituencies and positions within sectors such as education, labour, health and communications attending from across Canada, as well as from the United States.

In response to feedback from the early workshops, the workshop structure of the “Teaching as a Profession” discussion was changed. After March 2003, participants commented that they would like an opportunity to work with all five scenarios instead of just two. At the next workshop, the afternoon was modified to allow everyone to deal with all the scenarios. The scenarios were further modified as the project progressed. To focus the conversations on teaching, texts were added to the scenarios to describe the educational environment. A list of targeted questions was provided to each group in order to better focus the discussion on the specific education issues Ontario wished to explore. The charts on which the scenarios had been based were distributed to participants along with the scenarios. This appeared to increase people’s confidence in the scenarios.

One of the distinctive aspects of the “Teaching as a Profession” model was the use of voting. At the beginning of each workshop, participants were asked to vote on the scenario that they believed to be most likely as well as on the scenario that they preferred, with the idea of determining: i) whether votes were distributed evenly among the groups; and ii) to introduce the difference between preference and likelihood. At the end of the day, a second vote was taken to determine if people’s opinions had shifted (see Table 10.1 below). Although the results demonstrate that this occurred only to some degree, at individual meetings, there were often marked shifts between the first and second rounds of voting. Even though it did not occur at all the meetings, a shift was regarded as a positive sign in showing how the use of scenarios could open up people’s thinking. Voting therefore served as a tool to facilitate discussion and to challenge previously-

entrenched ideas and it helped to provide evidence that *the use of scenarios* can successfully open up or expand people’s thinking.

The questionnaire results from the Phase 1 and 2 workshops produced the following outcomes:

Table 10.1. Workshop responses to the scenarios

	Preferred (round one)	Preferred (round two)	Most likely (round one)	Most likely (round two)
1 – Refining the past	31	33	50	51
2 – Breakdown	0	2	7	4
3 – Community focused model	35	23	6	13
4 – Macro-markets	12	11	45	23
5 – Complexity	47	36	17	14

Phase 3

A third phase has recently been initiated. It is intended to further evolve the range of futures methods and pursue discussions to directly address policy questions related to teaching as a profession, by considering case studies from the past, scenarios for the future, and applying them to policy development in the present. Three case studies were commissioned to examine the social, economic and political circumstances of three school-related policies that had been implemented in other provinces in Canada. By using these case studies, we are better able to understand the context within which policy decisions are made. The topics of the case studies are:

- Mandatory School Attendance (New Brunswick)
- Provincial Student Assessment (British Columbia)
- Open School Catchment Boundaries (British Columbia)

A workshop was designed to submit the case studies to discussion using futures scenarios as a vehicle and a pilot workshop used Study Group members as participants. It considered the New Brunswick Mandatory School Attendance policy which raised the school leaving age from 16 to 18. In the morning, participants were asked to examine this policy in the context of each of the five scenarios using the following questions: “Would this policy make sense in this scenario?” “How would you change it?” “How would the policy affect teachers and teaching in this scenario?” and “What other policies would you consider or introduce in this scenario?” The discussion led to unexpected insights into the nature of the policy and some of its consequences. For example, in some scenarios, there was no

adolescent age at which school leaving could be set because of requirements for lifelong learning. In others, the formal school leaving age might have to be lowered to allow students more opportunity to work in conjunction with their education.

In the afternoon there was a detailed and lively elaboration of the case study, which explored its place in the social, economic and political context of New Brunswick at the time. The participants were then asked to adopt a role (not their own) while they discussed the two following questions:

- Assume you belong to a particular interest group (*e.g.* teachers) and that you live in New Brunswick in the future (*e.g.* Scenario 1). Looking back to the 1990s when the Mandatory School Attendance policy was being developed, and given what you know about the future, how would you have changed the position you took on this policy in the 1990s?
- Assume you belong to a particular interest group (*e.g.* teachers) and that you live in New Brunswick in the 1990s. You have knowledge on what the future is going to look like (*e.g.* Scenario 1). Given your knowledge of what the future is like, how would it influence your position on a Mandatory School Attendance policy that is currently being developed (*i.e.* in the 1990s)?

Feedback from the pilot workshop indicated that utilising case studies, as well as futures scenarios, was extremely useful and stimulating in terms of generating discussion. As a result of lessons learned from the pilot workshop, a new workshop has been devised which begins with a discussion of a case study, and then asks the questions used in the morning of Workshop 1 and ends with lessons for current policy discussions. This workshop will be the first of a series to connect historical case studies (past) to scenarios (futures) in policy discussions (present).

Scenario content

Ontario's "Teaching as a Profession" used modified scenarios (see Box 10.1) as a basis for discussion. The five alternative scenarios illustrate differing impacts on teachers' roles in Ontario thirty years into the future. They have been constructed to differentiate possible roles for teachers and perspectives on teaching in the long term. The schooling alternatives were developed by a group of researchers in Ontario in order to provide a basis for exploring possible ways of teaching in the future.

The scenarios are differentiated using a number of parameters. For example, the macro-market future does not depend on continuing political

rule by international market advocates. Instead it considers that these attitudes will predominate everywhere so that all political parties will assume policies in the direction of those indicated. Some factors are projected in all five futures but there may still be variations of emphasis. In all scenarios, there are important advances in the understanding of education: a more fundamental knowledge about many developmental processes and influences on learning and capacity. But these occur at differing times and with differing impacts in the different scenarios.

Box 10.1. The Ontario “Teaching as a Profession” scenarios in brief

Refining the past. This future brings new evidence and experience to the structures and processes of the early 21st century. Canadian civil federalism becomes a preferred world model. Governing systems become far more efficient and accountable and the mixed public/private economy is regulated to produce slow and steady growth. The educational system is highly regulated in terms of curriculum, credentials, and accountability for results.

Breakdown. This is a depressed and unstable future with a very high level of unemployment and underemployment. Warfare and terrorism increase the number of refugees, and international trade becomes difficult. Technological innovation supports effective, low-cost ways of delivering no-frills service. Public education systems break down, become smaller, are chronically underfunded and less comprehensive. Alternative forms of schooling increase.

Community focused model. This future emphasises the impact of changes in the nature of community life. Community life changes dramatically with an increase in the concern for the environment. Large numbers of self-sustaining communities develop strong local cultures and are responsible for educating their own members.

Macro models. This future maximises the long-term impacts of global trade. Major global businesses increase dramatically in number and scale and the boundaries between corporate and national interests become blurred. The importance of knowledge management is recognised in both the public and private sector as essential to development. Lifelong learning becomes common for everyone.

Major breakthroughs in complexity science. Complex systems develop with linked social, economic, and political growth tied to access to “learning by doing”. Multi-faceted learning networks are possible due to communication and transportation capacity provided by technology. Lifelong learning is encouraged.

Outcomes and benefits

Benefits of futures thinking

A number of important lessons have emerged from experiences. The scenarios proved to be an effective way of opening up people's thinking and moving them away from entrenched biases and viewpoints. Using the scenarios also gave participants the opportunity to discuss certain issues in education in an open environment. People felt that they were able to talk about education with individuals in a setting and manner in which they would never normally have the opportunity. One participant said, "I find the scenarios have helped me broaden my thinking. I find myself slipping back at times but at least now I can identify when I'm being narrow-minded. I find it interesting and informative to be able to hear other people's points of view and to have the experience to work with a group of such a wide variety of backgrounds is very enriching". Another participant found that "when you speculate, you generate options to create". There was great enthusiasm about the project for those reasons.

Limitations of futures thinking

Many participants felt that there are limitations to the use of futures scenarios generally and the use of particular futures scenarios in policy development. One such person wrote, "Policies reflect the contexts in which they arise, including the traditions, values, institutions, resources, etc., that characterise those contexts... The scenarios ... are insufficiently sensitive to context for the purpose of policy development". Overall the project, up until this point, has shown that scenarios are useful for promoting discussions, but there may be limits to their usefulness in policy development, particularly because they can never fully capture the contextual and situational importance in which policy is designed, decided upon and delivered. Through the introduction of a case study approach, the current phase of the project is intended to bring the scenarios closer to current policy issues that face schools in Ontario.

Lessons learnt for policy development

The Ontario project has been a success and shown quite clearly that futures scenarios can be effective in opening up discussion among competing groups on a contentious issue such as the future of teaching as a profession. The use of future scenarios allowed such disparate participants as union leaders, parents, school administrators, teachers, and civil servants

to engage in discussion without falling into traditional postures. Almost all showed a capacity to explore the issues in depth considering a range of future possibilities, most changed their minds about the future they preferred and some changed their minds about which was most likely. This was demonstrated by the very positive feedback received from the post-workshop discussions (see Table 10.2 below).

Table 10.2. Evaluation of the process by workshop participants

	1 (worst)	2	3	4	5 (best)
What was your overall impression of the workshop?	0	0	5	35	50
Please rate how useful you found the scenarios in expanding your thinking.	0	0	11	41	38
Please rate the potential utility of the scenarios in policy development.	0	3	14	33	38
How did you feel about the length of the workshop?	Too long 5	X	Just right 66	X	Too short 19

Results from these workshops have led us to conclude that futures scenarios can be useful in opening up policy discussion among diverse groups on difficult topics.

In the new phase we are attempting to consider the connections between future, past and present policy concerns. We have commissioned three case studies of past policy initiatives. We are designing workshops that relate these to future scenarios with a view to their application to current policy issues. We have so far drawn no conclusions, but look forward to the development of a product that can help participants understand more about the process of policy development and improve participation in actual policy debate.

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CREATING AND USING SCENARIOS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN EDUCATION

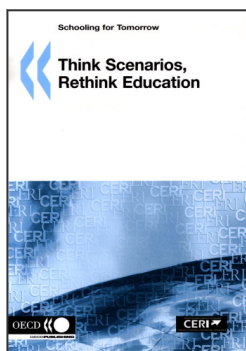
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